For Him

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I think that I am smart for a fourteen year old. I mean, I am really good at school, but I think that I know people, and I think that is what being really clever is all about. And I knew my father better than anybody else does, including him. I certainly knew him better than Mom ever did.

I don’t mean to say anything bad about Mom. She died three years ago in a car accident. I was only eleven but that is an age when I think that you understand everything pretty well. I did.

Of course I was sad, but I had plenty of friends that I was close to. Maybe they did not understand things as well as I did, but that was okay. They were just normal, and normal was what I needed.

Looking back I realize that at eleven you only have 6 years of memory of your mom. Those memories are great, are great, and I can share them with Daddy. But Daddy had many more memories and nobody to share them with. He suffered badly with the loss of Mom. People were expecting me to be the one that suffered most, but it was Daddy. And I knew it would be that way.

Daddy was a stay at home father. He was creative. He was good at music and art. It was stuff he could do at home. Mom was a high-paying job in the city – I am not sure what. It made sense that she go back to work and Daddy look after me. He did, up until she died.

My Daddy depended on my Mom for everything. It was not just that she earned the money, she liked everything to be just the way it should be. I can guess that whatever her job was that was what made her good at it. She gave directions and Daddy’s job was to do what Mom told him to do. But he liked it that way. So long as she was directing, he was happy. But then she was gone.

Daddy really let himself go after Mom died. He did not cut his hair and he grew a straggly beard. He even did not wash himself properly, so he was a bit stinky. The dress up idea was about getting him cleaned up.

If I saw him getting really down I would always suggest that we play a game together. It was my way of turning him away from sadness, and it usually worked. When we were in a little bubble of two, I would laugh and he would laugh. It was just like playing with my friends. We might have a tea party or play nurses in some hospital drama, and he would have to be like one of my friends.

I would take charge, I suppose. But like I said, Daddy liked that.

I told him that I had always wanted to Mom’s bridesmaid, but of course they had married before I was born. I wanted play bride and bridesmaid and Daddy had to be the bride. The wedding dress was too big for me, but it fitted Dad perfectly once the girdle was on.

But as I explained to him before he dressed up, he needed to take a long bath. He needed to get rid of the beard and the hair on his arms as well and wash out that long hair. Daddy might have protested a bit, but he always wants me to be happy, and I really do think that he prefers to take instructions.

So, Daddy took the bath and I added some wonderful perfumed salts. Daddy actually shaved his legs as well as his arms, even though the dress was long. I told him to use Mom’s special moisturizer on them. I suggested that he use the special smelly stuff on his beard before the bath, because Mom always said that for getting rid of facial hair it was better than a razor.

When Daddy got out of the bath all rubbed down and in a soft towel robe, I sat him down on Mom’s dressing table in his boxer shorts and put some curlers in his hair to give volume. I guess that I was so happy and excited that he started to laugh. I told him that he was a giggling bride, and so he was.

He could see how happy I was. To me he seemed as happy as he had been when Mom was alive. But I knew he would be - because I know him that well.

“Let’s go for it,” he said. “I will be the perfect bride and you will be my perfect bridesmaid.”

He just laughed when I showed him the underwear. He put that on in private but I helped him stuff the bra and tighten up the girdle to give him a good shape. Because he had smooth legs he could now wear stockings, and I found among my mother’s wedding stuff, the white stockings she had worn. The sight of them made Daddy tear up again, but after they were rolled up his legs the tears were gone.

All the way through I was talking about the imaginary wedding that was about to take place. It was going to be on a beach, beneath and arch made of flowers. The groom would be the second best looking man in the whole world, and (because it was my game) the best man would be the best looking man in the whole world.

Daddy laughed, and said: “Will he take me into his arms and kiss me?”

“It will be such a powerful kiss that you will faint slightly, but he will catch you, and support you until you recover. And he will always be there to support you like that, forever.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Daddy said, and I could see in his eyes that they were sharing the same dream as me.

I took the curlers out brushed out his hair. Daddy always had plenty of hair but it needed the body that the curlers had given it. His hair was dark – it still is – but with that volume and bounce all that would be needed was a well place hair ornament. I used a side parting and a jeweled clip to keep the hair off the face.

It was time for makeup. Even though just a teenager I knew all about makeup. The special stuff Daddy had used had left his face very smooth but a little too pink so I used moisturizing foundation and brushed on color to show off Daddy’s best features – a straight nose, good checkbones and big eyes and lips. I told him this was my favorite part, but I needed to tidy his eyebrows.

“Remember that this is just a game,” he said, telling me not to go too far. But I had the shape I wanted and brushing the brows can only go so far.

Eye makeup in the key to the right bridal look. This wedding was daytime, just as if it were on a beach, so the look needed to be bright and colorful, and the eyes clearly accented. And the lips pink as the dress was white.

Daddy stepped into the bridal gown and pulled it up. I zipped up the back.

He just stood and stared at himself in the mirror, first with his mouth open. I was very pleased with myself. I want to be an engineer when I grow up, but I could also do a sideline in hair and makeup. That is still my plan. Especially weddings. I love weddings. What girl or woman doesn’t?

Daddy put a hand on one hip and gave a little wiggle. He smiled at the mirror and gave a little mock laugh as he tossed his hair. I clapped my hands. I knew I had done the right thing.

Then the doorbell rang. I rushed straight to the door and opened it. It was Frank, our neighbor. I heard Daddy call out to wait, but it was too late. I had already ushered him in. And there was Daddy looking so beautiful, and Frank looking … well … amazed.

I think Daddy said: “I can explain, Frank …”, but Frank just held up his hand. This is the time when a young person like me should make themselves scarce, but I had to stay.

“Don’t say anything,” said Frank. “Unless it is to agree to come to dinner with me tonight.”

“I don’t want you to get the wrong idea. We are just playing a game.”

“I don’t care what you are doing,” said Frank, forcefully. He is a big strong guy. I suppose he is used to getting his way. He said: “You look fantastic. And you need to get back out into the world, looking just as good as you do right now. Perhaps you can change into something a little less formal?”

“It’s just a game…”. Even through the makeup I could see Daddy blushing.

“Go and change into something suitable for dinner, but keep the hair exactly the way it is.”

I told you that Daddy tends to follow directions, so he went off to the bedroom to open Mommy’s closet which he had left untouched. I went to help him. He really had not much of an idea, but I already had an outfit in mind. It was a dress that hugged the figure that we had formed with the girdle and stuff and was capped off with some classy shoes and a matching bag.

Daddy tried to excuse himself by saying that I could not be left alone. But I told Frank and Daddy that I would be able to arrange a sleepover at a friend’s house, and they could drop me off. That was easy to arrange. And that way Daddy and Frank would have the whole evening together, and the night as well, if they wanted.

Well, I am far too young to know what happened that night, but I can tell you that I needed to arrange another sleepover the following night, and the night after that.

And so here we are, a year later and now Daddy is officially my new Mom, and Frank Is officially my new Dad. Yesterday the wedding was not a game, but I still had a big part to play in getting the bride ready for her special day – almost like the game we played last year except without the special underwear. This time the lingerie is what any bride would wear, although maybe just a little sexier.

In case you had not worked it out, and perhaps because you may think me a little too like my mother, I suppose I should confess one small thing in finishing this story. Frank didn’t need any sugar when he called around last year - at least not the sugar that you can buy for baking cakes and cookies. Frank just needed the right kind of woman.

And Daddy just needed Frank, or somebody like him. I know my Daddy. He likes to be looked after and told what to do. And I think that I know Frank too. He likes being in control and he likes beautiful things too. That’s why I called him. I knew he would be right for my Daddy. I know about people, remember?

The End

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Author’s Note: This story is based on something inspired by a captioned image by Tiffany which I called “For Her” where a father lost in grief plays dress up with his daughter “for her” and gets caught by the neighbor dressed as a bride. Here the daughter arranges it “for him”.