The Gamer

A Short Story

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He should have been insulted when the first message appeared in the comments on his you tube channel – “Hey that is Sarah Goode … without makeup! She is back!”

He had worked hard on setting up his site. It had cheats and tips for gamers. All delivered through a voice scrambler to hide his naturally shrill voice. He had also never intended that it show his face, but some elements of controls and how to wear certain apparatus required him to appear on screen for a moment. But how could he be mistaken for a girl? And who the hell is Sarah Goode?

He had to look her up. Sarah Goode – “Any Girl can be Beautiful”. 800,000 subscribers! It was one of those beauty sites, but this time he could see that at the beginning of her tutorials Sarah was really kind of plain – even masculine looking. She looked a lot like … like him.

Then he tracked her history. She started as pure “clothes styling, hair and makeup” and then moved to talking about “inner beauty” and that seemed to lead her into personalities and personal advice.

Lots of comments like - “Sarah, I just feel so worthless. How can I be more positive in my outlook?”

How do you answer a question like that? He read a few more comments. There was talk of suicide and Sarah was busy talking people of the figurative bridge. He could almost feel the strain. The videos seemed to stall as the comments increased. And then suddenly, only a few months back, they just stopped.

It seemed that she may have succumbed to the pressure. What had happened to her?

He tried to get in touch with her. Of course, he left some messages, and no replies. But he was smarter than that. He looked for metadata to try to pin her down. She was near him – in his very city, and not too far away. That was the best he could do, for now. If he could not find her, then he should just forget it.

But it seemed that now they – the great internet surfing public - thought that he was Sarah he was being plagued for more of what she did. It was ridiculous. Yet he could not help but notice that his numbers were going up. It seemed that more people were interested in her than anything he had to say.

He started to get messages like – “Sarah, I know that’s you. I don’t want you to solve my problems, but just try to help me to look pretty.”

It seemed that these girls may have come to the same conclusion that he had about Sarah – all the self-respect and relationship stuff had worn her down and she had run a mile. It seemed to him that hair and makeup must be easy. He knew some pretty dumb girls who were experts in that stuff.

But he was a guy. There was no way he was going to put curls in his hair and pluck his eyebrows just to please an audience he did not want. But the fact is that his numbers were shitty. He thought that his site was great, but it seemed that only a handful of people really agreed with him.

The he received a private message to his site from a large cosmetics company.

“Hi Sarah. We understand why you may have walked away from your old site, but we really miss the influencing that did and the positive impact of your work on our sales. We would be prepared to send you a package of all of our products and pay for work on your site, plus pay you the sum of $20,000 if you could restart “Any Girl can be Beautiful”, on the conditional that you stick to beauty and avoid personal advice. It is too much for you to handle, Sweetheart. Joyce.”

$20,000. Plus paying work on the site could be more cash if he invoiced for it. It was very tempting. He would have to pretend to be Sarah. How could he do that without showing his face, and then painting it? How could he offer hair advice without taking it? He would need to wash his stringy hair and then research how to style it. It would be fulltime. No time for gaming. That required every bit of his concentration, which was the beauty of it. It gave no time for thinking of other things.

But what about Sarah? He could not take her money. This was her site. What is she came back? Maybe if he did this it might even force her back?

“Hi Joyce. I agree your condition. My new site “Sarah is Back” will only be hair and beauty. I will send details for payment. Please also send any instructional material. Sarah” SEND.

Now all that he had to do was to change himself from a male gaming expert into at last appearing to be a female beauty expert. It seemed like an impossible task. As he waded through everything it seemed even more unlikely, but he kept at it.

For the voice, he found that quite easy given his naturally high pitch and his easy adoption of Sarah’s friendly speaking style. He recorded several audio only sessions to get it right.

Then the package arrived. If he expected a small box with lipstick and mascara then he was in for the shock he received. There were several boxes. Not just lipstick and mascara, but creams, foundations, highlighters, pens and brushes, eyebrow stencils, eyelashes and eyelash curlers – and that was just one box. Then there were hair treatments and a host of appliances, shampoos, coloring, curling solutions, straightening solutions, sprays, lacquers. Then there was a box of manicure tools and stick-on nails and about fifty different nail colors, plus varnishes and transfers. Before he knew it, he was awash in the stuff.

He had to go online and have a mirror delivered – one with lighting. He could then convert a desk into a dressing table and get to work on his appearance.

To his surprise it all came easily to him. His hands moved through the items in front of him with something like familiarity, although he stumbled now and again. It was not nearly as difficult as he expected. He had accepted that his first efforts might be awful, but they were passable, and with practice excellent.

“I can always edit the video to make me look more adept,” he said to himself. That was something he was good at. And he could set the camera properly with a backdrop and improve the lighting.

Within only a couple of weeks “Sarah is Back” was up, with all Sarah fans being redirected from his gamer support site. He could make it even better than it was when she was running it.

How many people would notice that this was a new Sarah? Surely somebody? But nobody seemed to notice.

“People will be wanting to see new stuff from me,” the new Sarah said in a practiced voice. “I will be working on some new looks and some new styles, but just to let you all know I will not be giving relationship advice or getting caught up in peoples problems. I hope that you forgive me, but that is not what I do in this new format.”

He started by following the tip sheets sent with the products – first rehearsing a little and then recording a vlog and editing before posting. But it seemed that the old Sarah was ready to do more, so it seemed that the new one should follow.

“Now the conventional approach is to add highlight from here, but if you have a face like mine, you should do it like this.” It seemed partly like an inspiration and partly as if drawing from the past, as if he had been a woman in a prior life.

Maybe the new Sarah did not pick up all the followers of the old Sarah, but the numbers seemed to hold up. The feedback was good. The sponsorship was building, and packages were arriving – clothing and accessories to be plugged on the show.

If there was a downside it was that he now looked like Sarah. He did not look male at all. He had the face of a young woman even when not made up, probably because of the depilation and skin treatments, and when made up he was quite an attractive your woman. His hair had been long but now it appeared nothing less than feminine. Plus, in his presentation he had become so used to behaving like Sarah that if he stepped outside, he would appear to be a woman.

But he had no reason to step outside. He could hardly remember when he had last done that.

It was just that it seemed so deceitful. He was telling his audience that a plain girl could be pretty and step out proudly, but that was something he was not prepared to do.

“But you are not really a girl,” he said to the camera as it was not recording. “You are just pretending to be Sarah. If you stepped outside somebody would see the lie. They would make a fool of you, or maybe even attack you. Best to stay at home.”

The truth is that he did not venture out. Everything was bought on line and delivered. He told himself that he was free to be whatever he wanted in his apartment. He could even be Sarah, but it was clear that she lived in the real world. Could he really be her without at least trying.

It was not agoraphobia, but it was close. It was just that the four walls were home. He did not fear the outside, he just saw no purpose in it. But now it seemed that he had to put it to the test. People could accept his as Sarah on screen, but what about the corner store?

He had been sent dresses. “If you like this then please wear this online and say something nice”. He even had shoes, which nobody would see unless he held them up. He had accessories and the face and hair of a woman. It was as easy as walking out the door. So why was it hard.

When he was standing on the sidewalk he wondered why it was so hard. He smelt the air and felt the sun on his face. He walked to the corner store and bought a lollipop.

“What beautiful nail polish,” the girl at the counter said.

“You can buy it on line.” It was the voice of Sarah, and her smile too. “My name is Sarah Goode. “I am online as “Sarah is Back”. Check it out.”

He could walk further. Down to the park and the circle path. He could see that she was being looked and admired. It was Sarah walking with poise and purpose. Yes, she liked to step out. She was nothing like him.

On the way back she looked in some shops. She bought some earrings, perhaps just to show that she was not just a slave to sponsors. She was almost sad to get back to the apartment. It meant becoming him again.

The instant release was to get back to the task. Make another video. Be her. Be happy and pretty.

It suddenly seemed that he was the problem. Why not be her? Why not simply not be anyone else.

There was a message on the last posting. It read – “Oh Sarah, you have everything, and I have nothing. I real feel that there is nothing for me in the world and that I should simply leave it. I feel that I should just check out. I don’t think that anyone will notice or care. You all seem so busy being successful. Signed: Sad Suzie.”

It was happening again.

You can tell people not to drag you down, but they will cry out no matter what you say. Desperate people do. The question is what you do about it. There are those who just pay no attention, maybe like him. Then there are people like Sarah. People who listen. People who care.

Have you ever felt déjà vu? You know, that feeling that this has all happened before?

Well, it had. And it was only just dawning on Sarah. You can shut yourself away. You can even try to wind back time and pretend to be the man in whose body you were born.

“You cannot change the fact that you are good, just like the name you chose.” She upbraided herself as she looked in the mirror. “You just have to learn to accept that you cannot solve the world’s problems by takin it on your own shoulders.”

“Dear Sad Suzie,” she wrote. “I do not give personal advice, but there are plenty of people who do and you need to talk to one of them. But a message to everybody out there – do not run away from who you are. Learn to accept it, and love yourself, and then people will love you. Love, Sarah”.

She smiled at herself.

The End

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