Composite

A Short Story

Inspired by an idea from Veronica, heavily corrupted.

By Maryanne Peter

Which of us died? It must have been her. Yet she seemed to be uninjured. The sight of her body looking so perfect staring at me in disbelief from the mirror. It was just the arms and the shoulders and the chest that seemed out of place, and as it turned out, the heart and the brain, and the spinal cord.

We were just travelling between two planets of the star Morbius 6 – from Planet D to Planet E where or interstellar cruiser was in orbit. It was a small vehicle. It simply had to send down probes into a planet already marked as unsuitable, to check for mineral resources. It was an operation of only a few Terran days.

It was not expected to be dangerous. We knew that there was an anomalous area between the planets – one of those sections of space effected by a system where the sun is large and inner planets also have mass. It seems to create what some poetically call “spatial eddies and occasional whirlpools”. Areas capable of causing warps like the waves we harness to travel between galaxies but many times smaller. They can seize a small spacecraft and suck it is and crush it. It seems that is want happened to us.

We were a crew of two. Lionel Hachette and Anastasia Gorova, two young and relatively inexperienced cosmonauts. Too young to die like that – or rather that was what I was thinking as our craft started to collapse. They say that in accidents under gravity impacts at speed seem to act out in slow motion, but in zero gravity they are slow motion.

When the main structural beam collapsed into my waist and severed the bottom half of my body from the top I knew that it was unsurvivable. I remember seeing the globules of my blood and the liquid from my guts floating in front of my face. In that moment I looked across at Stacey (as she was known) to see whether she would live to tell of my death, but it was plain to see that she was dead. A smaller structural support had entered her chest and my guess was that she had been killed outright, from the look on her face with her eyes open and blank.

We were dead. There was no question of it. The cold vacuum of space would take any last fragment of life. Even if help were not over a gigameter away, our bodies were beyond repair, at least by any technology known to humanity.

So, what happened was not of our world.

I have had plenty of time to think about it, and there are even snatches of memory in times when I was conscious. Most of the work was done by machines, but the operators of those machines were present, and were not in anything like human form. I have an idea that they had tentacles like some evolved land-dwelling octopus, but that is all unclear. What is clear is that the made a decision to save my life, and to learn from me, before returned me to the orbit of Morbius 6E in my repaired spaceship.

What they did in terms of repairing a human body and a spacecraft seemed all the more remarkable given how different humans must be from them. It is testament to just how much more advanced they must be over our species. But clearly their lack of familiarity made them believe that they could use parts of one creature to repair the other. It seems so crazy to us now, but they achieved it somehow, without causing body rejection.

Perhaps they also did not fully understand the endocrine system also, and how that would change the pieces of me that were left. At least, that is my understanding of things.

If I were to guess how much time I spent on their side of the warp I might say several Terran months, but who can say? Perhaps they could accelerate healing; perhaps they can play with time itself. But when you travel between galaxies, even with our relatively crude technology, you understand that time is not linear. For the perspective of my crew back in orbit around Morbius 6E, it had been only a few days.

Their facts are now history, albeit bizarre history: the instruments showed that our craft was crushed and destroyed with wreckage disappearing into a space-time eddy, and then suddenly it reappears two gigameters away from that location and close to Morbius 6E, but not quite the same. The craft has been rebuilt – better and with unknown materials that are still the subject of study in the maintenance bay, and instead of a crew of two only one person survives – a composite.

They saved my life, so I must assume that their motives were good. Afterall, if they had been concerned to keep my brain alive simply to learn from me, then why would they repair my spaceship and return me? Why would they go to all that effort of rehousing my brain into her body?

I say her body because it was. There was only the chest and arms of me left, and now female hormones have worked upon them to make it feminine. Only the broader shoulders and stronger hands mark that part of my body as being Lionel’s. The rest of the outside is Anastasia. On the inside the heart and lungs and the brain and spinal cord are Lionel’s. So, who am I?

It has taken me a while to accept that I am new being. I have taken the name Leonora, which is a feminine version of Lionel, and after contemplation and experience of my new life I have taken a new family name too – Gorette. It is a combination of Gorova and Hachette. Anastasia

I was in the same state of semi-consciousness that I had been throughout those months – if that is what they were. I was just wearing the slip that Stace liked to wear, so basically naked when I realized that somebody in a suit was looking at me through conning glass. I could see they were from my crew, but still the thought that I had been rescued escaped me. It seemed as if the dream sequence in that split second before death still had another month or two to run.

But when the tether was fastened and I could see that I was being pulled back to the maintenance bay of the cruiser in orbit I slowly began to understand that this might be real. It was what was known in times past as “a miracle”. I had time to pull myself together while I was on my own, and that was when I discovered that in form anyway, I was no longer me.

I had time to consider how I should react to this. I would have accepted the body of a slug to live, but instead I was in the body of the beautiful Anastasia Gorova. I think many men on the cruiser desired her, even me, although I was not sexually active so not expressive of any desires. I will not go into details because that Lionel is gone, but I lacked potency and therefore interest. Perhaps that is why they put us together?

Her personal items had been collected and were present, including the fan mirror which she preferred over a handy device. She looked as pretty as if she was about to go dancing, with her long hair arranged in a high bun and some makeup as she wore out of habit, even on a working mission. Our rescuers had returned her as they found her, just with bits of me inside her.

I watched the giant bay door close and lock and waited for the air pressure to rise. I loosened my straps and I felt the gravity. I stretched my legs and then I stood up, as best I was able in the small cabin.

The door was opened from the outside. Two men entered. I recognized one of them as Mikhail Bykovsky, known as Misha. He said something to me in Russian which I did not understand, and then he rushed over and embraced me, whispering more Russian in my ear. This time, if I did not understand the words, I understood the meaning well enough. I just smiled at him as we broke away.

He would have kissed me were it not for the other man also waiting to help me out.

But the crazy thing was that I would have kissed him too. What does that mean? Science tells us that attraction lies in the brain, not the heart. But even if it was the heart, both of those organs were not Stace’s? Or does some part of desire lie in the part of me that I had yet to learn to live with – the internal sex organs of a female? It seemed to me that this was where I was feeling something.

It made sense. Misha was a good-looking man and outranked Stace, and they were both Russian – less than 10% of the total crew. Stace kept her male admirers at arm’s length, but he was one.

“I don’t believe it,” said the other one – his name was Tom. “We thought you were dead. You look great. We expected to carry you out, but … well let’s get you out of here.”

“I stepped onto the floor. The room was still chilled from the vacuum, and a woman stepped forward to put a robe around my naked shoulders, but not before everybody could see that something was out of place. Everybody because there was a large party to welcome me, including the captain and other officers, and the physician and other vehicle crews that Stace and I worked with.”

“This is fantastic, Stace,” said the Captain. “What happened to Lionel?”

“We lost one Captain.” That was the reply I gave. I had not planned it - it just came out that way. But I suppose that it was acceptance that there was a casualty, it just might not be him. “I was rescued. Only one survived.”

“Rescued? By who?” It was our Astro-physicist, Clarence Veale. But before I could replay our physician Karlotta Munz insisted that I be taken to sick bay and examined. The Captain and Clarrie followed.

“You must have a story to tell,” she said as we entered the four person Internal Transport Pod (ITP). “I noticed that you upper body is not as it was.”

The others had not noticed. But now they were curious – Clarrie even excited.

“Our sensors picked up the accident,” he said. “Your craft was destroyed. It was unsurvivable. And yet I have already examined the craft you arrived in. It is not yours, or not entirely. And it seems that your body may not be yours either?”

“It seems that it is a combination,” I said. “A sort of Frankenstein’s monster made from bits of me and bits of …”. I stopped because it seemed to much to say “bits of her” when I clearly was her.

“Well, it is a pretty good-looking combination,” said the Captain. He was about the only person aboard who could get away with saying something like that.

“The hair on the chest looks a little incongruous,” said Dr. Munz. “I can loan you a razor. Because your breasts are coming back.” She squeezed the mounds on my chest that I had only just then noticed. “Are there any other parts of Lionel that have survived?”

I had the answer, but I was almost reluctant to say it. I think that I had been aware that people were happy that it was Stace and not Lionel who had survived. Where did that idea come from? It felt as if it came from the belly, but I knew that even instincts are from deep within the brain. But Stace was popular, even widely adored, certainly loved by one – maybe more? Lionel Hachette? No, not him.

“Heart and lungs, I think,” I said. “Some parts of the brain? It seems that I don’t speak Russian anymore.”

I could see Dr. Munz react to that. I now understand that language is so vital to personality that this betrayed to her the truth of things, but she said nothing. She let Clarrie and the Captain question me and record the answers.

“She needs rest. I will need to keep her in for observation,” she said to them as she guided them out the door. Then she turned to me and said – “This must be a shock for you Lionel? Do you think that you are going to be able to cope?”

I burst into tears. It was not me at all. I was never prone to weeping. Dr. Munz put her arms around me and that felt good. I had never been tactile before. I said as much to her.

“In addition to a different from the female body has different chemistry,” she explained. Your body is adjusting. The organs that generate female hormones are intact. There are no male hormones other than what those organs produce. Your breasts will grow. The musculature of your shoulders arms will reduce, but not the bones. Your female reproductive organs are intact and healthy. You could live as a woman if you like. Or we could try surgical adjustment to allow you to function as a man?”

But it seemed to me that I was something in between.

It seemed ungrateful to complain. By rights I should be dead. But then to return and be somebody different and potentially somebody better – it was something that I had to explore.

“Do I need to decide?” I asked her.

“No,” she said. “But I think that the captain needs to know.”

Sometime later I learned from the Captain that he was somewhat relieved. Apparently, he embarrassed himself in some exchange with Stace. He did not go into details but the fact that I had no memory of it was useful to him.

As for Misha, he only needed to know that the person who he regarded as his girlfriend had lost all memory of their prior relationship, and that she now preferred to communicate only in English.

“Then I will start again,” he said. “I will try to make you fall in love with me all over again, and in the process I will fall in love all over again too.”

Those words seemed to have the same effect on me as that first embrace he gave me, but I had no real plans to enter into a relationship with somebody who still seemed to me to be of the same sex. But he was persistent, and there was a new part of my body that was ripe and cried out for physical stimulation. And by that I mean that it did seem to cry out.

Once he had penetrated me, and not for the first time as he explained, any thoughts of living my future other that as a woman evaporated in an instant.

But as I have explained, he needed to know, along with everybody aboard, that the person who had returned to our space vessel was not Anastasia Gorova and it was certainly not Lionel Hachette. That person was a new person to be know as Leonora Gorette, or just “Nora”. She could function and present as a female, and was sexy and attractive as such, but in truth she was something else. She was and still is, something in between male and female – a composite.

The End

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Laika suggested:

A married couple or boyfriend and girlfriend are on a deep space mission far from our solar system. Their spaceship crashes and the man is totally smashed up, just about dead, when some kindhearted (but perhaps genderless) aliens find them and save the male's life with their super-advanced technology. But having no idea of what a human is supposed to look like they use the woman astronaut as their model when they reconstruct the other one's body- breasts, more delicate facial features; vagina, ovaries + uterus, the works. They fix their spaceship too, and on the long trip back the wife---who's bisexual---shows the new female that it's really not so bad being a girl. That could happen, right.