Constructing Bridget

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I work construction. I always hated the fact that my only real job skills were some of the manliest. I would lift lumber or cement and work power tools. Every day I would wake up and put on my construction clothes and tie back my hair back into a low ponytail and put my company hardhat on. Even with pink cotton panties underneath I would feel awful. I just looked disgusting.

I really wanted to dress the way that I felt, and that was not like a man. I used to dream of wearing dresses, but I am married. I made for myself some secret time and I had a secret stash of the most feminine clothes to get dressed into. I had to wear leggings under my dresses to hide my hairy legs because I could never shave them. Hairy legs in bed were just expected, no matter how unnatural they seemed to be to me.

He likes me to be like him. Yes, I am married to a man – a gay man. My Jason.

There are so many stories about men hiding their feminine desires from their wives, but none about concealing your desires from your husband. Of course, he knew that cross-dressed, but he never approved of it. He said he was attracted to the manly things about me, like the fact that I work construction.

The truth of it is that I chose my trade because it was manly. I wanted to suppress the feelings inside me, the feelings of femininity. I picked a job that no woman would undertake, or very few. I worked hard to be good at my job, and I am, but sometimes I wish I was a hairdresser or a florist.

Jason always hated feminine things. I am not saying that he hated women, but I suppose you can say that he did not care for them. I think that it was so much worse for me because even the wife of a crossdresser or a transwoman can appreciate why their husband might like feminine things. Jason never could. He wanted me to be manly like him.

I love him, so I tried to be that person.

Sometimes, the moments that made me feel happiest were just sitting on the sofa looking across at my man and knowing that here was my handsome husband beside me. In those moments I would image myself as his pretty wife. I gave me true happiness, which I took whenever I could.

I just wished that he would hold me like a man holds a woman, but he was not like that. We were two men who loved one another, and men express love differently by being both men. Jason liked us to be equal in bed too, to do one another. I would be happy just to be his but he likes for us to do it hard. He likes my body to be strong. This is not me at all. It is just the person I wanted people to think that I was - most of all him, even though he knew there was something sapping my soul.

He could see my anxiety but he expected me to “man up” in a way that no woman would – no wife. But he was a husband and so was I, or so he thought.

I got so anxious that I developed incontinence. Strangely, wearing diapers made me feel better, perhaps because they are sexless. During the day I had to use male guards which did not have the same effect as fluffy diapers, but they did help me cope with releases.

It was all getting on top of me, and I felt as if I was going to split wide open at any moment. And my biggest fear was that I would lose Jason. He would suddenly see that I was really a woman pretending to be a man, and he would leave. Our relationship would be over.

Then Jason got a job working at an Indian casino. He had always worked in hospitality and this job was a big move for him. It would involve us moving into accommodation on the tribal land, but as he explained, there was plenty of construction work available. The casino was paying for development of housing and community buildings including a new Health Center.

I was looking forward to it. I would follow Jason anywhere.

I found work training some young men of the tribe in construction work. I spent less time on the tools, but I was outside, and we were doing good work. I felt good about the move we had made, and I told him. But after only a few weeks in, Jason started to feel unwell.

There was a doctor at the Health Center who could find nothing wrong with him, but the lady on the reception desk suggested that he talk to the Indian healer who also had a consulting room at the Center. This person was a healer of two spirits.

Jason was initially dismissive, but then he went to see this person. He came back and told me about it. He said – “This healer is a trannie. Some kind of Indian half-assed cross dresser. He or she or whatever has suggested that we go in together, for some reason.”

I would have urged him that we should even if I had not been curious about this person. The Medical Center was funding by the tribal organization which had hired Jason so there was no cost, and I did say to him that it would not be a good look for him to ignore their traditional indigenous practices. So, we went.

The healer was tall and clearly a man, with long hair as many men in the tribe wore, but otherwise presented as a woman, and acted perfectly as if she was one. “She” seemed entirely appropriate.

But from the moment that we walked in, her focus was on me, not Jason. Without looking at him she said – “I know exactly what the problem is, Jason. You need to release your spouse from bondage.”

Jason was there under sufferance, so he was not impressed. But what this healer said next threw us both. She kept her eyes on me.

“You are two spirits just as I am two spirits,” she said to me. “Do you know what that means? You have the spirit of a woman inside you, but you are also a man. Because you are of two spirits you can be twice the person that your husband is. Perhaps he does not want you to be that?”

Although I don’t think that Jason understood what was going on, he disliked the accusation against him. But I understood. This person had no idea who I was. She had never met me and had no idea that I should be anything other than what I appeared to be – a rough and ready construction worker. And yet she had seen right through me and had seen what I was. I had the spirit of a woman inside me.

She turned to Jason and said – “Your illness because you are trying to drown the spirit. You may not be affected among white people, but here in this land the spirits are strong. So long as you try to suppress a spirit in another, you will lose energy. It could be serious. People have died from this.”

Jason did not believe a word of it, but he needed to be polite. He liked his job, and he understood that it might entail a greater understanding of a culture he had no experience of, but I think that he felt this was an intrusion.

He did not exactly storm out. He found an excuse and left me with the healer.

For the first time I let it out. “I feel that I have a female spirit but if I wanted to, how could I release it and still be a man?”

“But you are not a man. You are something else. Two spirits people lie in the middle, with a spirit of each. For some, like me and also like you I think, the female spirit is stronger. It has nothing to do with your body. For all people the body is an obstruction to the spirit, but in our case that obstruction is unhealthy.”

I had never looked at it like this before, but I could really relate to this idea. Just hearing it was a release. There is a woman within me, as well as the man. She cries out to be free. My body is her prison. I could almost picture her banging her head against the bars of my rib cage.

“How can I free this spirit?” I asked.

“A knife freed her from within me,” he said. It took me a while before I understood what that meant. “But we now have modern medicine next door. There are hormone suppressors that can let her out without destroying her cage.”

This was like a turning point in my life, but I knew there would be problems for Jason.

“You don’t believe in this bullshit do you?” he said when I got home.

“I wouldn’t except for one thing,” I said. “Everything she said was true. It has been years since we talked about it because I know that you don’t want to, but there is a woman inside me. How could this stranger know that if it were not a gift?”

“I don’t want to lose you,” he said. Then, probably because he never liked to appear sentimental - “But this is a great job I have here at the casino.”

The following morning he could barely get out of bed. His illness had taken a bad turn. He even started talking about being the subject of an Indian curse.

“Look, let me just try to see whether I can make you well again,” I said to him. “You don’t need to do anything except let me. I will do the rest. If it doesn’t work, then I can stop.”

The drugs that the medical center provided were effectively a chemical castration, to match the healer’s physical castration except totally reversible. But even then, I was fearful of that first tablet. It seemed to me that I was boarding a train that could take me anywhere – in particular away from the man I loved. “You can get off any time you like” sounds OK, up until the train is moving so fast that you cannot.

But I wanted to do this. It seemed to me that fate had presented me with the chance to have a little peek at what life might be like on the other side. For somebody who has dreamt of that place all their life, that was too hard to ignore.

And the effect on Jason was immediate. He recovered, and every day that followed he got better. And I did too. I felt as if my anxiety was disappearing. The other changes came over time.

Jason complained that the drugs also caused me to have low sex drive and hopeless erections, but I was still ready for sex if he did all the work. What I noticed was reduced facial and body hair and then I started to notice a swelling in my chest.

“Surely this is not supposed to happen?” I said to the healer. “This is like taking female hormones.”

“The spirit of woman inside you is strong,” she said. “Maybe you should try female hormones?”

I refused but only because of Jason. I was in constant fear that he would see the woman in me and leave me. But at the same time as the fear mounted, I also felt delight, and somehow those emotions seem to fit well together. I saw glimpses the person that I dreamed I could be, and they thrilled me.

In fact, from the moment that the male hormones stopped controlling my body, I had felt content. Now as things progressed I felt a little more happiness in my life every day. Jason could see it.

I did not cut my hair. I told the young men that I was training that I might wear my hair long as older Indian men did. But the truth is that I liked it long, and perhaps because of the blockers it appeared fuller and softer.

But of course Jason noticed that too, and of course he was upset. It seemed to him that I was becoming something other than a man. I spoke to the healer about it and she asked us both to go and see her again, together.

“Do you love this person?” She put it that directly to Jason. To be honest I was a little concerned at his delay in replying, but I was happy with the answer when it came.

“With all my heart,” said Jason. “But I am in love with a man, not a half man half whatever.”

“If you fell in love with this person, you fell in love with whatever,” the healer said. “Would you love this person less if they had one arm? The body is not who we love. We may desire what we see on the outside, but we can only love what is on the inside.”

“I am worried that if I no longer desire his body, I might no longer love him,” he said.

“Then this is a test of your love – a test as to whether it is true,” the healer said. “Because I see more changes ahead in this person. I have told the tribal elders about your partner, as I believe that she is a positive force in our community.”

“She?” said Jason. “Are you talking about my guy as if she is a woman?”

I was dumbstruck. I just sat there. I felt as if just the use of the pronoun in referring to me had drained all the man out of me on the spot, and it was not a bad feeling at all.

“I have suggested to the chief that you wife join us here at the medical center where her energy is needed, and that you as her husband be accorded more honor in your own job. He agrees.”

“What are you saying?” said Jason. The healer had called me his wife. I was almost faint with euphoria.

“It is a promotion for you,” said the healer. “More than that, it is an invitation for you to join our tribe, for so long as you are married to … what is your female name, Child?”

“Bridge …,” I said. “Bridget”. It just came out. It was a name that I had nursed for years. It was unspoken, so almost a magical word. I said it without thinking whether it would bring my world crashing down or not. But by renaming myself I somehow knew that I would never go back.

Jason looked at me in horror, but I remained calm – I think the word is demure – perhaps even ladylike is a better word? He had a choice to make as to where his future lay. Would he accept even further advancement in a job he enjoyed, and become a part of a community that he increasingly admired, and love the person rather than the body? Or would he walk away from everything?

I now had all the courage that I never had before to become the person I always knew that I was.

I no longer work construction. I work in healing, and I learn more every day.

And I live as woman. I try not to flaunt it too much in front of Jason, because I know that he does not care for feminine things, but I am his wife and he has come to accept it, just as everybody in the tribe does.

I am still a man in bed for him, even though I cannot perform as a man anymore.

I tell him that I am still the person that he married, although my hair is long and my skin is hairless and soft, and bulges in places where Jason disapproves. He has learned to accept things, because we live in a very different place now. We live in a community and in a society that accepts that not everybody is exclusively male or female, and you love the person, not the body.

But I still love his body. Oh, how I love my man. Perhaps even more that I am now a woman.

The End

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