Chance Encounter

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Part 1

He was driving slowly as he came around the corner so the scene seemed to unfold in slow motion. Had he been speeding by perhaps it would be more easy to glance as he went past and excuse himself. He could say – ‘perhaps something was going on there, but I could not say for sure’ or even worse – ‘it looked like an assault, but I was not in a position to stop.’

But there it was, he could see everything. Three men and one woman. They were pulling at her clothes. She was obviously in distress. It was an attack. If he drove past then he might as well be one of them. At the very least he could never again call himself a decent person – he would have forfeited that right.

There was something he could do, but he had to do it now. He had to let adrenalin take charge and become a person that he was not – somebody of courage – a man. He pulled the steering wheel to the left and felt the bump as he mounted the kerb

He drove carefully and directly at the two men pull at her rather than the man behind her and restraining her. He could injure them without making contact with her. What rescue would it be to injure her. He put his lights onto high beam. Even that was enough to make them all turn there attention towards him coming towards them.

He applied the brakes but he hit at least one who fell off the side of his hood. The other may have stumbled, but he was on the ground. The one who had been holding her was now standing apart in shock.

He reached over and opened the passenger door. She was standing there trembling, with a red dress torn away revealing black underwear.

“Get in,” he called to her. “Get in now. Don’t look at them. We need to get you away from here!”

She was in and his foot was on the gas. At least one of maybe two of them pummelled the trunk of his car with their fists, but when he looked in the mirror the three figures were mainly standing and in the distance. The car crunched back on to the roadway.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Thanks to you.” The soft voice was deep, but fragile. This was a boy. A boy dressed as a girl.

“You should not put yourself in such danger.” He regretted saying the words immediately. It was not his place. It made him sound patronizing and old. He was older than this boy, but not by so much. “You must be in shock. Should I take you to hospital.”

“Please no,” the young man said. “They grabbed my bag. I can’t go home without changing.”

“We can stop at my place, if you like. It is quite close. My name is Anson Jeffries. I want to help.”

“I am not sure,” he said, his voice showing it.

“I cannot rescue you and wreck my car in the process and then abandon you. Please let me get you some hot tea and something to wrap you up in.”

“I call myself Charmaine, but that is not my real name.”

He glanced over at his passenger. “I guessed that, but you look like a Charmaine. Pleased to meet you, Charmaine, he said smiling at her. He pulled into the drive of his house.

Charmaine still looked a little uncertain as he opened the passenger door for her, as if for a real lady.

“You have my name, and this is my address,” he said. The number was on the house and the street sign on the corner was visible. “Text those details to a friend if you like, just to be sure.”

“My phone was in my bag, but that you for suggesting that. I suppose it is Okay.”

He unlocked the door and stood aside to let her in.

“I have a landline if you want to call somebody,” he said as he arranged hot water for a cup of herbal tea. “Or you can just tell me how I can help.”

“I guess that you know what I was doing out there tonight. I am desperate for the money, you see. This is not dress up. I really am transgender, but I am living with my parents and taking hormones they don’t know about. Working in a restaurant kitchen for hours after school is not enough. I only offer hand jobs and blow jobs. I am not ready for anal sex.”

“You probably need to come out to your parents,” said Anson bringing the cups over to the sofa.

“I am an only child. I think that it would kill them. But if I don’t do this, it will kill me.”

“Believe it or not, I understand completely,” said Anson. “But this is how I live. The female me gets a rare outing these days, and when I say ‘outing’ I mean within these four walls.”

“Oh,” said Charmaine. She was shocked, but suddenly at ease. “But you are just a cross-dresser, right?”

“If it were that simple.” Anson sighed deeply. I suppose that with my wife dead and my kids moved away I should consider myself as free as you should be, but I have truly painted myself into a corner. It now seems impossible for me to dream. But you, you can do it. You must do it.”

“It is so hard keeping things from my parents, and from everybody at school,” said Charmaine. “I want to stay at school until graduation in a few months, but I am starting to look very odd as the soft-skinned man child.”

“Take your wig off, Sweetheart,” said Anson.

Underneath it the hair was almost as blonde as the wig, but short. Even then, with the makeup on this was clearly a girl. Only the voice betrayed it, and perhaps the crudely padded bra that those ruffians had exposed.

“I’m sorry, let me get a blanket to wrap around you.,” said Anson. “Do we need to call your parents to tell them that you are OK?”

“They think that I work in the kitchen extra late some nights,” said Charmaine. “I have my wig, dress and shoes in a bag and I change in the alley behind work. But I lost the bag in the scuffle. Now with no boy clothes how can I go home?”

“I can loan you clothes,” said Anson. “We are the same size, I think. Even shoes by the look of it. But perhaps tell them that you are staying over with a friend? Let’s talk through your problems. Maybe I can help. I would certainly like too.”

“I really don’t want to be a burden,” Charmaine sipped the tea.

“Call it vicarious transition. Do you know what that means? It means helping you to transition will be like me achieving my own through you. I would be indebted to you rather than the other way around, if you were to let me help.”

“I could not accept any money,” said Charmaine. “I want to save up for my surgery, but I want to earn it – but I just hate the prostitution thing.”

“Just support then. But if you want to stay with me for a bit then I would happily pay for some help around the house. I have a busy job. I run my own business.”

“My parents love me, but I just cannot go through this in front of them.” There was a tear in Charmaine’s eye. She had been through a lot, but the this was the first tear Anson had seen.

“Believe me, Child, I understand,” he said.

Part 2

“Are you ready?” asked Charmaine, her voice now a perfect female one after months of practice.

A figure stepped forward, out of the bathroom. The floral dress was loose but belted. A good figure was visible. The freshly shaved legs looked good too, bare for the summer air covered on by a little fake tan. The arms were smooth too, and the hands softened by regular application of cream and by Charmaine’s talent as an amateur manicurist. Her skills were visible too on the makeup. The wig had once been Charmaine’s too, but it was now colored a warm mix of brown ombre tones.

“You must be Angela?” said Charmaine playfully.

Angela cleared her throat. She had a hard act to follow. She did her best, and it was good enough – “Yes, my name is Angela … Angela is my name.” It was husky. There was room for improvement. But it was good enough.

“Are you ready to hit the town, Angela?” Charmaine asked.

“No,”came the reply. “I am scared shitless. You are young and pretty, but look at me.”

“Older … and pretty,” said Charmaine looking her up and down. “Definitely female. There is no question. This is who you are. You know it don’t you?”

“This is hard for me,” said Angela. “I have spent a lifetime living as a man. I cannot just cast it off like some kind of hairy coat. It is ingrained into me like scars or an ugly tattoo. I may wish that I could rub it off, but I can’t.”

“Listen to yourself,” said Charmaine. “That is Angela’s voice. I hear her. I see her. There is no Anson Jeffries. Not tonight.”

“Promise me that if I am found out we are coming straight home,” pleaded Angela.

Charmaine smiled. She had a quick glance around the room. It had changed so much since she moved in. “Boarding with a friend” as she told her parents – “So I can live my true life”. It was a man’s home when she moved in, but now the traces of femininity were all around – flowers and pot pourri, new art without the hard edges, air freshener, quality curtains. It was not just her. There were two women living here.

“The Uber is here. Let’s go,” she said. She held the door open for the older lady who moved easily on her heels despite complaining earlier.

“Do you ladies have a big night planned?” the driver asked as he sped away.

“Just a few drinks and a nice meal,” said Charmaine. “But we will see what develops.”

Angela pinched her. She was not ready to speak. Charmaine mouthed for her to say something.

“Drinks and a meal will be enough for me. I am too old for a big night.” Angela squeezed out the words in her best husky falsetto.

The driver looked in the rear mirror. He was an older man, of an age when he felt he could say it – “You ladies both look young enough for a big night, provided you can persuade the barkeep that you are not underage.”

They were still smiling as they got out. It gave Angela a little more confidence as they entered the bar.

Charmaine had chosen it. The cocktails were expensive and exotic. Only the very rich or profoundly stupid would come here to get drunk. A best type of customer was Angela’s best insurance, even if it meant that she was buying.

“I’ll have one of those,” said Charmaine. “Come on – you do the ordering. Charm the barman like you did the Uber driver.”

Again, her words drew no strange stares, but then barmen are meant to be discrete. The drinks were tasty and carried the threat of being too easy to drink. Angela promised to pace herself.

Even though the bar was not full it was not long before a man approached Charmaine and offered to buy her a drink.

“There are two of us,” said Charmaine, indicating the presence of her friend. “And we are not ready for a fresh one yet.”

“Nobody would do that if I was dressed as a man,” said Angela. “He had his back to me.”

“Watch your voice,” scolded Charmaine. “Even talking between ourselves, when you are Angela you are all her, all night.”

Angela nodded. She looked around the bar. Nobody was staring at her. This was working. She started to feel relaxed. But there was one man staring. And then he was coming over. Looking directly towards her and walking towards her.

“Good evening ladies,” the man said, acknowledging them both but addressing Angela. “I can’t help notice that you two ladies are drinking alone, and I am here with my son on business – that is him the shy one sitting over there. We are from out of town and wondering if you might be local, and whether you might share our table and allow us to by you a drink. Nothing more that probing for a little local knowledge, that is all.”

Angela was struck dumb. Charmaine was looking across the bar at the young man sitting alone.

“We are local,” she said to his father. “And it would seem to be downright inhospitable to refuse. Don’t you agree Angela?”

“Right,” chirped Angela. The man had her trapped in his gaze. He reached out a hand.

“My name is David Horwell,” he said. “And my son Jason is over there.”

Angela offered a hand, but did not grip his and shake it. Somehow, she seemed to have suddenly become weak. The hand she put forward was simply offered to be grasped. Was it soft enough? Had the hand cream that Charmaine insisted on, worked?

“Angela Jeffries,” she said. “And this is Charmaine.”

They walked across to the table as Jason rose to his feet. He was tall like his father and strongly built, and his face was wide and honest. He welcomed Charmaine into the seat beside him. David held the chair for Angela and slid it under her bottom as she held her dress.

“We were wondering about a place to eat,” said David. “Somewhere with good food. Let me get your drinks. You might even join us.”

Charmaine looked at Angela and appeared to nod. But for Angela it was happening too fast. How long could she keep this up? She named the cocktail and David hurried away giving her a slight relief.

“I have to say that I noticed you at the bar,” Jason said to Charmaine. “I said something to my father, and it is just like him to walk over the way he did. I wish I had his confidence.”

“There are worse things to be afraid of than a little embarrassment,” said Angela. C nodded at her with a knowing smile. “So, you and your father are in business together. How nice.” And as David rejoined them she asked – “What exactly is the family business?”

“It really is a family business,” said David. “Originally established by my great grandfather. Horwell’s corsets. It was big in those days. Medical corsetry is what kept me going but with a renewed interest from women seeking that classical female shape, we are growing again and Jason is interested in putting his business degree to some use”

“Corsets. How interesting,” said Charmaine.

“Not that you ladies are in need of such things,” smiled David.

Angela took a sip of her drink before saying something. She said – “Well, David, for reasons I feel that I should state early, we may well be in need.”

“You don’t have to talk about our problems, Angela,” said Charmaine, evidently growing nervous about what was to happen.

“We can’t claim to have the perfect female shape because neither Charmaine nor I are female.” There. It was said.

David choked on his drink. He straightened himself and cleared his throat.

“Well done,” he said. “You had me there. Except that it is too obvious a lie.”

“You are quite possibly the most charming man I have ever met,” said Angela. “And as much as we might wish it were a lie, it isn’t.”

“There is a market in body shaping garments for the transgender community, Dad,” said Jason, strangely looking at Charmaine with a new respect. “Where do you recommend that we go for dinner.”

Part 3

Charmaine was helping her to get ready. She could be counted on for that.

The bride looked resplendent. Her hair was her own, fine but now covering the scalp thanks to some surgery and treatments. It was now blonde because that hides the grey, and long because she was now a complete woman. It was shoulder length but today was worn up with a hairpiece for volume and an ornament with matching earrings.

“Who would have thought that I would get married first?”

“Why not. We had surgery at the same time, and the truth is that I am not ready,” said Charmaine.

“I always thought that you and Jason …”.

“He needs a family, and I can’t give him that,” said Charmaine. “I can give him everything else and he knows that, but I wish him and Gayle a happy life. We can still work together. We can still have sex, if that is what he wants. Maybe he will come back to me. Maybe I will find somebody else. I am just loving the freedom at the moment. I don’t envy you the ball and chain of a husband. Not yet anyway.”

“I wish I could say that this was the day I had always dreamed of, but I could never allow myself to dream it, and now here I am.”

“Don’t you dare ruin your makeup after all my hard work,” said Cara. “Now there is the music starting, so we just need to step into the hall and walk down the aisle. Are you ready Angela?”

“God yes. But before we step out I need to say something to you, Charmaine. I need to thank you for helping me through all of this and leading me to this day. If it were not for you I would not be the woman I am. Thank you, my darling.”

They embraced.

“No, thank you for rescuing me. I might not even be alive if you had not stepped in, or ridden up onto the sidewalk that night. Thank you, Angela.”

They smiled at one another. They kept smiling all the way up the aisle to the waiting groom, David Horwell, just a month divorced from the woman he had hated for years, now ready to take as a new wife, the true love of his life.

And her corset gave her that wonderful shape beneath the gown.

The end

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