Long Shot Wedding

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

In Dodsonville Texas they look down on young men who don’t serve. It was just in those days I could not serve even if I wanted to. I was gay. Simple as that. But in Dodsonville Texas they don’t even bother looking down on fags – they just walk all over them.

Even my sister joined the army. Sometimes I think she did it just to spite me. She was a real daughter of Dodsonville, was my sister Verna. She was tough, and not the least ladylike. My mother said that God does not make mistakes, but it was almost like her got us the wrong way round.

It was while the war in Afghanistan was going on. She was stationed over there. I think she was driving a truck or something. My brother was there at the same time, but they never saw one another. I guess Afghanistan is a big place. Then he was sent to Korea, but she stayed on in Afghanistan through the summer of 2016.

Then we got the message to say that she was pregnant. Some say women get pregnant to get sent home, but that was not what happened, I am sure. She liked the army, least she always said so. I suppose she could have made the decision to get an abortion over there and stay on, but it turned out that the problem was that it was too late.

Verna was always a bit chunky I guess, and she also had digestion issues like morning sickness, so maybe that is why she never noticed and never reported that she was pregnant. Or maybe she just did not want to believe it. I could believe that of her too.

Then there was the fact that she was not married to the father, and worse than that, by the time she had found out, he had been transferred Stateside. He was a sniper and was going to assist in training new snipers at the base at Fort Bliss. When Verna finally found out that she was pregnant she asked him to make contact with my parents.

I sure wish I knew what she thought was going to happen when he did. His name was Pedro Diaz and he was Mexican. I mean he was born in Texas, and maybe his parents were too, but he was Mexican. I never thought that Verna liked Mexicans, because sure as hell my father hated them. Anyway, she must have dropped her prejudice long enough to get fucked by Pedro.

Pedro came around and I was there. Before my father exploded, Pedro said that he was coming to ask for the hand of his daughter in marriage – all old-fashioned and the like. Pedro said that he cared for Verna and that he was a man of honor and would be a good husband and father.

On top of that, Pedro was a big, good-looking guy and had a charm about him that was special. I have to say, I fell in love with him almost straight away. For young gay men like me, that can happen. It is like we know it can never happen, but we can all have dreams – right? I am not prejudiced. I would happily be fucked by Pedro.

Pedro said that he was ready to marry her by proxy, which is a thing. It is the law in Texas that “a person may agree to marriage by the appearance of a proxy appointed in the affidavit if the person is: (1) a member of the armed forces of the United States stationed in another country in support of combat or another military operation; and (2) unable to attend the ceremony.”

Verna said that she knew that our father would want to keep the whole thing very quiet, so the member of the family she was appointing would be me.

It was a shotgun wedding of a kind, because my father would happily have used a shotgun if needed, even though it wasn’t. The truth is he would rather have used it to send Pedro and his kind to whatever hell is set aside for Mexicans, but his grandchild should not be born a bastard.

Pedro said it was more like a long-range wedding – a sniper rifle rather than a shotgun. Except that no scope would be enough for him to see his bride.

So, it is like a real wedding, with a licence, repeating of vows and an exchange of rings and everything. It was just that I was standing in for Verna. I was not supposed to make a big deal of it, although God knows I would happily have worn a wedding dress. I just decided to buy some white pants and wear a white shirt, like bridal colors.

We had the ceremony in my parents living room before lunch. My father had hired a marriage celebrant who did all the paperwork.

Pedro didn’t know me, but he was grateful that I was doing this thing. We had some fun through the ceremony. Given that my father was staring daggers and my mother was mad with Verna for causing all this strife, I did my best to lift spirits. The celebrant did not say “you may now kiss the bride” but I puckered up anyway. Pedro just laughed.

It was done. Pedro took the wedding certificate and sent a copy through to Verna and to a few others. Then we had some drinks and we sat down for a big family lunch – the family, now including the celebrant. We were going to try to call Verna, and we did try, but she was not answering even though it had been arranged.

But just as the celebrant rose to leave, there was a knock on the door. It was the visit that no family with service people wants to receive. Verna was dead, and had been for the entire day. She had hemorrhaged during premature delivery of the baby. The baby was alive, a daughter, but Verna was dead.

My mother burst into tears, and I embraced her. My father just stood there in shock, and Pedro put an arm around his shoulders. A Mexican comforting my father – could you believe it.

“I need to think about my little girl,” said Pedro. “I need to bring her home. She is my family now. My parents will help.”

My father started to bristle. I could see it. He said – “That child is a part of my daughter – a part of this family, and …”.

I knew what he was about to say. Something like - “no fucking Mexicans are going to bring up my granddaughter”, but thankfully he stopped himself.

I am not sure whether Pedro asked or whether the celebrant volunteered the information. It was just that Pedro had spent a few hours married, and so what was his status now. Was my father’s son in law?

“Well, a proxy is an agent, and if the principal party does not exist then the agent steps into her position. So, I guess you two are married.” He was pointing to us – me and Pedro.

I mean, the whole family was very upset. Such things were not our concern. For my parents it is one day planning a wedding and the next day planning a funeral. As it turns out Pedro was not that keen on marrying Verna, but for a few hours it seemed that he was, and now she was gone. Now, how could he be married to his bride’s gay brother?

It was 2016, the year after the Supreme Court decision on same sex marriage. Our marriage was legal and so it was real.

It turned out that Pedro had put in for family quarters. His new spouse and child would be returning soon, but she had to be a wife. 2016 was also the year when a new government was talking about policies affecting gays in the military. If Pedro had a male partner, that made him gay, and potentially out of the services. Nobody wanted that.

What everybody wanted was for him to have a bride, somebody from my family, somebody who could share in raising my father’s grandchild. And it just so happened that Pedro had a spouse – just not a bride.

“You have signed up for this,” my father said to me. “You will have to step in for your sister. You will have to be a wife to Pedro and a mother to your newborn niece.”

That was that! If you don’t know my father, I will have to explain it just that simply. No ifs, buts or maybes.

My mother just needed something to get her mind off her grief. It was her idea that I dress up and that we take wedding photos. She had her old wedding dress in the attic, and she brought it down. Verna would never have been able to get into it, but it fitted me perfectly. Even the bridal shoes fitted me at a squeeze. She brushed my hair up and pinned it under the floral wreath she had worn all those years ago, and shaped my eyebrows and applied makeup.

“I always thought that you were prettier than Verna,” she told me. She was sad, but the truth is that she was never that close to my sister. They clashed. Verna had always been a Daddy’s Girl just as I was always a Momma’s Boy. Dad hated the fact that I was gay, even though he had my older brother and Verna, both of whom chose to serve.

I came downstairs and both my father and Pedro were amazed.

The marriage celebrant was still there, and it turned out that he was a pretty good photographer too. He took some photos of us with the family, and then he suggested a “kiss the bride” shot. Only hours before I had puckered up as a joke, and I did that again, closing my eyes and waiting for the air kiss.

But instead I felt Pedro’s lips on mine, hot with passion. It was a total surprise, and perhaps I was ready to drop away, but I felt Pedro’s hand on the silk in the small of my back, pulling me in, and I just melted. It seemed to last for an age, but when it ended I wished it hadn’t.

I opened my eyes and I could see Pedro’s face was a portrait of confusion. My parents just looked shocked.

“I’m sorry,” whispered Pedro. “It was just that you looked so beautiful. This was the sort of image of me and my bride that I always had. It just seemed to have come true for a moment.”

Looking at him, I felt the same way. Nowadays gay men dream of marriage the way I supposed we never used to. We dream of standing in front of family and friends and looking into the face of a strong man, and seeing that look in his eyes – just the kind of look that I saw in Pedro’s eyes that day.

You can see it in the photo too. Hardly a day goes by when I don’t look at that photo. Me and my husband Pedro. It was the day my sister died. It was the day that we got married. It was the day we fell in love. It was the day that I knew that I had to be his wife forever and be a mother to our newborn child. Curiously, in just that order.

The End

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*Erin’s Seed: A young man agrees to be a proxy for a young woman getting married. After the vows are made, the girl is discovered to have died/disappeared/been already married whatever but the groom insists that he and his bride are married now. The bride has to agree and off they go*

*Note on Proxy Marriages*

*In Texas, Section 2.203 of the Texas Family Code guides proxy marriages. This section states that upon receiving an unexpired marriage license, an authorized person may conduct the marriage ceremony as provided by this subchapter. The 72-hour waiting period after receiving the marriage license still applies in proxy marriages, just like it does in a ceremonial marriage. The second part of the statute states that a person may agree to marriage by the appearance of a proxy appointed in the affidavit if the person is: (1) a member of the armed forces of the United States stationed in another country in support of combat or another military operation; and (2) unable to attend the ceremony. Thus, the individual requesting the proxy by marriage must be serving in the military and stationed outside of the country. In 2014, an outcry of public opinion prompted a change in policy to allow Texas prisoners to get married by proxy, thus prisoners in Texas are now allowed to marry someone on the outside. In most of the United States, marriage by proxy is not allowed, but a small handful of states still permit it, including Texas.*