Man of the House

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

My parents were very keen to meet Manuel, my sister’s new boyfriend, and it seemed like she was toying with them … my father in particular.

“Are you worried that I might embarrass you? Or that we will clash, Chrissy?” Dad asked her.

“No, Dad,” she said. “If there was a clash then you will fold. Man is a guy like no other guy you would ever meet. “Man” is not just a shortening of his name, it is what he is. He’s incredible. I am very lucky to have snared him. But he is probably more than you can handle. They way I handle him is to just let him take charge. He is that kind of man, Man, and I love him for it.”

“You are talking love, sweetheart?” Mom said. “Are you sure? You haven’t known him very long. But if you are so certain then we need to meet him, don’t you think?”

But it had already been decided. I was helping to lay the table for five for a big Sunday lunch – Mom’s special meatloaf – ground beef and herbs with pureed chicken livers her secret ingredient to make it taste rich, and a chili bourbon glaze.

Chrissie was getting excited, so when the knock on the door happened, she bolted to get there, only pausing at the hall mirror to check that she looked good. I was at the end of the hall and the first to see Man walk in.

He was tall but not too tall, strongly built without being bulky, dark hair – good looking – and with dark eyes that looked directly at me. They were remarkable eyes. They seemed to look right inside me, but not in a scary way – there was a twinkle of humor in them. I liked him immediately, even though I could sense that he was working me out just by sight.

“Oh, this is my brother Robert,” said Chrissie, as if I was a mark on the carpet.

He reached out his hand, which for some reason seemed to confuse me, as if he was expecting me to give him something. I felt stupid that I was late to offer my hand to shake, but he smiled and took it, not to shake but to squeeze and hold.

“Nice to meet you, Bobby,” he said. “You don’t mind if I call you Bobby, do you?”

I hate being called Bobby, or even Bob. I prefer Rob, but anything but Bobby. But I said – “Sure, that’s OK,” even though it was not. Was I just trying to be helpful?

My mother was next. She came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

“My mother’s name is Joanne,” said Chrissie. “You’re Ok with Man calling you Joanne, aren’t you Mom?”

Mom was staring at Man, and her lips were moving but nothing was coming out. She just nodded slightly.

“Joanne is such a beautiful name,” said Man. “It is perfect for you.” He took both her hands in his and he kissed her on both cheeks. I swear Mom blushed.

The crazy thing is that while Mom is a warm-hearted person, she is a little shy of intimate contact. I think that we all would have expected her to subtly sway back or raise a hand to avoid the kiss of a stranger. Even my uncle and aunt have givrn up trying to embrace her, but this guy just did it, and she accepted it.

My father stepped forward having witnessed this, almost as if to protect Mom, but before he could say anything, Man turned to him and thrust out his hand.

“Ah, Mr. McGill. Chrissie’s told me so much about you, I feel I almost know you. Do you mind if I call you Phil?”

My father hates being called Phil. He always corrects people who do, politely but firmly. But for some reason he didn’t do that this time. His mouth was open, and his eyes locked on Man. Was he trying to see something in the young man who seemed to have won his daughter’s heart? It sure didn’t look that way. He looked blank, as if his head was empty in the moment.

“Can I just say it – I see where Chrissie get’s her looks from. I mean you are all just such attractive looking people,” said Man, looking at each of us.

“You’re a fairly good-looking guy yourself,” said Dad. It seemed like an odd thing to say, but stranger still was the way that Dad said it, softly but with his voice almost cracking.

“Actually, I am going to call you Filly,” said Man, looking at Dad again, somehow responding to the compliment. “That is a young horse, right? A horse is a good thing – strong and dependable. They say hung like a horse?”

“A Filly is a young female horse,” I pointed out.

“Well, some females are hung, right Filly?” said Man.

“I guess so,” said Dad. What the fuck was going on here?

“You have a very pretty face, Filly. You don’t mind me pointing this out, do you Joanne? You could do something to help your husband to look even better, couldn’t you?” It seemed as if Man had cast a spell over both of them. As for Chrissie, she was already under that spell and we sort of knew that before he even turned up.

“He does have beautiful blue eyes,” said Mom. “They would benefit from having a little eyeliner and mascara to show them off.”

“What a good idea,” said Man. And do you have something he could wear in a color to accentuate that eye color? Why don’t you take Filly upstairs and get him ready. I love being surrounded by beautiful things. You and your daughter, Joanne, are both magnificent, and Filly could be. Go on, get upstairs and get changed. I feel that tonight is going to be a special evening. I am going to be swimming gorgeous things. Off you go. Do you want to go too, Chrissie? I want to talk to Bobbie.”

I have to say that I was afraid to look at him. As I saw my whole family head upstairs as if in a trance, to put makeup on my father’s face, I felt a sense of dread. This man, Man, had walked into our home and taken over. What was he about to do to me?

“I think that your father has been hiding something, don’t you, Bobbie,” he said. “Perhaps he has never really met a real man before?”

I turned to look at him. If I was going to reply, I needed to. If I had a reply in mind it was gone the moment I looked into his eyes. There was a power that I had not seen when I first met him in the hall. It was a look that seemed to tear the clothes from your frame, so that you felt that he was seeing you naked, and that your naked body was inadequate.

“God, you are pretty too,” he said. “You have such wonderful long hair. Have you thought about wearing it up? I would love to see it in a more feminine style.”

My hand went to my hair seemingly by impulse, or was it direction. I needed to get a grip on myself, but I could not stop looking at his gaze. I clenched my fists in order to get my question out – “What are you doing to us?”

“This is a wonderful home,” he said. “And this is a wonderful family. Bobbie, you need to know that I am serious about your sister. I think that she is the one. If she is then I would be happy to be a part of this family, but – you can call me old-fashioned if you like – I sort of expect to be top dog. People call me a man’s man, as well as calling me just Man. I enjoy the company of men, but real men. People less than men have a place, I guess, but in my house people less than men should not be men. So, if you want to follow your family upstairs and come down properly dressed for dinner, then off you go. But perhaps point me to the liquor cabinet before you do.”

It seemed as if he had found me out. I wanted to dress as a woman and present myself to him. It seemed as if this desire had always been inside me and yet I could not remember ever having felt it before. It was not as if I felt compelled, but rather that I was relieved that a secret was out. Did the same thing apply to my father? Were we latent transvestites?

“Are you hypnotizing us?” I asked him. I still felt compelled to go to the cupboard where my father kept the alcohol and open it for him.

“I have no idea about that stuff,” he said. “I am just a man, and some men find me intimidating. But I think a lot of women find me powerfully interesting, including women like you and your father.”

“I am not a woman,” I protested. I would have said that my father was not one either, but I was starting to have doubts, even though that was completely irrational.

“Maybe not yet, he grinned. “But why don’t you run along upstairs and join the ladies. I will make myself a drink and when all four of you come downstairs we can eat, and after that we will see how many men there are in this house.”

I looked at him again. The only thought in my head was how I could please him. How pretty could I make myself? I could wear my hair up, I guess – Chrissie could help me. I would need to shave, although my beard was sparse, like my father’s. In fact I would need to do a lot of shaving. I suddenly realized that if I wanted him to find me attractive, I had a lot of work to do and very little time. I ran up those stairs.

Chrissie had already changed into something very sexy, and Mom had too. Chrissie had Mom seated at the dressing table in the master bedroom applying new makeup and putting some curls in her hair while Dad was in the ensuite shaving his legs. I would have the use the hall bathroom, and then take my turn in the styling chair before we all went down for dinner.

He asked Chrissie for permission and he asked Mom whether she minded waiting until next time before he bedded Dad and then me. I suppose he just had to settle it once and for all. We are not really men at all. None of us are. We are women and our role is to please him. Since he moved in there is only one man of the house. Man.

The End

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Author’s Note: Somebody on FM message board asked to reference to – “stories where the man of the family gets feminized by men who take over the family and the house. Boyfriend of the daughter or a new male friend of the wife.” I replied – “I don't know of a story like this, but I quite like the idea.”

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