Judgement

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Part 1

Docket 9613/53/56

**Judgement of the Court**

Justice Charles Jacobs presiding

This case involves the estate of the late Delphine Leroux.

By all the evidence it appears to me that Mrs. Leroux was a strong woman. Widowed when her two sons were very young, she took the small cosmetics company she and her husband had established, and turned it into a substantial beauty products enterprise, now in 30 states.

Sadly, Delphine Leroux died last year, after a brief illness.

Before she died, she made a will dividing her wealth between her two sons, David and Alexander. But in the case of Alexander she made his inheritance conditional. Because of that, Alexander Leroux, the Plaintiff in this case, comes before the Court to seek to overturn his mother’s will.

The Court has limited power to intervene. The starting point is that the decedent has the legal right to dispose of their property in any way that is legal. It is assumed that the author of the Will knew what they were doing, and the burden of proof is on the claimant that the testator lacked testamentary capacity or was influenced by undue pressure from a beneficiary, or fraud, or some insane delusion.

The Plaintiff alleges that the requirement that has been placed upon him is so onerous and strange that it proves that his mother was mentally unwell at the time that she made the Will.

I draw no inference from the fact that his brother David does not support his claim. He was not represented at the hearing last week, and only filed to protect his position should any order of this court affect his interest. He has no reason to be concerned.

I have reviewed the material including correspondence between Mrs. Leroux and her attorneys, which included copies of emails between her and Alexander. It is very clear that she disapproved of her younger son’s lifestyle, and in particular his attitude to women. It is very clear that Alexander had scant regard for that disapproval. This must have been particularly galling given the fact that the Plaintiff never bothered to find a job, relying on the largess of his mother, nor had he ever entered into any meaningful relationship as she hoped he would.

Her older son David, in contrast, qualified in law and business, worked in and now takes over management of the family business. He has a wife Mrs. Leroux approves of, and three grandchildren she clearly adores. This is evident from the correspondence in evidence.

Alexander has been a disappointment to her, and it was probably her view of him and his attitudes that prompted her to impose conditions that she did.

Still, he receives no more than his younger brother, provided that Alexander meet the terms that his mother has set out for him. She could easily have cut him out completely, but that is not what she did. She simply set him a challenge which, if he meets it, entitles him to the same share. Some might say that the Plaintiff may not deserve a full half share, but that is not my place. I simply decline to intervene in the testator’s wishes.

What she has asked of Alexander may seem strange, but I find that she set out those conditions rationally and with a full understanding of how they would affect him. And it is only a request. There is no compulsion other than to give him the option: If he wants his share of the estate, he can meet the conditions. If he is not prepared to, then that share will go to a number of charities for abused and oppressed women.

While odd, I see nothing unreasonable in her requirements. They certainly do not disclose any mental instability. In fact, they echo of some sense of justice for the Plaintiff’s perceived misdeeds, and perhaps to allow him to correct his ways by experiencing life on the other side.

The Plaintiff’s claim is dismissed.

While I consider that the Plaintiff’s case had little merit, approved costs will be borne by the estate, which is substantial, provided that there is no appeal. If he does appeal, the Plaintiff will be liable for all the costs of the current proceedings.

“So, there is it, Alex,” said Mark Clearbourne. “We can appeal, but I have to say that the firm would want their costs paid. And, as a matter of law, there are no clear grounds for appeal.”

He looked across the table at Alexander Leroux. He was not really a friend. They had gone to the same private high school for the privileged, so Alex had sought his advice. Mark was only a junior at the firm, but by bringing the case in, he had the chance to sit second chair during the trial, under a senior partner. As the junior, he was there to watch as the bad news was delivered.

“Tell him to take his medicine and collect the cash,” that same counsellor had said when the judgement came through. “Pride has a price”.

But how do you tell somebody that? Bluntly – that’s how.

“It’s two years, Man. Two years living as a woman and working in the family business. Like I say to the less fortunate of my criminal clients: Take the plea offered; swallow hard and do the time.”

“You don’t understand,” said Alex, looking up with his big eyes looking almost afraid. “Even from the grave she is trying to control me.”

Part 2

Patricia Harbison was elegant and severe. She had joined the House of Delphine fresh out of school. Delphine Leroux had paid for and encouraged her to go through night school and acquire additional skills and qualifications, but what she valued most was what she had learned from her mentor.

“We only learn from experience and the experience of others,” Ms. Leroux had told her. “Observe and listen and understand that a depth of experience is what prepares you for life”.

She knew exactly why Alexander, now Alexis, stood before her, almost trembling from the feeling of having of nakedness after having every hair ripped from his body. He was dressed only in a fine silk robe. Everything else that he would need was laid out before the forlorn creature.

“Treat this as a gift from your mother,” Patricia said. “She wanted you to acquire a love for this place that can only come through understanding it at every level and understanding how she built this empire from the bottom up.”

“Whatever,” snarled Alex.

“You start at the bottom, with a level of pay probably insufficient to even survive in this city, so if you want more you will have to improve your attitude. Your mother’s house has been sold, so you will need to find somewhere to live. I would suggest that promotion to a proper level of remuneration should be your goal. But to give you an advantage you have these clothes and others, and access to the products of the business. Beauty products.”

“I just have to live as a woman,” Alex said flatly.

“Then live as a poor woman. Women who are not proud to be women, do not advance at the House of Delphine.” Patricia held up a garment that could best be described as heavy underwear that could enable anyone to acquire a female form. He snatched it from her.

“I will give you some privacy,” said Patricia. “But you will see that there is a channel to tuck your penis back so that you will not need to take it all off to pee. And perhaps I should give you a little instruction on how to put on a bra and pantyhose. These are things you will need to know about.”

“You’re enjoying this aren’t you?” said Alex.

“I will enjoy executing your mother’s wishes,” she replied. “If you are up to it, I will enjoy watching you develop the way she would have wanted. I won’t enjoy it if you don’t, but I think that your mother understood you better than you know.”

“What else is lined up for me?” he said. The look of resignation that Patricia expected was creeping across his face at last.

“The salon treatment,” she said. “Hair and makeup is part of the business, so please do more than just let it be done to you. Watch what they are doing. Ask questions. Learn. A knowledge of the business is the key to this experience. Without that knowledge you will not get the promotion you need to pay your rent.”

Rent? Alex suddenly realized that as of Friday he would be out of the house. Would Dave put him up? That seemed unlikely. Dave was angry about the suit he had filed. Who else? Could he couch surf for a bit? Maybe? Mark or Al, or maybe …? Who? It dawned on him that there was really nobody.

Patricia had gone so he examined the garment that was supposed to transform him. He put his feet through the leg openings and examined the structure that would restrain his penis. What a nightmare.

There were sticky patches under the false breast allowing the liquid filled shapes to fall a little. He thought nothing of it. He had no understanding of how female hormones could pass directly through the skin for the 14 hours a day he would wear these garments for the next few months.

Part 3

Mark walked into the reception area to greet Alex, but it seemed that he was not there. An attractive young woman rose as if pose a question, so he smiled at her.

“Hi Mark, are you ready for me?” She spoke as if she knew him. He found himself second-guessing. Perhaps he did know her? She was still smiling when It dawned on him.

“Alex?”

“Is it the hair or the dress?” she asked. “How could you not recognize your old pal?” She was teasing him. The transformation was unbelievable. The hair was honey blonde and curled at the shoulders. The dress was expensive and showed off a body that the stuff of dreams.

“Sorry, just not expecting …,” Mark trailed off, before correcting himself: “Come in, take a seat.”

She moved gracefully, and took he seat with an elegant swing of her behind, tucking her dress underneath and crossing her legs at the thigh. The legs were bare and long, the shoes expensive and with a high heel.

“I got the apartment lease you sent through,” said Mark. He was averting his eyes from hers. Alex always had those big eyes, but somehow with the makeup and the painted lashes they seemed huge and deep. They were unsettlingly beautiful. She was unsettlingly beautiful.

“Is it OK to sign, then?”

“Nothing irregular. But it seems expensive. You have a few months to go before you have any access to your share in the estate.” Then Mark felt able to raise his eyes from the document and say: “But it looks to me like you are on target to collect that.”

“It is expensive, but I am on an acceptable salary at last.” She opened her designer handbag to look for a pen. He offered her his, but she waved it away. “I sign in aqua these days,” she said.

The signature was new too. It was looped and feminine, and aqua.

“I just can’t believe it,” said Mark. “When took our advice and agreed to do this, I thought you were just going to endure it. But can I say, it looks like you are relishing it.”

“You have to see the positive in the inevitable,” she said, initialing the pages of both copies of the document with a flourishing “AL”. “And the fact is that working at the House of Delphine requires that you live up to a standard.”

“There was a time when you told me that you would never work for your brother,” said Mark.

“Dave is a numbers guy,” Alex said, tidying the pages in front of her with manicured hands and long painted nails. “He has no sense of style. Mother was the style in the organization. We never got on, but I know that now. Dave thinks that you can hire it in, but that goes to show that he does not understand how crucial mother was. But she had sons instead of daughters.”

“Well, it looks to me like she has a daughter now,” said Mark.

The pretty face looked at him oddly. “I just want the money,” she said. “I will do what the judge said I had to do, and then I will collect.”

“It’s not just the money. It’s half of the company too. I suppose that you can sell it to David if he is a buyer. He may not be.”

“He’ll run it into the ground.” She suddenly looked worried. “Dave knows nothing about the business other than what is recorded in columns. Patricia is competent, but she is no style leader. You cannot just carry on with what was in vogue last year and expect to be ahead of the pack. And make no mistake about it – if there is one thing I have learned in the last year or so, it is that the players in this industry are wolves. Anything that falls behind will be killed and eaten.”

“It sounds like you have picked up a lot in the last year or so.” Mark could not deceive himself any longer. He was hopeless attracted to this woman, and this intensity magnified that. “Maybe you should consider buying him out? We could discuss some options. Not professionally I mean. Just talk about it, informally, no fees or anything like that. Maybe over a drink? Or dinner? I finish up in an hour. Or maybe I could knock off early?”

“Are you asking me out on a date?” She asked it with a sly smile, but then added: “You would not be the first.”

“So, you have dated … as a woman?”

“Look at me, Mark?” She adjusted the top of her dress to show that the breasts visible were no longer fakes. In truth that awful underwear had been discarded long ago. All that was underneath was a tiny pair of panties that were all that was needed to conceal even tinier genitals.

Mark found that his were in the very opposite state. He cleared his throat: “Alexis,” he said. “Would you give me the honor of allowing me to take you out tonight, on a date?”

“I thought you would never ask.” The words came out of her mouth almost automatically. I seemed that she wanted the man in front of her to desire her, and perhaps she always had. He was a good person – kind and intelligent. If he showed any bad judgement it was in his remaining friends with Alexander Leroux. But now Alexis knew that there no longer was such a person.

“God yes,” she said.

The End

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