The Candidate

A Short Story for “Getting Ahead”

By Maryanne Peters

I have always considered myself a Republican. I suppose in America it is like being a Christian – you are born into a Christian household and you are raised with Christian values and so that is what you are. I was raised with Republican values when we all knew what they were. I mean free-market capitalism, low taxes, deregulation, individual rights, law and order, a powerful military. I still believe in those things, so even if I may not be so much a Christian these days, I still feel that I am a republican.

I have always considered pursuing public office. He may have been a Democrat, but I think Kennedy was right to say – “ask what you can do for your country”. I would happily serve in the military if I thought I had the temperament for it. That is not something I can do for my country. Ask again. What can I do that might make this country better? Nowadays for any republican who believes in Republican values the answer is, convince more people that these principles are right.

Maybe we are in the minority. It seems like the majority are saying – “It is the principles of the Democratic party that are popular and get the votes, so we need to win by trickery. We can use the electoral college and the senate and gerrymander congressional seats and stay in power with less votes than they get.” To me, that is not right. If Republican values are not popular, we need to get out there and educate the public.

That is the kind of talk that won me support in the party, but only in the moderate wing. Luckily that wing still holds some sway in my state. My state is one of the few. Because I am still in politics I won’t name my state, but maybe you can guess.

But as the state branch of the party said to me, more than once – “Kid, the problem is that you are a HWM – a heteronormative white male, without a recognized name or a military background. The deck is stacked against you. Hell, even if you were black or gay, or even both, the party could use you for diversity. Sorry, son.”

The truth of it is that I was doing more than considering a political career – I wanted it and I wanted it bad. Having to hear that I was disqualified because I was too normal really grated, but it was true. How could I become a minority, or at least more interesting?

I was not gay, and I had no desire to pretend to be gay. To be honest, I found gay people quite distasteful. Perhaps it was because it seemed to me that many of them were stridently anti-Republican. Perhaps they had good reason to be, but I did not feel an affinity there, even with gay men who were Republicans.

But I went to a Republican conference in Los Angeles and one of the speakers was Caitlyn Jenner, who was (of course) once the Olympian Bruce Jenner. She proclaimed herself a proud republican but said (you may heard this – “When I first transitioned, coming out as a Republican was more difficult than coming out as transgender”. She had a grace about her that I liked. She had glamor as well as brains. That was when I decided to pursue my political dream as a transwoman.

You can call me up on this, and you would been right. It is a cynical way to achieve a position of power. I put it to you that it is no more cynical than the hypocrisy and many of the other strategies in use in my own party. But what you hear coming out of my mouth is my values and my policies. No matter what I look like, in public or naked, my words are me. I know plenty of Republican colleagues who claim to be Christians when they are not; or claim to love their wife and kids when they don’t; or claim to never take a dollar to change their policies when they do.

I discussed it with my parents and they both thought that it was nuts. It was just that I had tried so hard to get ahead in the party and I was going nowhere. But I had to agree. It was nuts.

“Just let me try to do this,” I told them. “If it doesn’t work out then I will forget about politics. If it does, I will do my bit and then move on.” But even as I said it, I felt that unless I won election, I would keep on trying, and if I did win it might be hard to quit.

I knew that if I was going to do this, I needed to look good. My thinking was that I did not need to do any irreversible so facial surgery was a possibility but should be avoided, But I needed to take hormones and do some serious body shaping. I did my research and when I thought that I fully understood what it was to suffer from gender dysphoria (not feeling at home in a male body) I visited a specialist and got the prescription.

I went and got a full body wax. I was told that there are plenty of men who do it, but I told the girl attending to me that I was transgender and on the cusp of transition. She told me that she was not surprised because - “I feel that there is a woman inside you”. I have to say that made me feel strange, but not in a bad way.

There are numerous resources on the internet for the transgendered and I took full advantage. Adjusting to feminine mannerisms that do not appear drag-queen exaggerated is a challenge, but I have always enjoyed challenges. Getting the voice right was easier than I expected. I suppose that the one thing about Caitlyn Jenner for me that was not right was her voice. It still sounded masculine. I wanted to do better, and I found that I could.

I wore my hair quite long to try to win the younger vote, and I had plenty of it. I decided that I would continue to grow it, and keep it properly conditioned during my phase of hidden transition, and then I would get it cut in a feminine style when I was ready to “come out”.

As if to confirm everything that I was thinking an article appeared in Politico written by conservative transwoman Barbara Minney entitled “Why a Republican Trans Candidate is good for Trans People”. It was about Caitlyn Jenner, but a lot applied to me.

I contacted the state branch of the party and told them they I was trans and I always had been. I told them that I wanted to stand for office but that I could not do so without telling might potential constituents the truth – inside I was a woman, so as a woman I must run.

Of course, they were shocked. I would have been surprised if they were not. I felt it necessary that I was still the same person, with the same values and the same abilities, and the same commitment to hard work … “and by the way, did you read that article in Politico?”

They wanted to meet the new me. Of course, they had doubts. I had to be presentable. That is the nature of politics. If I was unselectable then my idea was finished. And I had to be selected to be elected – that is obvious.

I decided that I would go to the salon and see what could be done. I wore a tracksuit and trainers – something unisex. But I walked in a man and asked for a feminine hairstyle and a makeover. I wanted to leave that salon looking like a woman.

The hairdresser was very good. She suggested that I use my own hair and cut a blunt bob with curtain bangs. She would need to layer where I did not have length. I had no idea what she was talking about but I told her that it needed to be feminine but look serious. She just smiled and went to work.

She colored, cut and treated my hair. She said that I would walk out with a sleek look, but that here was a style that could be low maintenance and look relaxed and would be easy to grow out. I could even add curls. It was all new to me, but as I said, I always enjoyed challenges. Hair was just another.

Makeup to. She explained what she was doing to make me look good, masking some heavy features and bringing forward my blue eyes. She suggested a little lip plumping and told me where I could get that done immediately. She gave me a list of essential items.

She found a magazine with a few outfits that she thought might suit a business meeting. She tore the pages out and gave them to me.

The place that did the plumping also did hair removal by electrolysis. They explained the limitation of facial waxing, and the risk ingrown hairs and skin disorders. I have to say that the pictures did not look good. A politician needs to look good. Pimples or boils are not good. I booked a series of appointments.

I then went shopping with the pages from the magazine in my hand. I decided to go to an upmarket area. I figured that the right outfit should be expensive. I was never really a shopping person before this, but I watched the other women in the store and I did as they did, feeling the fabric, checking the label, taking it off the rack to check the color, holding it against my body.

I decided that I needed the right shape. I went to a lingerie store where the lady told me – “We have customers like you. You need shapewear and the right padding. Don’t give it another thought, Sweetie, let me get you into shape.”

I suppose that was the first time that I understood that womanhood was a special club, and that good people were ready to make a transwoman an honorary member. The whole day was an education, but also an initiation. And I had an appointment with the party apparatus still to come.

When I walked in, I felt ready. I had only been presenting as a woman for that day, but I had been preparing for many weeks. I have always believed in preparation. If it is done right everything will come together on the day.

I knew things were going well and nobody recognized me. Women I knew smiled at me as if I was a stranger. Some men I knew even leered at me, which was something I discovered I would have to used to, as any woman who takes pride in her appearance has to.

I introduced myself to the lady minding the committee room by my feminine name. I had chosen on that was feminine. I will not disclose it for reasons that will become clear.

She asked – “Are you any relation to …?” even though I was him. I was very pleased with myself.

How do you reply? I told her that I was expected, I was on-time, and she should check.

I walked in just as I had rehearsed. I said my little piece in my perfect womanly voice, and took a seat, tucking my skirt and crossing my legs, with my hands on my lap and my business-like shoulder bag on the floor beside me, giving my “I am beautiful and powerful woman” look across the table, to nobody in particular.

The committee chairman spluttered in total surprise. He said – “We were not expecting you to look as good as you do, or sound so … convincing.”

“Convincing is what every politician must be,” I said. I think that I smoothed an eyebrow or something like that – it was a very feminine gesture. I detected something in the room when I did. They were mainly men. We are talking about a Republican selection group. It seemed to be something sexual – as if a doe was aware of rutting stag nearby, or more than one.

Someone said – I don’t know who - "You look so good drop the trans thing. A female candidate will go so much further than a trans one.”

One of the few women present raised a protest – something about all the “real” women that might be worthy of selection. But the fact is that regardless of sex I was the best candidate, and had been well before this, it is just that the best candidate is not always the right candidate.

“I wouldn’t want to do anything dishonest,” I said. “I would not want to deceive voters.” But then I started to think about much of what I had read, and I said – “But what my anatomy is, what my chromosomes might say that I should be, are my own business. Yes, I could stand as a woman, but if anybody dug a little and outed me as trans, I would have to admit it.”

Everybody seemed to be nodding. It was like everybody was thinking that the selection dilemma had been resolved. The candidate that they always wanted was now suddenly eligible.

There was a PR whizz kid in the room. I won’t use his real name. Let’s just call him Bob. He said - “She will have to place herself in our hands to shape her image and a little backstory that can be told without lies. I like the style I am seeing, but it could be tweaked a little.”

I smiled at him. He used “she” and “her” and I liked that. It was as if he was acknowledging all the work and some sacrifice to that point and giving me a royal title.

The selection was not announced, or even final. The committee announced a shortlist of three, including me. The press would get interested and write profiles and the public would get interested. But the press in our state is lazy. They would just reprint what Bob wrote. I was interviewed but Bob had given them questions, and I had answers.

Of course, there was the compulsory question that seems to be asked of women candidates more than men – “Is there a man in your life at the moment?”

“I am trying to keep my private life private,” was my answer. “If I am lucky enough to be selected then I know that will not be something I can do in the future.”

Bob had styled my look with a few playful curls in my hair, but he suggested that I needed to grow it. Some “glamor shots” were taken, and the press ran them. The best headline was my name and the description “the Ravishing Republican Candidate in waiting”.

Bob told me that the feedback was great, and I was the frontrunner – “But there is far too much interest of a sexual nature. We need you to have a love interest. Somebody who can add to your kudos. Just the right boyfriend.”

“Except in case you were not aware, I am not gay,” I told him. “So as a woman, I guess I am. I guess I am a lesbian.”

But as he said – “You have this wrong. We love the interest from men. Women vote women, but while most men vote for the brains and integrity of the candidate, some men vote for sex. We need to get you into a relationship with the right man. It makes you off limits, but still sexy. And on that note, we need to get you some tits too.”

I like Bob. He says things the way they are. But I have to say that this seemed all a bit too much.

But with time to think I knew that I needed to take advice. Breast augmentation is reversible, and boyfriends seem transient. In fact, it did not take too much time for me to agree to everything. While I was under the knife I took a little work to the face too – nothing that a little photoshop on my glamor shots could not persuade people that I had always looked that good.

Then they arranged for me to meet my “boyfriend”. As it happens, they had found the perfect man.

I won’t name him, but to describe him may be all that is enough for people who want to know who I am. He was the ideal partner for a Republican candidate. He had a name – a father who was a past Republican state senator and an uncle who had represented the state in Washington. The family was wealthy, and he was educated, yet he had served in the military with honor. He was the total package. Everything I was not. If I held his arm all of that could rub off on me. Just don’t hold it in a submissive way. As a strong woman, he is my equal, not my master.

As we drove out to his family ranch, I was told that he was a huge fan. He had been told the whole story and he was excited to play his part.

“No, no - he is not gay,” said Bob. “He just believes in you. He knows your platform. He wants to bring the party back to true Republican values. He has not time for representatives who are male, pale and stale. He wants you in Congress, and he will help to get you there.”

I was still sore from the surgeries, but I was not ready to see him until the swelling had gone down and I was able to get on some makeup. But I was still on some painkillers and I was flooded with female hormones to let my breasts take proper shape, so drugs may have been partly responsible.

I just remember that when I met him for the first time, I felt euphoric and a little faint. These were feelings that were new to me. People used to call me calculating and unemotional. I suppose that I was. The way I felt was the opposite of that.

I convinced myself that this was a momentary thing, but it was undeniable that I liked him. What Bob had said was completely true. We were on the same track, page, wavelength, whatever. We both wanted the same thing, and we both believed that I could make it happen.

He said – “We need to present as a loving couple. We need to be relaxed with each other. We need to be able to touch. Do you ride?”

The ranch was large and had big stables. We took some horses and we rode up the hills overlooking the valley, just the two of us. There he spread out a blanket and we lay down together and touched on another. He stroked my face and my hair, and I did the same to him. I understood why. We needed to be able to touch one another so that people thought we were a couple.

He asked whether I felt I could kiss him, because he was ready to do that. Honestly, it was like the most wonderful thing I had ever heard. It was like the ultimate romantic movie – will he, won’t she? I suppose that we both knew that we had to, to make this work, but that is not why we did it.

I looked into his eyes, and I could see the desire, and I am sure that he could see it in mine. I know it makes no sense. It did not then. We were both heterosexual men back then. We are not now. He is. I am not.

We did kiss that day, lying on that blanket with only the horses watching us. More than once. We did not have sex there, but I think that we both wish we had. We had time for that. A campaign is tough, and it can be lonely for the successful candidate, and I was successful – I was selected to run.

On the road and in hotel rooms with the public and the press all over you like a swarm of hornets, sometimes you just need to held by somebody who truly loves you, and who is ready to give you are part of themselves – that injection of pure life that can swim inside you and make you feel that you have purpose.

Also having somebody that you can trust as we do one another. We always face decisions, sometimes under stress, and we can look at one another across the room, over the heads of all of these campaign workers, and our eyes meet, and he might nod, and I might nod back. And then he will smile, and I know what his is thinking, and I want that too, but later.

So, I was elected to Congress, which is why I cannot tell you my name, or the names of anybody else.

But I will probably give it away by telling you that I will be getting married to the man I love in the fall. There is only one thing that I need to get done, and given my position that will be done overseas, and discreetly.

The End

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