Roadside Encounter

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

She was she, at least for the day. It was never more than a day, and usually a Sunday. She would go to bed as her and in the morning she would face the week as a man, and just dream about next Sunday. But on that fine day drove for an hour just to be her for 3 or 4 hours, and then was driving home, with a bright new dress and some other things on the passenger seat.

And then the car broke down. There was steam coming out from under the hood. She did not know much but she knew to pull over. She searched for the lever to open the hood, and it worked. She stepped out and opened it, but she immediately wondered why she had bothered. There was machinery inside, and steam. It was not her thing.

And then he pulled over behind her. He stepped out, and strode over. He was big and powerful, like the electric blue SUV he was driving. He had the smile of man stopping to help a lady in trouble – that air of sympathy tinged slightly with derision.

There was a moment of panic. There she stood with the hood open, and a gentle breeze caused by passing traffic wafting her pink dress against her freshly shaved legs. It seemed as if there was a choice – was she the woman he thought she was, or a man in a dress – a pervert caught out in broad daylight. The sun beat down, and he drew nearer.

“What seems to be the problem little lady?” he said. She was little compared to him. But it seemed that he had made her decision for her.

“I don’t really know, but I have over heated the engine I think.” She squeaked it out. She had used a female voice over the phone a few times. It seemed to work then. It seemed to work now.

He drew close. He smelled like something nice, but she could not place it.

“You don’t know much about cars then?” he said.

“I should know more than I do, but no. I don’t know much about cars.” It was the truth.

“A broken fan belt,” he said. “Not uncommon in a car this old.”

“I don’t drive it enough to bother with a new one,” she said. That was true too, but also she spent too much money on being her, and wouldn’t spend a cent less.

Do you have a pair of stockings?” he said.

“I am not wearing any,” she said.

He looked down at her legs and nodded. “Well, that’s a shame for at least two reasons I can think of,” he said.

He was flirting with her, and she liked it, perhaps more than she should. It was not something that she ever thought would happen. She had to smile.

“I could use my shoelaces,” he said. “But what say we walk down to that motel down there and see what we can find that will not see my shoes falling off.”

He pointed down the highway. About 100 yard away was a motel with a small diner out front.

“Whatever we find we are going to have to wait for the motor to cool down even before we top up the water in the radiator, so maybe I will buy you a coffee, or maybe even lunch.

“No, you stopped for me so I will buy,” she said.

“Miss, I am not that sort of man,” he said, grinning again. It was like this expression was his natural one.

They walked. She was wearing heels. They were not practical – they were ridiculously feminine – which is why she was wearing them. The shoulder of the road was uneven. He offered her his arm. It seemed so wrong to take it. When he found out he would be furious. It made her reluctant to touch him, but as she almost stumbled, she had no choice.

“Perhaps you should have driven me,” she said apologetically.

“I am sure that you would not get into a stranger’s car,” he said. “We have not been introduced. My name is Joe Holst, but people call me Tiny.”

“They must be joking,” she said. “You are certainly not that.”

“Six foot four, and other parts in full proportion,” he said. And then with a smile he added – “Actually, that’s a lie. If I was in proportion I would be over seven feet tall.”

It was a joke, but a good one. She found herself looking at his crotch out of impulse. It was the first time that she had ever looked at that part of man. Why would she? She realized that she was looking and that he was watching her looking, so she gave a look of mock surprise and nodded approval.

He laughed out loud. It was the kind of laugh that could fill a room with warmth. Even on that hot day she could feel it.

“They call me Kate,” she said. It was not her name, and nobody had ever used it but her.

“Kate,” he said. “Pleased to meet you, Kate. Pleased to be helping you.” He opened the door to the diner and let her inside. She could feel his eyes on her butt.

They ordered just coffee.

“Have you driven far today,” he asked.

“Just to the Mall in Hambletown, and now I am headed home, about a mile away.” It was a long drive to go to the mall, but there she could be Kate and not have any chance of running into anybody who might know that she was somebody else. She could be her, even if only for the day, and the evening ahead once she was at home.

“Hambletown is a way,” he said. “You don’t check the temperature gauge then?”

“No,” she said. “I feel pretty stupid.”

“I am sure that you have other things you are thinking about,” he said. “The good news is that if you only have a mile once the motor has cooled down and the radiator has been topped up you will be able to get home without a fan belt. I probably don’t live too far from you so maybe I can come around and show fix it with a pair of your old stockings, just until you get a replacement belt?”

“You seem very keen to get hold of a pair of my stockings,” she teased.

“Perhaps I am,” he said. They both took a sip from their coffee cups, looking at one another as they did. At the mall she had let the makeover girls add eyelashes and highlights, and she knew they looked good. And there was a lipstick mark on her cup now – flamenco red. It made her feel exotic and exciting, and wonderful to be a woman.

His eyes were warm and seemed to be undressing her just by him looking at her. It was foolish to be fantasizing the way she was, but also exhilarating.

“Are you living full time as a woman?” he asked

There was a part of her that was relieved. There was a part of her that was disappointed.

“No,” she said. It was the truth. She did not want to say that it was one day a week, and not every week.

“That’s a shame,” he said. “You make a very attractive woman.” He seemed to give her time for the warm glow of the compliment to find its mark within her, before he added – “What would it take for you to go full time.”

“She thought for a moment before answering in a considered was – “Acceptance.”

I accept that you are a woman,” he said. “But then we have only just met, and I only know you as I find you. Who are the people whose acceptance matters to you?”

It was a question that disarmed her totally, because she had no good answer. She was only casting about for something to say when she said with uncertainty – “Work colleagues?”

“What job will not allow a person to live their true selves?” he said. “If they won’t you need to stop wasting time there. You need to quit. But you did not say family, or anybody close to you?”

“My parents live out of state,” said Kate. “I am not sure whether their acceptance really matters. I hadn’t really thought about it.”

“You should live your life and do what makes you happy,” he said. He leaned back. He was a happy man.

I am not sure that I have been happy for some time,” she said.

“When I get those stockings off you and fix your car you will be happy,” he said, coaxing a smile from her mouth in flamenco red. “Tell me, are you happy now?”

There was that smile again. His natural expression. There was only one thing to say. She said – “Actually, now that you ask, yes, I am happy. Right here, right now I am a happy person.”

“We there you are then,” said Tiny. He then trust his head toward the counter and called out to the lady behind it. “Are managing the motel here as well, Ma’am? I was wondering what your rate is for a room, just for the afternoon?”

“Sure, Mister,” came the reply. “We can give both a double unit for the afternoon, or overnight. It is the same price.”

“What are you doing, Tiny?” she said. If is was supposed to sound disapproving, it didn’t.

“Just promise me one thing,” he said. “From now on you will always be Kate.”

She had to agree to whatever he wanted. The was the way it would be from then on.

The End

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