Jonni

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

It was a classic New York City brownstone - a building I am used to working with. I had been asked to inspect it and report by a legal firm that often had me do this kind of work. All that I knew was that only 2 or three weeks before, the owner had checked himself into hospital and had promptly died. The law firm would be handling his estate.

For the outside I could see that the building had been poorly maintained. I had a set of keys from the deceased person, and as I opened the door, I was expecting the inside to be in a poor state as well. But to my surprise everything was extremely clean and tidy. There was about three weeks’ worth of dust settled everywhere but that would be right. Nobody would have been here since the old fellow died.

So, I was surprised that when the door slammed behind me I thought I could hear a noise upstairs.

I called out: “Hello. Is anyone living here?” My first though was squatters. Vagrants who may have found a way in. But everything was so tidy and organized.

I decided that before I carried out a room by room inspection, I would need to find the source of the sound. Maybe it was a pet locked away somewhere. I went up the large staircase, and then the next.

Towards the back of the house there was a door with a bolt on it. My first thought was that the door was very solid, and the bolt too. I made me a little cautious as I slid the bolt on opened the door.

The room was illuminated by a skylight. The door was open to an adjoining bathroom with a light on. There was a bed slightly in the shade, and sitting on the bed, huddled in the corner, was a small figure.

“Would you help me please?” It was not cry for help, but a polite request. I came closer.

It appeared to me to be a girl. She was wearing pale blue pyjamas. Thin and pale she had blonde hair falling about her face. Her face had a square jaw but would have been pretty were the blue eyes not sunken by her appalling condition.

“I really need something to eat,” she said. “The food ran out a few days ago. I have only had water from the faucet.” Still she was not begging or demanding. It was if she was almost expecting me to refuse her.

“Let me help get out of this room,” I said. I was horrified. This girl was locked in a room and was surely only days away from dying of starvation. What kind of man would lock her away like this?

She offered me a hand, but it was clear that she was so weak that she would not be able to walk. So I scooped her up in my arms. She was as light as a feather. She put an arm around my shoulders, and I carried her down the stairs.

“What is your name?” I asked. I had many questions to ask, but I should start there.

“Johnny,” she said.

I did not drop this person, but I was that surprised that I might have. It seemed barely credible. With pale soft skin and blond hair well past the shoulders, this did not appear to be a boy. Even the smell, did not seem masculine. She had a bathroom and had obviously washed herself recently, but what odor there was did not seem that of a man.

“You must have a story to tell me,” I said. “But I think I had better call the Police.”

“Please don’t,” Johnny said. “I don’t want to get Herbert into any trouble.”

“If you are talking about the owner of this place, he’s dead,” I said, with cruel disregard. We had reached the kitchen and I sat her down at the table. With the sun streaming in I had a better chance to look at this person. Perhaps 25 years old, but not a hair on the chin. If this was a boy, he was an unusual one.

The expression of Johnny’s face was equally puzzling. There was sadness there. It seemed unbelievable that to be told that the man who locked you up and all most killed you, should make you sad. But fear also. Fear and uncertainty.

I brought a sandwich with me, which was in my bag in the hall, but Johnny suggested that I go to the fridge and select a protein shake. It was a sensible idea given that the stomach may have shrunk through the recent ordeal.

“Do you have anybody that I can call?” I asked.

“No,” said Johnny. “I am all alone now. And I suppose that I will have to leave?”

“No idea,” I stammered. “I guess so. I am here to inspect the house. May be advise on some work to be done before it goes on the market. Exterior definitely. I will have to check the electricals and plumbing, but the rooms look very tidy.”

“I like tidy,” said Johnny. The protein shake was pink and had left a pink ring around her mouth. Of course I mean his mouth, but that was not as I saw it. “She” pulled a wisp of “her” blond hair behind a small and beautifully formed ear.

“So you worked for this guy? This guy Herbert?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Johnny, and after a strange pause added: “Since I was very small. He took me in and would not let me out.”

“Can I ask how old you are?”

“I am 27,” said Johnny. “I know that I look younger. Eunuchs look younger.”

Well, that explained it. This poor guy had been castrated.

“This guy Herbert did this to you? We have to call the Police, Buddy,” I added the word “Buddy” although it seemed totally out of place. I still could not view this person as a man. I was not even thinking about what there was left in his (or easier to say her) pants. The thought of castration should make every man wince, but in this case, it did not seem real. Or maybe, it was just easier to think of Johnny as “she”.

“No police, please” she said. She looked up at me. There was some color returning already and I could see her eyes - china blue. The kind of eyes you cannot refuse. I shrugged my shoulders.

“Where will you go?” I asked. I assumed that she would want to leave, but still I felt that I needed to add: “You cannot stay here, long term anyway.”

“How much time have I got?” she asked.

“I don’t think that you should stay,” I said. “I can’t understand why you would want to.” Then, looking at her sad and scared face, without giving much thought to it at all, I added: “You could stay at my place for a bit.”

In that moment I knew that I had made a mistake, but it was only a moment. When that smile appeared on her face it was as if another sunbeam entered the room. All the fear and uncertainty vanished. In its place was joy and beauty. I found myself smiling too.

“Thank you,” she said. “Just for a bit. I am so grateful. But I am sorry, what is your name?”

“I’m Frank. Frank Monagatti.”

I still had work to do assessing the property. Johnny felt able to walk a little and she was able to show me where the things I needed to look at could be found. I inspected the basement and all that was in it, the electric power board and wirings, the cisterns and plumbing, the roof and spouting. The house would need paint and that was about it.

While I did this Johnny could not help but to go around the old house to do the dusting and vacuuming. Dust had built up while she had been locked away, and she obviously did not like to see the place looking untidy. Before we left, she had time to take a bath (and clean it afterwards) and collect a small bag of stuff to take with her.

Her bag contained only her toothbrush, a hairbrush and more pajamas, and slippers. It turned out that that was all she wore. Like a little Chinese coolie outfit. Silk in the summer and heavier material in the winter. House-slave clothes, I guess. That is what she had been. A eunuch house-slave.

She climbed into my truck and we drove off. She turned around in her seat to watch the brownstone disappear from view. I suppose that she thought that she would never see it again. She was wrong.

I lived in Brooklyn. A nice place. It had belonged to my aunt who never married. I bought it from her estate. It was a mess when I bought it, but my late wife and I fixed it up. That is my trade. A builder, but a plumber and electrician too. As I got older, I was good enough to get off the tools and start advising other guys on how to fix heritage houses.

Since my wife had died a few years before and my son and daughter had gone to college just in the last two years, I suppose that I had let the housework get away on me. But to Johnny my place was like a dream come true. She could pay me back for my hospitality by doing some work. And she was a great worker. The moment that she walked in the door she started tidying.

There were lots of things in my home that seemed totally normal but surprised her. I began to understand how strange her life had been in that brownstone.

“That’s a television,” she said. “Of course, I know what it is, but I have never seen one. Just as I know that is a personal computer, and that is a mobile telephone.”

She explained that everything that she knew was from reading books and magazines which Herbert gave to her. I got the impression that if Herbert had not taught her to read, he must have played a major part in her receiving a broad education. She knew lots of stuff, but almost nothing about current events.

I apologized that I had nothing in the house to eat, but we could order in pizza. I did that far too often.

She said that she had looked in my pantry. It needed tidying but she could make us a meal.

“I love to cook,” she said. “I cooked all of Herbert’s meals. He brought me some books and lots of magazines with recipes in them. He liked to bring me magazines with recipes and home decorating stuff in them. Women’s magazines. I learned so much from magazines. I learned about TV shows, but I have never seen one.”

She made a pasta meal with tinned tuna and her own sauce. After dinner we sat and watched TV. Her blue eyes were like saucers as she watched incredulously. On some shows she knew the names of the characters and the actors who played them. It was very exciting for her. I confess I spent more time watching her react that I did watching the screen.

She had two spare rooms to choose from. She chose to sleep in my daughter’s room.

I expected her to be very tired, but when I got up in the morning there were wonderful smells coming from the kitchen. She had not only made pancakes but also a fruit sauce to go with them from stuff she had found in the pantry. She was a marvel.

“This is delicious, but you are going too far,” I said. “You don’t have to do all of this. Just rest and recover.”

“I like doing this,” she said.

I realized that she was wearing her coolie clothes. I said: “I have to start early today but I can come home early, and we can get you some clothes. In the meantime, if you can find anything small enough for you in my son’s room, you can wear that.”

“I will wash anything I wear,” she said.

She had already packaged up the leftover pasta for my lunch, with some other things. She handed it to me as I walked out the door.

“After work we will go shopping,” I said.

While I spent my day working, I spent some time worrying about what I was doing. I really felt that Johnny was a person who had been abused. Although she never said that Herbert had castrated her, I felt that it must be so. There was no doubt that she had been locked up. And then it occurred to me that I was using her too. She was probably in my home right now, cleaning and tidying. She had swapped one slave owner for another. I felt that I should honor her request and not get the police involved myself, but that we should talk seriously about doing that when I got home.

I suppose I pulled into my garage about 3:00pm as I had done everything on my schedule by then and went into the kitchen. There was the smell of fresh baked cookies. Johnny was there. In an orange dress. An orange dress with something in her hair.

I knew that he could see that I was surprised. He said: “I hope you don’t mind, but I think that your son must be just as big as you, but your daughter is exactly the same size as me. I just found this. It’s women’s clothes of course, but I know something about women’s clothes from the magazines. I think that it was easier for me to go shopping dressed like this, because I think that maybe I might … I might look a little bit odd.”

“You have been out?”

“Oh yes,” he said. “I have already done some shopping. We are going have ragu tonight. It’s in the oven. With potato gnocchi.”

She was smiling. Her blonde hair was tied back with a scarf, also with orange in it. My wife had bought it for my daughter. Johnny, the eunuch, looked truly beautiful.

“But you don’t have any money?” I said, still in a state of shock.

“I know,” said Johnny. “I feel very stupid about that. Of course, I know what money is. I’m just not used to using it. Anyway, when I told Mrs. Perano that I was staying with you, she said that I could take what I needed and pay later.”

Perhaps I should have been more understanding of Johnny’s strange position, but I have to confess that the first thought running through my head was that Maria Perano from the local deli would be telling the entire neighborhood: ‘Frank Monagatti has got a transvestite servant’. I grabbed the phone to call her. Johnny looked puzzled, and a little worried that she may have done something wrong.

“Oh yes,” said Maria. “I met your beautiful young guest Jonni. I assume that is short for Jonelle or Jonette or something. She must have left her purse behind, so I told her I knew you well. She asked what food you like. She seems very knowledgeable about food. Is she making you something nice? What a very pretty young girl she is.”

I hung up the phone in relief, saying to Jonni: “She thinks you are a girl.”

“Well I suppose, dressed like this, that is probably not a surprise.” She spun around slightly so that I could take in her outfit. It clung to her body which looked perfectly feminine. She even appeared to have a modest bust.

“Maybe it is best to keep it that way, until … until you can get some treatment, or whatever.”

“I know that I look strange,” said Jonni. “And I now know that women look very different from men, when they move, I mean. Until today I had never seen a woman in real life. Just in magazines. I mean, I know lots from the magazines. I know how they do their hair, and co-ordinate their clothes and accessories, and apply makeup. But I have never actually seen a woman walk, or freshen her lipstick, until today. But I like to watch them.”

I found myself pitying this poor creature again. What a life poor Jonni has led. A prisoner unable to experience everything else that we all take for granted. Never going to the shop, or even walking along the street. Never seeing any living human being, apart from the one who had imprisoned her, for God knows how many years.

“What would you like to do, Jonny?” I asked. “You have sampled the life outside, but from knowing all that you do from your magazines, what would you like to do?”

“Well, let me see …,” she said. “Yesterday I drove in a car, and I saw big buildings and a river, and a bridge. And I watched TV. I liked that. Today I went outside, and I walked down the street, and I saw real living people, and I went shopping, and I talked to a woman. And I learned about money. All of these things are first times for me. But … I would like to go to the movies. And maybe go to a show, or the opera. And go on a boat. And go up a mountain. And bathe in the sea.”

“One thing at a time,” I said. “We can go to a movie this afternoon. Then we could come home and after dinner we could watch some more TV.”

“That’s sounds great,” she said, with a smile a mile wide. “That would be perfect.”

So, we went to watch a movie. I have to say that I needed to be careful about what movie we went to. I did not want any horror or action, or anything with too much CGI. I thought that this might be way too much. In the end the only thing showing was some kind of romantic comedy – a “chick flick” I suppose. I cannot even remember the name. Initially Jonni seemed more interested in the audience. There were couples in the cinema and some groups of girls. Then the lights went down, and she was entranced.

I have to say that the movie just went by in front of me. I was thinking about the gaps in Jonny’s experience of life. Then she whispered in my ear: “Do you think that you should lay your arm on my shoulders like the other men are doing?” So, I did. She was still watching the people who were watching the movie, but she saw enough to get caught up in the love story. She ended up with her head on my chest and a tear in her eye. Her soft blond hair smelt like my wife’s used to, although hers was dark.

“I know what sex is,” she said on the way home. “I know what they were doing in the movie. But Herbert told me it was something that I could never do. It is impossible for people like me. I don’t have the equipment anymore.” She seemed excruciatingly sad.

“I am sure something can be done for you,” I said optimistically. “Everybody should have the chance to enjoy intimacy. Intimacy and love.”

“I would like that,” she said.

We ate dinner together. I am Italian and have always thought that I had enjoyed the best Italian food, not only at restaurants but at family gatherings, but I swear that what Jonny had made for us was the best food I have ever eaten.

When we sat in our living room it was clear that her touch was everywhere. She had taken down some drapes to wash them, but everything on the shelves was tidy, there were flowers from in a vase, and everything was polished and gleaming.

Instead of sitting away from me, Jonny sat beside me, leaning on me like she had done in the cinema. I suppose that I should have felt uncomfortable, but I didn’t.

There was more kissing on TV. It occurred to me that this is the world we live in. What a torment it must be for people like Jonny, who have had the sexual capacity literally cut away from them?

“I am sorry if I am too close to you,” she said. “I am not a woman, but you have to understand that I need to touch another human being. Herbert didn’t like me to touch him, or even be that close to him. I like being close to you, Frank.”

“Jonny, it’s the least I can do,” I said, holding him a little closer to me. “I just wish I could do more. I wish that I could help you to find love.”

“And you can’t have love without sex.” That is what he said. I am not sure whether it was a question or a statement. It seemed to linger in the room, whichever it was.

“You might be able to experience sex,” I said. “The way a woman does. I don’t know too much about it but let me get my tablet and we will see what we can find out.

If the TV and the movies had impressed her, then the tablet amazed her. She insisted that she knew what it was. She seen them in articles and advertisements in the magazines, but she had never understood how the data and images could appear so quickly with a few jabs of a finger. She had never used a keyboard, or a touchpad, and all of the icons were a total mystery, but she learned fast.

“I know what homosexuality is,” she said. “There is stuff about that in magazines.” She seemed to disapprove. Maybe this would be harder for her than I thought. I suddenly thought that thinking of her as ‘she’ might be completely wrong. This was a young man who had been mutilated. But one look at her was enough to dispel that notion. Especially with that hair and in that dress.

“You can use this tablet when I am at work tomorrow. I will show you how to charge it and switch it on and off, but I think that you know how to use it.”

God knows what she dreamt about that night. Her head must have been filled to bursting with so many new experiences.

But in the morning, she was again up before me making breakfast. She was wearing another of my daughter’s dresses. A blue one. My daughter had pants that would fit her, but she was wearing another dress. She seemed very happy.

“Don’t try to do too much,” I warned her. “Just stay in the neighborhood and we will go further out when I am with you. Take this money to Mrs. Perano and there will be plenty left for other things if you like. But be careful with strangers. Not everybody is as good and kind as Mrs. Perano. I think there are more Herberts than Marias in this city, so be careful. Stay safe.”

Despite her assurances I spent most of the day worrying about her. In fact, she barely left my thoughts.

I thought that maybe if I called the house she would pick up and I could check on her, but then I realized that there was no telephone in the brownstone. She would have no idea what the sound was or what she should do with the machine that was making it.

Instead I got home early. I let the door slam behind me.

“Frank!” I heard her voice from upstairs. “Frank!”

I started to think that she might be in trouble. I rushed up the stairs. “Frank!” was the third call coming from my daughter’s bedroom.

Jonny was lying on the bed. She was wearing a red negligee with maybe something underneath which was able to reveal that she had enough soft flesh on her chest to push up an acceptable pair of breasts. She had curled her hair and made up her face with dark eyeliner and false eyelashes and pink lipstick, all expertly done by my guess. She had a huge smile on her face. She looked like a goddess.

“Frank, I know what to do. I have flushed myself out and I have been using things all afternoon to make me wide enough. You can show me what sex is like. You can show me how I can be loved. Will you do this for me Frank? Will you?”

“What have you been reading?” I said. I was worried about her, but at the same time the swelling in my pants was starting to play with my thoughts.

“There are people just like me,” she said. “People who live as women but have penises. People who have men who love them. Have men who have sex with them and make them look so happy, and they make happy noises. Can you do that for me, Frank? Can you make me that happy”

I wanted to say that I was not that sort of person. I wanted to say that my only concern was for her welfare and to help her find a way to lead a normal life. But what I said was: “Yes. I can do that. But not here. Come to my room. Come into my bed.”

This was all wrong on so many levels. She was not a woman. My bed was my wife’s bed too. I was not a man who had sex with people – I dreamed of the life I once had and jacked off in the shower. It was just that what lay in front of me was a fantasy vision. She still had her panties on, and I was not looking for a bulge. As far as I was concerned, she was a woman, and a very beautiful one.

She almost ran to my bedroom. As she went past me, I could smell scent on her. Something from my daughter’s drawer perhaps. Something spicy and sexy. I needed no more encouragement.

When I entered my room, I pulled my pants off. I had to. It seemed that my cock would burst through the fabric like an alien birth.

She was pulling back the covers, but when she looked at me and she saw it she got very excited.

“Oh, an erection,” she said. “So much bigger than on “Trannyporn”. I think that you might be … how long are you?”

“I have no idea,” I honestly replied. Who measures their dick in real life? “But I don’t think I have ever been bigger.” That was honest too.

“I am going to use a cushion,” she said. “That’s what they do. Now you need to …”.

“Jonny,” I interrupted her. “I know what to do.”

She smiled at me. Such a smile. It spoke of curiosity and excitement, but also innocence, and perhaps a little fear of what might happen. Would it hurt? Worse still, would it be nothing?

I pushed aside her thong so that I could avoid looking at whatever was underneath it, but it was small. The head of my penis found what she was offering, lubricated as promised. I eased myself in, looking into her eyes as I did so, being careful not to hurt her. She just looked puzzled. It was all so new. She looked like that for the first few strokes then I could see her eyes widen.

“Oh gee,” she said. Something was happening already. Although I did not think it possible for eunuchs, what was in her panties was growing. I kept on pumping her.

“Frank, Frank.”

“Are you alright?”

“Don’t stop, Frank. Don’t stop. Ohhh.”

It was too soon. I knew that it was too soon. It had been so long since I had done this, and she had just excited me so much. It meant I was going to come, and she was going to misunderstand the whole thing. But then she squealed. Out of the top of her panties a tiny pink head poked through and emitted some clear fluid onto her belly. And my own penis erupted like a volcano, deep inside her.

I am not sure what I shouted but I was not looking at her. Surely in that moment she must have been terrified. I am sure porn actors do not make such a sound, if that is who she had been watching do this on my tablet. But when I opened my eyes and looked down, I could see her smiling.

“That was sex,” she said. “I like it. I like it a lot. Did you like it? Did I do it right?”

“It was fantastic,” I said. I leaned down and kissed her on the lips. She put her hands behind my head and held it as she continued the kiss. It was a clumsy attempt at a kiss. It occurred to me that it was her first kiss ever. How strange all of this must be for her.

“I have made you Chicken Parmigiana for dinner,” she said. “Maybe after dinner we can make love again?”

Make love. Where was this coming from?

“Jonny, I don’t want you to rush things,” I said. “You don’t learn about love from porn sites. That was not conventional sex. Conventional sex is between a man and a woman.”

“I’m neither of those,” she said. “That means that I can never have conventional sex.”

I realized what I had said. She was upset. My words had been unbelievably cruel, and completely unnecessary. Why had I even said them? What could I say now?

“That probably was the best sex that I have ever had.” The strange thing was that it seemed at the time it was 100% true. Perhaps it had been so long that I had forgotten just how good sex with the woman who had been my life partner, had been. Or perhaps it really was the best sex ever?

Her face, that had been on the edge of tears a second ago, broke back into that beaming smile.

“It’s my first time,” she said proudly. “Surely it can only get better.”

I bent over her and I showed her how to kiss. How a man in love can kiss a woman. How two tongues can play and talk to one another. How the world and time itself, can be made to disappear. At least until she needed to go downstairs to make me my dinner.

I lit some candles over dinner. She knew what they were. There had been power cuts in her past. But a romantic dinner by flickering candlelight was new to her. She had some many new things to experience and watching her react to every new thing was invigorating. I mean that literally. She came alive with every new thing, and every she came alive she seemed to breathe life and power into me.

She wore an evening dress with dinner, and drop earrings. She freshened her lipstick and checked that the work she had done on her face was holding up. She looked glamorous – like a movies star.

“This is the look I was going for,” she said. She had bought a magazine. It had an article: ‘Alluring Looks for Spring’ or something like that. There were instructions, and a pair of free eyelashes came with that edition.

“You really are very clever,” I said. “You really look like a woman. Like a supermodel. And you can cook too.”

“Can I be a supermodel?” she asked. “I know what that is.”

“I think that you would have to be a woman first,” I told her.

“Can I be a woman?”

Such a simple question. The only answer is no. I said: “It is possible, I understand. Maybe not completely, but doctors can do an awful lot to help people be who they want to be. They can give you breasts and even some functioning female sex organs.”

“Do you want me to be a woman?” asked Jonny.

“I want you to be whatever you want,” I said. “I don’t want you to do what I want. I am just helping you to find your way in the world. You have so much to see and so much to learn. Don’t rush things, Jonny. Don’t make decisions that you can’t go back on.”

“I want to stay here with you,” she said.

I have to say, my heart leapt at the words. There she was sitting across from me. In the candlelight she looked like the most beautiful woman in the world and she was living in my house. She had just cooked the second best meal I had ever tasted – the night before was slightly better. Would she be in my bed tonight? I hoped she would. And she wanted to live with me.

“You can stay as long as you like, but you do not have to. I don’t want you going from one old man to another old man. You have a life to lead. I want to help you lead it.”

“Herbert never made love to me,” she said.

I did. Again that night. She did stay in my bed. I woke with her in the morning. We lay beside one another looking into each other’s eyes. It was a Saturday morning, so we were in no hurry.

“I can make you breakfast,” she said.

“No. Let’s go to the beach. You can see the sea. We can have brunch on the way.”

She was excited by the thought, and the excitement never stopped the whole day. It was early spring and to cold for her to bathe as she wanted, but we paddled in the sea and she was just happy watching the waves. She had seen pictures of the sea with waves breaking, but never occurred to her that these were moving things. It all seemed so strange to her, and strange to me that she could think what she did. That was her life experience. Still photos in magazines. Before me, the only moving things had been herself and Herbert.

And on Sunday we went to Bear Mountain, because she wanted to see a mountain. We drove for hours and stopped to see all the things that she had never seen. Waterfalls, cows in a field, wildflowers. Everything was like a miracle.

Sometimes she was a little fearful, so she would hold my hand. The first time a horse walked up to her at a fence my hand was not enough so I held her in my arms. I extended her hand with mine to stroke the horse’s head. She was like a small child in the body of a beautiful young woman, when in fact, she was neither of those.

We stopped for a meal at a restaurant on the way home, as it was already getting dark. She had never been in a restaurant before, but she knew what it was. She had her first hamburger, and he first glass of wine. She examined her first dinner check. She was only beginning to understand the value of money, and how I needed to trade my time and skill to get the money to buy things. It seems so basic, but magazines gave her no clue as to these things.

It was late when I drove her home. She fell asleep in the car. She was so sound asleep that I lifted her out and carried her upstairs. She was still so light of weight, even after consuming more food than seemed possible. I decided to put her in my daughter’s room.

But in the morning, she was unhappy about that decision.

“Why did you not take me to bed with you?” she said, with tears in her eyes.

I took her in my arms. She sobbed so much I thought that her heart was breaking.

“I just thought that you were so tired you would get better rest on your own,” I explained.

“I never want to sleep anywhere except in your bed, Frank,” she insisted. I stroked her hair and promised her that I would respect her wishes.

I had to go to work that day, it being a Monday. Jonni promised me that she would cook something nice for dinner. I never doubted it. She made me some sandwiches to take to work. She followed me to the front door as I left, and just as I stepped outside, she threw her arms around me and kissed me. It was a kiss from a movie, for sure. It was long enough for people on the street, including a neighbor or two, to see. Frank Monagatti and his pretty child-like house guest, kissing on his doorstep.

The thought worried me all day, not least because I knew, even if nobody else did, that my houseguest was not a woman.

I had a call from the attorneys that were managing the estate of Herbert – Herbert Downes was his name.

“Frank, we have that reports on the property, so thank you for that,” the caller said. ‘Now, we have no questions about the Report as such, but in relation to the house, did you see any sign of anybody else living there apart for the deceased?”

What could I say? What would Jonni want me to say? He did not want me to say that Herbert had kept him in slavery in that house. I should respect his wishes.

“Oh, you mean Johnny?” I said.

“That’s right!” The attorney sounded extremely surprised. “John Larsen. An adopted son, as we understand it. The sole heir of Mr Downes. Do you know how we can get hold of him?”

I suppose that I should have been happy for Jonni, but I found out something about myself that I was not happy to discover. All I thought about was Jonni leaving my home. It seemed so clear that if Jonni had money, she would not stay with me. Why would she. I was another older man taking advantage of her. As I discovered in that moment, a very selfish man. Somebody who would happily surrender her happiness and chance of independence to meet my own base desires – my want of company, good food and some kind of sex.

But somehow, there was enough good in me to say: “I might be able to track him down for you.”

I was appalled at my thoughts. I felt that I needed to get back home and talk to Jonni – tell her and explain, as much as I could, and seek her forgiveness.

When I got home, I let myself in and I could hear talking in the living room. She had a guest. But when I entered, I could see Jonni, looking perfect in a pink dress with her hair up, talking with my daughter Justine.

“Daddy,” Justine jumped up and bounded over to embrace me. I could see Jonni smiling at our hug, and blowing a kiss just for me.

“Justine, it’s great to have you home, but aren’t you in the middle of term?” I had expected her home at some stage, but not so soon.

“I have a study break, so I just came home to surprise you,” she said. “And I’ve met Jonni. And she has told me everything.”

“Everything?” I asked.

“Yes, everything,” Justine confirmed. “She apologized for wearing my clothes, so we went out and bought some for her. She has had her hair done. And we have booked to see a specialist about the surgery she wants. And Daddy, I approve. She is the nicest person I think that I have ever met.”

“Yes, she is.” That is what I said. And I knew it was true.

Jonni came up and she kissed me in the cheek. She gave me a little turn to show off her new dress and hairstyle. They both screamed feminine. There was no doubt in her mind what she was now, and none in Justine’s either.

“Was it expensive?” I asked.

Jonni looked suddenly ashamed and worried. “I’m still learning about money,” she said.

“Well, maybe you shouldn’t be too worried if it was. I estimated that Herbert’s Manhattan brownstone would be worth $22,000,000 with a little restoration work that I could do myself in a year, and from what I understand, that building belongs to you, my Darling.”

The End

© Maryanne Peters 2019

A person wearing a black shirt

Description automatically generated

Jonni