The Colonels Assistant

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

When he looked at the calendar on his desk, he noted that it was 300 days until he could elect full retirements benefits. He had been counting the days until May 14, 1972. He wrote “300” on the bottom of his new blotter, on his pristine new desk.

After 32 years in the air force he was an early riser, so he was not surprised that he was the first into the admin building, but he was surprised that it was not locked. Surprised but not annoyed, as he did not want to wait outside and then upbraid the first to appear. He was over that now. 24 years. 300 days to go. A new posting – the one that nobody wanted, but it came with the promotion to full colonel that he doubted he would ever get. So why piss people off? Ride along and collect at the end.

He had more or less decided that he would be the base commander in the avuncular style – a friendly uncle who could be firm when required. That was not how he started out. He had so much to prove in those days. He was out of the ranks. No Westpoint degree; no military family; no political connections. He barked and snapped his way up, as far as they would let him but no further.

He would have been quick to criticize were it not for the fact that the office was so tidy and clean. Very tidy and not a spec of dust anywhere, although the rest of the base seemed run down. Were he not just 300 days from leaving he might have done the “new broom sweeps clean” thing, but why bother? He had nothing to prove.

There was a knock on the door. Colonel Pike reached for the nearest bunch of paper. Without raising his head he called – “Come”.

“Airman Nightingale, reporting, Sir! Your administrative assistant, Sir!”

When he looked up to return the salute, he thought for a moment that the base was playing a trick on him, and that they had sent a young woman dressed in the blue grey to tease him. But the voice was male – only just. He snapped off a salute out of habit.

“At ease, Nightingale,” he said. “That is a bit of a mouthful. Do they call you anything else.”

“My name is Melvin, Sir. They call me Mel.”

“No nickname? “Birdie” perhaps?”

“No Sir. Airman Nightingale. Or Mel in private”.

“In private then, Mel.” He had never addressed an enlisted man by his given name. Never. But 300 in days he would use only given names. That was how it would be. “Stand easy, Mel. Take a seat. Bring me up to speed.”

Mel took the seat offered, but awkwardly. He said – “You have my briefing paper in your hand, Sir.”

“You wrote this? Good work. But take me through it, with the real need-to-know.”

Mel smiled. He had perfect white teeth. His hair was a little longer than regulation. To Colonel Pike it could easily have been a pixie cut, and certainly would have been without he required side parting. This airman did look like a woman, and an attractive one. It was an odd and unsettling thought.

“Well Sir, as you know this is a very isolated base with a fairly low complement, but we do get busy, or so I am told. I suppose that what with everything going on in Vietnam at the moment, this is all a bit sleepy. But the base commander is always a full Colonel. It is a very big facility.”

“Yes, Vietnam,” said Colonel Pike. “You are well out of that. Things are not going well.” It was not something he would ever say to anybody, least of all a lower rank. But in 300 days he would just be another young man – potential meat to the grinder.

“Well, Sir if you will allow me to speak freely, I joined the air force to avoid the draft. I have an uncle in the service who may have a hand in getting me this posting, about as far away from Southeast Asia as we can get.”

A draft dodger. The military connections that he never had. A life ahead of him when the war was over. But he felt no bitterness. 300 days will do that. He just smiled and nodded, like a friendly uncle.

“You run a tidy office, Mel,” he said.

“I am a bit of a clean freak, Sir,” he admitted. “I like things clean and tidy.”

Colonel Pike could see it. His uniform was spotless and ironed, and the skin on his face seemed without blemish or even the hint of a hair. He found himself looking at the man as he might look at a woman. It made him shift in his seat a little.

“What about you, Sir? Can I ask what brings you to this part of the world?”

Should he tell his story? Why not?

“This is my last posting. I will likely be out of the service within a year.” He feigned a little regret though he felt none. “I have spent a lifetime in the air force, or so it seems. Joined fresh out of high school. Married and raised 2 kids at various bases across the states. The boys have moved on and my wife died last year – cancer. No more married quarters for me, so I took the job and the promotion and here I am. Whereas I am guessing you are just passing through, and staying out of the war.”

“Just another 300 days, Sir.”

“Really? 300 days? Well I never. That is strange. Same as me.”

“We can walk out together, Sir.” Mel grinned.

Another image flashed through the Colonel’s min. He was walking out of the base in a cardigan, slacks and loafers, and beside him was Airman Nightingale, wearing a pink dress. He went cold with the realization.

“Thank you for the briefing, Airman Nightingale, you are dismissed,” he snapped.

Mel leapt to attention and flicked off a salute. But he was smiling, as if understanding that this was a game of some kind, and now there was work to do. He turned and left the office. Colonel Pike found himself watching the young man’s butt as he did so.

Colonel Pike looked for water, but there was none. He could not call his assistant for some, or walk past him in search of some. The boy was the problem. A glass might not even fix it – perhaps he needed a basin of it to immerse his head into.

He had never had thoughts like this. This was homosexuality. He knew what that was. It was something that every officer needed to be aware of. It was dangerous to order and to morale.

If the boy was a homosexual then that was his way out of the draft. But who was the faggot here? It was him, not Mel. He was the one dreaming of his admin assistant wearing a dress. It was just that he did not look like a man, so that had to be different – or so he thought.

He needed to find a way to deal with this. And the fact was that he liked this young man. He had picked up on something and opened up to him. He was honest and communicative and he needed that from his assistant. And he was tidy, and the briefing paper as he started to read it for real, was excellent. It was informative but brief. It had key issues to addressed listed and numbered “in order of proposed importance – subject to command directives”.

It reminded him that he was in command, but also that the order Mel had selected showed sound thought and common sense. There was no doubting the value of this young man, it was just that he needed to remember that he was a young man, and that was not going to change.

But he wished it could.

He had Mel back in his office a short while later to take notes, and he still had strange thoughts. He inspected the base with Mel taking more notes and found the unnatural images coming back. It was all very distracting and disconcerting.

Somehow, he worried that it might make these 300 days ever longer. He was in a battle at last even after 32 years of no real action. The battle was with himself.

But those in combat find ways to cope. Humor is always good.

Sometime later he walked into his office to find Mel dusting his filing cabinets with a feather duster.

“Is that a regulation piece of equipment, Mel?” he asked – he still addressed him that way when not in the presence of others. “I am sure that you would do a better job of that if you did it wearing a French Maid outfit.”

“Well, that is a uniform Sir, so if you can requisition it, then I suppose I could wear it.” They both laughed. Mel spoke about the effectiveness of a feather duster, and Colonel Pike wondered how he could requisition the garment – just as a joke.

But the fact remained that Colonel Pike was still wrestling with his sexual frustrations. After the death of his wife, and for over a year before that as the cancer slowly took her, he had imagined sex with women and masturbated. Initially they had the face of his wife in the early days of their marriage, and later of other women as he tried hard not to fixate on her. But now all the women of his dreams seemed to look like Melvin Nightingale.

In 1971 it was no easy thing to find somebody who could dispatch a French Maid outfit, but once such a thing is found and can be purchased, the armed services are very good at seeing a parcel delivered to any corner of the world that is blessed with a US military facility. And so, eventually, the parcel arrived at the office of the base commander.

“A parcel has arrived Colonel, from a company called “Fantasy Made Real” and addressed to “Maid to the Colonel”, Sir.” Mel was grinning.

“That will be your new uniform, Airman First Class Nightingale,” grinned the Colonel – he had treated his able assistant to a well-earned promotion.

“There is no dust here, Sir, but your quarters may need a clean later in the day.” The young man was grinning, and Colonel Pike grinned back. He imagined that the parcel would sit under his admin’s assistant’s desk as a private joke.

Had it done so it would have reflected the easy rapport that they had developed over a few months. They worked well together. Colonel Pike liked things just so, and as it happened, so did Melvin Nightingale, in fact, just the same “just so” as his Commanding Officer. His assistant was a good gatekeeper too, ensuring that the Colonel’s time was not taken up with timewasters and troublemakers. They were both agreed that the priority was not the men on base (and given the isolation they were all men) but the facility itself. The original list of priorities reflected that, and it had barely changed.

Colonel Pike had come to grips with his problem. He had a dream woman. She might be Airman Nightingale’s sister, or even his mother (in her younger days) but not the man himself. It did not matter because she was not real. Dream women are unattainable by their very nature. Enough said. Masturbation is a fact of military life.

But the evening of the day that first parcel arrived changed everything. It was only the first parcel, but it triggered the others.

That night there was a knock on the door shortly after Colonel Pike returned from dining with his handful of officers. He went to the door and could see that it was somebody wearing a standard combat poncho with the hood up, even though it was not raining.

“Is that you Mel?”

“Can I come inside, Sir?” He responded by opening the door, and the figure swiftly entered, and equally swiftly the poncho slipped to the floor.

It was like a dream come true. She stood in the living room of base commander’s cottage – one of the concrete structures on the base that was surprisingly homely inside. She wore fishnet stockings over her freshly shave legs, and black patent heels that showed off her gently shaped calves. The black dress was short, and what pretended to be an apron was small. The bodice was tight hinting at corseting underneath, as did the bosom and visible cleavage achieved with clever inserts that came with the costume. “She” had washed her hair which without hair oil was surprising full and feminine. There was makeup too – especially around the eyes making them big and blue, and staring into the Colonel, down to his skipping heart.

“I just came around to do some dusting,” the vision said, holding up that feather duster.

“What shall I call you,” said Colonel Pike, in clear acceptance of the visitor’s offer.

“Melody,” she said, shyly and with a little uncertainty.

“Melody Nightingale,” said the Colonel. “How perfect. Where would you like to start?”

“I hope that you understand that I am just extending your little joke, Colonel,” she said, perhaps detecting an odd tone in his voice. “I don’t want you to get the wrong idea.”

“What idea would that be,” said Colonel Pike. He was standing now - on his feet and elsewhere too. It was unmistakable. He had put on his pajamas and a robe with the intention of retiring early, but now his intentions had changed, visibly He walked up to Melody – very close to her. Close enough to feel his breath.

“Oh Colonel Pike,” she said. It sounded to him like an invitation – an invitation he had been longing for.

He kissed her. If it was the was idea, she could have pushed him away, but she didn’t. She pulled him in.

“I am not a homosexual,” he whispered.

“No, you’re not,” she said.

It was all that he needed to know to enter her and fill her with everything he had. After that they slept with their limbs entangled. He felt young again. She made him young.

But Colonel Pike was not really an old man. He was in his early fifties. There was a future for him after his service.

His assistant took the time to reach out for a suitable job – position suitable for a man of his talents and his personal assistant / private secretary.

They took the same transport back from the base. The both took their discharge papers with the proper formality. But for , Airman First Class Melvin Nightingale it was not only the last time that he would wear a military uniform, but also the last time ever in male clothes of any kind.

It turns out that Colonel Pike still remains a bit of stickler on how his secretary should dress, and being a man brought up in the fifties he retains a strong preference for the clothes and hairstyles of those times. He has similar preferences for his wife – his second wife in fact. But of course, his wife is his secretary, the young lady that was Melody Nightingale.

The End

© Maryanne Peters 2022

2564

Erin’s seed: “on a remote military base, the commanding officer nearing retirement is assigned a clerk to act as admin assistant who a very fresh-faced 18 or … beautiful and has a very feminine air about him, graceful, demure and dutiful and it's making the colonel a bit crazy. They are talking about the colonel's retirement and the boy says that that day is the end of his enlistment so he will be leaving the service at the same time as his CO. Now the colonel can't sleep, imagining going into the private world and hiring the boy to be his secretary - he imagines the kid dressed in as a private secretary from the fifties and masturbates…”