

The Statue

by: Maryanne Peters

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A Short Story
By Maryanne Peters

The development team had thought they were getting nowhere with Terry Adler. He had signed the non-circumvention agreement like all potential angel investors, and he had received the initial Information Memorandum, but he appeared disinterested at first. He still seemed like the best fit - savvy in software of this type, his own team of developers, past history of punting on good ideas and more money than anybody could dream of.

It was not until the "Team Profile" was sent that a meeting was requested. Marcus had suggested that some venture capitalists invest more in the people that the concept, so the "Team Profile" just had pictures of the four guys and a profile on each. The same day it was delivered Terry Adler requested a meeting as early as convenient. Given the situation that was the following day.

At the meeting it was clear to everybody that he only wanted to talk to Leo. Even Leo felt uncomfortable that all the questions were being addressed to him. While the team had no leader as such (all being equal) Leo was not the best qualified to answer most of the queries. In response to the team debrief after the meeting Leo told the others that he felt awkward given the way that Terry Adler stared at him throughout.

The others felt that things had gone well, and that perhaps a proposal would follow. It did, but not in the form that anybody was expecting.

When Terry called Leo the first question that he asked was, "Have you or any of your family got roots in West Virginia?" And on hearing the no reply, he explained, "I only ask because my late wife came from that state."

He asked for a private meeting with Leo. Leo, of course, told the others. Everybody was keen that he should meet, and if that meeting was alone there were no issues. They were still a team. So Leo went round to Terry's home that night as arranged.

Terry met him and the door and invited him inside. "I have some news that you may like," he said. "But it comes with a condition that only you can meet."

In the grand foyer of Terry Adler's palatial home was a large marble statue of a naked woman. Terry stood looking at it for some time before saying, "This is a statue of my late wife, Esmerelda, or Mel as we knew her. It is hand cut from Carrera marble. It cost me a lot of money."

"She is very beautiful," remarked Leo, politely.

"In addition, I have three paintings of her and many photo-portraits in the house," said Terry. "I freely admit to being slightly obsessed. I want you to have a look at one of the photo-portraits over here ...".

As Leo looked at it he was suddenly struck by something, "She looks as if she could be related to me," he said. "The nose and chin, and the blue eyes with dark hair."



That is why I asked the question," said Terry. He paused to stare at the image for what seemed a strangely long time before adding, "You see I loved her so much. Having these images of her about me comforts me a little. Is that so strange?"

Leo sensed the need for diplomacy. He said, "I am lucky I have never faced the kind of grief you are talking about, but I suppose anything that helps must be worth it."

"I think so," said Terry. "I can see that you are a compassionate person, and that brings me to the condition of my support for your project. And I have to warn you that it is, or may seem, a little ... shall we say, odd."

Leo heard those words, but the possibility of complete backing for the development that the boys had been working on for so long, seemed so very close.

"You see," continued Terry, "I have for some time been considering a live model, a living statue. The problem is that I could not stand the idea of a plastic copy of my wife. I could hire some girl and have her face surgically altered, but it is just not right. And you can see that Mel was just so unique. Her nose and the line of her jaw was described as masculine, but as you can see she was just so beautiful."

She was. And Leo was a little confused, but he had an idea where this was going. He said, "I don't have any sisters."

"I know" said Terry. "Forgive me, but I have looked in to you a little. I know there is only you. You are the only one who could do it."

Into Leo's mind came the glimmer of realisation. He considered the words, "Surely you are not suggesting that I be the living statue of your late wife". But he was looking at Terry and Terry was looking back. And that was exactly the suggestion that was under discussion.

Terry said, "I should say at this stage that while I think you boys have a good concept here, I would not be investing in it, were it not for you, Leo. If you were to come and work in my household in a special capacity for, say one year, then I would invest, and invest immediately. I would take 60% of your business and fund it through to full distribution, including having my own people do most of the work. With

that level of expenditure, I would be committed to fund distribution. On your own numbers, your personal 10% would be worth over \$10m. And, if I wished to rollover our arrangement at the end of the year I would give to you personally another 10% from my own share. In fact, say 11% so all of you will have control."

"I'm married," said Leo, bluntly. He said it not only to show that he could not abandon his own home, even for a period, but also to assert his heterosexuality.

"I know," said Terry, equally bluntly. "She could be a very wealthy woman."

"What would I need to do? What changes would be made to me?" As he said these words Leo wondered how he could even be thinking this. He needed to talk to the others. Surely, they would say 'this is too much - we will look elsewhere'.

"Hair extensions, depilation, body-sculpting with garments and exercise ... breast implants I suppose," said Terry looking him up and down. "All reversible. But your face is hers. It is almost unbelievable to me. I could see it the moment I looked at your profile. Without makeup, my Mel looked so much like you."

"And to be clear, this is look, don't touch." Leo was starting to consider just what he was prepared to do to realise the dream they all shared.

"Listen Leo," said Terry, facing him directly with a look that Leo could trust. "I am not a monster. I am not a tranny lover looking for sex with a copy of my late wife. She is dead. I am only interested in her memory. I find my sexual release elsewhere, not with her image. It means too much to me. You will be here and visible, just like the statue and the images. You will be paid for your time of course., over and above our business deal."

"I need to talk this over with my partners." He meant the boys, curiously disregarding for the time being, his wife Megan.

"Of course," replied Terry, before escorting him back to the front door. "I know that this is no small thing for you." I hardly needed to be said.

Of course, it's crazy," said Marcus. "But it is a great deal. 40% with the chance of control. This deal should cost us 80-90% of the business."

"It's too much to ask of Leo," said Byron.

"Would you still be in the team?" asked Kyle.

"I guess so," said Leo. "I think that I am sort of live in decoration, but when he is working I will still be working with you guys. I need to confirm that, but only if I do it."

"You need to do it," said Marcus. "If we say no we are back to square one. We all know that software development is about exploiting a gap before somebody else closes it. We need to finish development and get this product out there, NOW. This is our opportunity."

"If you do this Leo, we owe you big time," said Byron. "If we get 51% you need to have a bigger share than the rest of us."

"Do it," said Kyle. "We will help you through it. We will be there for you every step of the way."

Marcus said, "Before we do anything, we need to go through what is proposed".

He pulled out the draft document Terry had supplied, and presented a summary. Leo's year in this service would start January 1st, so Marcus would be home for Thanksgiving the following week, and Christmas. After that he would be in residence for 4 months and could then have a spring break, and later a summer break, each of two weeks. After the first 4 months Marcus could stay at home some weekday nights.

Megan had been very hostile to the idea, not because the details had been made known to her, but just because she understood that Leo would be away from her for that first 4 months. Terry had agreed to a payment for Megan for what the document described as "loss of consortium". That appeared to have soothed her, for the time being. The truth is that Leo had been so busy with the project, including working weekends and evenings, that she barely saw him.

She would need to be a party to the agreement with Leo, Marcus, Byron and Kyle. They would all be subject to confidentiality. Until she

signed she was not fully informed of what was proposed for Leo. At some stage after signing she would have to be advised. But nobody else was to know.

A final document was signed at Terry's lawyers' offices. Funds were transferred immediately and when the initial deposit to each account was confirmed Leo went immediately to visit the doctor appointed by Terry, for blood tests and injections. Leo did not even ask what the shots were, and the doctor did not tell him. Everybody had agreed, and Leo was fully prepared to fulfil his part of that agreement.

That weekend was Thanksgiving. Leo still had not told Megan everything, but without describing the weird background, she raised his impending absence with her parents and 2 brothers at the dinner.

"It is an intensive program to complete the software," Leo explained. "I will be working and living in the building 24/7 for at least 4 months."

"All of you will be?" asked Megan's father. "You and your partners?"

"For some reason this only applies to Leo," said Megan. "I am not happy. I've been paid off."

Leo was starting to get a little angry. He thought that Megan was being selfish. While he did not want to do it there over dinner, she had raised it and he needed to respond. He said, "You know how important this is to me, to all of us. We have the opportunity of a lifetime to turn our ideas into millions. How can you stand in my way like this?"

He worried for a moment that she might tell all - the details of the perverted proposal and the fact that he would be in drag for a year to secure the funds. But the agreement that both he and Megan had signed contained strict confidentiality clause - any such disclosure would have turned off the money. She was not that foolish. But she was bitter.

The truth was that regardless of what was going to happen, things started to fall apart for Leo and Megan that night. She came to his parent's house for Christmas as planned, but things were tense. When he left their apartment on New Year's day, it may have seemed to both of them that they would not live together again.

By the time that Leo reported to Terry's home, the injections taken 6 weeks before, and the pills, had already had some effect. His muscles, skin and hair had softened, and his nipples had grown and become tender, a prelude to breast growth.



Terry was not there to meet him and instead left him with a team of experts to effect the required changes. As promised there was depilation of his entire body, but in particular his face. That would also be the subject of an intensive skin program, and an ongoing regime to maintain the best possible skin condition. He learned that "the late Mrs. Adler had excellent skin".

There were hair extensions, and coaching on the management of long hair, something Leo had no experience of. "The late Mrs. Adler never had a hair out of place," he was told. That meant regular salon styling, but in between he would need to wash, condition and put up his hair appropriately. Apparently, that was the way she wore her hair. Leo had always liked long hair on women and had encouraged Megan to wear her hair long. He could play with her hair, but with his own in such large volume he felt clumsy and inadequate.



For some reason the hair never seemed to look tidy when he did anything with it. It was fortunate that there were people there to help him, but he knew that he had to develop some skills of his own, just to keep it neat.

He was even prepared for breast implants, but he was told that final advice would need to come from Mr. Adler on that issue. In the meantime, he would be using gel inserts in a bra and a bottom forming underpants to give him shape for all the clothes and shoes he would need to become familiar with. The inserts wobbled like the real thing, and had the weight in them that forced him to pull his shoulders back. The feeling was unnatural, but something he could grow accustomed to.

He hardly had time to stop and look at himself. Just the occasional sight in the mirror of a confused woman being shuttled from one place to another. It hardly seemed like himself. It was as if he was watching a bad movie - a body swap movie perhaps - rather than being a participant.

He was to be coached in dressing, walking, sitting, standing, getting into cars, getting out of cars (of all sizes), carrying things, holding a handbag, using lipstick and mascara, brushing his hair, sitting down to pee, washing his hands. Everything seemed to be slightly but importantly different. But there would be time for that - after the big reveal.



It all seemed unnecessary. If he was to appear as a tableau only, why did he need these skills? But of course he was not motionless, so his movements must be in accord with his appearance. Leo understood that. He had signed up for this. He could do what was required of him. He was part of a team with a specific role to play. He needed to wear the role. Was that method acting? It would require effort on his part. His seemed a burden heavier than the other guys', but he had taken it on for the collective good.

The arrival of Terry was a moment of nervousness. He had a thought that his appearance would now be so ridiculous that the deal would be off. They would all be back to square one. He felt that he needed to do this right. The objective was to play a role in costume, dressed as a woman. It was not to be a joke, a drag performance, mimicking a woman. This was to be a presentation.

He was dressed in the body shaping garments and ushered to the in-house salon for preparation. His hair with extensions was washed and put in curlers, while two girls attended to his hands and another prepared his makeup. It all seemed to take an inordinate amount of time, but the result was quite spectacular. The makeup artist showed him the copy of the photo portrait she was working off, of the late Esmerelda Adler, alongside his own face. It was remarkable.

He took his place in the atrium. His hair was down and fell in big curls around his shoulders. He wore a cream dress and tan heels. His face had the haughty look from the portrait, as he had prepared himself, but he was ready to smile. He was ready to give life to the statue at the appropriate time.



Terry stepped inside without looking, and threw the keys to his Lamborghini in the Swarovski bowl near the door. Then he saw her, and he froze. Leo could not tell if he was awestruck or furious. Leo delivered his smile. He still could not tell. Terry stared and approached slowly.

"You look fantastic," he said. "I mean, as in a fantasy, a fantasy come true."

"Thank you," said Leo, but it seemed to break the spell.

"Don't speak," he said. "We are going to have to do something about that voice. Until we do, please don't say another word."

Leo pursed his lips and motioned to zip them closed. Terry laughed. It was the first time Leo had seen it. He felt strangely deeply satisfied that he had been able to extract some joy from this man, who seemed to carry such a sombre air about him. He smiled back.

There was something about the look in Terry's eyes that suddenly unsettled Leo. He felt as if he had done the job too well. There was no doubt that having this living image of his dead wife in front of him, changed Terry. Leo was starting to understand why this was so important to Terry, even though the thinking behind it was so weird.

"Come upstairs and sit with me while I get changed," said Terry. And then, as if to temper the demand he added, "Would you?"

Leo mimed his consent with a slight dip towards him. It suddenly struck Leo that it was a very feminine gesture. He was not sure where it came from. He had not been coached in that. It was almost as if the costume was equipping him with more imitation skills.

Terry had him sit at the dressing table and brush his long dark hair while Terry undressed for the shower. Leo was looking at himself in the mirror. It was almost as if this was not him. She was way too beautiful to be him. Somehow his appearance as a man was not particularly attractive. His large blue eyes and dark hair were his best features, but did not make him handsome. But on a woman's face they were unmistakably attractive. The dark eyeliner and lashes made his blue eyes look huge and almost luminous, and the long dark hair framed his face showing off the perfect skin.



In the mirror he could see that Terry was naked as he went into the bathroom attached to the bedroom. He was carrying a towel, and Leo wondered if he might be concealing an erection. He hoped not. That would add another complication to the weird circumstance he now found himself in. But looking at himself it would not have surprised him either.

He wondered why he didn't have an erection himself. There was a beautiful woman looking at him. She was pouting and winking, and batting her eyes. He was turned on but with no sign of an erection in his well secured crotch. In fact, there had been no stirring there for weeks.

When Terry got out of the shower Leo resumed brushing his hair. He could see the reflection of Terry glancing at his living statue while he was dressing. He came over.

"Do you mind if I stroke your hair?" he asked.

Leo was about to say, "You paid for it, so you do what you like." But he could see Terry motioning for silence, so he simply nodded.

Terry stroked his hair. He stooped slightly, perhaps to smell it. It did smell good, as Leo knew. He could feel Terry's breath. It seemed almost charged with electricity. It was a puzzling sensation.

"I am going out," said Terry. "When she was alive she would have come with me, but now I go to these things alone."

Leo suddenly felt sorry for this man, so caught up in his grief that he needed a prop to function, and so lonely. He looked at him. Terry looked back. There was no denying what that look was. It was love. Terry's love for his dead wife was still alive. Leo wanted to run away. It was a very uncomfortable moment. Thankfully it was Terry that broke the impasse, by turning and leaving the room.

Leo went to the large and well-furnished room allocated for him that night. He was troubled and he needed to distract himself. He watched some TV and read some of the many women's magazines that were the only reading material in the room. He kept wondering about where this would lead. How would it end? Surely Terry would tire of this performance.

It was clear to him that Terry was so besotted with the image of his

wife, that even a man pretending to look like her, would do. Or maybe his maleness somehow made his portrayal of Esmerelda somehow unattainable? It was clear that Terry had chosen well for the appearance. Without any significant modification, Leo looked like her. Maybe Terry was attracted to masculine looking women? Mel clearly had some heavy features. Perhaps Terry was a latent homosexual?

Leo experimented with braiding his hair before going to bed. It was just something to do. There was an article in the magazine. He seemed to have so much hair. After several attempts he happened upon a braid that really did look quite tidy.



The bed was comfortable and smelt of flowers. He slept - thankfully a dreamless sleep.

He was woken by a maid who had laid out some clothes for him.

"Can you do your own makeup or should I help," she asked. From her appearance he could see that she had the skills.

"Do I really need to get everything on before breakfast?" he asked her.

"You should join Mr Adler in the morning room in 20 minutes, so I think yes," she said.

He showered quickly and applied a little makeup without too much help needed.

"Good morning," Terry said, when Leo walked in. The room had windows on two sides and a skylight. It was almost a conservatory and was flooded with sunlight. There was coffee and fresh fruit, and pastries.

'Can I talk?' Leo wondered. But he kept his mouth shut and just smiled a return greeting.

"I would like you to talk," said Terry, appearing to read his mind. "I do not expect you to speak like a statue. It is just that you need to have the right voice. If you approve I have brought forward the surgery, and it will include some work on your voice. All completely reversible of course."

More questions peppered his thoughts, and Leo's enforced silence became increasingly frustrating. He decided that after breakfast he would compose an email to Terry. He would say that he was happy for things to continue, but he needed more involvement in the project with the guys. Just sitting around the house was going to drive him crazy.

"The doctor has sent over some consent forms," said Terry, patting an envelope on top of the morning paper to his right. "Of course, I remind you that you have agreed to certain procedures as part of our deal. Coffee?"

Terry had lied to him. The body sculpting including the breast implants were reversible, but not the work on his throat. But he was only to discover that later. He signed the documents too quickly and without advice. And within a week he was in and out of the private clinic, recovering at home. At Terry's home.

His silence was now medically enforced. He could not speak for four weeks. He carried a slate for written questions and requests.

He was able to stay involved in the project, but only by chat and email. It seemed that the development work was proceeding at pace and now involved more of Terry's staff than the original authors. Just like Leo, the others seemed to have become observers.

The swelling and bandages on his breasts, buttocks and hips, proved not too uncomfortable and he healed quickly. He needed to wear a special bra for some weeks after the bandages came off, but he had time to become accustomed to a new feature of his anatomy. Breasts were indeed, a strange sensation.



So, it was some time before he could show off the whole package to Terry. For the weeks before he did he had performed what Leo like to call his "statuary duties": He sat silently with Terry over breakfast. He would lie on the terrace with him on certain sunny afternoons. When Terry dined at home, he would dine with him, in nice clothes and hairdo, silently. Leo would often visit Terry's bedroom to sit at the dresser and brush his hair. Or sometimes lie on the bed and read next to Terry. But he would always retire to his own room to sleep.

It was a Friday when he got the all clear from the clinic that he could speak. He decided to call Terry from the car that was driving him home. He said, "Hello Terry, it's Lee."

Terry had started to call him 'Lee' almost from the first day. It pleased Leo that he had not started to call him 'Esmerelda' or 'Mel' and that would clearly show that he was unhinged. As 'Lee' he was a different person - an actor playing the role of Mel. But 'Lee' was clearly a better name for somebody who looked like Leo did now.

After a pause, perhaps confusion, Terry said, "Lee. I'm so pleased to hear your voice."

"I can stay mute if you like" said Lee. "But not over the phone."

"No, no," said Terry. "The voice is perfect. I wanted you to have it so that you could talk - without breaking the spell, if you know what I mean."

When Lee introduced herself to her partners they were in for a shock. It was in fact, Lee's first outing. She wore smart business attire - a figure hugging dress and a small jacket, and shoes with a modest heel. It was not what she would have chosen, but the fact is that the wardrobe she had to choose from consisted of things to wear around the house, evening gowns, cocktail dresses or business clothes. Nothing casual at all.

Her maid had helped her to dress, and had helped to put her hair up nicely, and apply daytime makeup. She had checked herself several times through the house and while sitting in the back of the limousine. When she walked down the corridor of the software development wing she felt

confidently feminine. It was the style she had been developing for weeks now.



Marcus, Kyle and Byron were seated in a glassed walled room within an area filled with geeks seated at multi-screen workplaces. There were for workstations in the room, one unoccupied.

"I assume that is my desk?" she said, after walking in on them.

All three of them looked at the beautiful woman so out of place in this environment. She just smiled and put a hand on one hip, inviting recognition. It seemed an age before anybody said anything at all. There were three gaping mouths about her.

"Leo?" It was Byron. Lee was suddenly aware that he was the nicest guy of the three. Sure, Marcus was better looking and Kyle had a great body, but Byron ... Lee was shocked that she was even thinking like this about her friends and business partners. But she pulled it back.

"You're doing your bit and I'm doing mine," she said, making a slow twirl so that the boys could see all her glory.

"Fuck," said Marcus in amazement.

Kyle laughed. "Wow," he said. "Leo, you make one gorgeous chick."

"Well, thank you, Sweetie." Lee was playing with it now.

"Are you Ok," said Byron. "Are you Ok with this."

"Well, let me see," said Lee. "I live in a mansion. I have servants waiting on me hand and foot. I have somebody who admires me 24/7, and I hope that we are all getting rich. What do you think?"

"Well I hope we are getting rich," said Marcus, getting down to business. "We have a big team working on the project now, but there are problems. And we do have a competing product."

"You had better tell me all about it," said Lee. As she prepared to sit down Byron stood up and pushed a chair under her round bottom. She sat and crossed her legs. Kyle stared. Marcus too, but he continued to update the fourth partner on recent events.

She heard his car arrive in the garage. She was waiting for it and had left the connecting door open a little. The growl of the high-performance engine was unmistakable. She walked to the atrium and struck a pose against the column. It was her little game. The living statue.

Terry smiled as he entered and saw her there. He walked up for a closer look. She stood still, looking into the middle distance. He inspected her as if she was marble. He raised his hand as if to touch her, and she could see it almost quiver. He never touched her when she posed like this. She looked up and pouted a little.





"You can touch if you like," she found herself saying to him, as if taking pity on him.

His hand reached out to touch her arm, but he held himself back. He only looked. He never touched. She should have been happy with that. It was what she wanted.

She had been to the salon that day and had her hair styled in a glamorous updo. She wore sparkling drop earrings and bright red lipstick and nail polish. Her dress was silver - long, sleeveless, plunging to reveal her perfect breasts, slit to reveal her perfect legs. Totally inappropriate for afternoon wear. A show for him.

"I'm frightened to touch you," he said, honestly.

She looked at him. "Really?" she said.

"I'm frightened that if I touch you I will only want more."

She reached out a hand and touched his cheek. It was slightly rough with slight late-in-the-day stubble. She had never touched a man's face before. The texture contrasted with her smooth hands softened by months of moisturising.

He took her hand in both of his and held it against his face, then his lips. She was real. The hand was soft and warm, and smelled of roses. He could not bear to pull his lips from it.

When he looked up he could see her face was no longer smiling. Her expression appeared to match how he was thinking. Confusion. Emotion. Desire. Confusion.

He took her into his arms, completely; and kissed her, deeply. She felt her body go slack as if completely in his power. The only muscle moving was her tongue, playing with his. His hands moved around her back, as if wanting to touch every part of her body through the fabric. He found the zipper and the garment fell to the floor, as if designed to yield to passion.

Next the bra, snapped open with the same ease, allowing the now perfectly integrated breasts to bounce free, the hormone enlarged nipples standing out in excitement. His tongue licked each in turn.

Lee's spine arched against the column behind her. A moan escaped her lips.

He picked her up. Lee wondered whether he was incredibly strong or whether he was so much lighter. Leaving the dress and bra on the floor in the atrium he carried her into the lounge and lay her quivering body, clad only in panties with a concealing garment beneath, on the sofa.

"What is happening?" she asked him, her hand now behind his neck.

"I don't know," he said. "But I don't want it to stop."

Megan waited at the coffee shop. She noticed the tall woman in the Chanel suit enter, but only to note that she seemed out of place. She was tall in high heels, and glamorous in that smart suit and with her hair in a flawless French roll. She was walking towards her as if to greet somebody behind her.



'Leo is late' she thought. She looked down. Her coffee was cold so she pushed it aside.

"I'll get you another," said the voice above. A warm feminine voice but strangely familiar. "That will be a triple shot latte."

She looked up and saw the well-dressed woman smiling at her. Her makeup was perfect, accentuating the blue eyes circled in black. Eyes she knew so well.

"Leo?" she asked, in disbelief.

"I go by Lee these days," she said. "May I sit." She did anyway.

"What has happened to you?" Megan asked in amazement. And then with a trace of bitterness, "What has he done to you?"



"Everything," Lee replied. Then to the waitress, "One triple latte and a piccolo please." She shifted her handbag. It was Chanel too.

"I had to tell you that I am rolling over my arrangement with Terry," she said. "There will be a modest pay-out for you. I think you filed divorce papers too early, but we are in a position to be generous."

She was smiling at her again, this woman who had been her husband. She was beautiful and stylish. For a moment Megan felt dowdy and inadequate. And she felt poor. Her new boyfriend had succeeded in losing the money she had received earlier, so she would need to be thankful for whatever might come of this. And more careful with it too. Or perhaps she might be entitled to a little more?

"So that means you and the boys will own over 50%?" she asked.

"Yes," she said, her manicured hand with pink nails fingering the sugar bowl. "But I am afraid that our great program will not amount to much despite the money Terry has poured in."

'So much for that' thought Megan. She would take whatever was on offer. Leo had already surrendered more than his share on separation, so anything more was cream. She had a sudden feeling that things could have been so different if she was still with Leo. But where was Leo? This person may have his eyes, a trace of his voice, the same infuriating need to fiddle with the sugar bowl - but otherwise, this was not him.

"So, after this, where do you stand with Terry?" she asked.

"He wants me to marry him."

The words hung in the air, as if incapable of being understood. It seemed an age before Megan stammered, "But that cannot happen. You are a man for Gods sake!"

"Not any more I'm not."

Two coffees were tabled allowing both women to collect their thoughts.

"I had final surgery 4 weeks ago," said Lee. "Consummated last weekend." She seemed so matter of fact that Megan was exasperated.

"That's disgusting," she said.

"I was going to invite you and what's-his-name to the wedding," said Lee. "With all expenses paid for you. But if you feel like that I can take you off the list."

"But you're not gay," said Megan. It was not a question.

"No," said Lee flatly. "Not then. Not now. Don't ask me to explain. I don't understand myself. I just know that he adores me and that when you receive love like that, you just have to return it. And then last weekend ... well, let's just say that now I know that I could never be a lesbian."

"He made you into a copy of his wife and now he is going to marry you? You are not a person to him. You are a thing."

"That's how it started, you are absolutely right in that. But it is not like that now. I am me. I have found out that I am nothing like her. In fact, I have found out that she was a cold-hearted bitch who treated him like shit. They had little physical contact and she may even have disliked him. Quite why he was so in love with her I don't understand. But I don't care about that. Our relationship is very different. I am a different person from her. I want him. I want to be near him. He was fascinated by his first wife, but me, he loves."

"You never loved me," said Megan, with tears welling in her eyes.

"You're wrong. I did. But just not like this." She sipped her little coffee daintily. She said quite directly, "I'm sorry Megan. We had a good thing, but I don't think it would have lasted, whatever happened. With Terry, and as his wife, I have found my place. I have learned that I am more a receiver than a giver."

"And now you have the anatomy for it," jabbed Megan.

"That is happily true," said Lee. She put a \$50.00 note on the table and left.

The End

