Frock Therapy

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

If I blame anyone for anything that happened, then I would blame my job.

I worked on a trading floor with a bunch of young men. There were some women. But let’s face it, stock trading suits the male ego. Women give up and move on to something without the bullshit. That was what I wanted to do, but I stayed on until the pressure drove me crazy.

I should not say crazy because with the benefit of hindsight what happened to me was not madness, although it might seem to be. What I really wanted to do was to find a way of dealing with stress and that is why I became the person I am today.

I suppose my mother had something to do with it as well. She was a beautiful woman. She still is in her own stylish way. But when I was young, I used to watch her do her hair and makeup and think that she was a goddess.

I never thought about imitating her when I was young. Like my older brother I wanted to be like my father. My brother was more like him in so many ways, but he was smarter and went into engineering. I followed my father into finance.

My father was successful and popular but never very rich. He was a risk taker which meant he lost money, and what he didn’t lose he spent on appearances and my mother, which was really the same thing. But he had energy and a love of life which I loved in him.

He started with trading but went on the other things. He said that trading would teach me about hard work and understanding people who understood money, rather than understanding money itself.

“Nobody really understands money,” he liked to say. “Business is people. Money only exists because people believe in it.” He was full of stuff like that. It sounded wiser than it was.

The problem with me was that I was not him. I did not have the same kind of ego, which is really what keeps men in that line of work. I was not good at decision-making. I could not handle pressure.

The men I worked with (and they were all men) seemed to thrive on it. It was like a badge of masculinity. Everybody was expected to have at least one woman, but some took on another seemingly for no other reason than to create personal stress to add to professional stress. It meant 2 phones and the worry that one or the other would find out and all the emotional turmoil that would cause.

I had enough trouble with one girlfriend. My doctor told me that while erectile disfunction in somebody as young as me was rare, it was the result of stress. My girlfriend was understanding, but I felt the problem was mine. I simply could not enter her with anything truly solid, no matter what she wore or didn’t wear, or how gorgeous she looked. It was me who called it off. She deserved better than me.

I was searching for ways to cope. I tried yoga and did breathing exercises in the men’s room or anywhere else that was private. It worked for a while. Usually only minutes.

I suppose the turning point was when I was in an elevator with two women at the office. I suppose that they were executive assistants or in HR or something, but not on the trading floor. They were complaining about hard work, and then one of them said something that seemed to hit a button in my brain.

“When things get on top of me, I just buy a new dress and book myself into the salon for a new do and a makeover, and hit the town. It just feels so good to become somebody fresh and new, and then meet somebody who judges you only by the way you look – not what you know or what you do. It is so good not to be a man.”

I was standing right in front of them. They must have known that I could hear. But they did not care. Why would they? They were both attractive young women who could do or say whatever they liked. I was not in that position – I had to watch what I said and what I did. But it had me wondering - Was it good not be a man? Was relaxing as easy as they said it was, if you were a woman?

At around the same time there was a story in the news about an unnamed male judge being found unconscious after a beating while wearing women’s clothes. Apparently, he told the authorities that he dressed up “for relaxation purposes given the stress of work” but it was not clear why he was strolling through the park. Anyway, the point is that it seemed like a dress and a makeover worked for him too.

What was it that made a dose of femininity so effective? I felt that I had to find out.

It’s a big city and so there is more than one “feminization boutique”. I chose the one that seemed to promise a transformation into somebody normal, rather than a burlesque artiste. They said that the were there to assist “casual dressers or those seeking full transition”, although I had no idea what that meant at the time.

I simply sat down and asked for “the works”. I was not concerned about body hair as I wore a suit, but I did say that my face would need to appear normal the day after.

“Don’t concern yourself,” the lady told me. “We know what to do. You have a bone structure which will make it easy. I think that you will be pleased with the result.”

Surprised would be a better word. I endured the body waxing and the shaping garment and I squeezed into a tight blue dress, but my head was left until last, with the big reveal done by spinning my chair around to face a full-length mirror.

When that happened, my initial thought was that this was a clever joke. They had an attractive blonde woman in the same outfit I was wearing sitting behind a pane of glass in front of me, mocking me with a puzzled look. But it was me. I stood up with their help, unsteady although the heels were only moderately high. I was transformed.

“Are you ready to step outside?” one of them asked. “We have a coffee bar nearly we take our new ladies to. You don’t have to go. We can just take the glamor shots for you to take home and then we can take you back to manhood, but you look too good not to face the world.”

Did I become a sissy in that moment? It certainly felt as if something had happened to my psyche. I found myself striking poses in the mirror almost unintentionally. I was not imitating female behavior – I was checking my angles. I looked good from every angle.

I did go to that coffee bar with two of the ladies as they had time before the next appointment. They said they had time because my change of gender had been so easy.

“Are you thinking about a permanent change,” one asked me. “We can get you hormones and referrals to good surgeons.”

I was horrified by the idea. I explained that I was only there to find a way to deal with stress. I imagined that it would be an interim thing. I had already decided that it would be a thing. I felt great just being somebody totally different from who I was, and even better in their company. All they wanted to talk about was clothes, hair styling and makeup. It was all so superficial that it was wonderful. The biggest problems were clashes in colors. What to wear was not even an issue.

“Just have plenty of clothes and follow the rules, but remember that breaking the rules is good too.”

I decided that this was something I could do at home. I asked for some tips. I was referred to some cross-dressing stores online and makeup tutorials on YouTube. It all seemed so simple. I just needed to pick a night, maybe one night a week, when I could switch gender and empty my head of every male thought.

“Frock therapy is better that shock therapy.” I was told. “But if you feel that you need to go further, come back and see us.”

I paid the bill and thanked them profusely. I went home and spent that night arranging all that I would need for my weekly regular self-administered frock therapy. I slept better than I had in years. But in the morning I woke up and appeared at the office and everything turned back into shit.

It seemed that the only way to cope was to cross-dress every night. That was what I was doing within a month. And a month after that I was wearing women’s underwear under my suit at work.

I had an image of myself as being my alter-ego Annabelle, dressed as a man and fooling everybody. Whenever I felt stress building, I would say to myself – “Just pretend to be like them, Annabelle. Remember that when you get home you can take off this ugly disguise and wear something pretty”.

It was becoming my new reality. I was finding myself lapsing into some feminine gestures and then correcting myself, silently warning myself – “Careful, Annabelle. They can never find out that you are really a girl.” I had found the answer to my stress, but now the new worry was being found out.

It all sounds crazy, I know, but somehow this need for Annabelle to be the real me led to everything that followed. I found myself going back to that feminization boutique and talking about.

“So, you want to abandon manhood?” They saw things far too simply. I felt that I had done that, but I still needed to live man’s life. That was my job.

“Hormones should help,” I was told. “The changes can be hidden for some time, but it will help you to feel totally female even in the manliest of outer-wear”. I had flatly refused only a few months before, but now it seemed like a good idea.

“‘And you should grow your hair. You can style it male during the day and female at night. He problem with a wig is that when you take it off your gender can disappear in an instant. Going to bed and waking up in soft curlers will help you to dream like a woman.”

I felt that I could work with this idea, especially after my first few weeks with estrogen coursing through my veins. Annabelle was so much more real. The male me was so much less real – a mere cardboard cutout character that could be draped over her feminine shoulders. I ditched the wig and adopted a pixie cut in my natural light brown.

My makeup skills had improved immensely and now it seemed that I needed to spend my Annabelle evenings looking at hairstyles too. It made me long to have longer hair, but what I had was already drawing the attention of my boss. He disapproved of the man bun thing, but in my case the word “man” seemed out of place – I had taken such good care of my hair that the knot looked too full and shiny.

It was only a matter of time before one of the guys actually asked the question – “Are you transgender or something? It is just that the guys are noticing some changes lately?”

I responded by asking – “Would it matter if I was, if I was still doing the job?” It was not a rejection, but it seemed that it was the right thing to say. Fairly soon the whispers were out. I was trans.

Somehow it came as a huge relief. It seemed that there was no longer a chance of being found out, even though I did not then regard myself as being transgender. But it had come to the point that my sanity seemed dependent on me being able to move between genders so how could this be bad.

But then I was called in to the see the boss and I was asked whether I intended to present myself to work dressed as a woman anytime soon. I have to say that the question caught me by surprise, and I began to wonder whether my mechanism for stress relief really depended on me being two people – the harassed man during the day, then the calm and rather disinterested woman in my private time. My answer was – “I can continue dressing as a man if that makes people feel more comfortable.”

“It’s not about our comfort – its about what is best for you,” the boss told me. “We have never dealt with a trans-person on the staff before. We need to be understanding and helpful. It is your welfare we are concerned with.”

Really?! This was the first time that I was ever aware that management had the slightest concern for the welfare of anybody. We made the company money, and we made money, and if doing that burned us out then vacate the seat and let another guy try. I suddenly felt that maybe it would be an idea to have Annabelle step forward, if only to test this new caring attitude.

She really had nothing to wear. There was pretty ultra-feminine clothing, peignoir and sleepwear, but nothing professional. I asked for time off to buy something and I was amazed when my request was granted.

I had brought everything online before that day, but now I was walking into the women’s section in the department store and browsing, and being assisted.

“Is this for you?” It was as if the assistant could see Annabelle through me. I had to smile.

“I want this to be my last day dressed as a man,” I told her, whether or not it was true. “I need something suitable for work. Something that says I am proud to be a woman in a man’s world.”

“I know what you want my dear,” she said. “But you should know by now that this is not a man’s world that we live in. It is a woman’s world, but we just let them think what they want to think.”

Was she right? It seemed to me that I had found peace in surrendering control, but were women really in control? It was a nice thought.

She dressed me from my smooth skin out, with proper underwear rather than the silly sissy stuff I had bought, and then she referred me to a local salon to have a makeover.

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| I had my hair done. There was enough of it to style with a few curls, but what it really needed was color – something that said “look at me”. Then they went to work on my face, starting with my eyebrows and adding a delicate plumping of the lips.  The overall look was gorgeous. It made my masculine nose and chin almost disappear. I was ready to head back to the office and walk back to my desk reintroducing myself to everybody as Annabelle – the new me.  I could have left it until the following day because by the time I was ready the day was almost over, but I was glad that I sorted things that day, as it resulted in the suggestion that some of us go out for a few drinks, and my makeup was suited to a night out.  I could see that my appearance was unsettling some of my male colleagues, but I found that thrilling. I had turned their opinions of me on their heads. Who was this woman and where had she been hiding? |  |

It was a good question, had they ever asked it. I can only say that she must have been hiding inside me all along, because none of this seemed to be pretending. I had let her out. Looking back I can see that.

Transition is not always easy but I don’t blame my job. My stresses were much more than I knew perhaps because I was fighting to repress the real me. I was a ball of pure stress, and my work just added to it.

Now it seems that I have all the answers to stress. I have a boyfriend now, and I let him make the hard decisions simply because it makes him feel good to be in control. When we make love I have no erection to worry about anymore – I just lie back and encourage him. And then, like the two women in the elevator, if I feel anything that might be cause for worry, I just buy a new dress and book myself into the salon for a new do and a makeover.

It is so good not to be a man.

The End

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