The Leap

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I am like that guy Hamlet. You know: “To be or not to be, that is the question”. I just could not make up my mind. I must have stood there on that cliff top for close to an hour. To be or not to be.

I had heard that the last guy who threw himself off “The Leap” had just driven there in his car with his girlfriend, ran up and over the barrier and he was gone. Dead on the rocks below within seconds. Too easy. But not me.

So along came Janet Downing. She came, and we talked. And I did not jump.

I know what you are thinking: Good deed done. Man saved from his fate. But you do not know Janet. She did not want me not to kill myself. She just wanted me to kill myself to her advantage. But maybe mine as well.

My life was a mess, and it was all because of my temper. I had beaten up my wife, and not for the first time. But now I was on the run. There was no way I was going back to prison – not after the last time. I was never going to be raped again. No wife, no money, and no future.

So Janet said that I could do the decent thing. She said that I could provide for my kids from the grave. She had the money. So much money. She just needed my body. My dead body.

It was not immediately apparent to me that she was trans, but after a while I became aware that she might be. Then she confirmed it.

“I was on the run, just like you,” she said. “You may think that this is just the ultimate disguise, but I have always known that I was transgendered. So, I was able to take on a new identity to escape my pursuers, and realize a life ambition, at the same time.”

She was attractive enough, I guess. She had the money to have all the work done. She was the same size as me, which I suppose was small for a guy but big for a woman. Like me she had dark hair and brown eyes.

We drove to her house and she cooked me a meal. It was the first good food I had eaten in weeks. And she told me what she wanted me to do.

She said that she needed to reinvent herself again. Her pursuers (who were never revealed but were clearly not the Law) had found out that she was now living as a woman. She said that this time she needed to be dead. Only her body would throw them off the track. Or my body, under her plan.

Now, the obvious problem with my body was that I was not like her in the most important regard – I was not a post-operative transwoman. And that was what she needed me to be.

“This is going to take some time,” she said. “The same surgeon can do that work. I will need to get you across the border and back again. We need some time for healing. I will need a little bit of additional work done too. Then we come back here, and you can end your life to the good fortune of your family.”

The idea sounded crazy – it still sounds crazy as I say it, but I was out of my mind.

It was not that I even considered the loss of my dick and the pain of surgery to have my body and face made to look like her (God knows I deserved the pain) but my only concern was whether I could wait that long to end my misery.

The only way I could cope was to think about how I could make things right for my wife and kids. That meant being out of their lives forever and providing for them with money. Maybe with that money they might (over time) remember me better.

My only concern was not for myself, but how I could assure myself that Janet would keep her side of the bargain. She asked me to choose an attorney to hold the money. Once he received it and I saw it in his account, I was able to agree. There was a “reversion” term, but after the time she had allowed, the money would be available to my family and nobody else.

Now I was ready to die. Now I was ready to be found as the body of Janet Downing at the foot of the cliff they call “The Leap”. I just needed to be that body.

Why would I agree to my body being mutilated? Well, I was never particularly happy with my body anyway. I was too small and scrawny, and apart from the large dark eyes that my wife had fallen for, I was not particularly good-looking. But at the moment in my life, my self-esteem was at the lowest ebb. I wanted to die, so what concern could I have for my body? It was nothing. A retched vessel for a life not worth living.

She arranged everything. We flew in a private plane over the border into Mexico, where she had a surgeon lined up. She told me that the work that would be done must be to the highest standard. When my body would be discovered it must be seen as her. She had the money and would only have the best surgical “affirmation”.

When I came to I was wrapped in bandages. After the painkillers wore off I felt as if I had been burnt alive, as my entire body had been lasered to remove hair and condition my skin. My face felt as if I had done 50 rounds in a boxing ring with a heavyweight, and I felt as if I had been gutted through my groin. I went into surgery suicidal, but I came out praying for immediate death.

Janet had some work done too. Just some tightening to look a little younger. She told me later that she could not bring herself to make major changes even though she ought to, because she had been very particular about the woman she wanted to be at the time of her first surgery and did not want to change all over again.

Healing was the priority for both of us. Janet had been through the more radical surgery that I had just endured, and she was willing to help me. There was cream needed for my skin, and to help the skin over my breast implants to relax. Once the packing and the catheter had been removed from my new genitals there was a stent inserted, but Janet said that I would not need dilation.

“You’ll never get to use your vagina,” she told me. Of course not. I thought that I would never want to. But I was curious. Once the pain had gone, I found myself examining myself with a hand mirror.

Of course, the most obvious effect of this surgery was having to learn to piss sitting down. Now people will say that losing a penis is far more important than that, but where I was going I had no use for it. There would be no other woman in my life. Sex was the furthest thing from my mind. But pissing is what we have to do every day. And there is something about pulling down your panties and letting it out, that seems so girly. On the seat I felt different.

When the bandages came off my face, I realized that I was different. My nose, which I had broken as a child, had been straightened and reduced in size, my cheekbones had been altered, my hairline pulled forward and my lips plumped up. Even with some residual discoloration I could see that I was pretty.

My hair, which was long and shaggy, seemed to look like a girl’s hair, even when I was flat and sweaty from the bandages. I wanted to wash it and see how good I could look as a woman.

“Don’t worry,” said Janet. “I will make sure that when your body is discovered you will look good. I wouldn’t be seen dead any other way.”

But as we flew back to her house overlooking the sea not far from “the Leap” she made it clear that all the other things that concerned a transwoman transitioning to female would be of no concern to me. I would just be wearing a tracksuit all day every day and just healing. I had no need of acquiring the skills of a woman – how to walk and talk and move and gesture – I would be dead.

And yet, when I looked at myself in the mirror I felt drawn to all of those things. I found myself sitting with my legs crossed at the thigh, something that I never did before. I found that my hands seemed to behave in a different way. My legs too, when I walked even in the sneakers I wore every day. And I found myself talking softly, like a woman.

“Why are you talking like that?” she said, angrily. But I just replied that somehow it just seemed the way I should sound. A man’s voice coming out of this face just seemed unnatural.

“Well,” she said. “We can put it to good use when you go in for a makeover before … before you fulfil your side of our bargain.”

The jump. It was what I signed up for, but the day was rapidly approaching, and I found myself not looking forward to it as I had done, up until that point.

I was confined to the house, which was very private, and instructed not to answer the phone or the door when she was out. After all, I did not exist. Not anymore.

But after she went out for most of the day following mentioning “the Leap”, I decided to explore the parts of the house that I had not ventured into.

There were four bedrooms upstairs and I had only ever been in one. One was open and empty, but the two large bedrooms with a view were off limits and kept locked. That was no problem for me, as I was a locksmith. She did not know – she had never asked what I did. I had a college degree in the arts but the only work I could get was as a locksmith. I had learned from a master smith and I there was not a lock I could open.

One bedroom was Janet’s. She slept in it. I could see that. The other was (I realized) set aside for the new person she would become. She was not sleeping in it. There were clothes hanging in the closet, but two open suitcases on the bed. The clothes were different to hers – younger and more stylish. So were the accessories – the shoes and bags.

In one bag there were documents including credit cards and a passport in the name of Valentina Maria Fanucci. It was an Italian Passport, but the credit cards were from the US and Bermuda. I looked at the passport photo. It was her, but it could be me.

A week later she said that we could go to town for my makeover. It would not be in our town, I mean the town nearest her house. It would be a town some distance away where we would be unknown. We were both going in for the works: Hairdos, manicure and makeup. I would need to put on a dress – the first time I had ever worn one.

Janet put on a dress from the closet in her room, but I was pleased to see that in choosing something for me, she unlocked the other room. She had two to choose from and was holding them up against me. One was pale green and quite loose, but feminine, the other was white with a V neck and a floral pattern either side of it.

“I like the white one,” I said. She looked very surprised. She tossed it in my direction without a word, and I slipped it on. I could pull it on, but it had a zip on the side so that it could hug my figure. I seemed to know all about putting it on. Maybe I had seen my wife wear something similar? Not as I recall. I checked myself out in the mirror. I swished the full skirt. Janet looked at me suspiciously. She said: “Enjoy it if you like, but this will be your first and last day as a woman.”

It occurred to me that she was becoming increasingly hostile, but I could not understand why. We had a business arrangement, to our mutual benefit. I was doing everything required of me.

The shoes were sensible. Just as well. It would take time to master heels, and I had none of that left. But still they were feminine, and the total look was outstanding. Somehow the skirt of the dress flapping in the warm sea breeze, with only the finest fabric between that breeze and my new genitals, was liberating. I thought for a moment that I would never wear pants again, and I was glad of it.

What an odd thought?

We drove for ages. I sat in the passenger seat. All I could think of was how strange it felt in those clothes. I started to imagine myself sitting in a car like this with a man at the wheel. I was his drop-dead gorgeous girlfriend and he was taking me for lunch at the restaurant on the point. But Janet was at the wheel. There was still something very masculine about her profile, but it broke the dream.

We arrived at the salon and were whisked into chairs side by side for a skin treatment and preparation for the manicure. Our hair would then be washed and styled with the makeup to be done last. The smells and sounds of the salon were so strange to me, but somehow very comfortable. Something about my new body and the clothes that I was wearing convinced me that I belonged in this place.

When we were separated during the styling, my hairdresser struck up a conversation with me. She said: “I don’t think that your hair has been treated for a long time. But it is strong and healthy. And you really do have a great body.”

“Thank you,” I said, in my best and most feminine voice. I felt it best to keep my conversation to a minimum.

“I can see that your older sister is really a man,” she whispered. “I hope you don’t mind me saying it. She really is very attractive, but she has no quite got there.”

“She tries very hard,” I said.

“It must be so difficult for transwomen,” she said. “They want so much to be girls like us. Who can blame them?”

“So true,” I said. I was looking at myself in the mirror, and she was too, over my shoulder. She was proud of her work. With good reason. I looked fabulous. My hair was not that long really, but with curlers and hairspray she had created a soft and feminine style with heaps of body.

If I thought that looked good before, after the eyebrows were done and the makeup applied, I looked breathtaking. It was not as if I had been seriously glammed up. Janet had said specifically that it was just a day look, but I could not believe what had been achieved. It was not that there was no trace of a man – surgery had done that – it was that I was now looking at a seriously good-looking woman.

I thought that Janet would be pleased, but instead she looked horrified. With similar effort having been applied to her, on top of the extensive “tightening” that she had undergone only weeks before, she could not hold a candle to my look. She barely spoke on the way back.

She was focused on my death, which was now only hours away.

We drove separate cars to “the Leap”. I drove Janet’s car, and she drove a new car. A sports convertible. It would be in the name of Valentina.

Strangely, it had never crossed my mind how Janet would have faked her death before she came upon me, that grey afternoon on the clifftop known as “The Leap”. Who would have been the body she needed had she not met me? How could she find another post-operative transwoman who would be prepared to die for her? Or could she find such a body already dead? It was only when I started to think about these things that I started to wonder about what kind of monster Janet Downing (or whatever her real name was) might be.

I had thought of myself as a monster. I was a nasty and ill-tempered violent little man. At least I had been. Somehow with all these hormones that I needed to develop her body I was not like that all anymore. With my nuts gone I no longer had any violent thoughts. In fact, that, or the female hormones, seemed to have made me placid, and even (dare I say it) content. Maybe even happy.

Certainly, suicidal thoughts no longer dominated my thinking. But the fact is that arrangements had been made. I needed to die so that Janet could die.

It was three years ago today, that we drove up to “The Leap”. She needed to make sure, you see. We took separate vehicles so mine could be left there. We went to the clifftop and looked over. The tide was out, and the jagged rocks were exposed. That would mean immediate death, but if there was any chance of life, the incoming tide would take care of that.

She thanked me for what I was doing for her. She said that she was looking forward to her life as Valentina Fanucci. I smiled. And then she fell. Let’s just leave it at that. She fell, and I didn’t. I went to live in Tuscany and she didn’t.

I confess that I Facebook stalk my family these days. I mean the family I had as a man. They seem very happy, and I am glad of it. But I do not regret losing that life. I have my own life now, you see. I have Guido. As it happens I have rather taken to being Tina. I think Guido always thought that American women were a little rough around the edges, so my lack of femininity was never a problem for him. And I am improving. But sex with him is so good, I don’t miss manhood at all. And of course, I have all my money to enjoy.

Quite the perfect life really. “To be” is the answer to Hamlet’s question. To be.

The End

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