Climbing Back

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

They call it a climbing accident. That is what it was, but not with me crashing onto rocks from a great height and tearing my groin open. Perhaps they could have done more if that is what had happened.

The fact is that when you are climbing and the conditions get bad you become like an automaton and just trudge on. Hypothermia has something to do with it. Your body shuts down the extremities to keep the core of your body alive, and your brain starts to wander. Altitude too, can play tricks on you, and I was well above 10,000 feet on Mount Shasta. But it was just that my body was numb, and so you don’t notice that a part of you has just died.

There was tear in my pants. I was wearing the proper gear – fully insulated with a bid front and back, and seals to the jacket. But there was a rip. It was the seam. It may even have been faulty manufacture, but the evidence was destroyed when they cut the pants off me on the helicopter.

Your scrotum is supposed to protect your testicles. It is another of those cunning parts of the human body, where sperm is kept cooler than normal body temperature until the body gets cold and the scrotum shrinks to bring the glands closer to the body core. But when blood to the scrotum fails the contraction does too. Everything that has no blood can rot. That is what frostbite is.

When I passed out, my to co-climbers were not even aware of what happened. Neither was I even if I had been able to talk. Nothing was done to restore blood while they dragged me down the snow slope to where the helicopter could pick me up. Even then the priority was to get my body core temperature up. They checked my face and my hands and feet which is where frostbite usually strikes, but they found nothing. Then somebody spotted the rip and found that my genitals were hopelessly destroyed.

I wanted to climb Everest. What mountaineer doesn’t? A winter climb of Mount Shasta in Northern California is a great place to get the practice in. The summit is 14,179 feet. It is a 3-day climb – add an extra day for the more difficult ascent. We never even got to the final ridge.

Instead I found myself in a hospital in hospital in Sacramento with a doctor talking about how to reconstruct my groin.

“Your penis is gone, but we have been able to recover nerves which we hope that we can put to use in any replacement, but I am sorry, there will be no reproduction. And you will urinate through a catheter for the time being.”

“What kind of replacement?”

“We could use the flesh of your belly to create a hollow penis shape and then attach where your penis was. We run the catheter through it to urinate, and use an insert for coitus. The idea is that we the recovered nerves to give you feeling in the tip, but we lack length.”

Foolishly I wanted to see what I had left. They sat me up and used a mirror to show me. There is no mistaking what I could see. They had cut away all the rotten flesh and there was a perfect seam from my pubic area shaved for surgery until just short of my asshole, interrupted only by a plastic tube to the bag hanging off my bed.

“Genital injury is not uncommon,” the doctor droned on as if to belittle my shock. “Even total destruction like yours happens with alarming regularity. We actually have a nurse on the staff who has been through a similar injury, although perhaps with even greater trauma. A sawmill accident I think it was. I could send Nurse Napier to see you if you like?”

I just fell back and stared at the ceiling. I must have said yes.

A sawmill accident did sound bad. Looking back I was numb the whole way through mine. Even what was left was not overly painful. Sure, I would listen to this guy. Maybe he would even show me that cock they had made for him?

“I have been sent to look after you and see you through this.” It was a woman’s voice but a little deep and husky. I turned to see. She was a large woman, wearing nurses scrubs and a big smile. She had a mass of dark curls held back from a centre parting with two bright red bow clips, and she wore lipstick to match. She was attractive and friendly. She had the badge of a registered nurse above the name tag “Florence Napier”.

“Are you Nurse Napier?” It seemed like a stupid question from the moment I said it. “The sawmill accident.”

“That was my old job,” she said, browsing through my medical notes. “The settlement from the mill allowed me to retrain, and after spending time in hospital I decided that this is what I wanted to do. Help people. Maybe I can help you? First you need to tell me whether you need any pain relief. Let we get you sitting up properly. You may want to talk.”

“But you’re a woman?”

“Thank you for saying so,” she said. “But as the doctor may have explained I was not always one.”

“Well, obviously you are in a very different position to me. You must be transgender – right? The accident would not have had the same consequences for you?”

Her strong arms pulled me forward, and adjusted my pillows. She smelled of a mixture of floral perfumes and antibacterial scrub – a surprisingly pleasant combination. She pulled up a chair and seated herself.

“Transgender? Not before my accident. But now, well I have crossed from one gender to another, so by definition that describes me.”

“I thought that you were going to give me advice about rebuilding me as a male?”

“I can describe that to you, yes,” she said. “It didn’t work for me, but it might work for you. I have been sent to offer you care and support. That is what I do. That is what I love to do. Tell me how I can help.”

“So you had a penis reconstruction?”

“It is not a penis,” she said. “It is a penis shape I suppose. They take a piece of flesh from your stomach, complete with blood vessels and they roll it into a tube and leave it growing there with a stent inside it, until it becomes viable, and then the cut one end and attached that below your pubis, and wait for that to become viable with proper blood flow. You have something weird growing down there for months before they cut the other end off your belly and fashion a tip. Then basically you have a hollow living flesh sausage hanging in your groin.”

“But it works like a penis?”

“It looks a bit like a penis. With a catheter running through it you can stand at a urinal and piss like a man, but it can get messy. I prefer what I have. I prefer sitting down. I wipe and I am done. I don’t even need to use panty liners, but sometimes I do just because I like to.”

“And sex?”

“It can be done, but you will have to explain it to her. She might be horrified, but you pull out the catheter and you put in a stiff rod to create an erection. You might give her pleasure if she can take her mind off what is going on, but you won’t get much.”

“They said that they have preserved nerves but they are too short.”

“Long enough for a clitoris I bet. That would make you very lucky, if you went my route.”

“I don’t think that I could be a woman.”

She smiled at him. She knew his pain. She took his hand in hers. It was a smaller hand, but not as soft – she used hand cream regularly.

“I found a woman inside myself,” she said. “I think there is a little woman inside every guy, we just have no need of her. But when we do need her, she will stand up, and she might even be better than the man you once were.”

“I am still a man.” It was a whimper. I did not really believe it. I felt tears. Surely this was a clear indication that I was no longer male. But I had to ask: “What happened? What made you give up?”

“My reconstruction failed. Gangrene. It rotted just like your penis did when they cut it away. It went black and rotted. I told them to cut it off and just direct my stream down. The vagina came later.”

“The vagina?”

“I still need sex. Yes, my vagina gives me so much more pleasure than my penis ever did.”

“So you have sex with a vagina, like lesbians?”

“No, I have a husband silly!” She held up her hand to show a wedding ring. “I have used my vagina for sex with women, but a man inside you is so much better. And a man makes me feel more like a woman. That is what I am now, and I love it. I work with other women in a way that men don’t. We are a proper team, at an emotional level. We are supportive of one another. I don’t think that it is just because we are nurses, it is because we are women.”

“You look like a woman,” I said. “I never would have guessed that you are not.”

“If you had guessed that, you would be wrong. I am a woman. I could never truly be a man, so I became a woman, and I am one. That is my story. It does not have to be yours. I am just pointing out that you do have choices.”

“I suppose I am just wondering if I will ever get to climb Everest.”

“Women climb mountains too. But first you have a mountain to climb to get out of this bed and back on your feet.

And at that very moment a man appeared beside the bed. He looked like a doctor, but not one who was attending to me. He was not there to see me.

“Excuse me for just a moment,” he said. he turned to Nurse Napier and said: “Flo, I have finished my shift to I will get a cab home and leave the car for you.”

She looked at him and smiled. I could see the joy in her face. I envied it.

“Oh good, you can cook dinner,” she said.

I looked back at her husband, and found myself wondering what it would be like to be a woman and to be married to a man like that.

The End

© Maryanne Peters 2021