The Pride of Wallaceville

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Wallaceville is just one of those towns in the corn belt pretty much like any other. It is a rural service town, as they say, where folks can drive from homesteads to get the things they need. It is not such a small town – there is a tractor dealership and a real supermarket as well as the usual strip of stores. And there are two churches, because the people of Wallaceville do like their religion.

But being a little larger than some towns does not mean that everybody in Wallaceville did not know everybody else. They did, and sometimes they knew more about one another than they should. But that is life in the corn belt, and some say it is the best life.

There is a high school in Wallaceville too - Wheyman Wallace Memorial High School, named after Wheyman Wallace, as a memorial. Young folks can get a good education at WWM, and most do. Some don’t.

John Tolhurst graduated from high school a few years back. He was the son of Eamon Tolhurst who worked on the big grain machinery. Eamon drowned in a corn silo. Folks don’t understand how that can happen, but it does. You fall in and the more you fight the faster you go down. Then you can’t breathe and that, as they say, is that.

He left behind a widow – a pretty thing named Lauren, with those two kids Gaynor and John. Little Gaynor was pretty too. Everybody said too pretty to stay in Wallaceville, so she left straight after graduation. When it his turn John was to leave too, but not before he had turn the town of Wallaceville upside down.

The truth is that the boy was devoted to his mother and would have stayed. But John carried a secret, and the boy was brave and smart enough to know that such a secret should not remain hidden.

It happens all over this country so we are told – just not in Wallaceville. John collected his diploma and then announced to everybody that he was now Janice, a woman – or about to become one. Janice would be attending the prom in a dress, so everybody could meet her.

Like I said, everyone knows everyone else in Wallaceville and a story like that travels faster than sound itself. The townsfolk, as they say, were astonished, disturbed, and pretty much appalled. Nobody had ever heard of such a thing outside news from the big cities.

But as Pastor Thomas Nathan said – “Those cities are in the hands of the devil and best left to him”. And to all those who said that the poor child John had simply been led astray he added – “There are the tempted and then there are the instruments of Satan himself, placed in good God-fearing towns to corrupt the populace.”

If young Janice Tolhurst was expecting to be accepted by her fellow graduates then she was in for a shock. Or she would have been if she had not turned out to be so goddarned pretty. It should come as no surprise given her mother and sister, but the fact is that on prom night it was plain to see that the prettiest girl on display was not a girl at all.

The worst of the treatment came from the parents in attendance. They did not know the child whereas their own all knew that John was a good and kind a person as there could ever be, and as some of the boys had to admit, very easy on the eye too.

Janice went to work with her mother at her salon. It was not long before business tailed off. Pastor Thomas was spewing his hate and people where drinking it up. Janice knew that it would be hard to stay. Nobody would hire her, and her only admirers were the numerous boys and men who would watch her walk down the street and admire the way her breasts were growing and imagine themselves on top of her.

It so happened that a young man named Patrick Jemison was passing through town and after a little meal he decided to get his haircut. Now Wallaceville has just one barbershop and the truth is they don’t welcome strangers. This young fellow crossed the road to the salon and had his hair cut there.

Janice had worked with her mother and knew a thing or two about men’s haircuts. She accepted this new customer and gave him the trim that changed his life. He offered to buy her dinner and Janice accepted. The problem is that while there is a choice in Wallaceville every one of the places treated Janice like a pariah.

If she intended to or not se was forced to tell Patrick of her origins and her life of hell in Wallaceville. Being the gentleman he was he offer to, as they say, take her away from all of this – which is what he did. He promised to send for her mother Lauren, and he did that too, a few months later following some surgery but before a wedding.

I suppose that you might say that with the Devil having left town the light of God shone down upon the town of Wallaceville, but it was just the sun. It was hot and that following harvest was a disaster. The water dried up and the corn almost popped on the stalk. The following year was not much better, and even the year after that. But it was the three years in a row that made it tough.

Nobody suggested that this might be punishment against the townsfolk, because to say that would to be accuse God of being a tranny-lover. Maybe some people thought it, but most people were ready to forget the Tolhurst family, and even to pull that plaque off the silo where Eamon had died.

But a year or so after the drought broke, Janice and her mother returned to town. Janice was by then Janice Jemison the wife of a successful Hollywood Director, and her mother was married to a well-established screen writer. There husbands were by their sides.

Patrick Jemison made it known that he was preparing to make a movie and that he would like to make it in Wallaceville. He said – “This is the perfect backdrop because this is where it happened”.

It had people thinking back to Wheyman Wallace, whoever he might be, and there were visions of a western, even though Wallaceville was hardly west enough.

“It will be a big production, we will need to rent buildings and homes, and land, and we will need workers, and supplies and catering for a huge cast and crew.”

The town was still hurting. This was like a Godsend after the drought. Surely He had heard their prayers at last.

Even Pastor Thomas Nathan was forced to say – “Even the very worst of sinners can be used by the hand of God to do some holy purpose”. Whatever that means.

“So what is the story that you are telling,” Patrick was asked. “What happened here in Wallaceville”.

“My wife was raised in this town and pilloried for being different,” said Patrick. “Her step father has written the script and we have two key cast members already recruited. Will Ferrell will play the bigoted preacher, and the roles of John and Janice will be played by a local youngster who has sent us videos proving acting ability. I want to introduce you to Francis Lowell, although he, or rather she, would prefer to be known as Fran.”

And with that the young man was called forward from the audience to the shock of his parents.

It turns out that this kid had wrote Janice in Hollywood Being that Francis/Faran was transgender and Janice was too, and from the same town, and being that Fran dreamed of being an actress, it seemed a good idea to write Janice in Hollywood and tell the sad story. That story was that not much had changed in Wallaceville.

Which is why Janice persuaded her husband – which was easy given that he adored his wife – that her story should be told, and that the real town she was raised in might be the set for the movie.

No as for whether than movie gets made or not, we will have to see, but it seems that two people ar now vying for the titled “Pride of Wallaceville” – Janice Jemison who seems to have saved the town, or young Fran Lowell who is taking Hollywood by storm as the first true transgender starlet.

Who knows? Who really cares in a town like ours?

The End

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