Loss of Consortium

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

You probably don’t recognize the name the physicians use: Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or ALS for short. You probably know it as motor neuron disease or Lou Gehrig's disease. But by any name, it’s a death sentence. It’s genetic. It’s in my body. There is no cure. Three to four years was all I had. It advances with age, and you cannot fight aging.

Or can you?

It seems remarkable to suggest it, but in some circumstances, you can. ALS only attacks one specific type of cell – the motor neurons – the cells that control the movement of the body. That’s not the whole body – that will age regardless – but if just those particular cells can regenerate without being replaced with something slightly less robust (which is the process of aging on a cellular level), maybe…?

Who would not jump at the chance of signing up for the experimental cure? You know what ALS did to Professor Stephen Hawking, but he was unusual in that he lived with it. Most die within five years of diagnosis. But they die paralyzed and dribbling on their pillow, shitting in their beds. Who would want that?

The options that I was given were life or death. A single treatment that might postpone the onset of ALS for years, or it would fail, and I would die. I might die of ALS a few years on, or I might die sooner of a bad reaction to the treatment. But who would not choose life over death?

My wife didn’t know what to do. She wanted me to live, and she said that she would nurse me through if I decided not to participate in the clinical trial. She had no part in the final decision, but she knew the options: Life, fairly immediate death, or short-term death.

I signed the release forms.

It was a single treatment. Some complicated chemistry that went straight to the motor neuron cells in my body and attached to them in a way that almost froze them. That can work for motor neuron cells which are fixed in the body and serve as a pathway for nerve impulses. The treatment effectively made these cells almost inorganic, as if my nerves that controlled were replaced with fine copper wire. To be honest the details are far more complicated, but it worked.

But there was one completely unexpected side effect. It was something so seemingly unrelated to the nervous system that at first, the specialists refused to believe that it was a consequence of the treatment. But after full investigation, they had to concede that it was.

Having told you that the aging of my body, other than neuron cells, would be unaffected, the first signs of the side effect was that my body appeared to be getting younger. It almost appeared that I was regressing to a baby state. I was not shrinking, of course, I remained the size of an adult, although I have always been smallish. But all the hair fell from my body and my skin became soft and unblemished. The hair on my head fell out but that then started to grow quite quickly.

And this new form of me was totally impotent. Impotent and with almost no libido.

All of this took place in the research hospital with these specialists poking and probing and taking daily blood samples. Those samples showed that, somehow, my body was being flooded with female hormones. It appeared that, despite remaining the same size and skeleton, all soft tissue in my body had become youthful and was now increasingly feminized.

What’s worse is that my body did not appear to respond to male hormones. That circumstance is usually associated with yet another hereditary disease – Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS). Like others, it’s generally understood to be untreatable. So, I now had a new untreatable condition, as a direct result of the experimental treatment that I had undergone.

But the whole paragraph you’ve read was a lie. I never took the male hormones. In fact, I was taking female hormones. Why? For cash, that’s why.

I only knew about AIS because I was researching hereditary diseases. I didn’t realize that it was something that is apparent from birth, as the disease affects the foetus. ALS does not appear until adulthood.

From the moment when the first unexpected symptoms arising out of the cure began to appear, my wife and I took legal advice. We went to see a law firm, and met with their premier litigator: Tom Jacques was a major specialist in medical misadventure claims.

“Your claim will be difficult, Simon,” he explained. “The release that you signed is iron-clad and effective. I my view, it can’t be overturned. But if we use Margot as the Plaintiff, because she wasn’t a party to the release, we can make a claim based on loss of consortium.”

Of course, we asked: “What’s loss of consortium?”

“Basically, a claim of loss of consortium is a claim that Margot has lost her proper matrimonial relationship with you, because in your present state, you can no longer function as a husband, or more particularly, a lover. If that condition is permanent, the damages could be substantial. And the more obvious the condition is, and the more seriously it affects your relationship, the more likely it’ll be that we can swing a jury strongly against the defendants.”

It was not his idea, it was ours. How could we make it obvious that I could no longer function as a man? Make me a woman, of course. In view of my present appearance that seemed so easy. Hairless, with soft skin, and hair on my head now fine and blond. We decided that being sexless was not enough. If I was drastically changed, there was no chance of me “consorting” with my wife Margot.

And could my condition exhibit mental changes. These would be easy to pretend. My appearance was suddenly child-like. Could my brain regress? Could I feign that? Why not? The more serious the consequences of the negligence of the medical professionals, the bigger the pay-off.

I became Sarah – that’s the name we gave her. Sarah was what was left of me. An adult-sized (albeit a small adult, as I was) child creature, who exhibited feminine traits and appeared intellectually less competent. The person who had gone into treatment was now gone and replaced with Sarah. Sarah would be the prize witness. In cross examination she might look confused and, if necessary, burst into tears.

Counsellor Tom Jacques would say: “Look what has happened to the plaintiff’s husband!” The jurors would shake their heads. “She, the person sitting beside the Plaintiff, was a robust masculine man and a husband to my client, and now look at her! She now can no longer function as a man. She has gone backwards in intellect and is back in school relearning things. The Plaintiff never agreed to this. The Plaintiff never understood that this was a risk. She signed no release. She has suffered. Feel her pain.”

That’s right: Feel her pain and award the millions.

But the trial was years away. These things take time. Pleadings. Disputed causes of action. Discovery. Depositions. It takes months for that and then there is Court time to be arranged. And the whole time, I had to “preserve my injury” as the lawyers say. If I got better, there would be no damages awarded, or not enough to make it worthwhile.

And not just in public, either. As was explained to us, the medical insurers that would be paying out on our claim were watching us. God knows how deep they were prepared to go. Bu there was a lot riding on it. Pay a few hundred thousand to private investigators to prevent having to pay millions is something that makes sense to these guys.

That didn’t mean just going to huge lengths to conceal the source and consumption of the hormones, but also ensuring that our living arrangements reflection the “loss of consortium”.

That was no hardship. I was not capable of sex even before the hormones. I had my own room, which it was agreed should be decorated appropriately for a teenage girl. That was what I needed to pretend to be. I watched TV and the internet and read teen magazines voraciously. I needed to know all about it.

We decided that the best way to show intellectual regression was to enroll me in the local high school. I looked young enough, but on enrollment, the staff were told that I was there to help with some issues with memory. There were fees that could be added to our claim. The idea was that I would fail where the person I was before had succeeded easily, and we would have independent proof. I have to say that this was the hardest thing: Listening to students struggle when I knew the answer but could not say.

But the best thing about high school is the friends you make, and now I was one of the girls I made lots of girlfriends. I mean friends who were girls.

Have you heard it said that you become what you pretend to be? It wasn’t quite like that. I just got used to living the way I did. I got used to wearing pretty clothes. I grew out my hair – it grew very quickly for about a year – and then I enjoyed playing with hairstyles with my new friends. I learned all about makeup and we experimented with each other, too.

It was like I had a second chance at high school where I was only looking to have fun. The high school years I had many years previously were a complete drag.

Its fun being pretty, but then you have to deal with boys. I thought that when I said: “I’m sorry, but I have a penis”, it would send them all away, but as I learned, not all of them. While I could never show it, I thought that these high school boys were just so stupid. I could never go out with a boy that silly on his own, but when we hung with some guys as a group, I could do that.

Margot thought that it was a huge joke, but in public she could only show horror. When she picked me up from school, with everybody else around, she would shake her head, and maybe sniff a little for all to see. I would bounce up with my tits on display and a high ponytail, beaming with joy at the end of another day in high school as some kind of teen bimbo. Everybody was a potential witness for the Plaintiff.

But it seemed as if Margot was no longer pretending. She was starting to get worried. She was starting to feel that “loss of consortium” for real. It was taking too long. She was starting to become who she pretended to be: a wife who had lost her husband.

And then she did. And that really happened on the day that Raul Osario joined Tom Jacques on our legal team. Raul was fresh out of law school and engaged as junior counsel. He was tall, dark and handsome, and he was given the task of briefing witnesses, including me.

I say that it happened from the day he joined, being the day he was introduced to us, because it seemed that when he shook my hand there was some kind of exchange of energy. He said that he saw in my eyes that I was deceiving everybody, and that I saw in him that he knew that. I am not agreeing. I tend to think that it was something more visceral – even sexual.

He knew that I was a sexless man-child being mysteriously feminized by the cure that had been experimented on me, but to look at me, he would just have seen the flighty high school girl. I saw in him a man who could make me feel what I was not – a woman.

We got down to briefing evidence and he started with Margot, followed by me, interviewed separately which he made notes. I don’t know what I said to make something click, but he just looked up at me and said: “This is all bullshit. You’re pretending.”

I gave him my confused look. I had been practicing it for over a year. It was going to be my courtroom *coup de grace*. It had worked on everyone else, including Tom Jacques and the other lawyers, on both sides.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “I won’t tell. Let’s just finish your brief. We’ll keep it between us. Our secret – if you agree to go out with me.”

What is it about guys liking guys with tits and dicks? I’m sure that I would never have been interested. I think girls should have pussies, and boys… well, boys should be exactly like Raul.

“Okay,” I said. “But we’ll need to be very careful.” Which we were.

The problem is that in the end we could not hide it from Margot. It all blew up at a meeting.

“How could you do this?” Margot shouted at me.

I just played my part. I was the silly schoolgirl, muttering apologies. But I wasn’t sorry. My ass was still tingling from the night before. I had learned a lesson – more than one – and things were going to be different. I knew that now.

“You could be disbarred for this!” Tom shouted at Raul. “Not only are you involved with a client, but a client of diminished capacity.”

“She’s no child. She’s older than me and I think she is a lot smarter.” Raul spilled the beans. Tom was staring first at him and then at me. I guess the dumb look fell off my face. I got up and sat down next to Raul and held his hand.

“Well, all I can say is that I’m glad that we’re not bringing this to trial,” said Tom. “If we did, I’d need to disclose this subterfuge to the judge. But as it happens, we’ve received a very handsome settlement offer which is in the band we agreed would be acceptable. So, you, Margot, and… and… Sarah, are going to be rich.”

I think that he was going to say Simon, but he corrected himself. He knew. And Margot knew too.

Raul had misbehaved and could not stay with the firm, but he has a great practice in Hawaii now, where we moved straight after my operation. Not that he really needs to work – we have quite a bit of money these days. We are just happy, consorting.

Although I have noticed some weakness in my limbs lately…

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