

Crossroads in Drag: Ten Seconds Version

By Margarita Pignataro

It happened again, this time in Torino Italy where my Chicano brother Ricky and his fashion diva Mexican *wifa* transformed me from my tomboy look to a splendid breasted queen. The size 34D padded bra beneath the skin-hugging cotton mini orange dress accessorized with the fastened wide-waist teal blue elastic belt disciplined my abs to pop. My thick muscular legs, the right bent slightly in front of the left, and my displayed bulging biceps bugle called all the *italianos* strolling with their pets in the dog park: a definite satisfying cat-walk sight. The finishing touch for the unexpected photo shoot was the long strap green satchel over the left shoulder which made the photograph designed for an award winning mail order bride listing. The gold bling bling Italian platform open toe sandals made it difficult to walk or, as I would find out later, run away from the destiny that would place me back to the ancient Rican relationship I had escaped from three years prior in the United States. I didn't know the influence of that digital click the day I posed for the Torino picture dressed in fashion.

Ricky and his girls, mostly queens –non-dairy as they liked to joke– always played with me, dressing me up in their fun, picking out the striking colors and styles. Ricky lived via my willingness for a laugh, and my self-consciousness and slight uncomfortable mood gave him and the *wifa* a thrill every minute they saw me trying to breathe and adjust my padded breasts. If we had been at their summer Torino apartment lounging among friends it would have been different –all “*ja-ja-ja ji ji ji*, turn this way, bend over, and hand me that Cuban *Romeo y Julieta*.” But this time we were on an excursion in wine country with Italian business potentials. I had to excuse myself from the open-air dining looking over vineyards just to enter a water closet and unhook the borrowed lingerie to let out a huge sigh before struggling to re-snap. Visiting friends' wine cellars and mini markets —only opened on call— gave me a break as all lingered the visiting hours over great fresh provolone, prosciutto, bread sticks, pepperoncini and of course, the best savory *vino* in the world, that is while in Italy, of course.

After a quick jaunt to the Italian Riviera I returned to the States with a new fashion bug, the Italian one, because life is too short not to dress in Italian fashion *a la drag*. Of course my ex *güerito* didn't notice the upgrade because, well, there was no cause. Too many theories for the situation: he wasn't attracted to me enough to be passionate about us, he was too depressed, in a rut, mad or all of the above, or he simply wanted a virtual relationship via computer plus the cooking, cleaning, laundering that I did for him. Honestly, I think it had something to do with his dental care. Too much decay causes blood restrictions in other areas, so stated this article in a men's health magazine. He had resistance to his own gender preference: claimed not gay. What he didn't claim, which was the truth, was being a woman trapped in a slender white muscular man's body. Confused was not the word because he just was and to just be means satisfaction within, peace and the “this too shall pass” motto. He was a hermit who preferred consistent routine of solitude, nature, and just creating cyberspace identities. He wanted to avoid topics which I thought important, such as, adopting a child and being a family. Marriage with this one was out of the question. First of all, because he didn't want to have anything to do with the

pinche institutions —church and state— and second, he couldn't understand why one should pay for the evidence of love. But marriage wasn't love. Rather, it was a commitment, a contract, a partnership, an agreement for two to be one team and he just didn't find weight in a signed love commitment. All marriage talk aside, he just didn't want to play with me anymore. Of course, nurturing the bed of roses for seven years produces joint checking and savings accounts, and home equity and car loans. I arrived at a point where I needed more life, adventure, energy and answers to the ever changing questions that came with developing me. And thus, the sticky chewing gum relationship with *gringui* kept me boomeranging across the country from Arizona to New York to Massachusetts and then I finally took the scissors —chain saw edition— and snapped away like a rubber band man to Walla Walla. An opportunity to begin a life —in a new place, on the other side— was the temptation I longed for and embraced tightly. It was far away enough from Massachusetts and all *gringui* episodes. With a “Bon Voyage” I left everything: house, car, cats and plants. The only thing I took was me, myself and I. I started a new job, work out plan, and for the first time worked with a personal training, Joey, referred to by, of course, a nice man. I began to fall in love with the routines and the nice man named Dan.

Dan was a big teddy bear that turned out to be a mama bear turned teddy. He conversed about his transgenderic experience to me one afternoon over chicken salad and ice tea at the wine and pastry shop on Main Street. After this outing the trans detail sublimely confused my brain wiring concerning the usage of pronouns, but that detail was overlooked as we began to work out together. A work-out-at-7am guy, I could handle the early morning wake up with him in sight, but his eye was on another, an ex, and that could be draining. I kept my distance. I began to assess if he remembered me throughout the day with a call: he didn't. What did that prove? He wasn't a pest or/and was busy? If he had other calls, they weren't to me and I just directed focus on my present and not “what ifs” and imagination. I accepted invisibility even during the workouts we had with Joey, our personal training in couple sessions. Then, the day of the call to meet him for lunch and, at that point, I thought my life was going to be transnormative. Just the two of us, no *nepantla* border announced space, just a flowing peace of some sort, a magical air to reality and not just Disney World, but a spiritual commonality.

Workouts and lunches were consistent with Dan on Monday thru Friday. Saturday I would go to the Adventist service and that designated Saturdays skip-Dan-day. It was a Sunday while at the office working on a monologue describing my dinosaur age love life with a crazy Rican that a text beeped and shook my vacation from drama. I stared at the ancient 2007 flip phone model and thought it odd to receive a beep so early in the morning, so I just ignored the noise. Two more beeps followed and I finally pressed the nitrate button to the text: “If this is my *chilena* this is your ghost from the past.” The opposite of Disney, perhaps a weird twisted Hollywood or, better yet, a Robert Rodriguez movie. I stared at the line and my rewind mind flashed the inner circle story images: “She got on her broom one Halloween night and she flew away.” The witch or bitch adjective I didn't mind, they both rhymed. I had made myself disappear quick fast that Day of the Dead night, and not one soul cared to investigate to where my saintly halo had escaped. Now, technology closed the across the country gap bringing Syracuse scenarios instantaneously to Walla wonderland.

Mateo was this *potorro*'s name. A Bronx boy, molded in a household by four Boricua women, he would call himself Matilde by age five jive with the other sisters' names: Magnolia,

Magallanes, Marigold and Maggidet. Each morning over coffee he lingered to see the television news casters' dresses, commenting that every day they wore different dresses, and that cute little *dominicana* prognosticator was ready to pop out that child under the sexy over size sixteen garment any day now. Visiting his sister Magnolia in the Bronx reminded me of curious comments concerning lady's eyebrows, the terrible job the makeup artist did, and the quick replies Mateo offered: "Oh, they penciled the eyebrows." It seemed as though with one text the Boricua turned Irish. His lucky charm and dragon tongue would cause sights of perfect shooting stars and lure me once again into his spicy den. The first pic text sent showed a picture of him and a giant yellow transformer. I sent him the Torino picture and that was the beginning of our new chapter: *Capítulo dos la reunión*.

The first vacation I took was to see him. Forget Dan for now, he was transforming himself into whatever he thought was best for his life and there was an ex involved so the safest was to be work out buddies, keep tabs on the no-no carbs, the after 7pm ½ a pound of sliced turkey ingestions and "go to the gym!" texts. I had to jet to witness the new and improved Mateo and verify the verbal picture painted with true image sights with my own eyes. Mateo's award winning hook from all the conversations during the six months convinced me that he would be the superman rescuing my body. His confession: "I'm an alcoholic and haven't had a drink for a year."

I arrived at his in-the-sticks home encountering green pastures, farmland, horses, cows, goats, and donkeys more than humans on my walks and bike rides. Even after 40 minutes of biking, trees and open fields greet me, and when I arrive to the country highway –the designated truck route– it does not give me an option of a *bodeguita* in either direction –definitely not the stepping out of the 187th and Prospect Street apartment in the Bronx to walk to *bodegas* on every corner experience. I actually ride with no notion of geographical location —Maryland or Pennsylvania the choices. I don't have access to a vehicle, but the rancho basement home feels mellow with the rain falling steadily as the pine trees stand strong. The ground level window view offers yellow orange irises right in my face which brightens the white cloudy day. The blue jay that jets by reminds me of my fast fluttering wings to reunite with Mateo and the Torino drag days when creativity with a purpose was on the agenda 24/7. Back and forth that blue jay crosses my window, and darting eyes swing me to the life lived and life to come. Death awaits to escort me to the cherished peace, but for now I had a take two of an earthly relationship. How to tend to this relationship so not to repeat depression? I imagined an accommodating routine in this new life with Mateo. In the morning he would leave to the auto shop to change oil and what not, and I would wait for his arrival in the evening, eyes always sighted long, passing the irises to the wimpy weeping willow in the horizon.

When Mateo lived in Syracuse his immaculate apartment served as my playground, but now I noticed dust in his room and at this point of his life, a detail he neglected to divulge while I was on the west coast, he lived with his older sister who paid the rent in full and he repaid her in weekly increments. Sounded like the same Syracuse story –financial struggle– with a plus: I was assisting to clean his cobwebs from mind, heart, and soul. Day by day I began to realize that I had returned to the same guy from which I had flown away. To whom should I confess now? Offering my sob story *número dos* to anyone who would say, "I told you so." But confessions seemed so cowardly at this point of my life: "Oh, self, I am sorry for being curious or for not

being more curious.” Why did I suppress my awareness on the matter and not pick up on the clues of attitude or just listen to my mother.... hmmm.... that sure brings the senseless guilt feeling to the forefront. The voyage back to the past with the mantra “forgive and forget” was somewhat supported by the suggestions that he was a sober Christian now. However, I felt the need for a neon plea on my forehead: Define SOBER Christian.

I was well in Walla Walla, falling in love with life’s new surroundings and same old same old. Dan, the big teddy bear once mama bear, lingered in my mind as I called Mateo “girl” and “*mami*,” hormones oscillating moment by moment. Of course Mateo didn’t mind, in part because his dog was transgendered. A white female Maltese named Chico that urinated like a male dog. Her qualities were both female and male so I just called her Scruffy. She would reunite with the straight brown female dog Allie upstairs and sniff her butt, but Allie paid no mind because she either liked it or thought Chico the Maltese with female parts was a male. The wonder was not only with the pets, I wondered about my presence with Mateo. What am I doing with Mateo and not trans Dan? Why cornfields and not wine country? USA and not Italy? Why little hermit on the prairie instead of Big *Papochongo* from the Bronx block? Should I get on my broom to get out of this mess or should I stay and see how it plays out? And why do I want to play and how do I know what play fits the strategy of my life and suits me well? What are the choices that I have? I could go to a psychic . . . or two . . . just for a second opinion.

Why the series of questions? Well of course, it always has to do with a misunderstanding of a dragon fierce sexual night, a night that was purely his, although he probably didn’t think so. I say it was his night because it was his timing, position, and a finish absent of the delicate caresses, neck kisses or sweet nothings whispered in my ear. At the end, after I came back from the bathroom, he slapped the bed for my attention, and uttered the command “pass me an underwear.” I had to call him on it, “*por favor*” I insisted. He saw no need for the kindergarden lesson of “please” or the next one I had in mind: “*gracias*.” At that moment I thought *cortesía* especially after his hug and pump, and he thought nothing of me and only satisfaction for him. Jonesing for my turn I remember the Jesus attitude and teachings of “humility, obedience and death.” So I passed him his under garment. And he rejects it with a toss across the room. *Pendejo cabrón* after I just let him do as he pleases. I breathed. And then I asked for a kiss goodnight. This time he avoids me with a roll over onto the stomach.

Present moment realization. Stating that one is a Christian and a new born again sober man are not guaranteed personality change bets. Anger, negativity and misery overpower going to church once a week to network your auto skills and socialize with the former alcoholics and drug addicts. The will to stop drinking in order to not die due to liver or kidney disease motivates one to be healthy, but attitudes still reside in the inner most corners of one’s programmed mind and beating heart, and inner work is a continuous chore. I knew that, and the others with whom he associated didn’t because they didn’t see the ugly. The ugly is always saved for the closest loved ones.

Attitude also is contagious even though you want to be condor while the other is a turkey. One has to stay focused. But why am I to go through all the poor Puerto Rican spaces again? What excuse does he have this time for his behavior? The effort of being nice is always more energy and investment then just a turn of the head. I left the room only to sit sulking and

soothing my ego hurt mind. I looked at three pound transgendered Scruffy for comfort, the “don’t be drama queen come play with me” glance was cute. Even though Boricua claimed tiredness due to his job, it was not an excuse for the church going oh-I-have-to-pray-about-it guy to be R U D E. With energy bottled in me, I glared at Scruf long enough to decide to pop. He has to be taught a lesson. I was changing my life. I could have stayed in Walla for the summer. I could have gone to Ricky’s again and play. I stopped my workouts with Dan and Joey to be in isolation. This po’ Rican had to be taught a lesson, the *marimacha* way. I came back like a *machetecabrona* diva, but more of a Michele Rodriguez in *Fast and Furious 6* with my memory erased. No clue of any “ommmmmmm” chant or silent meditation by the vineyard side. No thought of Omega Institute teachings. The tranquility in heavenly Rowe Conference Center deleted. I was *EN FO GO NA DA*. Scene One: entrance, lights, action. I pounced on that bed to turn him over like a human Scruffy and *lucha libre* on top of him. I straddle his torso, nailing him quick, to hold his fettuccini arms down with my turbo limbs. Left hand on the little meatball bicep and my right hand on the *cuello de una gallina asustada*. *Diez segundos de una nueva vida para la machetecabrona* diva. I mumble, “I’m telling all your followers, your clients, church, everyone, what a *pendejo pinocchio* you are to me.” That was a fast and furious ten seconds flash.

Now the question is why my *machetecabrona* move? Frustration. Anger. Confusion. Those were some great feelings to confess and act upon. Or it could have been the tornado tazmania devil energy that was announced to pass the next town over. I recollect that his sister may have mentioned my name in the same sentence as “Tornado Warning.” The tornado didn’t hit thus, I took over the night of creating the whirlwind change. Another crossroads paved perfectly perpendicular and parallel and 90 degrees wide for me to stand in the bulls-eye center. Cardinal directions north, south, east and west and all the other variations in between that could be options less likely, but still valid. I mantra, “I am in my destiny to create my next step.” I am on top of the world and a man to whom I owe my present state of mind. But was this action figure resulting from the off emotional sexual confident night that I was having, or did it have to do with something else? Like the dinner the other night.

I had made fettuccini and meatballs. I had no vehicle to go to the store to shop for a nice red wine for simmering the sauce, but I managed the best I could with the food pantry ingredients Mateo’s sister had been “blessed” with that were in the cupboards hiding with expiration dates. I was satisfied with the product, but what happened lingered suppressed in my mind. He said that the meal would have been perfect if *Greg*, the guy who lived upstairs, would have made the sauce because he makes it from scratch. After voyaging across the country I may have had jetlag, but the mention of someone else’s sauce being better than mine, at this point I thought, go get Greg’s sauce. If blond, blue eyed country boy makes better sauce than *tu amante que le encanta hacerte salsa para la pasta*, then fine. I slaved over a stove from noon until 3:30pm to make a sauce to then hear the comment about a Mr. G. Uncouth! I retaliated. Oh, I commented, “This farmland is great but would be better if Ricky or Dan were here.” With my comment Mateo sprang from the chair and tossed the plate on the counter, “*y máh*, it sucks and I’m not going to eat it!” Before the end of his sentence I had helped slide the plate to the end of the counter for the diving crash.

Evidence that the menu would not repeat sauce ever again, I concluded no serving or cooking for him either. His sister would have to feed him. Life was too precious to be with a man who thought about someone else's sauce. Go fetch yonder for the sauce. This second time around lacked comprehension and appreciation and Rican copped an attitude when I called him on his comments. The "would/could/should haves" thoughts and comments were uncalled for, however, better in sentences than in real life time where the past cannot be changed.

Even though Mateo converted into a church going, saved, Jesus praising and counting God's blessings male, he still had the personality of a bi polar angry alcoholic. Angry at what, I wondered. That he wasn't really born Matilde? One can eliminate the drug and alcohol from a person's home, but that doesn't mean peace and love will be the substitute. Sure there are miracles which I am all for believing, however, the transformation requires elimination of substances AND reprogramming of the brain and emotions to live courteously. Each person acts out their will and develops their personality and higher consciousness. If one is willing to pay a price then one will pay, if another wants to bargain, then bargain and see what is gained. It doesn't hurt to ask, but I know that my observations conclude that the man has not changed. The drinks in hand have changed: a soda for a beer; a bottle of water instead of wine; a shot of espresso instead of whiskey, and the puny individual ensure box instead of a delicate colorful martini glass. That's all that is substituted, so how do you teach patience, divinity and how do I work with myself in this situation? Am I reacting to the energy of rudeness, screams, and becoming uncontrolled in my emotions? Mateo, a saint in front of strangers and a devil in front of his lover, filled with dragon fire with a furious tongue that converts his neighbors into skeletons. I don't want to entertain or revisit the topic that turns explosive.

I could get used to the *wifa* life. Looking pretty, working out, doing laundry, washing dishes, not making dinner and going out to eat at my choice restaurants. So, I ask as a queen, am I dragging myself into another inferno? Or am I just in *nepantla*, the *entre tierras*, hanging onto identities and figuring which destiny is for me? My slide show life, I decide, is one to be filled with positive thoughts and prayers, enjoying the earth walk and not the negative misery that people dish out because their blood sugar is low or some other imbalance excuse. I want to enjoy my earth travel, and I thought I could with Mateo. I smile and think of stories that make me laugh and mad crazy to get over this moment. And I still think of Italy and my skin-hugging cotton mini orange dress as Scruffy hops into the bedroom to play and to see me straddled on Mateo's torso.