Substitute

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Rebecca Farnham was not an attractive woman, although she probably could have been. The fact is that she was brought up in a sporting family where achievement was more important than appearance. She had one brother playing pro-football and the older brother playing pro-golf. It was always assumed that she would excel in something physical. It could have been any of the sports she showed promise in at school, but she chose tennis.

Success in any sport is about be competitive. Competition drives people to work harder and put in the hours of practice needed. Tennis is a sport that needs time to be spent on developing the shots and the fitness needed to be a winner. Hand-eye coordination is just a part – the rest is sweat. You have to be driven. You have to want to win.

When I became her agent, it was that will to win that impressed me. But I did not like her. She was not a nice person. If you represent somebody that doesn’t matter. If she is rude you just put it down to her being “focused on her training”. I figured that if it came around to things like endorsements, she could be coached to be more engaging, or perhaps even learn to smile. But first she had to win tournaments.

She started well. She had the temperament, and the ability hone by that. She won her position into the professional ranks quite quickly, and still staying under the radar. I would hear people ask – “Who is Rebecca Farnham?” I was guilty of not putting her image out there, but mainly because I could not find a good image. She could not pose and in all the action shots her face was so contorted it did not look like her.

None of that mattered to me while she was slowly climbing up the ranks. But staying there is about appearances. Once you are playing professional tennis you have to keep on playing. People don’t understand this because top ranked players can take time off. In the bottom ranks you can’t. You have to at least, put in the appearance.

And then she ruptured a medial ligament in her knee. If you have ever encountered it you will know that it is a serious injury. People might say that it is just soft tissue damage, but soft tissue takes time to heal. Bones can be fixed with pins and plates, but soft tissue must rebuild over time. She needed time off the court, but she could not afford it.

I never would have thought that we could get away with putting somebody in her place if I had not seen the person suggested to me. It is cheating I suppose, and no sportsman, or sports agent, wants to be involved in that. But for me it was not about winning points or climbing the ladder, it was just about staying on the table.

My assistant Carrie simply photoshopped the face onto one of the many images I had cast aside. She said – “What about this one?”

“She actually looks quite good in this one,” I remember saying. “She doesn’t look like she is about reach into your chest and pull your heart out.”

“That’s because it is not her. Its another player, an amateur but with some talent.” So I was told.

I looked at the image and started to think something unforgiveable. I said – “I want to meet her.”

Carrie just burst out laughing. She said – “I can arrange a meeting, but not with her. That’s a guy! His name is Wayne Hart. But except for being the wrong sex, he is a dead ringer for Rebecca.”

Maybe I was a little relieved that I had been spared breaking the rules, but I looked closely at the image of the face, and the likeness was uncanny. I suppose that Rebecca looked somewhat masculine, and maybe this guy looked a little feminine, but they looked the same.

I told Carrie to arrange a meeting. I figured – what harm could it do. Young tennis players never refuse a meeting with an agent. I might talk to him about his future, but get a closer look at him as well.

I had him come in his tennis gear and I am glad I did. He was the same height and the same build as Rebecca and his legs in shorts were not sinewy but could easily pass for women’s legs. He had a big mop of blonde hair which required him to wear a headband when he played. Rebecca had mousy brown hair that she wore in a severe ponytail. But it was the face that was truly remarkable. It was her face, but the expression was different. Wayne Hart was a happy person. He was talented and willing, but not twisted by the desire to beat his opponent at all costs.

“I have won some tournaments and placed in a few more,” he said. “I have brought the details with me.” He had a CV which I felt obliged to pretend to leaf through while looking at him in profile.

His voice was not overly deep. It had me wondering if he could be coached to speak with Rebecca’s voice, although the truth was that she seldom used it except to shout at umpires.

“I may have the opportunity for you to sample life as a professional player,” I said. “But it would be an off the record and perhaps even slightly illegal scheme. I cannot even explain it to you without a contract in place including strict confidentiality. Would you be interested?”

“On the pro circuit? But I am guessing not in my own name?”

He was sharp too. That was obvious. But he was interested. Who wouldn’t be? Some guys toil for years and never get there. A little taste of life as a professional tennis player to see if it is worth making the sacrifices. Who would not take a chance? I pulled up a contract and he signed on the spot.

“Hang on, you want me to pretend to be a girl? There is no chance I could pull that off!”

But then he looked at the images I had of Rebecca and he saw that I was not as crazy as he thought.

“She looks angry,” he said.

“She usually is,” I said. “Show me an angry face like that.” He could do it, but his resting face was a pleasant one.

The fact is that Wayne Hart was one of those lucky kids who was born fit and talented. He was an exceptional tennis player just because he was. He could get better with effort, but he would still be a good player without it. I am barely reasonable, but we played some tennis on the court beside my office and I could see that he was good enough to play as a substitute for Rebecca.

The only questions were – Was I ready to do it? Was he ready to do it? Would Rebecca agree?

Rebecca knew immediately that she needed to stay on the table. It would be months before she could play again. She was near the bottom. To slide down is to slide off.

“Do it,” she said. “Make it work. But just in case I will disappear. Officially I know nothing of what you are doing. I will deny everything. I don’t want to get into trouble. Just make it happen.”

But she was directing me. I keep recordings. Agents have to look after themselves.

As for Wayne, he wanted the chance to get involved even in a different gender. His only concern was how much he would be paid for doing something “pretty underhand”.

I stressed to him that that he did not need to win but just hold her place - she will be back as soon as she recovers. All that he needed to do was make the appearance and win few matches without pushing his way into the finals. It would only be a few months, but first he needed to learn how to pass himself off as Rebecca Farnham.

I gave the job to Carrie. I figured that she knew Rebecca and she was a woman. How hard could it be? But Carrie was shocked. She said that it was typical of a man to think that passing as a woman was just a flick of the hair. She told me that I would need to open my checkbook and be ready to take Wayne into her spare room to work on this 24/7 until the next tournament.

She also suggested that I should contact my secret supplier as I would be needing hormones. Not the steroids that I was used to and which I will deny knowing anything about – something different but available from the same sources. The very opposite of steroids.

“On the tennis court there is no room for a transvestite. If you want to pass off a male athlete as a female one, we need to go to the very core,” she said.

I told her that she would need to get approval from Wayne – signed off where necessary – but under our arrangement he was committed to follow our directions.

Wayne moved into Cassie’s house and I agreed to pay for her board there. Then I left them to it. The process was unimportant to me – I am interested in results. All I saw was the bills – the salon, an electrolysist (whatever that is), clothing and cosmetics.

“I should point out that Rebecca rarely wears cosmetics,” I said.

“That was the old Rebecca, now is the time for you to meet the new Rebecca!”

It was all engineered, perhaps by both of them, for dramatic impact. I was ready to smile, and hopefully give reserved approval, but what walked into my office in that moment, changed my life forever.

The deadpan expression was the Rebecca Farnham I knew. It could easily have been her, with that derisively confidant air, but everything else was different. The face was framed with blond curls, and the eyes and lips showed a restrained use of makeup. She wore a tennis dress, but not what Rebecca would wear, something with color and a little style – asymmetrical. At the bottom of the tanned now smooth legs were tennis shoes also with a splash of the same color. But the big difference was that this Rebecca was beautiful, and as I gazed in amazement the smile that broke out on her face seemed to double that beauty.

I know now that in that moment I was smitten. I don’t even know how long my trance lasted. At least until she spoke.

“Hi’ I’m Becky,” she said – she was not Rebecca. “I am playing in the tournament tomorrow. Will you be there?”

The voice was perfect. It was high yet deep. It made her question sound like an invitation to have sex. At least, that is what I heard.

I must have mumbled and stumbled over my words – “But … the hair is not right?”

“What were we supposed to do,” said Carrie. “She can’t wear a wig and play tennis. She can’t grow a ponytail overnight. She had hair enough for this do. We just have to change Rebecca’s look a little. So why not make some other changes? A girl who wears this hairstyle wears makeup, even on the court. And she has a sense of fashion. This is the new Rebecca. Maybe a more marketable Rebecca?”

She had a point. There was a reason why there were not many pictures. Rebecca Farnham the driven athlete was unpopular if not reclusive. I had talked about endorsements with her, but it seemed unlikely. But the girl in front of me was something very different.

As if reading my mind Becky pulled some of her curls away from one ear to reveal that it was pierced studded with some semi-precious stone. A marketing opportunity if I ever saw it.

Becky spoke in that same delicious voice – “To be honest boss, I am happier taking some interest in my appearance. I think I look more like a woman this way, or less like a man.”

The statement was ridiculous. Becky looked nothing like a man. Wayne had disappeared.

“So, what about the game?” I said, perhaps to break the fog of confusion in my head. “Are you ready to play? We have signed you up. You have a game tomorrow.”

“The hardest thing is the tuck, but if I am wearing a dress I guess it is necessary.” Becky then did the unthinkable. She raised the hem of her dress to reveal sports panties, and what appeared to be a female anatomy inside them. “This can get very uncomfortable.”

“Maybe, but you never do that, not even in front of us,” Carrie scolded.

“I’m ready,” said Becky. There was that confidence.

It was solidly based in fact. Her first game was a success. But it was her appearance that caused a stir. The press was asking – “Who is Rebecca Farnham? We can see from her appearances that she has been on the circuit for a while, so why have we never noticed her? It must be the change in look.”

The good news was that nobody noticed that this new Becky was not the Rebecca Farnham who had appeared before.

Even her defeated opponent was fooled.

“I like the change of look Rebecca. It suits you. And a change of style in your play as well.”

“I am trying to be more relaxed … and please call e Becky,” said Becky

The second match was against an overseas player unknown to me or my team. But her results were good, so I suggested to Becky – “Maybe you can lose to this girl?”

That may have been Becky’s intention, but all the shots seem to fall perfectly, and she was in position for all the defense instinctively. A loss could only be achieved by throwing the game, and I did not want that. The win was surprisingly easy.

“Look at this headline,” said Carrie the morning after, reading from her tablet. “The New Rebecca Farnham – Changes in style. On the outer court yesterday the crowd was treated to a remarkable game between two talented players. The big surprise was Rebecca Farnham, sporting a new blonde hairstyle and a more fluid game style. She appears to have abandoned her power serves and base line game for a more fluid game, and it worked for her yesterday. She also appeared to be enjoying herself for the first time since she joined the professional ranks. She is certainly one to watch in the third round.”

I had a call from the real Rebecca. She was not happy. She said – “What is going on with this girl who you brought in to impersonate me? She looks like a Barbie doll. Now I am going to have to cut my hair when I get off these crutches. But she is making me look like somebody I’m not. She has to keep a lower profile.”

The pint was well made. I was getting calls. People wanted interviews. One cosmetics manufacturer even contacted me talking about endorsements.

“I have seen the before photo of this tennis player and see what she looks like now. What a transformation! What would it cost us to say that our products played a role in her transformation?”

In only a few weeks the new Becky was more well-known than the old one who had been playing professionally for over a year.

“She has to lose the next match,” I told Carrie. “But it needs to look real.”

I left it to Carrie in part because I was troubled by my feelings. The crazy thing was that my fascination with Becky was starting to invade my thinking. I mean, I knew that this was not even a woman, but a man dressed as a woman. But I had visions of Becky naked in my sleep, and in those visions, she was entirely female, with ripe breasts and dripping pussy begging for me to penetrate impale her. These are not the thoughts of a heterosexual man, and that is what I always understood that I was.

Carrie did her job. I watched the match on live feed. Becky played well but missed some key shots. I could see what she was doing, but nobody else would have.

At the end of the match I could see that she was in tears. It made no sense to me. This was always the plan. She was doing her job and she was keeping a place for Rebecca.

Cassie called me and said that I would need to talk to Becky. Of course I had do it, but I dreaded the contact. She was still preying upon my thoughts, and seeing her in tears had affected me too. I felt that I needed to protect her, or at least support her.

I offered to take her to dinner. Somehow I thought that a public place would be better for me, and allow me to keep my strange feelings in check.

I treated her as I would any woman. I had to, in public. And she behaved as a woman would. It seemed that she had adjusted to her role so completely that I had the first understanding that this might not be entirely an act for her.

She had dressed for the occasion. She wore a dress that was short and heel that were high, and she had evening makeup on which showed just how stunning she could look. Perhaps the original Rebecca could have done the same work, but I knew that she would never look that good. Becky had a way about her that you knew that she was supposed to be gorgeous.

But I was there for business. I explained to her again how this whole deal was supposed to work.

“The problem is that I don’t like losing,” she said. “As for the tears, maybe that was the hormones? You know that I am taking hormones, don’t you? It was your idea – right? You want me to be female, and here I am.”

She fluffed her curled hair and pouted her painted lips at me. I could feel the erection rising in my undershorts. Nothing like this had happened to me before. I wish I could say that it was love, but it was more animal than that. I found myself repeating a phrase in my head – “She is not real”. I mean, she was not really a woman.

“You’re doing a great job,” I said. “I am checking on Rebecca’s progress. She will recover in a month or so. You will look back on the experience and thank me for it. But for now you can play for the experience, and to keep in the ranking, but you cannot win a tournament. It will soon be over.”

“What happens if I don’t want it to be over?” she said.

“Hey! Remember that you are ineligible for this competition.” I was shocked and a little confused. What was going on here.

“You really don’t understand, do you?” she said. She was right. I didn’t.

But I felt that I had confirmed arrangements. I drove her back to Carrie’s house and watched her walk up the path with those bare legs and the heels. I was barely able to drive around the corner before I had to stop and jack off in the car.

By the time that the next tournament came around I was getting buried in requests for meetings with Becky. It seemed like the best thing to do was to say something like – “Becky is careful about her image and what products she might endorse, so the process may take some time.” Still, you have to receive the requests and process the material.

Perhaps I never should have mentioned it to Becky. I just felt that she could not be blind to what was going on. I just said to her that her priority must be the tennis, and I would manage the business side of things.

“Don’t worry, I will see that you get rewarded if Rebecca gets any endorsement deal, out of our managers share,” I told her. But I was already worried that if Rebecca came back and was Rebecca, nobody would want her. The reality was that Becky was fabulous, and Rebecca was basically a sour-faced bitch.

Then the original cosmetics company that had approached me, broke the rules. They went over the top of me and approached Becky. They had a guy called Sebastian who was assigned the task of winning her favor. He was good-looking and very slick. He arranged for them to meet by chance half way through the second tournament. It was in another state and he was staying in the same hotel. It was an elevator or something like that.

“Hey, aren’t you Rebecca Farnham, the tennis player?”

“Becky. Becky Farnham. Yes, that’s me.”

“I am Sebastian. My company has been talking to your agent about product endorsement. We are in the beauty business, and well, that means you, because you really are beautiful …”.

Sometimes I think that Becky was so new to being famous (although it was not really that at her level) or just so new to being female that she might fall for the thinnest veneer of charm. But it was more complicated than that. By the time I got to hear about it, it seemed that Sebastian was truly interested in Becky, and Becky was interested in him. It never dawned on me that Wayne might be gay, or perhaps he wasn’t, but Becky certainly wasn’t. That made her even more desirable to me.

I was entitled to be pissed at being worked around by this guy, and the company he represented. But I now know that the real problem was that I was jealous. I wanted Becky, more than I was prepared to admit. Somehow in all of this I had forgotten about the problem of her anatomy. I had fallen for the girl she appeared to be. I mean, she was that girl. She had become that girl.

I think that she lost that tournament because she was distracted by this Sebastian. I can only guess what they were getting up to, but I had to assume that it could not be anything less than sexual. But I was not thinking like her agent – I had become sexually obsessed with her.

I could not bear the idea of her going back to living as a man. I just thought that as Becky she had so much to offer. I barely remembered Wayne, and I did not want to. I wanted to think of her as always being Becky. I wanted to think of her as the woman in my dreams, naked and lying on a bed, underneath me.

But the whole idea of this Sebastian was too much for me. I could have felt so betrayed by Becky that I might have been mad with her, but I wasn’t. It seemed as if she was an innocent in all of this, brought into a situation that she was not prepared for, by me. She had no experience in being a woman. Maybe Sebastian did not know that when he met her, but he must have come to understand it. I held him responsible for taking her from me.

That is why I killed him. That is why I am rotting in jail now.

I was expecting everything to blow apart, but I never really followed the consequences of my actions. To take somebody’s life is an awful thing, so you try not to dwell on it beyond being apologetic to the victim’s family at the sentencing hearing.

But months later I had a visit from Rebecca Farnham. Of course, I expected the real Rebecca Farnham as I assumed that the substitute had returned to his normal life. But to my surprise it was Becky. She explained that Carrie had arranged a photo ID in that name, and that she clearly looked more like a Becky than a Wayne.

Her hair was longer, and she was more beautiful that my constant dreams of her. She wore a low cut dress and I could see real breasts on her chest.

“I just thought that I needed to come to thank you for what you did for me,” she said. “Becoming Becky taught me two things that might otherwise have seen me waste years of my life. Those weeks playing professional tennis taught me that I was not cut out for that, and they taught me that I was female in my core. Now here I am.

I asked about the original Rebecca and she said that the injury never healed totally. She returned to tennis with a new hairstyle, but everybody described her as “not being the same” and some said “clearly being in pain”. She left the circuit and has not been seen since.

As for Becky, she said that she had a new name that she would not be sharing with me, and that she had a new man whom she would keep safe from me by that.

I longed to break through the glass and hold her – just once.

I still dream of her, but now I understand that she has the body I once only imagined.

The End

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Erin’s Seed: “A top ranked female tennis player is injured so her agent recruits young man to take her place just to keep up the attendances needed to stay on the tour. The crossdressing player is told that he does not need to win but just hold her place. But the agent doesn't want his client to come back - maybe it turns out the agent is falling in love?”