Re-engineered

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Dominic Grady came from a long line of engineers and he was smart enough to follow that line. Not as smart as others in his family, like his older brothers Rod (structural engineer) and Paul (environmental engineer), but smart enough when family connections played a part.

He chose chemical engineering, because it was not structural or environmental engineering, or electrical engineering like his father. It had seemed interesting, but it wasn’t. Halfway through the second year he thought about giving up, and stepping off the family line of business.

It was not as if his father had great expectations. He had spawned two older engineering sons and the fact was that Dom was more a Mommy’s boy – being the youngest he seemed to be delegated to assist her around the house. It was his thing, and because of that he enjoyed it.

It made him proud that while he may not be able to make a generator, or a bridge or a wind turbine, he could make a ratatouille, and they couldn’t. They might know bolts and rivets, but he could sew a ripped seam in a pair of pants, he could get stains out of carpets, and bake cookies. There was chemistry in some of it, which may have led to his choice of studies, but Dom had learned the key ingredient in the domestic arts is love.

“A meal made for others and for people you care about will always be better,” his mother used to say. She was devoted to her husband and her sons. She had never cooked a bad meal, in Dom’s recollection. “You father can build machines that can achieve great things, but there is no love in those things. There is in food; there is that in a tidy house, and a well-made bed.” Dom’s mother was proud of what she did, and they all loved her for it.

But if there was one thing that Dom did like about studying engineering it was Axel Gunnarsson. He had shared a dorm room with Axel in his first year of courses – “Introduction to Engineering”. Axel’s father had already made millions in software as a college dropout, but he wanted his son to qualify in something useful, and engineering is always useful.

“Engineers are problem solvers.” Dom was just repeating what his father would say, but Axel liked that.

After that first year Axel had moved into an apartment that his father had bought for him, whereas Dom ended up with a room in a boarding house, because that was how his father and his brothers had studied. They lived some distance apart but initially they attended the same classes they caught up all the time on campus before heading home in different directions.

Axel’s long standing girlfriend Beth had just walked out on the most eligible bachelor in the state, and they were a few drinks in at a bar near to campus. It was agreed that they would not be discussing women. They ended up talking about one another.

“I don’t even know why you bother studying,” said Dom. “Your father is famous from dropping out and you have a job in his company anytime you like. Why study at all?”

“Unlike you I am interested in what I am studying,” said Axel. “It seems like you aren’t so why are you bothering? Find something else.”

It was a good question but a troubling proposal. What else was there? The conversation moved to a discussion about skills.

“I am good around the house,” said Dom with the smile.

“Maybe you could quit school and I could pay you to be my maid?” Axel grinned at his friend. It was a poor joke considering that Dom was wrestling with real issues. “Seriously though, I do need help in keeping my apartment in order, so if you need some extra cash I will happily pay you to do some chores that Beth used to do, or stuff I could never persuade her to do. I know we weren’t going to discuss them, but I am done with women. Paying a friend is a better idea than getting involved with another woman, even a hired one.”

“The only extra cash I need is to buy the drinks to drown your sorrows,” said Dom, rising to get in another round.

“No, seriously Dom, I have a tab at this bar. Let me look after the drinks. You can help me out. I will make sure it is fair. Honestly, you would be doing me a favor.”

That was how it began. It started with Dom coming up to the apartment once a week for a few hours to “tidy up”, but that became 3 times a week and Axel gave him a key.

“Why cross town to do this. If you want you could take the spare room,” said Axel. “It is never used. Beth just used the closet space. She’s been gone weeks and she still has stuff in there.”

“That would be too much,” said Dom. “We have agreed on you paying me an hourly rate, and I am keeping a tally. I know you are good for the money, or beer to the value of any work I do.”

“Honestly, Dom, you do keep a tidy place, I have noticed, and the meal you left for me in the fridge last night was outstanding. You are the perfect man-wife. Move in and I will pay monthly.”

Dom took up the offer. The boarding house was crap, and the apartment was clean and tidy because he made sure it was. He didn’t have much to put in the closet, but he needed just a little bit of space.

“What do you propose to do with all this stuff your girlfriend left behind?” Dom asked. “It all looks too expensive to just throw in the trash.”

“I will send her one last message to collect it before the end of the weekend and if she can’t be bothered, I would junk it,” said Axel. “But there is some nice stuff in there, but that girl’s butt was too big for some of those dresses. It seems like some women can’t even use a mirror right.”

Dom moved in and kept his stuff in his case until he expected the closet to be emptied, but Axel’s girlfriend Beth was not willing to collect it. She told Axel that she had moved on. He had paid for much of it. She didn’t want it.

“I am away for the rest of the week and back on Sunday, but you can sort out what to do with it,” said Axel. “Give it to charity if you like, although the poor don’t often wear cocktail dresses and silver stilettoes. I will leave it to you to deal with. I have moved on too.”

Having Axel out of the house gave Dom the chance to give the place a deep clean, so he went to work, starting with the contents of Beth’s wardrobe. He laid some items out on the bed. He could see that Axel was right. Evidently Beth had taken all her practical clothes and left just dresses. In the drawers there was only underwear suited to wear beneath such outfits, including a corset and some other shaping garments. Everything looked so beautiful. These were not items for charity, just as Axel had said. Dom wondered whether he could try to put some on EBay. For that such garments lying on a bed would not make the right image to get the price they deserved. He needed a model.

He held a garment up between his own body in a tee-shirt and shorts and the full-length mirror. It was a wonderful dress. And it was his size. He confirmed that by trying it on. To his surprise he was also able to put on the shoes that went perfectly with this outfit. But what was needed was some of the underwear to give shape, and what could be done with the legs? He needed to show the total look and that included the hem and the shoes. All that was needed was to shave his legs.

He laughed and put the dress and shoes back. He had work to do and he set about that, rejecting the notion for most of an hour. But he came back to it. The clothes were his to dispose of. They were expensive garments and some with labels of note. There was a market for such things, and he needed the money. With the right underwear he could show off the clothes he way they should be worn. What was the issue about shaving his legs? Hair grows back?

He simply did it, and the forearms too. Summer was well over, and he could cover his limbs while hair grew back.

Over that Friday afternoon and the next day he worked his way through the contents of Beth’s wardrobe using his camera on a stand set to multi-shot while he struck a series of poses in each outfit of Beth’s. He found himself moving between poses in a feminine way, almost feeling the feminine power of these garments bewitch him in the moment. His plan was to crop his head and face from the image, but he did find party wig of Beth’s on a shelf that he could use for some shots.

He took photos of himself in some of the day dresses as well, and simply kept those on while working around the house. It seemed funny to him that he should be doing the work of a housewife while dressed as a housewife, but somehow it seemed to make chores fun, as if he was putting on a show for an invisible audience.

He even found himself humming and signing along to the music playing in the background in a high voice for the song sung in a female voice. It just made the time pass. Somehow it did not seem at all weird that he had gone to bed on the Friday night in a sexy nightie and panties found in Beth’s drawer, or that he had dreamed of things that were less than masculine.

In his dreams he was Dottie – intelligent but not overtly so. Dottie wanted to be kind, helpful and pretty. That is what made her happy. These were easy things to do so she was happy all the time. It made Dom wake up with a smile on his face. How different was her life? If engineers solve problems they look for them. How happy a life without problems might be.

The entire day seemed to fly by just getting things tidy, but he still had time to bake something that he could share with Axel when he got home on Sunday. He just wished that Axel’s girlfriend had an apron, but she was clearly not the practical type. Still, she did have some wonderful dresses, and he had photos of them, worn by a model that made them all look great.

But just for his own curiosity he was drawn to try on another day dress. He did not wear the wig. Instead he decided that he might style his own hair a little with stuff left in a bathroom drawer by the once girlfriend. It was just a question of using a brush and some spray – it was nothing that could not be washed out in the morning.

Strangely without the wig, Dottie was not the same. The pretty woman with the tousled pixie cut was him, or a female version of him. For a moment Dom was taken aback, and then he laughed at his own discomfort. Her smile lit up the room from behind the mirror.

“Hello,” said Dom, in the voice that he had been singing in for most of the day. “Where did you come from? Who are you? And why do you look so pleased with yourself?”

“Who and why indeed!”

Dom spun around in shock. At the side entrance to the room stood Axel. His eyes were wide open, and his mouth betrayed neither a smile nor a sneer.

“What are you doing here?” said Dom, in her voice. He cleared his throat and added in a deeper tone – “You were not due back until tomorrow?”

“That’s right, but the Saturday night engagement did not eventuate, so I came home,” he said, still looking puzzled more than anything. “But I am glad I did. Is she going to answer? Where did you come from? Who are you? And why do you look so pleased with yourself?”

“I can explain,” stammered Dom. “I was just going through those clothes, and …”.

“Did you find the little black dress?” said Axel. “I bought it for her but her ass looked like a dirigible in it. I was really looking forward to a good meal and a bit of night life tonight, and here we are. I would love to see you in that dress, whoever you are. Why don’t you let me take you out tonight? It seems like we might both be at a loose end.”

“It was just to model the clothes and get some photos to sell them online,” said Dom, but he suddenly realized that Axel was not listening. He was looking at her smooth legs and her smooth arms, and the shape of her body under the waisted dress.

“The black one,” said Axel, firmly.

“I did try it on,” said Dom. For some reason he had switched to a feminine voice, and if submitting to the direction of the man in the room. “It is a beautiful thing.”

“You are a beautiful thing,” said Axel.

“I don’t think so,” she said, lushing a little. “I would shame you by going out with you in that dress.”

“Book the salon around the corner if you like,” said Axel. “They know we and that I will pay. I paid for dozens of makeovers for Beth. Get your hair and makeup done. You look great as you are but who am I to judge what a woman considers to be an acceptable look?”

“I am not a woman,” said Dom, with a tinge of regret.

“I can’t agree,” said Axel. “I have their number on my phone. Let me call them.”

“Honestly, this is not a good idea,” said Dom, but he was still talking in her voice, and he was becoming excited for reasons he could not understand. He felt like Cinderella, but with the Prince in the room, on the phone, summoning up the fairy godmother.

“She has a space right now,” said Axel. “You know where it is. The next block to the south. It is in my name because I don’t know yours?”

“Dottie,” she said. “Dorothy Grady, but call me Dottie.”

He did, but not for too much longer. She is Dorothy Gunnarsson these days. Axel says that he had her re-engineered, but the truth is that it is more like chemistry. The ingredients were always there. It just required the right recipe to reveal the perfect dish.

The End

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From something by Erin – “The rich guy says to the other guy ‘You've done me so many favors, I should take you out to the country club for a nice dinner.’ He replies - ‘That sounds good … uh, how should I dress’ and Mr. Rich says - ‘Well, Beth always wore her little black dress …’”