

Husband / Palace

Minnie Bruce Pratt

The following two short prose texts first appeared in Minnie Bruce Pratt's book *S/HE* (1995) and are republished here in memory and honour of her life and work. Both texts beautifully explore her relationship with Leslie Feinberg while offering a glimpse into queer and trans life and love in the 1990s. Pratt herself gave her permission for this republication, but we also thank her sons Ben Weaver and Ransom Weaver for their authorisation.

Husband deviates slightly from the original version; and only a short extract is printed from *Palace* with a brief commentary by Pratt. Both texts are reproduced here in the changed/shortened form in which they were last performed at the reading in May 2023.

Husband

At the March on Washington, the man sitting next to me on the grass asks, "Is he your husband?" as I return from kissing you, as you step down from the microphone. On stage, Peggy DuPont in beaded white chiffon is ferociously lip-synching and tail-switching a drag queen's answer to the introduction you have given her, praise from a drag king resplendent in your black-on-black suit. In the audience, I hesitate over my answer. Do I change the pronoun *and* the designation of 'husband'? Finally I reply, "Yes, she is." He hesitates in his turn: "He hasn't gone through the operation?" The complexity of your history crowds around me as I mentally juggle your female birth sex, male gender expression. I say, "She's transgender, not transsexual." Up on stage Miss Liberty is reading, with sexy histrionics and flourishes of her enormous torch, a proclamation from a woman who is a U.S. senator, a speech that trumpets and drums with the cadences of civil rights. The man blinks his eyelashes flirtatiously, leans toward me, whiskey on his breath, waves his hand at his companions, "We're up from North Carolina." Then, femme to femme, he begins to talk of your beauty: "He is perfect. If I ever wanted a woman it would be someone just like her." With innuendo and arch look he gives truthful ambiguity to what he sees in me, in you,

something not simply about 'gay rights.' The queen whispers in my ear with his sharp steaming breath, "Don't let her get away. Hang *on* to him."

Palace

As we reach the grape arbor's leafy corridor, you suddenly kneel in front of me and kiss my hands. At the edge of the emerald lawn other visitors stare at the extravagant gesture, while I shift between unease and delight. You say, "I'm telling you now: Whatever you write of me, or of us together, you will never have to ask if I approve. The only place I want to live with you is in the palace of truth."

After reading this passage, Pratt commented: "Leslie was quoting what Una Vincenzo Troubridge said to her lover and partner Radclyffe Hall, as they readied for the fight to defend Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), the first modern English trans novel, from censorship. In 2014, when Leslie was coming to the end of her body's journey, she said to me, smiling puckishly, 'But what I really meant was: in the *house* of truth.'"