A New Face

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

The fact is that I had always wanted a career in medicine, but I was never smart enough to be a doctor. I decided to train to be a paramedic and I sort of fell into nursing. It is something that gives you more options, because manning an ambulance just wears you out. Male nurses are always in demand, usually because they have physical strength, which always counted me out. I decided to get involved in theater nursing – in the operating theater that is.

You need to have the backing of a good surgeon to break into this kind of work, and Dr. Mark Norgate was one of the best. Some might call him a plastic surgeon but more correctly he is a maxillofacial surgeon, who can rebuild faces. I just handled his instruments a few times, but we talked a little during surgery and I think that he got to know me a little.

We both liked the good things in life, but he could afford them, and I couldn’t.

“I like ambition,” he told me. “But ambition without ability is just constant frustration.” He liked put-downs like that. But I always handed him what he wanted when he wanted it, and he liked that.

I think that he guessed that if he was going to moonlight, he could count on me to work with him for cash – something somebody with expensive tastes on a low income, is always in need of. He had his own reasons for doing the surgery he had lined up, but for some reason I felt that it really had nothing to do with money. All he told me was that he had a contract to provide somebody with a new face, in fact and entirely different identity, and he needed a theater assistant.

You would be stupid not to realize that we were dealing with a criminal of some kind, but Mark told me that I need not have any connection to the work he was doing. The operation would take place in a sterile tent in a warehouse, and both of us would arrive first but I could stay hidden while the patient was conscious. He would then administer the anesthesia before I entered. My job was to man the instruments to check vital signs during anesthesia as well as managing the instrument tray.

“We can’t involve an anesthetist so you will do his job too,” said Mark. “This man’s associates will be outside the tent, but they never need see my assistant. That is the way I have arranged it. I am taking all the risk in this. As long as you see nobody you will be protected.”

Frankly, for the cash I figured that I was ready to take some risk, but I had no idea what I was dealing with. I agreed to do it. The way I saw it Mark would be indebted to me afterwards and that could only be useful in furthering my career.

So, things happened just as he said they would – at least at the start. We arrived at the warehouse, and he had a key. We went in and there was the tent, expanded with positive pressure to keep out infection, just as Mark had required. There was a sterile prep area with laundered scrubs, and once they were inside, we accessed the operating room that had been put together to his specification. It was fully kitted out with lights, table, monitors, blood and drip, gas, instruments, bowls - basically everything you would expect in a hospital - like money was no object.

I was fully masked up with my man bun in a cap and a face visor, so I was totally incognito when Mark rolled in the patient, already in only a gown, and looking very nervous. He was about the same build as me – not tall or heavy, and like me he had dark hair but his was receding. His face was somewhat unattractive, so he struck me as a good candidate for facial improvement. One odd thing that I did notice was that his legs seemed to be devoid of hair, and his face too – more plucked than shaved.

The man was unconscious with a shunt in his arm, and he was already connected to sensors. I asked mark for time that the first dose had gone in to check for more drugs or gas. I figured that it might not even be needed. But then I was told that we had a lot more work to do.

“I should explain that I have also been contracted to give this man a sex change,” said Mark. “It is not my field but I know the procedure. It will just take us some time, and you will need to test your skills if we are to do this just the two of us.”

“A sex change? That sounds a bit extreme for a change of identity!” I was shocked.

“This person has been secretly transgender and now that he is wanted by the law he sees this as the opportunity to realize a dream,” said Mark. “But let’s deal with the face first. I will cut along a new hair line and we will peel back and grind down the brow. Scalpel.”

But before I could place it in his hand, things went to shit.

Mark was a good surgeon so I always assumed that he would run all the checks on the patient’s reaction to drugs he would be using, but you can never be totally sure that nothing will happen. The problem is that if you are not in hospital but carrying out “backstreet surgery” there is no medical and technical support if something does go wrong. There was a defibrillator on hand but that is just there to keep the heart beating and does not address the causes. The same with adrenalin directly into the chest, but that didn’t work either. The patient had only been less than 20 minutes on the operating table and he was dead.

All the way through our fight to keep him alive, Mark was saying over and over that calling for help was not an option. There was an arrest warrant out for this man, and he could never go to jail. Hospital meant jail. Mark did not mention it but I knew well, that there would be consequences for him too. This was illegal surgery and reckless behavior and he would lose his medical licence. He might save his patient by calling this in, but his career would be over.

But the truth is that even in hospital the chances of this man surviving anaphylactic shock on that scale would have been slight, or so Mark told me.

“Now we have a bigger problem,” he said. “We will be the next to die, you and me, followed by my family.”

“What are you talking about?” I said.

“You don’t need to know the details, but unlike you I am not doing this for money,” he said. “This is duress - associates of this man are holding my family hostage. I have no choice. I have to do this. I thought it would be low risk. These are pretty straightforward procedures that I have done before. But I was left in no doubt that if this person lying here did not survive, me and my surgical team and my family, would all be dead. There are two guys waiting outside this tent and we have to produce a live post-op patient in a few hours from now.”

“Shit,” I said. It was about all that I could say. My mind had gone blank with fear, like the paralysis or terror that you hear about. “What are we going to do?”

A good surgeon never panics, and as I said Mark was a good surgeon. I could see that he was thinking. And then suddenly he looked up at me and said – “Slip your mask off for a minute. Yes, it’s a long shot, but we cannot escape this building, so it is the only way.”

“What are you thinking?” I asked him.

“You will have to take his place. I will have to do everything solo. We can lie him down over there on that recovery bed and I will say that is you taking a nap. They will look at you on the gurney and think that you are him, post surgery.”

“Ok, that sounds like a far-fetched scheme,” I said. “But it is better than death. So, we don’t need to operate? We just use bandages - right?”

“That is not going to work,” said Mark. “To be certain that we get through this, I am going to have to do the surgery I had lined up for this patient. They will be checking. It is the only way that we will survive this. It’s this or we all die, and that includes you, I’m afraid. And I will need every minute of time left, so we need to act now.”

I still had a few minutes to wrack my brain as we shifted the patient off the table and put him into my scrubs while I got into a gown and got myself onto the table. I could not think of any other way. These were serious criminals. Death was certain if we revealed the death. At least with Mark’s plan we had a chance. “The patient” could just remain in a stupor for a while until we found a way to get me away from this evil crew. Mark swore that he could do that.

I suppose that I figured that waking up with a new face was no big deal. I was on my own and had not seen my trailer-park family in Kansas in years. What I didn’t like I would have Mark fix as a part of his obligation for getting me into this mess.

It seemed that I had no other option. I believe him about the threat to us and his family and the thought crossed my mind that I could just blame him and try to get away, but why would these criminals let me live. No, I was in this with him and given that I respected him, I had to trust him to get us out of this. That is what I told myself as he pushed the shunt into my arm and administered the propofol. I seemed to be asleep within seconds.

When I awoke it seemed that my whole body had been surgically altered. My face was bandaged but so was my groin and chest, and my every inch of my skin was smarting. But the anesthetic maintained a lingering effect and the pain would only get worse. Mark was explaining to the two men standing over me about the painkilling medication he was handing over to them.

“Stick to the single dose if possible, and only double up if she complains of severe pain,” he said.

She? Who was he talking about? I was the one lying there. I would be the one in pain. Mark turn to check my state of consciousness.

“Now you will not be able to talk for a few days,” he said. “Please do not try until I allow you on one of my follow up visits. You could damage your stretched vocal cords if you do. I will be checking up on you every couple of days and going through everything that has been done. In the meantime, your friends here have arranged a very comfortable convalescence. They will take you away while I clean up things here, once my assistant awakes.” He gave me a wink. To his mind we had succeeded.

It didn’t feel like that to me. I was still on the gurney. The two men slid it into the back of a black vehicle equipped to take such a bed. I was on my own now, muted and with no idea how this was going to run.

“The boss is going to be pleased,” one of them said, looking down on me. “He has been really worried about you. Now you finally have what you both want.”

I looked to see Mark turn and walk towards the surgical tent as the vehicle door closed behind the foot of my gurney. It seemed as if he would have his work cut out. He had to dispose of everything that carried any trace of us, and then dispose of a body – the one that was supposed to be me.

My task seemed easier by comparison. I did not have to talk, so the vocal cords thing seemed like a clever ruse. I just had to lie down for a few days and wait for Mark to get his family safe and then come and rescue me somehow.

Surely, he would have to rescue me? I knew the secret – that the real patient was dead. Could he really run for it an escape these people who seemed well resourced and so able to track him down? I needed that trust to continue.

The further does of painkillers seemed to work and allow me to sleep. I have no idea how long it had been before I found myself in a bright room in a large house in the country, as it turns out only a little way out of the city. From my bed (not the gurney) I had a view of a well maintained garden, and good food brought to my bedside, and painkillers.

I needed them not because of the work on my face, but on some surgery to my lower body. I was pissing through a catheter and an enema tube was extracting solid waste from my anus. None of this made any sense given that this was supposed to be maxillofacial surgery. From my point of view the only surprise I had in store is what I now looked like. I was not concerned if he had made a few changes. I never liked the face I used to have – an ugly nose, chin and brow. My best feature had always been my thick dark hair that I used to hide my face when I was not working.

Perhaps my initial naivety as to what had been done was assisted by the painkillers – perhaps some kind of strong opioid which relaxed me to the point of not caring. So, the realization was slow, but that made it no less horrifying.

But it was my first visitor who triggered the first hint of understanding. He appeared at my bedside, tall, grey haired but otherwise appearing fairly young and fit – a good looking man but with a violent streak that was visible even through the affectionate smile on his face.

“Sweetie, it’s me. It’s Jake. It’s done Babe. You’re you at last. I can’t wait to get the bandages off. I am told you will completely different. You’re free now.”

It was like he was talking to a woman, and a woman that he cared about, but he was talking to me.

“She can’t talk, Boss,” another voice said. “It’s the voice box surgery. She’ll be signing soprano, but not for a week or so. Dr. Norgate will tell us when.”

The mention of Mark’s name was what I needed. Help was on the way. But what exactly had Mark done to me? He was not there so what was going to happen when the bandages came off? What was going to happen when I finally did have to speak? I might pass for being the person they thought I was with an altered face, but I was not a woman, and they would soon find that out. The catheter was up my cock – I could feel it, through the pain. But why pain there? My brain was slowly processing things. They would find out that I was a man … unless I wasn’t.

There I lay with a bandage in my groin. I reached down praying that it would not be true, but my worst fear seemed to have been realized.

Mark had mentioned “straightforward procedures that I have done many times before”, and one of those procedures was facial restructuring, but I knew that he had also done a number or sex reassignment surgeries – turning male genitals into female genitals. I was starting to piece together what had happened and why.

“They will be checking to see that I have done the surgery I had lined up for this patient”. Those were the words that Mark had used. My recent visitor, the grey haired man, clearly had a vested interest in seeing that the other change had been made. That person called me “Sweetie” and “Babe”. He is expecting a woman to have been rolled out of the surgical tent. So as not to take any further risks; so as to keep his family safe, Mark had to deliver that. I had just gone through sex change surgery.

But if this man, who called himself “Jake”, addressed by another as “Boss”, was involved with the patient now dead, how could I be expected to get out of this situation?

All I could hope for was that Mark had the answers. My additional hope was that whatever he had done he had made it reversible. He was clever, and as a result of that we were both alive, and his family safe. I had him to thank for that. But it was also him who had got me into this mess in the first place. But then, I had said yes.

I just needed to lie back with my bed slightly elevated so that I could see the view, enjoy my food, take my painkillers and recover from my surgeries.

To my relief Mark did turn up. It was after dark so clearly he had finished at the hospital for the day – he only did elective surgery. He was escorted into my room but asked to be allowed to be alone to confer with his patient.

“I owe you everything for what you have sacrificed,” he said. “We are both alive. My family is safe. Now we need to get you safe too.”

I opened my mouth to speak. I wanted to say - “exactly what have I sacrificed”, but he held his hand to my mouth to stop me.”

“You really cannot speak,” Mark said. “I have done the work on your throat. I have done all the work that I was contracted to do. I am sorry, but I just thought that we might need time to get you out of here, and if they discovered half measures, I would be in trouble again – both of us would be. You can see that – can’t you?”

I just nodded, not in agreement, but in understanding now that everything I feared had come to pass. I was no longer a man, and for the time being I as close to death as I had ever been in this ordeal.

“I have been spending some time trying to learn more about who you are pretending to be, and how you can get away with it,” said Mark, suddenly enthusiastic. “Look, we are both at the mercy of these criminals but whether we live or die depends on you slowly dislodging yourself from their grasp, in a way that doesn’t upset anybody. There is a way that this can be done. You need to listen to what I am going to tell you and commit it to memory.”

I nodded again, this time in resignation. It seems that the loss of my voice had made me passive, or was it the loss of my testicles.

“The man who owns this property is Jake Kasperek, a son of Polish immigrants who has set up a crime syndicate. Until recently he was a rival of a man called Karl Horvat, but somehow this Jake got to hear about Karl’s secret desire – that would be the desire to change sex. Karl was to become you – Amanda Peerless is the name he chose. I have only just learnt that – I was told the name you now carry. I was told by Karl what he wanted her to look like, and when those bandages come off and the swelling goes down, I am confident that you will look like this.”

Mark pulled from the medical bag her had brought with him a picture of an attractive young woman. I reached out to take it, and examine it. It was a computer generated image. It looked nothing like me. But she looked beautiful.

“I have told Jake that I adjusted your eye color and reworked your scalp because Karl was short of hair, but of course I didn’t do that. You cannot change eye color. I also said that I was able to knock some years off Karl’s age because he would be a good 10 years older than you, but I can’t do that either. As for your body, while you were unconscious, I stripped your body and looked for blemishes on the body of Karl to tattoo onto your body, just in case you need to get intimate with Jake.”

I am pretty sure that he could see the horror on my face that statement produced, because he added – “I have told Jake that using your new vagina for sex is months away.”

My new vagina. I took a deep sigh. He had said nothing about going back to anything like I was. It seemed wrong that Mark had lived through this, and his life would go on as it had before. I was alive too, but everything I had was now gone. Everything. I tried to think what that was. I had no family, no real friends, and work had only been a stepping stone to something better that had not yet arrived.

“I will also be explaining to Jake that you are suffering from an episode of transient global amnesia as a result of the anesthesia which may account for memory loss, and that he should expect the female hormone dispensing implants to produce some personality change, so I think that you should be able to cope until I can find a long-term solution. But on the bright side, in the short term you can expect to be treated like a princess by this guy. He has made a lot of money out of crime, as you did in your own right before you joined forces. You always told me that you have expensive tastes, and I can tell you that Karl was just the same, and so Amanda too. Except now you have the money to satisfy them.”

I was reeling from being told what had happened. I could not look at his face, so I turned my head. As if to confirm his point I looked outside and saw two gardeners attending to the rose bushes on the other side of a large swimming pool visible through the huge window. I was alive and living in luxury.

“Oh, and one more thing,” said Mark. “Karl Horvat is wanted by the police. He shot three of his employees in the head execution style, and they were all left for dead but one survived to turn state’s evidence. He had to disappear urgently and they brought forward the surgery because of that. I have only just heard about the murder, but clearly the expectation is that Karl will never be found. My understanding is that only 5 people know that Amanda is Karl – you, me, Jake and his two guys who brought you here. But even if they track Amanda down, the DNA evidence will exclude you.”

Suddenly I had a new vision of the guy who was rolled into the sterile tent that night. He looked harmless as most do pre-surgery. But now I knew that he was a cold-blooded killer. That made me that killer, by reputation anyway.

Who was I pretending to be?

“I just need to remove your packing from your vagina and insert a former,” said Mark. “Can you raise your legs a little?”

I watched as he pulled cloth by the yard out of me. And then to my horror he pulled will his medical bag a huge dildo object and some lubricant and proceeded to insert it inside me. It seemed impossible that he would get it at all, but which a twinge of pain or two the whole thing disappeared.

“You need to rotate this at least, but preferably move it in and out as much as you can without too much pain. If this closes up it will cause you problems. With this is place you will be able to toilet yourself. You will need to use toilet paper and wipe back towards the anus. You will get the hang of it. All my patients have done. This is good work, if I say so myself.”

I was in shock, and he was getting ready to leave.

“I will be back in a few days. They we can check your throat and get you talking. And we should be able to take the bandages off your breasts and off your face.” And then he was gone.

I just lay there for a while considering the answer to me question. Mark had laid the foundation for Amanda to be somebody very different from Karl. Her knew gender might destroy all of her murderous nature. Karl may well have craved not just a change of sex but a change of life. Instead of pretending to be Karl, which it seemed that I had no chance of pulling off, I only had to pretend to be Amanda, the woman Karl wanted to be. Perhaps I could pull this off?

I got up and walked around the room. It was a first floor reception room that had been converted from my convalescence. The other bedrooms were all upstairs. The house showed all the signs of wealth but was clearly not the principal place of residence.

There were two people in the house besides me. One of the goons who had been outside the tent was just there as a bodyguard. He reminded me that his name was Ozzy and that he had worked for Jake but had been assigned to care for me while I lived in Jake’s country house. The other was the housekeeper called Rose, who had worked for Jake for years, She simply said that she could get me anything I wanted, or cook me any meal I liked. Her pantry was full of the finest things, and there was a wine cellar too. It was all I had ever dreamed of in life – to be rich and to live in a style to which I wanted to become accustomed. It was just that I was in somebody else’s body – and a female one.

I watched daytime TV. I decided my choice of shows should reflect who I was pretending to be – so female talk shows, and makeover miracles, and lifestyle stuff. It absorbed time.

Jake Kasperek did not visit, but he called me every day. I could not speak, but he just talked about how things were going to be.

“Business is going well, Babe,” he said. “But when you are recovered let’s go to Europe. I have arranged a passport for you in your new identity. I just need the photo. We can go to Paris, or maybe southern Spain or Italy and have you wearing a bikini.” I just tapped the mouthpiece to show him that I was there.

I have to say that I questioned whether Jake’s affection for Amanda was genuine. I could not help but recall the rather ugly dead man on the gurney. How could a man like Jake fall for the woman he had never seen to be sculpted from that hideous clay? I wondered how he could have imagined a sexual relationship with such a person. Was he just pretending to eliminate a rival.

And what had Karl believed? Was he a fool? How could he be? Or just he just want to be her more than anything? They had been rivals and now as a couple their criminal enterprises were consolidated. Now that is a clearer motive. But then that was business, not personal.

I was starting to think about what Mark had said about – “whether we live or die depends on you slowly dislodging yourself from their grasp, in a way that doesn’t upset anybody”.

When Mark came back to see me again he had a woman with him.

“This is Grace,” he said. “We are going to take the bandages off your head, and she is going to fix your hair. We will tell Jake that they are invisible extensions, but of course all Grace needs to do is wash and style the hair you have.”

He removed the bandages but gave me no view of my face. He said that there would be swelling but all the cuts had healed, and Grace could go to work.

“You have so much hair,” she said. “I am trans myself and I just wish I had as much as hair as you do.” She seemed to me to have plenty.

“I thought that you might be able to talk with Grace about the trans thing,” said Mark. Moving down to inspect my chest before going even further down.

The trans thing? Had he forgotten that I was not that? This was something he had dreamed up to keep us both alive. Now I was stuck in this position with no apparent way out. It seemed that the solution was to drive me in even deeper. But surely Jake would realize that I was not the person he had seen walk away and into surgery? It seemed like that was only a matter of time. Global transient amnesia? Hormonal mood change? I was nothing like the person I was pretending to be. Could I pull this off?

“I remember that after my surgery I felt as I was a new person completely,” said Grace, as if she was reading my mind, when all she was doing was talking aimlessly as she shampooed my hair. “I felt as if my life had started anew – like a clean slate.”

That was it. A clean slate. Just as I had been thinking to myself about Karl having gone completely and Amanda being a different person, I realized that I was gone completely too. I was Amanda. Nobody else was going to be her. But I did not want to be with Jake. I did not want to be with a gangster.

Grace put my hair in a towel and Mark took advantage of the break.

“I need to check your throat and see if we can get you talking” he said. He had brought an instrument to look down my throat, first applying local anesthetic to stop the gag reflex. It only took a few seconds. I made my first squeaky sounds, and then he pulled out the instrument.

“Talk to us,” he said.

Out of my mouth came a voice I did not recognize. There would be more shocks to come, but this was the first.

“I need to get that surgery,” said Grace. “That voice is so feminine.”

“The most important thing is that it does not sound anything like Karl,” said Mark. “You don’t look like him. You don’t sound like him. That is exactly what he wanted. He wanted to be a woman, and as young a woman as I could make him, which is always hard unless you are already young, as you are. But you can do this because this boyfriend was expecting somebody very different to wake up after the surgery.”

“Okay, so I don’t need to act like Karl,” I squeaked, because that was how it sounded to me. “But Jake is talking about us taking a holiday together. He still expects me to know him. I can’t get away with this forever. I need to get away from this.”

“I am working on it,” said Mark. “But what would help is if you can find any evidence of a crime he has committed. Any solid evidence would allow for him to be thrown into prison, and we would be home free. It is either that, or you break it off with him, but gently. We don’t want to piss him off – right?”

“That is your plan?” I was annoyed.

“I am looking at a runaway plan as well, but that is definitely not the best way out of this,” he said. “If he thinks he has been duped he will track us down. Just let me work on things at my end. In the meantime, you are Amanda. Now Grace will dry and style your hair and I will check on your vagina before I go.”

The phrase “your vagina” still seemed incredible to me. When you are recovering from surgery you have time to consider your lot in life. People lose parts of their body in order to live – a gangrenous leg, a failed kidney or a diseased bowel. They may be rendered forever changed, on crutches, on dialysis or with a colostomy bag. This had been life or death. I had surrendered my genitals in order to live, and to see Mark and his family live too.

At the time it seemed like no decision at all – as in all such life or death situations. But as you lie in pain, you ask yourself why you allowed your body to be wrecked in this way. When you come to realize that you have surrendered not just your ability to have sex as a man, but your ability to generate progeny – the end of your genetic line – there is anguish. But you have time to think it through, and to give thanks for being alive, and healthy too. Others who have faced the choice of surrendering a body part suffer worse. And even those who accept transplanted organs in order to survive face a lifetime on drugs and immuno-compromised. I was better off than them.

And Mark was an excellent surgeon. He seemed very pleased.

“This is healing very well,” he said. “The swelling has subsided. You will have the ability to function sexually and to enjoy it.”

“As a woman?” I said bitterly, and he knew it.

“Or a lesbian, if you like. It was not like I had any choice. I hope you understand that. You are here now. Tell me how this would have worked if I had not done all the surgical work I contracted to do. At least I harvested your semen before I disposed of your testicles.”

Somehow that suddenly seemed a positive, although I had no idea how it could be. But by then Mark was gone again.

I had wondered about the other goon who had been there outside the operating tent. I only knew that Ozzy referred to him as Dan, and that he worked for me. I had to consider how I would deal with him when the time came, and that time arrived.

I was watching TV and painting my nails. It just seemed like something I should do. An expert had appeared on screen the day before and I asked Rosie to get me some nail polish so I could try doing it. I was behaving as I thought Amanda would – shaving my legs and wearing a robe, while I waited to be clear of the surgical bra and panties and wear proper women’s clothing for the first time.

He just appeared unannounced. I was busy with my art and there he stood.

I was ready. I said – “Ah Dan, good to see a friendly face!”

“Dan is it now?” he smiled. “Not Slobbo?” It sounded like a term of abuse, but I realized that his name might be Slobodan. Both he and Ozzy seemed to be Eastern Europeans.

“Everything is different now, as you can see,” I said, holding up my nails. “I never liked Slobbo. It was just the way I was then. We start fresh from today. Dan is good?”

“Dan would be good,” he said. I could see him eyeing up my legs and perhaps wondering how I might look naked. But at the same time, I sensed that he had been close to his boss – somebody with whom Karl could share his transgender secret perhaps? He asked – “What should I call you now, Boss?”

If he called Karl “Boss” then it should be something similar.

“Boss Ma’am maybe? I hadn’t thought about it. But not when there is just the two of us I want you to call me Amanda. I am a different person now, do you understand that, Dan? Still the boss if you want others to know it, but I feel very different from who I was.”

“You sure look different,” he said. “You look great - beautiful and classy too.” There was a look in his eyes that I was having difficulty understanding, but he seemed greatly impressed by my appearance.

“I still have some bruising, but I could cover that with makeup, once I know how to use it,” I said.

“I can’t wait to see you all dressed up like you dreamed of,” he said. It seemed genuine. He was in on Karl’s secret. They must have been close. As if to confirm that he added - “I am just sorry I could not come sooner. I am just keeping things tidy while you are out of action.”

“Yes, sit down and give me a briefing,” I said. He gave me an odd look. I had said something new. I needed to talk less and listen more. I could nod.

“Jake is keeping to his territories, and we are keeping to ours, and no more border scuffles despite the bitterness between patches in the past, and the buying together is really working for both you and Jake. We are able to fix the price just about. Everybody thinks that you are in hiding - maybe in South America or whatever – I ain’t saying. It is just that our people will never accept Jake as their boss. They know you are around because I say you are. I had hoped maybe you could get on the phone if I need it, but it seems that voice of yours … you don’t sound anything like … a guy.”

“No,” I said. “I never will again – I have received voice box surgery. No calls. I am depending on you, Dan.” I gave him a look. I don’t know where it came from. It seemed to come from the words, and out of the body I lived in, barely clothed and still injured. I could see that it affected him. I was a woman now, and he realized it, and I knew that he did.

He leaned forward and whispered – “I know that he says he is sweet on you Amanda, but I think Jake is holding a few things back. Some new enterprise that maybe our side is not included in?”

It was good to hear that he was looking out for me. I had to think smart. I wanted to keep this going. I needed to find a way out no matter what Mark was up to.

“Jake has done a lot and I am attracted to him as the woman I always have been,” I said the lie. “But business is business, and our business is dirty business. So, keep your eyes and ears open. If there is anything that might get him into trouble, I need to know it. And I need to know who in his close group might rise if he was toppled.”

“This is his place so we need to be careful,” Dan whispered, “But there are some of his followers who could turn on him.”

“Get close to those people,” I suggested. It was as if I was falling into the role of bandit queen with such ease that it was starting to worry me. But I was thinking about what Mark had said – “find any evidence of a crime he has committed that would see Jake thrown into prison”.

But where would that leave me? I was not ready to consider that then.

What I did need to do was to get on with the job of being Amanda. It seemed to me that despite the permanent changes this should only be temporary, but it needed to be done right. I sounded like a woman and I looked like one too, provided I didn’t move. But the movements of my arms and legs were not right, and I could see that. I needed to work on simple things and get them right.

Hair and makeup too -these are things that a woman develops from childhood, and perhaps a true transwoman may find easy by watching women with envy, but for me I could prove to be difficult. Surprisingly, it wasn’t. I had always had longish hair that I used as a screen, but now it could be a thing of beauty as I took to wearing it up, to show off a face I was now proud of. Given that Mark had been able to create beauty all I needed was to use makeup sparingly to highlight what had done while hiding how he had done. Those scars would fade over time, and they did.

On my diet of daytime TV I learned more about women’s clothes and with what Jake had bought for me I learned about the feel and comfort of quality underwear.

He asked me if I was ready go out, and I said that I was.

He booked a restaurant and before that he arranged for me an appointment at a beauty salon. There he had an outfit delivered for me to wear, once I had gone through a full makeover including a body waxing, pedicure and manicure, facial and makeup, and an evening updo hairstyle. It was his “welcome to womanhood” treat.

It seemed like something to be endured at the time, but when it was all done, I found myself entranced by what I saw. It was more than entranced which sounds like being momentarily stupefied, although that was what happened. The fact is that I was moved, in a way I did not expect. I was massively moved, from one gender to another. I saw a woman in the mirror. For the first time I started to see that I could be this person for the rest of my life.

My past had gone with my face. I had never liked it and I did not want it back, but to imagine the person that I was looking at – an anatomical women – pretending to be a man … it just seemed wrong. The person in the mirror was too gorgeous to be consigned to history. She had a life – it was just that it was a complicated one.

I stepped out to meet Jake and I could see the look in his eyes. Dan had warned me that Jake’s desires for me may not be genuine, but the look I was getting said that was not true, or if true then, something had changed. Of course something had changed, both on the surface and deep within me. With that look and all that he had said about us together, I started to feel a sexual connection with this man. It seemed that my orientation had also changed, or was changeable.

“You look like everything I dreamed you might be,” he said, offering me his arm. I felt like a princess as I took it. I was a woman. The world had turned upside down.

But at the restaurant, after the appetizer, things came back to earth with a thud.

“We need to dispose of the doctor and his assistant”, said Jake. I knew that I had to start thinking, and quickly.

“I will arrange get rid of the assistant,” I said, starting to wonder whether the body of the real Karl Horvat might be. “But there is no way I am getting rid of the surgeon who made me. What if I need some more work done? He is a genius that guy. I want to keep him.”

“How can I refuse you looking the way you do,” said Jake. “But I hate loose ends. I don’t want anybody who knows that my girlfriend was once … somebody else.”

In that pause he might well have said “a guy” meaning that what he really wanted was not to protect me but to protect his reputation. But I stayed quiet. I just concentrated on looking good and looking interested in him. But he was not finished.

“The other two who know are my guy Ozzy and your guy Dan,” he continued. “Loose ends. Ozzy has already dealt with by me - I will let you deal with your people, including the doctor and his assistant.”

It was hard to finish the meal maintaining a warm conversation with all this stuff going on in the background, but I was able to do the best I could. He took me back to the country house at the end, and then it appeared that he wanted more.

“I am still healing down below, and the boobs are still very tender,” I explained although it was not true about the breasts. But I could see that he was hungry so I felt I should offer him something – “I would love to kiss you.”

I was expecting to have to hold back a gag reflex when his lips met mine, but somehow that kiss seemed to confirm that I had turned a corner in my sexuality. I knew that the man with his tongue in my mouth was a monster, but somehow that made it even more thrilling. It was like I was in a movie, and I was the leading lady – beautiful and sexy, and soft and surrendering in his arms. But when his hands went to my breasts in the passion of the moment I pushed him away.

“I am sorry Jake. There will be time for all of that soon. We have a lifetime to work on that, but I need to get Dr. Norgate back tomorrow to check me again. I want my vagina working as soon as possible.”

“He can live to do that,” said Jake. He walked away to his own bedroom in the house with obvious frustration.

In the morning we shared breakfast and I told him that I would have to go into the hospital to see Dr. Norgate and that Dan would be taking me. I wanted to make sure that the conversation I was planning was well away from him. But he was headed back to the city, so he was happy for me to do what I needed to do to allow him to have sex with me.

Once I was in a consulting room at the hospital with Dan and Mark I was able to speak openly.

“Jake took me to dinner last night and he started talking about loose ends,” I told them. “That is what both of you are – loose ends. You can tell me that I am not the person that I was before Dan, and I’m not that person – I care about you, both of you, and I will not see you killed, but he is not dropping this. The only way of dealing with this is to drop Jake … into the biggest pile of shit we can find.”

“Are you talking about going to the law?” asked Dan. “That is not something I would do.”

“Killing him would just start a war between the parties to this fragile alliance,” I said. “This is about survival. It is not going to the law – it is using the law to get him taken out of the picture. Can you do it, Dan?”

“Yes,” said Dan. “But why are we talking about this in front of the doc here?”

“Maybe he can help,” I said. “Maybe we can accuse Jake of murdering me – I mean Karl Hovatt. Maybe the doctor here can find a body and fabricate some DNA or something?”

“I do have a body,” said Mark confirming that it was on ice somewhere in the bowels of the hospital. “I could do that.”

“That might suit you Amanda,” said Dan. “But for a Jake to be caught and nailed I would have to engineer a major crime and put Jake right in the frame. As it happens after our last talk I have something in mind, and I have an ambitious guy on his team who might work with us on this.”

It struck me that people may have seriously underestimated Dan. Perhaps Karl had not recognized his running him down with the name “Slobbo” but here was a man who was resourceful, decisive and capable. He had an idea, and I would leave him to it. I had a compelling desire to go shopping.

The following day Mark called me with his own bad news.

“I sent my wife and kids away for their own safety, but now it looks like my marriage is over,” he said. “The truth is she married a surgeon for money and status and now there is a hint that I might be involved in something nefarious, she doesn't want to know me. I always suspected that she was a bitch and now she has confirmed it.”

“I am sorry Mark,” I said. “But she must put her family first. Maybe I am more sympathetic to a woman’s point of view.”

“When I saw you yesterday, I almost fainted,” he said. “I knew my work was good, but you have turned out to be magnificent. Are you telling me that you feel like a woman now?”

“I suppose I do,” I admitted.

“Would you consider going out to dinner with me?” I could hardly believe it – as if my life was not complicated enough.

But it was about to get more complicated. Dan had constructed a complicated scenario, but he considered that Jake would have to die. So Jake would kill Karl with a car bomb. He had contacted Mark to get the body of the John Doe (not knowing it was actually the body of Karl) which would be burnt so that only DNA (fabricated in Dan’s thinking) could prove the identity. Then one of Karl’s gang would kill Jake in revenge – close quarters to make sure. To deal with those closest to Jake some of his key henchmen would be lined up by Dan’s contact in Jake’s set up – a guy called Mike – and they would be lured into a police trap where a gang war would be discussed and recorded and arrests would be immediate. The result would be that Mike would take control of Jake’s organization.

In fact it was to turn out better than that as there was an exchange of gunfire at that meeting which dealt with some, and the survivors all faced murder counts in addition to a raft of conspiracy charges.

“But who from my organization is going to kill Jake? And how is my organization going to be dealt with? And where will you fit in?” It seemed to me that there were holes in the plan.

“That’s easy,” said Dan. “I will kill Jake and then I will disappear. But you will still be part of this through me, unless you want out completely. You see I am in love with Mike, and I have been for some time. It is just that a love like ours can never be made known in the world of crime. But I have spoken to Dr. Mark about that. I want what you have got. Dan will disappear and Mike will have a beautiful new girlfriend – hopefully as beautiful as you.”

Dan was gay, but it seems that this Mike must have been bisexual. I never met him. I elected to take the exit that was offered to me.

By the time that I did Mark and I were an item. He is talking about marriage, and me being a stepmother to his kids now there is a joint custody arrangement.

Until then, even if I don’t need the money, he had arranged for me to become accredited as a theater nurse just to keep my hand in, and to keep an eye on him. But I now seem to have a vested interested in his career which is suddenly going from strength to strength.

Somehow I have achieved my ambition to be involved in medicine, even though I was never smart enough to be a doctor.

The End

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