Smalltown Heroine

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I was always a small town kid. I was brought up by loving parents in a small town in Alabama. We had not much money, but what we had was enough. I played with local kids, just like any other boy. It was just that I was a little different.

I say a little different, because it was never a major thing for me. I liked to think of Crystal as an imaginary friend, like maybe every other only child has. It was just that she was a girl, and she was part of me.

I told my mother about her and one day she let her come out. She volunteered at a used clothing stall, and she found a girl’s party dress in my size. She “borrowed” it for a day. She said – “I thought that this would be perfect for Crystal.” She let me wear it, and a pink barrette in my side parted hair. I just spent the afternoon helping her. I remembered it as the happiest day of my childhood.

But only a few weeks after that my mother was killed – run down by a drunk driver in the main street. The saddest day of my childhood.

My father said that I had to stop crying. He said that I was a man, and men don’t cry. Women cry. Men deal with their grief how they deal with life – the put it to one side while they get on with what must be done, and soon enough, what we leave on one side becomes less important.

I lived by that. Strangely, he was right. You can live like that. Remember that other things need to be done. Don’t abandon your troubles, or forget your grief, just put such things aside for a time. But I also had Crystal to cry my secret tears for me.

Joining the army was the same thing. We put to one side our own concerns while we get on with what must be done. It is a man’s way. If people die beside you, then you have to let it go in order to function, and come back to it later if it is still there. It works. I was a good soldier because of it.

And when I killed, I still had Crystal inside me, to remind me that I was good. There was gentleness and kindness inside me, when the man in me could dispense death with such apparent ease. It was like I was two people, but not in a deranged way. The man did what he had to do, the woman reminded him that goodness is right.

When I came home my father called me a hero, with the medals I had to prove it. But my army service was outside regular operations, so I told him to keep quiet about it. Still, to me it was his opinion that counted. That was why he could never know about Crystal.

But she needed to come out. Service in the army had broken me, although nobody could see it. I was so tired that I wanted to just sleep for a year. I let myself go. Crystal saved me.

I decided that I would go over to Crossville so that I could allow her to come out. It was far enough away from my town so nobody would recognize me. So what if people knew that the tall woman was a man in a dress? I just wanted to be her and not me, even for a day, twice a month. I was happy just to get changes in the back of my van, then go to the mall, have a nice lunch, do some shopping and feel human.

For a year I did that. I worked as a courier with my own van, and every coupe of weeks that van would turn up in Crossville and Crystal would step out of the back. She would Just walk about and do the things women do. At first people stared, but then fewer and fewer of them did. I became confident and that led to me being convincing, which made me more confident. I started to interact with people and to develop a feminine voice – not just the sound coming out of my mouth but the voice, of the person.

I got an idea that I could be her full time. I guess there are plenty of people who get to this point. Are you ready to take the next step? I should have used oral hormones and cupped them in my hand agonizing daily about whether to swallow or not. That would have been better, but the soldier in me said ‘take the slow release injection’.

My hair was long and I kept growing it with the idea of ditching the wig, but I kept the wig on. It seemed easier for me to use it as a transformation moment. I could be in my van in a dress with my face made up, but I was still a man until the wig went on. Then I was suddenly Crystal.

But then the wig came off and I was me again, driving home to sit watching the game alongside Dad.

He was really all I had, and all he wanted from me is that I be his son, the hero. But it seemed to me that I could nor even be that. It was a lie. It was eating away at me.

To make it worse, female breasts were growing on my chest and my muscles were wasting away. It was like I was on a runaway train to Girltown and I could not get off. I was worried that Dad might notice.

I had more or less decided that I would re-enlist. I could keep my rank and get a posting somewhere that I could be useful. I might even be sent somewhere where I could be killed in the service of my country, and die like the man I was trying to be.

That trip to Crossville was supposed to be my last. I would go all out. I would stay for a week. I would go to the salon and have my hair done. I would spend my money on clothes and shoes and wear them. And then on the last day I would burn them all and get a buzz cut. Crystal would be put aside, just like all problems.

I got changed in my van and then drove it to a motel which was close the Main Street and the mall. I checked in and I headed off to the salon for my appointment. I had booked the works. It was my first time in a beauty salon, and I remember being hopelessly excited – I was almost shaking with joy. They relaxed me and I just let it all happen. They washed, colored and curled my hair; they did a deep treatment on my hands and added nails painted and shaped, and painted my toenails as well; they gave me a numbing facial so I barely noticed the eyebrow plucking, before they applied the makeup. And then they unveiled the complete Crystal.

I am not sure where I chose the name from all those years ago, but in that moment it seemed perfect. She sparkled in the mirror. It took me back to that day with my wonderful mother. The girl she had as her daughter for a day was now all grown up – a beautiful and sophisticated woman. Surely, she would have been proud?

How could I leave this behind? How could I bury her and walk back into the filth of manhood?

I loved my eyebrows but I started to wonder what I would look like without the hair and makeup. I would need to shave off those eyebrows. I did not want to even think about it. I wanted to step out of the salon and show the world the real me.

The salon ladies must have known my secret although they said nothing. They hugged me before I left and wished me luck.

Somehow, I felt powerful as I walked down the street, like being locked and loaded and ready for war.

War was what I got.

I walked into a lingerie shop. I wanted to buy a nightie to wear to bed that night, but I wanted to spend time browsing through the bras and panties, and just being feminine.

Suddenly there was a commotion. There was a bank next door and there was a holdup in progress. The robbers had got out to the street, but a silent alarm had brought two police cars out to corner them as they left the bank. The doors had closed behind them, so they took refuge in the store net door. The lingerie shop.

There were three of them. They were heavily armed – I mean that the all had shotguns and were packing sidearms. There were two shop assistants and five customers in the shop including me.

They called out for directions to a back exit, but there was none. They were trapped. It would be a hostage situation and I was pretty sure that innocent people would die. I had seen the look in those men’s eyes before. Desperation leads to irrational behavior. The soldier in me knew what to do.

I put my hands in the air and told them that there was a way out, and I would show them. I just needed to lower the tension level a little and get the gun barrel lowered for a moment too. It was all I needed to bust his jaw and turn the gun on the second guy and get of a kill shot.

The third guy was close enough to one of the shop assistants to grab her as a human shield. I had the shotgun trained on him, so he decided to draw a pistol and hold it to the poor frightened woman’s head. I knew that the shotgun in my hands was not the right weapon, so I told him that I was putting it down beside his semi-conscious buddy.

He was wired and anything could happen, but his handgun was an automatic and I had not seen him work the slide. I felt that I could take the pistol out of the belt of the man groaning underneath me, and get a shot away. I was taking a risk, but it worked. It was short range, but the shot was something special, like something from a movie. A black spot right between the raised eyebrows – death a total surprise.

The police were arrayed outside, calling for the criminals to come out. But it was the lead shop assistant who went to the door, with her hands raised.

I let the gun in my hand, fall to the floor. The enormity of what Crystal had just done had finally struck her. I found myself on my knees sobbing.

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“I need to understand what happened,” said Lieutenant Morris of the Crossville Police Department. “it would seem that you have been able to take down three harden criminals single-handedly, Miss … I have only your name here, Crystal.”

“I was just a bystander.” I took the tissues he was offering, but I could see that my beautiful eye makeup was running, and was just craving a chance to repair it.

“Well, you were definitely not that. There were two surveillance cameras in the store, and I can show you the footage on my monitor here on split screen. So, perhaps you can take me through this?”

“It was a blur. I am sure I just did what anyone would have,” I said, looking at the screen.

“Alright, let’s start from them coming in. We have no sound. What’s happening here?”

“He is asking for access to the back exit. Everybody was frozen with fear, so I offered to show him to it.”

“Have you been in this store before today?”

“No.” I liked the way that this man spoke to me. I liked the way he carried himself too – with a confident swagger, but his voice was gentle and empathetic, even though his questions were to the point.-

“Well, there is no back exit.” Caught in my first lie, but it seemed not to matter.

“I didn’t know that. I just wanted them to leave. We all did. We were seven ladies potentially hostages. I just wanted them to find a way out.” I was thinking Sun Tzu’s golden bridge, but I did not say it.

“But you did not show them. You grabbed his gun. Look here, you stepped away from the muzzle and brought the butt up through his chin, knocking him our cold.”

“Maybe I stumbled? I just reached out and the gun was in my hands. It just happened so fast.”

“It certainly did. Let’s unfreeze. There you are. Bang!” He said the word so loudly it made me jump. I placed a beautifully manicured hand against my smooth chest, a revealed cleavage cleverly using padding and the breast tissue that had developed over the past months. I saw his eyes drop to it. That thrilled me for just a second. What women shake their heads seemed so wonderful to me.

“I have used a gun before,” I told him. “Point and pull the trigger.”

“That is certainly what you did, and then you did it again, but not with this weapon. Here you are putting it down.”

“He had a hostage. I was ready to give up. He told me to put the gun down very slowly, so that is what I did. See, there I am putting it down.”

“This is my favorite part,” he said. Perhaps he was teasing something from me, but he seemed genuinely excited to roll the video on. “Watch, up comes the revolver and … bang! Right between the eyes. The hostage right in front of him and with a cheap Saturday night special you got him right between the eyes.”

“Lucky shot?” It was a question. Was he prepared to believe that it was?

“I have a more plausible explanation,” he said, turning the screen away from me.

“What’s that?”

“Well, you must be a superhero. Maybe you are Wonder Woman, or the Freyr the Norse goddess of war come to Crossville.” He was smiling. “Is that what you are?”

“I just want to return to my anonymous alter ego,” I said, hoping that he could see a pleading look on my face, or here it in my Crystal voice.

“I’ll be honest, there seems little chance of that. When the press gets hold of this you can expect even TV station in the country to be tracking you down. You will be invited onto talk shows, speak to crime prevention groups, asked to empower women. Welcome to a life as a celebrity.”

“I can’t let that happen,” I said, starting to tremble.

“Alright,” he said, leaning back in his chair. “Tell me why not and I might be able to help.”

I took a deep breath. I had brought this on myself, but if I had been in the same position again, I would still have done what I did. I needed to put my concerns to one side while they get on with what must be done. I had to say what has to be said.

“I am a transwoman, and my family don’t know the real me.” I just stared at him.

“Now that I was not expecting,” he said, and I could see that he was speaking with honesty. “Frankly, I think you are gorgeous. I cannot imagine that there is a man in there. That is not a wig?”

“No, it’s my hair,” I said, proudly.

“And those breasts are …?”

“They are mine too, but they are not as big as they look.” I was proud to say that too.

“I think that you family need to know the real you,” he said. “I would like to know the real you.”

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They say that no good deed goes unpunished, although I am not sure who “they” are. It could have been worse had it not been for Lieutenant Lydon Morris. He took the tape as evidence, and it never went public. There were still seven witnesses – the other ladies in the store plus the robber who survived. Word got out about the tall attractive woman who saved them all.

The official story was that there were a series of clumsy errors which resulted in two criminals dying in the shop next to the banks, and that several citizens assisted in foiling the getaway. Among the witnesses was one Crystal Doe

Lydon told me that name would do for the time being, until I was ready to carry the name Crystal Morris.

Somehow with him beside me it was so much easier to go back to my father and explain. He looked confused when I came to the door holding hands with Lydon. He told me later it was like witnessing his wife come to life. I am fairly sure that he was horrified, but Lydon has that way about him.

He told my father that his daughter was the real hero, and he recounted the whole story. He had seen the video of what I did in the lingerie store first and vowed that he would marry that woman. At least, that is the way he tells it.

But his colleagues have confirmed that he exercised the chief’s right to interview me first, which is what he did. He called my disgusting news “nothing but a minor obstruction” and “no more than any police officer has to deal with every day”. He is like that.

My father loved him, and loves him still.

It helped that he had a ready-made family of three children with an ex-wife who expected him to spend more time with them than she did. I think that my father feared he would never see grandchildren, and now he has three, or he will do after the surgery next week and the wedding next month.

The End

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Erin’s seed: “A quiet crossdresser is making her one outing in months, driving to a nearby town where no one will know her and she can have a nice lunch, do some shopping en femme and feel human. But on one visit a radical bursts in on the scene and begins shooting the place up. She was in the military, a ranger with training in counter insurgency so she takes the guy down and ends up on national tv and every internet media site you can think of … it's horrible. So she hasn't gone home for fear of being seen sneaking into the place. Interviews are bobby traps, the cops want to know her identity since she busted the guy up pretty good. She finally confesses to one cop her secret and he gets a judge to give her permission to go hide until the cop know where and who she is, he's kinda fallen for her and pursues her. By the time of the trial, two years later, she's married and a woman full time.”