Signals

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I could have just headed for the hills. We all receive some training in surviving in the wilds, even in the Signal Corps. It is standard army training. But there was a problem. If I wanted to find a way out of this, I had to stay close to the base.

One thing was for sure, and that was that I needed to make sure I was not locked up. I knew that I could never prove my innocence from custody. It seemed to me that I was the one who had been picked as the fall guy for an inside job, if that is what is was that had caused the leak. It was not me, so it had to be somebody ranked above me – somebody able to shift the blame.

The fact is that I was the most junior officer with the clearance. That is the army. Pick a stooge and put it all on him. In an organization where rank is everything, I never stood a chance. My only hope was to find the source of the leak, and I could not do that from the woods.

But where can you hide when the issue is State secrets? It is not just the army, but the FBI and all law enforcement everywhere. The State will chase you to the ends of the earth. They will knock down doors and break rules to find the accused if the charge is treason. Where do you hide to buy the time needed?

“In plain sight,” my sister said. “With something better than the perfect disguise.”

Her suggestion would be perfect. But it was unbelievable. Who could believe it if I didn’t?

“Trust me,” she said. “What have you got to lose?” And that is the truth. She was my only chance, and soon they would be banging on her door. Because of that, she had me hiding at her workplace – the salon. And it was there, she said, that I could disappear.

And I did. In the salon chair where Jim once sat, there was, it was Emma staring at me. My hair was well past regulation length and long enough for her to anchor some extensions.

“A wig won’t do,” she explained, as she set to work on my scalp. “This is not going to be just a disguise; it is going to be a change of life. A new look, a new voice, a new personality, a new sex.”

Long hair with invisible anchors. I could even pull it back from my face and you could not see it was not my own. But this was not hair I could just put on a stand when I got home. I would have to live with it and look after it.

“But every other hair will have to go,” she said. “Every hair on your body except some arched eyebrows. No, everything. And waxed where necessary. We don’t want whiskers appearing where they don’t belong. That would give everything away.”

She had me listening to audio instructions and singing notes to lift my voice, while she set about stripping my body. Some of the high-pitched screams were genuine.

“I will apply the makeup, but you need to pay attention. I will talk you through it. You will need to apply it yourself in the morning, and every morning, whether you are going out or not.”

As I said, when she was done, Jim was gone. The name Emma just came into my head. She sat looking at me – startlingly beautiful with the long blonde hair and perfect makeup.

“Emma. Good choice. I like it,” she said. “Classy. But I have to say that the way the you walk and swing your arms about is a long way from classy. You will have to take instruction on feminine movement before you set foot outside.”

And it was late so we had to go back to her place. She had a dress for me to wear, because pants would not help me to adjust to being Emma.

When we got home, agents of the FBI and one Military Police officer were waiting. She whispered: “Now you will prove to yourself that you can do it.”

We walked up onto the porch and she introduced herself to them. “And this is my friend Emma who is staying with me for a few weeks. I’m sorry, but no, she is not carrying ID. She is taking refuge from an angry boyfriend and all her stuff is around there.”

She was good at this. I hardly needed to say a word. Just enough to exercise my new voice and show them that I was indeed Emma, a woman.

Once inside she prepared something for us to eat and then we started to look at how I could get access to the base.

“It’s all online,” I said. “I don’t need to go inside if I can just be close enough to the base Wi-Fi. There are some pockets of reception. One at the coffee shop by the North gate. The place where you used to meet me sometimes.”

“I know it,” she said. “And I know the owner. Derek is the brother of my best gal pal Dinah. He can be trusted. He can give you space to work on your laptop.”

I figured that while the fewer people who knew the better, it might make it a little easier if he knew that I was not what I seemed to be.

So in the morning I did my best and following her instructions on makeup, and she only needed to do a little remedial work, then I squeezed into another of her dresses and (more difficult) her shoes, and we set off towards the base.

“We will have to get you some of your own shoes and some shapewear and gel inserts to help you fill out that outfit,” she said. I have slack time around 10:00 so I will come and pick you up then.”

Derek was around 40 I would guess, sort of an aged beach bum, still with plenty of hair and a lithe body, but a face line by the sun and many trips around the world. My sister introduced me to him as Emma, and I was careful to take his offered hand softly. It was not as weathered as his face.

“Pleased to meet you Emma,” he said. “Here is a nice private table, or would you like to be at the window, and watch the armed forces at work.”

“This will be fine,” I said. I was still not used to this disguise. I did not want to push my luck, even thought my sister’s work was amazing, and my voice was good. I was just scared of letting some masculine gesture escape and be stared at. Private was good.

“Just call out if you need anything. Because of the connection, standard coffee is on the house.”

In the Signal Corps you are expected to know how hacking works. There are layers of security. The base Wi-Fi is not supposed to extend beyond the perimeter fence, but in places like the coffee bar it does. But there is nothing secure on Wi-Fi. It just gave me access to the work stations of some personnel including one I had invented some months before. While strictly not allowed, having the ability to be another user allows you to check your own accessibility. I could use the non-existent serviceman to sniff around the files and find out who was active at the time that the security breach occurred.

The morning rush came and went and in the quiet time before lunch trade Derek came over with a coffee and a muffin.

“You have barely raised your head,” he said. “I confess that I have never got deep into computers.”

“Very wise,” I said. “Nothing but trouble. But thanks for the coffee. I could do with a break.”

“Forgive me for prying, but I find you interesting,” he said. “You look like a beauty queen, but you don’t carry yourself with that superior attitude. And you look like you are only just getting used to those long-painted nails.”

“I got the full treatment this morning,” I said. I needed to be careful here. “I don’t usually look this good. My sister went a bit over the top. But thank you for the compliment.”

I kept working. The base was convinced that this was an inside job, and I knew that it wasn’t me. So I hoped that I would be able to use my skills to track down who was accessing the data by looking at traffic into the secure server, even though I could not get into it myself through the wifi network. But there was nothing showing and Derek was getting ready to close the place down.

“I would love to keep on working for a bit,” I said, with a hint of pleading. It was just him and me now.

“I can find some work out the back and stick around … if you go out to dinner with me.”

I agreed. And it was just as well that I did. The base was closing down and I knew that most of the people on base with the IT skills would be finishing for the day, and I started to see some activity. I tried to pinpoint it without giving away that I was active, when I suddenly realized that it might be coming from off base. That seemed impossible. The secure server could not be accessed over the internet. So how was it being done?

“Are you ready?” Derek was standing there. I was onto something.

“Can we go later?” I asked. “Or maybe order pizza so I can finish?”

“I was really looking forward to an intimate date at the Peruvian place around the corner,” he said. “But for you favor I could change our plans.”

A date? He said that it was a date. I was looking up at him and seeing his smile and a certain sparkle in his eyes that a man should never see in the eyes of another man. I needed to head this off, but not upset him.

“Derek,” I began with a little sad gasp. “You are a really great guy, so I would not want you to be disappointed, but I can tell you that in my case, disappointment is inevitable. You see, I am trans. I am doing my best, but I am not really a woman at all. I want to be but … well … I am trying.”

I was trying. I was talking and waiting for the expression on his face to change to one of shock or disgust. But he was still looking at me the same way.

“I think that is something we can work around”, he said. “I find you very attractive. If you are attracted to me then … well, I’ll order pizza.”

I seemed to be trapped. I just said that I was trans. I should have added that I was a trans-lesbian, but I needed to stay there.

“It’s a stay at home date then.” I smiled, because I had a feeling that I was going to crack this mystery and clear myself. But for him, that seemed an invitation to kiss me on the lips.

I could have pulled away. My first reaction was ‘oh no, here goes – the price I need to pay to get this done’, but I felt the heat of his mouth and tongue and then his body holding me as I rose into his embrace, something else took over. Had my smile been a signal to him? Had the look in his eyes signalled to me that I should smile to tell him to take me up like this?

He ordered the pizza and we sat in the darkened coffee bar eating it, and pushing strings of cheese into one another’s mouths like lovesick teenagers. We talked and I giggled, and we kissed some more, and nothing about it seemed strange or unnatural, even though it should have.

“I just have a few more minutes on my PC,” I explained.

And that was all it took. It was an external hack. It was through the power source monitor for the secure server, which was connected to the back up generator systems. It turned out that it was a couple of teenagers doing it on a dare. No secrets had been stolen. A crime had been committed but it has served to allow the base to improve security. The kids got invited to join the Defence Department hacking team.

I was so overjoyed and so grateful to Derek that I gave him the blowjob of his life. It was the first one that I ever did, but not the last. From that evening he was hooked on me, no matter what was going on underneath my clothes. But now that has all changed to.

I told him the whole story that night. In the morning, just to save me the complication of arrest, he took all the data over to my commanding officer at base. It was not an inside job. It was an external hack from this identified source.

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| The armed forces never like to admit that their hardware is hackable, but a clever and motivated operator can find a way through, and these kids did.You might say that the price I paid for the proof of my innocence was the loss of my innocence. Not the blowjob and all the other ways that I found to give Derek pleasure in the years that followed, but in the discovery that I was not the person that I thought I was at all.In those days the army was ridding itself of transgendered service people. The charges were dropped, and I was offered an honorable discharge from the army like others in my position, with the commitment to secrecy to save embarrassment to the service.Derek and I run the coffee shop together these days. Plenty from that base come over, but our premises no longer receive that wifi signal.The End© Maryanne Peters 2021Author’s NoteThis was inspired by a captioned image by Tiffany titled “Dodging the MPs”. Check that out. | A picture containing person, person  Description automatically generated |