New Contract

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I used to believe that the two most valuable things that I had were my custom-made CZ 75B and my penis. Now I have only one of those. My CZ 75B is my tool of trade, after all.

In addition to a good weapon, the other two ingredients for a success career in my chosen profession are a total disregard for human life and total anonymity. You lose either of those and you are no use. In fact, as far as my handler would be concerned, you are worse than useless - you are a liability.

You may have read the book or seen the movies about “The Jackal”. The interesting this about this story is that it is based on fact. Most stories about contract killers are just the products of naïve imaginations by those who have no idea of what we do. The Jackal existed. In the movie there was much made about him being a master of disguise, but it was not about him being other people as much as him being no one person. If witnesses each see different people, the killer cannot be identified.

I had always appeared average, and that is a huge advantage. Average height, average build, no large features in the face. If you were asked to describe me if you had met me before all of this, you would be struggling where to start.

And you have to know how to avoid cameras, and nowadays they are everywhere. You have to keep your head down, and only lift it when your face can be obscured. The camera is the killer’s worst enemy. Then one day, the camera shot me, and I was mortally wounded.

You cannot shoot back. The image was gone – transmitted. I was as good as dead. I suppose it was my penis, not my pistol, that saved my life. With that tool I had pleasured Coral, the “niece” of my handler (known as “Spider”) to such an extent, that she thought my life worth saving. Saving my life, even though it meant losing the chance of that pleasure, ever again.

It was part her begging him, and part Spider’s twisted pay back on me for “taking liberties” as he might say it, with her.

And also, Delphine, our lady assassin was dead, killed by her own poison in a moment of atypical carelessness. There was a vacancy, if you like.

Coral said that she would help. And she did. But this was a journey only I could make. Still, what would you do, if offered the choice: Emasculation or death? Shout “death!” if you like, in your macho pride. I would be happy if you did, then I would grant your request, quickly and without compunction. But it was my choice this time, and I chose life. It was no lack of courage on my part – it was more curiosity. Could I do it? Could I become somebody so different from me?

I thought about the Frobisher job. There I had to go deep, and wait. I had to become somebody to get close. I had to live as that person for 40 days. I did it. My mark was dead, and I slipped back into anonymity. But I was good at it – in disguise. It was some of my best work. I could live under cover.

It had to be a drastic change, as my old face was now posted far and wide. My anonymity had been truly shattered. To disappear would require more than a moustache and eyeglasses. What could be more drastic than a change of sex? Only death. Whatever profile was no being compiled by the law enforcement agencies of at least nine countries by my count, they would not be expecting me to give up my manhood. Who would?

The Spider would pay for the surgery. He had a plastic surgeon on hand, but when Spider told him what needed to be done, this man had the good sense to know his limitations. He found a specialist who could do the work, not only giving me convincing external female genitalia but also organs that “functioned fully for sexual relations”. That was of no concern to me, but Delphine was somehow reassured. I am not sure why, as I would be able to do nothing with her.

Spider approved the procedures provided that I would no longer have balls, or be able to function as a man. He received assurances on both counts.

But believe it or not, even after all the recovery and post-operative discomfort, that was not the hardest thing. It took me so much longer to become who I am today.

I say discomfort because I am inclined to understatement, but I had endured facial surgery grind my skull and jawbone to a feminine shape, and pull my skin and scalp, I had endured surgery to my throat to change the sound of my voice and the line of my neck, I had breasts inserted and my groin turned inside out, and my whole body was plucked or burnt to destroy hair and modify my skin. In short, there was hardly a square inch that was not in pain when they had finished, but I was alive. And, when I was ready, I was still engaged in my business too.

Coral visited me in my agony, wrapped up in bandages in our own sick bay bed. She outlined her plan. It would involve instruction and practice, in the dark arts of womanhood.

I remember hearing her words without listening, wondering how I had been inside this woman so many times for so much joy, and now that could never happen again. But could I function sexually as a lesbian? I suppose I only ever imagined that I would be a lesbian. Now the idea seems so odd.

She helped me out of bed for the first time so that I could go to the bathroom. The catheter had been removed and it was the first time that I had peed as a woman. It seemed strangely good. In my work I never liked to turn my back and look at the wall. It made me feel vulnerable. Now I was sitting and looking out, at Coral that first time. Both my hands were free.

I was given a dilation tool to insert in my neo-vagina. My first thought was that an internal cavity was a great place to conceal a weapon. I asked what the largest size would be, and decided that I would slowly work to achieve that. Coral appeared a little disconcerted at my enthusiasm.

She was more concerned with how I carried myself – how I walked and gestured. Her best advice was that I needed to know how a woman behaved but not try to mimic it, that could draw attention. That was something I could not afford to do. I was seeking to become as invisible as I had been before.

Now some of my physical form was a disadvantage. Average build for a man is quite tall and wide in the shoulders for a woman. Coral talked about how to choose clothing and footwear to my advantage.

I suppose that I had always assumed that I would wear pants. Women’s pants of course, but pants, rather than skirts and dresses. But with my first steps while my groin was still bandaged, a dress was the prescribed wear. Somehow, I took to the dress. There was good freedom of movement, and room to conceal something on the inner thigh, if not higher up in the future. And my legs looked good. They had been completely stripped of hair and treated with lotions. I had never had well-defined muscles in my legs. It turns out they were women’s legs all along.

Just a little heel was enough to show them off and not make me way too tall. I was walking freely and naturally in no time.

It was harder to pick up the hand gestures, and the rules as to where arms and legs should be when seated, or standing for that matter. Observation is the key. It is an essential skill in my profession. But do not mimic – observe and adopt.

My face was still bruised and swollen at this stage, but Coral said that I needed to do something with my hair. It was not that long, but was not as short as I usually wore it. Coral suggested a short bob with a side parting so that I could grow my hair out. I had not thought that I would ever grow my hair long. It seemed so much more flexible to have a short hairstyle, like a pixie cut, and where wigs when working. But that was my thinking then.

When the bruising disappeared, I found that my face was very attractive. Maybe a little too attractive. A witness would not say “I saw a woman leaving the scene of the crime”; they would say “I saw an attractive woman leaving the scene”. Was that bad. If that person were asked to describe me they might say: “Eyes maybe green, or blue or grey. Eyebrows dark and arched. Nose small, chin small, lips full, cheekbones high …”. That would seem to be the description of most attractive women.

Makeup presented the opportunity to make some changes. I had not thought about it before. As a man you can vary facial hair, but I never had strong beard growth, and fakes are too easily spotted. I learned that makeup and the subtle use of shadow and highlighting can make a face seem a different shape. And every woman wears makeup, so there is nothing irregular. I made experimentation with makeup a singular task, and I really acquired some special skill. In a short time I was doing Coral’s makeup for her.

Just to show what I could do, I had some “looks” based on makeup, clothing styles and wigs. I had names for them, like “Jan”, “Bea” and “Tina”. I even had one that I called “Delphine”. I was working on how I could do a quick change. Like go into the Ladies Room and Jan and within minutes reappear as Tina. I realized that this could be done much more effectively as a woman.

By my default was the new me - Suzy. It turns out that my natural color is quite fair as my hair gets longer – maybe a honey blonde. I decided that I would grow it out a bit so I could change styles without using a wig.

Coral encouraged me to go out with her to test one of my new presentations. I chose Bea who was sort of classy and a bit haughty.

Going out with company was not something I did so much as a man. Just for sexual release, I could cruise solo to a club and find a woman. I never actually went out with anybody else. I had not really since high school. I was a loner, I suppose. That is an advantage in my vocation.

I had to face the realities of my situation. I was no longer a man.

To be honest, I no longer had much sex drive as well. I was not going out looking for sex – I was just checking my ability to function in an active social environment in my new female guise. If the right girl came along, and she was into other women, maybe I could push things a little further …

Of course, Coral was into guys, so I just ran with it. She ran with the high class thing as well. I guess when you put the effort in to look as good as we both did that night, you would be disappointed if some quality guys did not hit on you. I mean by quality guys, guys with good looks and money, and a charm that could turn even a lesbian their way.

So, I guess I discovered that night that I might not be a lesbian after all. Not that anything happened that night, except maybe that Coral realized that I was no longer interested in her sexually. That was just as well, as she really needed a real man.

By that I felt that I had proved myself in my new cover, and that I was ready to work, so I asked Spider for a contract.

That was when everything changed.

The mark was a man named James Holbrook. He was a witness to some gangland shooting where his wife had died as a bystander, but he had survived. It was an easy kill in that there was no need to dress the scene as an accident, or to leave any message. It did not matter that this would be seen as a cold-blooded murder when his body was discovered. Mobsters like to see informers die publicly.

I have heard some in my trade say that you should never know the person that you need to kill, to make it easier. But for me, that was never a problem. Just like the Frobisher job. I was close to him. I waited until I could do the job cleanly and get away, and then he died. Simple.

James would die at first sight. I had no need to know him. I had a photo. Just identify and then do it. Crowded street maybe, to make a getaway. I should have done that, but instead I decided to check out his home. Suburbs can be good. There are few cameras, and if the entrance to the house is not in the view of neighbors, it can be a doorbell job. Ring the bell – fire the shot – leave.

But he did not come to the door. I rang the bell. I had my hand in the designer bag hanging over my shoulder, holding my CZ 75B with suppressor already screwed on. I had my eyes fixed on the door at eye level. A single head shot. But there was nobody there when the door opened. My hand stayed in the bag.

I looked down. There was a little girl standing there. I thought that maybe she was 12 years old, but what do I know? She was 10.

“Hello,” she said. She was looking at me a little suspiciously.

“Is your father home?” I asked. And then she smiled, and I smiled back. That is not something that I do. Ever.

“He’s coming,” she said. “He is just washing his hands. He’s been fixing his bike. You can come inside. It’s cold out there.”

“I don’t think that you should let me,” I said. “You don’t know me.” Where did those words come from? It seemed that I had momentarily lost my senses. Then I started to realize that this might not happen today. This could be messy.

“Do you like my hair,” she asked.

“You have nice hair,” I said. It was braided into what I guessed was supposed to be a French Braid, but it was bad. I had been learning about such things with Coral – doing her hair just to lift my skills in that area.

“Daddy did it,” she said. “It’s horrible. Could you redo it?”

I looked around the room. I saw a large family photo on the dresser. My target. His wife, presumably, the late Mrs. Holbrook. Two children. Little girls both. Three to die.

“Sure,” I said. “Sit down here. Points to your Dad for trying, but we can do better. What’s your name? Do you have a sister? Where is she?”

She put a comb in my hand, saying: “I’m Katie. My big sister Melanie is at dance class. She’ll be home soon. Rachel’s mother is bringing her.” This was getting far too busy. Fortunately, I had Katie’s soft hair in my hands to distract me while I considered my options. Perhaps it would have to be another day?

Then Jim appeared. Somehow the sun seemed to shine on him. Almost a halo.

“Hello,” he said. “Who are you?”

“Well, it would appear that I am your daughter’s hairdresser,” I said. It was humor. Out of my mouth had come something flippant and amusing. It was so not me that I found myself wondering for the second within a minute – who am I?

“Thank you for that,” he said, walking over. He thrust out a hand, and said: “I’m Jim Holbrook”.

“And I’ve got my hands full Jim, but if you will give me just a minute.” I was wracking my brains for an explanation as to why I was in his home. The obvious solution required no explanation, just bullets. But I was doing a good job with the little girl’s hair and I was close to finishing. I am a finisher.

Jim was watching me, but I was trying not to look back. For some reason looking him in the eye was unsettling me. This was also something new. I always prided myself that I could keep the gaze of my target even as the life drained out of their eyes. That is the mark of a good killer. No compunction – no obstruction to the job in hand.

“There,” I said, putting the band around the end. Her little hand touched it to check, and she smiled with approval.

“You should thank the lady,” said Jim. “Then perhaps she might introduce herself.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “My name is Vanessa Kilby. My family used to live here. I just wanted to have a look at the old place. And then your lovely daughter invited me in. She really needs to be more careful not to invite strangers in. I mean, I appreciate the invitation, but, well there are a lot of …”.

I stopped myself because I realized that I was talking. I avoid talking. And who the hell was “Vanessa”. I had no such cover. And his blue eyes were focused on me. And there was a warm smile on his face.

And I suddenly realized that I could not kill this man. And that was the strangest feeling of them all.

“You are very welcome,” he said. “Look around by all means. I’ll put some coffee on and perhaps you can tell me about your time here. My wife and I have only lived here for about 12 years, but we were happy here. We bought just before Melanie was born. It is a wonderful house. Full of love, I think.”

“Your wife?” For some reason I asked him with a tone of disappointment. But I knew his wife was dead. It was as if somebody else was doing the talking. Who is Vanessa?

“I should say, my late wife,” he said, sadly. “She was recently killed. Very recently.”

“Oh, I am very sorry to hear that.” I said it and strangely, I meant it. There was a look of such anguish in his face, but no sign of tears. The tears were almost coming out of my eyes. I had the weirdest thought that if I got close enough to him, he might put his arms around me. That might help him, or me.

“It’s beautiful,” said Katie. She had been looking at her hair in the hall mirror. “Thank you.”

The sound of his daughter’s voice brought a smile to his face and broke him out of the sorrow. I smiled at the child. She was pretty. Her dress was clean, but badly pressed.

“Do you have any help with your children?” I asked.

“Are you offering?” he joked. “You could certainly come around to do their hair. I’m hopeless at that.”

Typical man, I thought. I almost said it out loud. But why was I even thinking it? I am a man. Sort of.

“Anyone can learn,” I said.

“Come and have a look at the kitchen,” he said. “We completely renovated that part of the house 10 years ago. But upstairs is still pretty much as when we bought it. New paint and wallpaper throughout, of course. You may find it hard to recognize from when you lived here.”

He put the coffee maker on while proudly showing all his new appliances. I got the feeling that he was not really at home in the kitchen. It was almost as if he was reaffirming his own understanding of what he had there, as if feeling his way.

He was about forty, I guessed. But he was tall and had a body that looked athletic and tanned. He had a good head of light brown hair, strong masculine features and those blue eyes.

I felt that I needed to excuse myself, so I asked whether I could have a look upstairs. I needed to be alone for a moment to try to understand what was happening to me.

I tried to focus as I went into the bedrooms. I checked the master bedroom to see whether there might be a weapon in the house. If I did my job properly that was not a consideration, but I needed to focus on what I did. The answer was obvious. Go back down. One in the head for him. And then the child would need to die too. Simple. But I found myself convulsing, and had to put a hand on my chest, between my breasts. The thought was too horrific. His wonderful body lying bleeding on the kitchen floor. Little Katie blown apart by the hollow point bullet, her freshly braided hair covered in blood and gore. I felt sick. I steadied myself on the door jamb.

This situation was out of control. This had never happened to me before. But I knew that it had happened to others. The rule was: Get out now. Leave it. There will be another chance later. Get out.

“Coffee’s ready,” came the call.

I gulped. Collected myself. Called back: “Coming down directly.” I dialed the number for my phone to ring me back, so he could hear me take the call at the bottom of the stairs, saying: ”Yes, oh I see, yes, I can be there straight away.”

I walked into the kitchen and he said: “Don’t tell me that you need to go. I have made the coffee and I have cookies too.” And he called over my shoulder for Katie to come for a glass of milk.

The answer I had to give was to excuse myself then and there. I had set it up. Get out. But instead I said: “That coffee does smell good. I do need to go, but not straight away. Just one cup.” It was totally irrational. What I was doing was thinking one thing, and then doing the complete opposite? What kind of person does that? Not a person like me.

“I only use coffee from Guatemala,” he said. “Pure Arabica beans, not to darkly roasted.”

“Hmm,” I said, after the first sip. It was good coffee, but the “hmm” sound that I had just made was on another level. Like the “hmm” when a penis enters a vagina. I could see that he knew it too. It was an “hmm” moment. We were both smiling at one another. The air was full of the smell of good coffee, but something else. Something wonderful.

Jim said: “This seems almost callous to the memory of my late wife, who has only been dead six weeks, but could I see you again? If you are not seeing anyone else that is.”

“No,” I said. “I mean no, I’m not seeing anyone else. And yes, I would love to see you again. And no, I don’t think a woman who loved you would want you to live like a monk.”

“What about Thursday night?”

“What about tonight?” I replied. I suddenly realized that this man who had just asked me out on a date, was in danger. Not from me. I knew by that point that I would not kill him, but others would. And his children too, if they were witnesses to his death, or perhaps even if they were not, just as a message to cooperative witnesses. I knew that my duty now was to protect them. Jim and the girls.

Why? Where were these feelings coming from? I have to say, that up until that day I had never really been aware of any feelings at all. Not love, not hate, not fear, not desire. None of those things drove me before. It was money, sure, and need to do things right. To keep things clean and tidy. Emotions are messy. I saw myself as more of an engineer – measured, precise, correct. The very opposite of Vanessa – emotional, impulsive, caring.

Hormones? Could that be it? Chemistry is the scientific explanation. But somehow my change seemed more spiritual than chemical. It had been sudden, like an epiphany, sparked by those blue eyes.

“Tonight?” he said. Then he detected something in my demeanor and asked: “What is going on?”

“I having been lying to you,” I said. There – it was done, even though I knew that all the strange hopes that were running through my head, about a life with this man, could be lost by my confession. “I have never lived here. I am supposed to report back. There are people coming to kill you, Jim. And maybe your girls as well. And now, they’ll be looking to kill me too.”

“Is this about me identifying my wife’s killers?” he asked. He was angry, I could see that, but thankfully that anger did not seem directed at me.

“We need to get out of here. You need to pack up for you and Katie, we need to collect Melanie and go. And we need to do it now.”

“We?” he asked. “We should go with you? Together?”

“I can keep you safe,” I said. “You can go without me, but with me you have a fighting chance. Do you believe me?”

“I do,” he said. “Are you a Federal Marshall? Or witness protection?”

I felt as if I should not lie to this man. But the truth sounds so awful: “I came here to kill you, but I changed my mind. I think that I might have fallen in love with you, which is odd because I do not know what love is. Oh, and by the way, I’m a guy.” So, I had to lie.

“I am a security consultant working for the State’s Attorney,” I said. “But, for the record, I really would like to go on a date with you. We just need to keep you and your family alive to do that.”

He looked at me for a moment in obvious amazement. It was as if he knew that I was totally competent and in control, and yet I was still flirting with him, but he liked it all.

“Let’s go,” he said. “Katie. You put some things that you really must have in your pink travel case, and don’t forget your toothbrush. I’m going to call Rachel’s mother so we can pick up Melanie. I will pack her stuff and mine.” And to me he said: “Your car or mine?”

“Mine,” I said. “They will be looking for yours.”

The truth is that I did not really have much of a plan. I may have appeared to be in control to Jim and to Katie, but inside I was a squirming mass of uncertainty. This was the new me. Useless under pressure. I only knew that we needed to get away, and we did. I could still improvise – think on my feet.

I later developed a plan that I would kill everybody who threatened Jim and the girls, but it turned out that I was singularly incapable of carrying that plan out. The truth is that it was not just Jim whom I could not kill. It was everybody. I was so different a person it was even hard for me to contact Spider and have him kill his own client. For a price of course. I have money, so I can pay for others to do what I cannot. Everyone does.

Still we had to wait it out. Organized crime is always bigger than one man. But with the principal player out of the picture we would be able to return after a period overseas. And Belize is a nice enough place for an extended stay, close enough to Guatemala to get great coffee, and close enough to where my money was, Panama and the Cayman Islands. Distant perhaps, but the international school is great, and the beaches fantastic, and we have the four of us for the company we need.

I had said that I wanted to tell Jim the truth from that first day, but I never did. I like to think that lying to him about who I was, what I was, and what had done, was the last bit of evil in me. I was evil then – there is no better word for it. But do not judge me by my past. Judge me by my present. Judge me as a loved and loving wife to Jim and an adored and respected mother to Melanie and Katie. And allow me just that one evil.

The End

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