My Innocence

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

The police like to execute search warrants early in the morning. They like the subject to be up and dressed but they like to catch them unprepared. Another team will be executing another warrant at the workplace.

There was a warrant for my arrest too, but I was not there to be arrested. I was on my morning run and I would often stop for coffee and a muffin on the way back. I was living with my sister at the time, and it was just as well.

My sister was asked to step outside and she called me. She is no fool, my sister. She had read the warrants and she knew enough to be able to work out that the charges were in connection with the money that had disappeared from work. They were looking for documents to prove that I had stolen the money – that I was an embezzler.

There was nothing at home, but at work they might find out that I had found the money was missing the day before and started to look for it. I should have called the police straight away, but instead I had spent a sleepless night trying to work things out in my head and I hoped a system run in the morning might clear things up.

The problem was that I knew that I could have stolen the money and that there were only a few others that could have. In fact before I went to sleep I had started to think about who it could have been. It looked like I was being set up.

And now that I was a suspect as evidenced by the home search, would cooperating be simply closing the trap on myself. Certainly I had no way of knowing how well I had been set up.

I now realized that there was a good chance that I was going to be charged. And it is well know that the person charged is the person prosecuted. They will be looking for evidence to secure a conviction. That is how it works.

It seemed clear what I needed to do. I am a good accountant. I could find the embezzler, if only I could get access to the books. There was no sense in referring the police to things that I understood ten times better than they could, even if they were prepared to listen to the prime suspect.

I left my phone tucked in the seating at the coffee shop and headed towards our place but through the wooded gully so I would not be seen. I just needed a few essentials, and I could run for it. Maybe I could do something using remote access? It was the only way I could prove my innocence.

The alternative was just to run on. I had money in an old business account. It would be enough to make a start and it would be hard to trace back to me. But without a chance to prove that I was not the embezzler I would be on the run forever. That is no life.

My sister let me in. The Police had gone.

“You won’t be able to do anything remotely,” she said. “Everything has been shut down. Even people on your staff have been suspended. It looks like the office is in disarray. They are desperate for accounting staff. They are hiring … “. She stopped and looked at me.

“What are you thinking?” Like I said, my sister is smart.

“You need access to the system from the inside, and that means going back to the office,” she said. “And I think that I know how you can do that. You will need a disguise.”

“You’re kidding. I am known in the office and now it looks like I am a wanted man,” I pointed out. “No disguise is that good.”

“Try this one on and tell me if it might be,” she said. “It seems that your options are very limited. Even getting caught it is better to be caught trying to get back in to prove your innocence than at the border trying to flee the country.”

She has a way of making good sense sound better than just good. She was assuring me that she had the answer.

With all those smarts I never understood why she was just in the beauty business, but having said that she was probably the most successful operator in the state, with several outlets covering every aspect of feminine health and beauty. Her staff were totally loyal to her and she said that they would be playing a big part in my disguise. I was about to become Noella Harkness, junior lady accountant, and job applicant.

The idea seemed ridiculous. It seemed to me that I could never pretend to be female, I suppose because I considered myself as much of a man as most. But the fact is that I was thin, and having lost weight recently all my clothes concealed just how this I was. I had dark brown hair that was a little too long, and I wore a beard and glasses. Simply removing the beard and the glasses seemed to make me appear totally changed but add to that blonde hair augmented with extensions and the transformation was miraculous.

“Wouldn’t a wig do?” I asked her.

“It would be fine except you would take it off, and we can’t have that,” she said. “Making you look like a woman is easy, but what we need to do is to have you behave like a woman as second nature, and that means living your new sex. If you can simply take off your womanhood - that can never happen. If you are Noella you will live and be her 24 hours and 7 days until you get the evidence that you need.”

I was not in a position to let my disguise slip. While it might be said to be the last place that they would look for me, I was stepping back into the workplace that was the scene of the crime. People might be suspicious of anybody. I could not afford to have them look at me askance.

She drilled me in the manner of walking and talking, and standing and sitting. I needed to be able to do it, but not appear to be putting it on.

Until I was ready I could stay out the back of her salon, living in a windowless storeroom and staring at the mirror, learning to be Noella.

It sounds weird to say it, but I suppose that fell for Noella a little – a crush if you like. She would smile at me when she was happy with her makeup, or the fall of her hair and it made me feel good. It was as if I had a secret lover – a woman who lived with me and lived only for me. It was basically true, except that she wasn’t.

I really began to feel that it would hard for anybody to believe that I was not female, but still my sister picked up little faults. But still my resume was prepared and the background to it carefully fabricated. It helped that Noella Harkness was a real person and had done accounting work for my sister before getting married and moving to Australia. But we needed to beef up certain areas of the C.V. to ensure that I got the job.

What capped it off was a test done prior to my interview. It was something I had introduced myself. Some numbers with a discrepancy. Of course, I spotted the obvious one, and the second less obvious one.

Still I was offered a lowly position from which I would need to build up to full access.

I had hoped that my ability would see that happen quickly, but I was now a woman, and I learned to face the realities of workplace discrimination. It seems that men doubt your figures when they are looking at your figure.

I suppose that it was vanity that made me dress that way. I was slim and I was concerned that without some padded curves my shape might appear androgynous or even boyish. My sister said that I had good legs – better than hers – I just felt that my best chance of being wholly accepted as a woman was to show them off.

My sister had suggested hormones even before I got the job. She was concerned that things may take months, and when I needed to climb up the ladder to get access it seemed that she was right. Taking a small amount of hormones by anal pessaries was designed to keep away facial and body hair, and to suppress any embarrassing activity in my panties. But for some reason I was particularly receptive to female hormones. It seemed like no time at all before real flesh was pushing the gel inserts out of my bra cups.

And whether it was the hormones or just getting used to living 24/7 as a woman, I found that I was acquiring a softer appearance generally, and a total comfort with that. Surely, a man would have been concerned, but I was not. I read somewhere that hormones can induce placidity – is it true?

But I was not placid about my objective. I needed to get access to the files I needed to understand who had taken the money and to prove that it was not me.

My direct superior was a mid-level accountant of limited ability. I needed his access, so I needed to become indispensable to him and have him allow me to access and use the information directly. Unfortunately, this man, although married, had an old-fashioned view of workplace molestation. I have to admit that I let him do things that no woman would , to get what I needed.

So, with the ability to view the transactions, focusing on the transfers that I knew had been used to set me up, I was able to trace things back and find where the money had been going before that. I will not name him, for the same reason that I have not named myself. I can only say that the villain was the son of the leading shareholder of the company and with a seat on the Board. And there he had every prospect of being a star. Why would he take money?

I had seen him about the building, perhaps more than I should. On occasions it seemed like he was looking at me.

How far would I get by exposing him? Would the evidence even be believed? What was going on?

Accountants are rational people. We need to assess the pros and cons, and the risks associated with steps that we propose to take, even if justice demands that those steps be taken. Sometimes justice can be better achieved outside the system.

I decided to confront this man, and to do so in his glassed office. There we could not be overheard but I was in no danger should he be even more of a criminal than I knew him to be.

“I am so pleased to meet you at last. You have been with us for less than a year but you have developed a great reputation.” He was a charmer as men like him are, brought up to charm mothers and aunts to get what they want. He was also tall and handsome, and very self-assured.

“I asked to see you in private because I have discovered some interesting facts concerning the money that disappeared last year. The police have a suspect who is on the run, but the thing is, he did not take the money …”. I let that hang in the air.

“Oh really?” He was not about to let his guard slip, but I sensed some dismay. “Where did the money go, then?”

“You took it,” I said, placing some papers in front of him. “You covered your tracks, but here it is, dropped into an account controlled entirely by you.”

He just glanced at the papers. Instead, he looked into my eyes to assess how strong the case was against him. I looked back at him without flinching. I said – “I am just curious as to why. It is basically your money, although maybe not just now. Why take this risk?

“Because I like risk,” he said. He smiled. “What about you?”

“I like justice, or rather I hate injustice,” I said. “What about the man on the run accused of embezzlement? He lives in fear. He has no future. That is down to you.”

“I have been watching you,” he said. “You interest me. I have looked into you a little, as I tend to do where I have an interest. I am wealthy and we have to be careful – gold-diggers and such. So I ran some checks. You seem to be living in Australia under a different name and yet you are here. You references seem to tie back to numbers associated with a woman whose name I recognized – the sister of the fugitive you mentioned.”

I gulped. Still, it was a stand-off. Even if he knew who I was, I had what I needed and I had tabled only a copy. The originals were safe.

“It seems to me that you like to take risks,” he said. “I like that in a woman.”

“Well, if you have worked things out then you may know that I am not that,” I said.

“But you could be,” he said. “I am going to be very honest with you and explain that I find you totally fascinating and unbelievably sexy. I am not interested in the man on the run, other than that I don’t want him ever show his face again. I want you. Do you think that you could make an honest man of me?”

As I have said, accountants are rational people. You do the sums. Why would I want to bring him down if he is promising me more than I could ever dream of? As for the man I was, it seemed to me that he was gone for good. The truth is that I liked being a woman.

If there are any negatives about being female they relate to the absence of power. It is not that I had great power as a man, but when you cross over you discover just how much less society gives you. But as the woman of a man with immense wealth, a woman has all the power she needs.

It is simply a case of striking the right deal, and I was ready to negotiate. It struck me that I had the upper hand with the information I had, but with my new found experience I had learned how to handle men. Let them take charge, but keep your weapon handy.

As I say, best not to give any clue that might identify us. We are important people these days – “A Power Couple” they call us.

I never got to prove my innocence, but now it doesn’t matter.

The End

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