Swiss Clinic

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

**Part 1**

“Gil, Is that you?” The voice on the phone seemed to be his, but a little higher.

“It’s me, Kane” his client confirmed, clearing his throat. “I’m in Switzerland.”

“I’m taking a lot of crap over here, Gil,” said the lawyer. “Up until now I have been able to say that I had no idea where you were. I won’t tell anyone, of course. Client confidentiality and everything. But I can’t deny that I don’t know.”

“Look, Buddy,” said Gilbert Thorsen, taking a deep breath. “I have funds over here, as you know. I don’t have enough to pay out everybody, but I was hoping that you might be able to put together a settlement. I could do 10 cents on the dollar, maybe 12.”

“You have to be kidding,” sighed Kane Collins, attorney at law, and a specialist in property development, and therefore insolvencies. “If you had only institutional investors, and more was known about what happened, and you were talking 80 cents in the dollar, I might, just might, be able to get a deal. But some of these guys are not going to take anything less than 100 cents and interest. One in particular, would be happy to receive your bleeding corpse, plus whatever money they can get.”

“I want to do the right thing. I just don’t have enough. Two million doesn’t go far. If I can’t buy my way out of this, I will take the money and hide.” Gil meant it. Except that he did not even have the two million. He had enough to get away but not to stay away.

“On the bright side, I am 100% sure that I can get the fraud charges dropped,” said Kane. “But you have jumped bail, so that’s a problem. How did you get to Switzerland without a passport?”

“That’s a long story,” said Gil. As he said it he picked up the passport from the desk in his room. It was his wife’s passport. Her photo stared at him from the page. Anna Jane Thorsen – his wife. The same height as him. In the photo she was wearing that dark blunt cut wig – the same wig that lay on the bed. The wig that he had been wearing outside the room for the last few days. They wanted the passport to check him in. He was trapped in this town in Switzerland as Anna.

“You have to get these charges withdrawn,” said Gil. You know that this is not fraud. Everything stacked up at the beginning. It was just bad luck. Maybe even mismanagement. There was never a deliberate attempt to deceive”.

“The DA knows it, said Kane. “It will take a few days, that’s all.”

“I know I shouldn’t have jumped bail,” said Gil. “But if you explain that I am trying to make arrangement with my creditors, the Court should accept that. If I should not have been charged in the first place, I should get that bond money back You can hold it as the start of a settlement fund. I want you to tell people that is what I am trying to do.”

“I am not going to say that you are proposing a payout of less than 50 cents in the dollar,” said Kane. “It will not wash. I am telling you.”

“You can’t get blood from a stone,” Gil muttered. “The losses are way more than anybody thought possible. This was never going to be built. I could never find the money to pay it all back, even if my reputation were intact, and it is not.”

Kane knew he was right. He knew that it would be tough going for Gil. He asked: “Anna is with you?”

Gil wondered for a moment if he should tell Kane that he was in even deeper trouble, but he decided that he needed Kane to focus on the job in hand. So he lied. “Yes, of course,” he said. “She holds the money, as you know.”

And that was the problem.

Kane Collins was from rural Wyoming. He was a good lawyer (he claimed) because he had a simple outlook. He said that it was his father who had always said: “The only thing a man should own is a gun and a horse”. What Kane was saying to Gil was that his important assets should be in a trust. In property development personal covenants were everywhere.

There was a trust set up with Kane and Anna as trustees. Gil could not be a trustee as he might be compelled to meet obligations. The problem arose when the trust received certain commissions which Kane disapproved of. Kane could not be persuaded but had told Gil: “Under the trust deed you have the absolute power to remove me.” So he did.

He had intended to replace Kane with somebody more pliant, but he never got around to it. So, Anna was the sole trustee. Everything that he had worked so hard for over the years was effectively in her name. And just when everything was turning to shit, she announced that she was leaving him.

It was not just the money. Gil knew that. Things had not been going well between them. The stress of the problems associated with this development was a key factor. He had become snappy. A big piece of the fault lay at his door.

But it was her expression of entitlement that made something in him snap. She had done little to support him in all the years of marriage. She insisted on taking him away from important tasks, she was never there when he needed somebody to cover, she spent his money even when he was trying to save. It seemed to him that her contribution to the marriage was minimal. So how could she say that all the money in the trust she controlled was “my money”.

When she lay dead at his feet he wept. He loved her. He would have put up with her for the rest of his life. It was her decision to end it. It was her decision to gut him and leave his corpse to the vultures and the wolves circling, while she lay luxuriating in some expensive spa.

Gilbert Thorsen was an organized person. He knew what he had to do. Dispose of the body. Remove all traces of foul play, but not to overdo it and make it look like a crime scene cover up. Fortunately, she had died on the tile floor in the kitchen. Equally fortunate, he had rolls of building plastic in the garage to wrap the body. And, a third stroke of luck, he knew the concrete pour for the neighbor’s pool (which had helped to arrange with contractors he knew) would be happening the following morning.

It was while he was attending to this task that he came upon the outrageous plan to take her place.

By chance he and his wife were almost the same size. He was small for a man, and she was tallish for a woman. She teased him about it, especially when she was wearing heels. On more than a few occasions they had worn sweat-tops from the other’s wardrobe. And they had even shared sneakers as their shoe size was close.

They both had fine features. His jaw was a little squarer than hers. Her eyes were closer together than his, but she disguised this flaw with clever eye makeup. Her eyes were blue and she had dark hair. He had green eyes and light brown hair. But her hair was thin, and she wore that dark blunt cut wig almost always. That wig was untouched and fitted his head. All he needed was blue colored contact lenses, and he could pick those up easily.

He could use her passport to travel. He knew that facial recognition would pick that he was not her, so he could use the passport to leave and enter other countries, but not to get back. The facial recognition and fingerprints would not match. It was a one-way ticket out. He would other papers to get back home.

But from overseas he could make new plans. With money he could be whoever he wanted to be.

It made sense that Anna would leave to escape the problems. Her departure for foreign places would be noted without surprise. She had committed no crime. It also made sense that Gil would disappear completely. Some of his partners were known to be … well … gangsters, is a fair word. Either he died at their hands or he had gone to ground to avoid them. Sensible. Logical.

Anna held the purse strings for the trust fund which was money that was not frozen. He had to be her, at least until the money was in his hands.

He used her phone to send a text message exchange between them. There were expressions of love and concern on both sides. He would need to lie low. She would have to work with his legal team to sort things out.

He was careful about concealing the body. The pit for the pool was lined and he was able to conceal the body under among the reinforcing so that it would be completely surrounded in concrete. It was 3 am when he got to bed.

The following morning he decided to rise as Anna. He took a robe from her dressing room. He had cereal and fruit as she would have done. Using her phone, he texted himself a morning greeting. But his phone was in the river.

He decided that a first priority would be to cultivate a female voice. He needed to call his Swiss bank in Lausanne, using her voice. He went online and researched the methods used to imitate the higher tones, and using his voice recorder app he had listened carefully to see that he was getting it right. He discovered that he could follow a script, but he had more to do to be able to respond to questions.

As for appearing to be female, he suddenly realized that he had taken on an almost impossible task. But it was not as if he had much choice. He would need to present himself at the bank. That meant travelling and conversing with strangers, as a woman. And he had only a few days to get it right.

The phone rang, but he did not answer. He knew that he could not risk somebody calling into the apartment and finding him pretending to be Anna. He needed to head to the cabin up state. He could work things out there. He could text her friends, or use Facebook to stay in circulation. The disguise could only work with strangers. When he felt he was ready he would get on a plane and leave.

To his surprise he found that the internet was resourced for just this circumstance. He pictured hundreds or maybe even thousands of transgendered men doing what he was doing in the privacy of their own homes – following the online seminars “How to pass as female”, experimenting with body-shapers, clothing and makeup. It all seemed very odd, but he was convinced that he was making good progress.

So here he was in a hotel room in Lausanne, wearing his gaff, corset and padding, with the wig on the bed and a dress hanging over the back of a chair. Day seven and still no money.

The issue was the fraud case was still unresolved. The bank was no refusing to release the funds, the “gnomes” as they were called, were just delaying things. He had been in numerous meetings with Kurt Wiesel, the bank executive handling his account – or rather, her account.

That was the reason for the call – to check to see whether the charges were to be dropped, and to convince him to open a negotiation with creditors. That call had finished some time ago, with a request that Kane send an email through to Anna confirming details.

His laptop warbled and Gil checked the email. It was good enough to forward to the Bank.

It was almost 3:30. He had spent most of the day in his hotel room waiting for the workday to start EST. Now he was stir crazy. It was too late to visit the Bank. It was too early for a drink. At least he could get a coffee. He slipped into the dress, and checked his shaved legs It was warm enough to leave them bare. He applied some makeup over his well razored face, and slicked back his now shaggy hair to don the wig. He checked himself in the full-length mirror. Very passable, so he thought.

He told the desk to make up his room and trotted down the Rue de la Paix to the Confiserie Café, his bag over his shoulder. He ordered a coffee and sat down, opening a copy of “USA Today”.

“Excuse me, American?” The woman asking was blonde and statuesque, superbly dressed and well- presented and very attractive.

Gil was still unsure of himself in the situation, but he replied: “Yes”.

“I hope that you won’t be offended by this, but being in a similar situation to you, I recognize a sister in transition …”

Gill was not initially sure what she was talking about, but she had a smile and a warmth about her that persuaded him not to brush her off. And then when he did understand he was curious. He asked her: “What did I do wrong?”

“May I join you?” she enquired. She thrust out a large but soft and beautifully manicured hand, and introduced herself as she sat: “Nicole Nazaire.”

“You English is perfect,” remarked Gil.

“We Swiss have three official languages so we all need to speak English as well,” she said. But I know the UK and the US very well.”

“So, what am I doing wrong?”

“Nothing that I cannot fix,” she said. She reached in her bag and pulled out a business card. “Are you here to visit us at the clinic?” The card carried a photo of an ornate building. Not a hotel but a clinic. Gil remembered driving past it a few days before. The card was in French.

“I don’t understand,” said Gil.

“This is the largest private clinic in Lausanne. We specialize in plastic surgery.”

What a coincidence. Gil had just been thinking about plastic surgery the evening before. He was wondering if he needed to change his appearance if he was going on the run. But then he had thought that if anyone was looking for a body, it would be his. Anne had left the country and was now in Switzerland.

“We also do gender confirmation surgery,” said Nicole. “I am a gender counsellor.”

Gil wondered for a moment. He could say, or he should say: “I am not interested”, but would that show that he was in disguise with bad intent? He simply said: “I am sure that your services are worthwhile, but I am not looking for anything like that just now.” He said it in his best feminine voice and with a little girlish flick of the hand to show that he had the skills she might be selling.

“Oh, I am sorry,” said Nicole, with a look of dismay. “I am not selling my services. I am just inviting you to visit the Clinic. I am paid only to help patients. If you are not a patient, then any assistance I can give you is … *gratuit*. Like a gift from me to you. As I said, I have been through what you are going through. I would like to help.”

Gil was intrigued. “So, what do I need?” he asked.

“You need a facial,” said Nicole. “We have a salon and spa next to the Clinic, but not part of it. I am afraid that it is visible. That and I can give some advice on how to use your hands. Free advice, but the facial will cost you. But money that will be well spent, I swear.

“Can they take me tomorrow morning?” asked Gil. “I have a meeting in a few days and I want to look my best.”

“I’ll make a call,” said Nicole, and she pulled out her cellphone.

As it turned out, there was time if Gil was ready for an early start. He thought: “Why not?” He had nothing else to do. It would take time to settle the issue. He was stuck in a foreign city in disguise, with a suitcase full of women’s clothing. He was happy to be out of his hotel room. And if he was prepared to admit it, there was something quite liberating about walking down a street in a dress and heels, and looking good in them.

He sat a talked to his new friend for some hours, and then offered to take her for a meal. He learned more about being a woman in that afternoon and evening that in two weeks on the internet. And he found that he had a new appreciation of the issues facing transwomen like Nicole, who handled every issue with such grace and class.

“Your problem is very common,” said Nicole. “You know that you are a woman, so you want to be one, and appear to everybody as female. But you need to feel like a woman. You need to get up and look in the mirror every morning and say it. You need to love everything feminine, even if it means little to you. You need to change from within.”

It really had been a most enjoyable afternoon. He was at last comfortable in his disguise, knowing that he did not need to hide from Nicole that he was not female, but he still did not have to disclose who he was.

The following morning, he took her advice. For completely different reasons he wanted to appear as female. He washed his hair. He normally wore it slicked back, and it was a little longer than usual. But after washing it could be a pixie cut. He said to his reflection: “I am a woman. I feel like a woman.” He smiled, and was surprised to see how good he looked, even without dressing up.

He felt strangely confidant. He went to his wardrobe and fingered his way through Anna’s clothes just as she would. He found himself placing his hand under his chin in a girlish way, without even thinking about it. He said to himself: “This might just work”.

He decided to walk to the Clinic without makeup on. In a dress and with his hair a little spiky he felt he should test it. He walked in the style suggested by the website on the topic. Nobody noticed him.

He reported at the salon and spa next to the Clinic at 8:00am, a time not regarded as particularly early in Switzerland. Nicole was there to make the introductions but then had to leave for other duties. She reappeared a couple of hours later after the skin peel had been completed and the new skin moisturized.

“I have been able to sneak you a subcutaneous ERH, which you can have without charge,” she said. “It will do wonders for your skin and hair, I promise.”

Gil was not really clear about what she was offering. He knew that “subcutaneous” meant under the skin. He was expecting something in face, but then there was a sharp jab into his upper thigh.

“It will help with the skin?” Gil asked.

“It will help with everything,” said Nicole. “Now let’s look at your hair. You don’t need a wig. You just need some extensions. You have plenty of hair there. Let me see if we can get you into a salon chair before lunch. If so, you will need to open your purse, but lunch will be my treat.”

Gil somehow felt as if somehow, matters were now completely outside his control. The skin on his face had been stripped back and was now covered in cream. He had received some kind of injection. Now he was being seated in a hair dressing salon – the first time he had ever been in one. And all the while the conservation about him was in French. He had no idea what was going on.

Other staff spoke English and talked about all kinds of things, but it seemed that Nicole was calling the shots.

“What is going on now?” he asked. “What do you have planned for me?”

“Nothing that you cannot undo if you wish,” Nicole reassured him. “But it is really very simple. If you want to present yourself as female; if you want to walk down the street in a dress like that, then you should look like one. Now you have done a great job. Your voice is very good, and you walk and sit perfectly. But I saw though you yesterday. Trust me. You put yourself in my hands and open that purse a little, and I promise you that nobody will ever guess that you are hiding anything at all.”

Gil looked at her quizzically. She thrust a salon price list into his hand.

“This is what I do,” said Nicole, reassuringly.

Face peels, brow lifts, Botox injections … the list was long. And the prices? No more that would be expected for a major refit, or so Gil thought. After you deal in the expenses of property management all quotes seem small.

“Let’s do it,” said Gil.

**Part 2**

The phone rang and she slid a long painted nail across to answer. She pushed aside a lock of long blond curled hair aside to answer, holding it clear of the drop earring.

“Hello,” she said.

“Anna? Is that you?” It was Kane.

“Yes,” she said. I seemed the sensible thing to say. That was who she was, these days.”

“I was trying to get hold of Gil. I’ve got some good news for him.”

“He’s not here,” she said. He certainly was not. “Is it about the criminal charges? Have they been dropped? Can we come home?”

“Well, I suppose I can talk to you,” Kane conceded. “Yes. You can pass on the message that the charges have been dropped. I can send you through a copy of the minute from the Court. You should be able to advise the Bank. But, as for coming home, Gil still has angry creditors.”

“Oh dear,” she said. Things were not getting any better in terms of building a fund to settle debts. In fact, the daily trips to the clinic were eating into the funds. She still had plenty, but she liked being rich. Why would she want to see money going to those awful people Gil had done business with? They were his problem, not hers.

“Please pass on the message,” said Kane.

“Of course,” she said. “Thank you so much for calling”.

She took another sip from her coffee cup, looking out over the lake. It was a beautiful summer day and the café was perfectly located for her to enjoy it. Her dress was light and her legs were bare. The sun shone on them and she felt warm to her core.

She ran a finger as if looking for a run, in stockings that were not there. There was a man at the table next to her whose eyes would be almost falling into his cup. She had taken care to ensure that her legs were smooth and moisturized. It was so much easier after the permanent depilation that she had received at the clinic. Not a hair on her body except the luxuriant mass of blond on her head, her perfectly shaped eyebrows and just a little patch of pubic hair, which she kept shave anyway.

There was lipstick on her cup. Rose peach. It reminded her to freshen up. She pulled out a mirror. She always seemed to be looking in mirrors these days. There were never enough. Women’s bathrooms were now a favorite haunt. Compact mirrors were far too small. She needed to check her eye makeup one at a time. Perfect. Lipstick around. Pucker. Lips pressed. Perfect.

She picked up her phone and her nail touched speed dial.

“Good afternoon, Kurt, it’s Anna,” she purred. “Yes, thank you. Actually, I am just having coffee around the corner from the Bank. I have some good news. The document you need has arrived. I will forward it to you. I can do it from my phone. That’s right. I think that should sort things out. Shall I come to you? All right. I can be there shortly. Thank you, Kurt. Goodbye.”

The little mirror was still on the table. She held it at arm’s length to see the full picture. The beautiful blonde woman. Nothing like the Anna in the passport photo. The plain woman that she, in a former life, was married to. This woman looked spectacular. Everything that the clinic had promised had come to pass.

Her phone warbled and she tickled the pad to forward the email.

She reached into her bag, and her purse. She left a 10 euro note in the tray with the check, and put her things back in her bag. She stood slowly, smoothing the skirt of her dress deliberately over her now rounded bottom. She new the man at the next table was watching. She liked the effect that she had on men. It was one of the best things about dressing like this – about appearing as a woman.

She walked for him too. For him and all the other men whose heads were turned in her direction. There were plenty. But she looked straight ahead. She walked with purpose, her heels clicking on the ancient cobblestones, a hazard to that fashion. Her curls bounced. She imagined that the man at the table next to the one she had just left might now have semen in his pants. Perhaps she was right.

The Bank was only two blocks away. Close enough that she could pause to look into the window of the high fashion boutique and then the shoe shop around the corner. Just the window. She could come back afterwards, when she had access to more money.

The entrance to the bank was old and imposing, but not large. It was a private bank. Select customers. Discrete.

“Anna Thorsen,” she introduced herself to the receptionist. “I am her to see Kurt Wiesel.” Kurt Wiesel, the bank executive in charge of your account.

“He is expecting you,” came the reply. “You can go straight in.”

She knew the way. She had been here before, more than once. The first time she had looked very different. And strangely, every time she visited Kurt seemed slightly different too. He had not changed at all. He was still the same tall athletic, very Germanic-looking man, but he seemed non-descript when she first met him. He seemed to appear better looking every time she came.

He stood to meet her. He said: “Mrs. Thorsen,” then he corrected himself as she had requested on her last visit: “Anna. Please take a seat.”

“Thank you, Kurt.” She tucked her dress behind her and crossed her magnificent legs.

“I have your email. Yes, I think that there is no problem in releasing the trust funds. I apologize for the considerable delay, but you understand because I have explained it to you. It’s the international anti-money-laundering treaties, you see. So difficult.”

“I understand,” said Anna. “But I have been able to put my time to good use.” And to illustrate she flicked just a single curl away from her smooth neck. It had an immediate effect on Kurt. She liked that. She liked everything about this.

“So, you are the trustee and the beneficiary of this trust,” said Kurt. “That makes you a very wealthy woman.”

It was no news to Anna. But she smiled. Free and clear at last. What kind of life would she lead? Could she ever get home? She would need a new passport. She could then return as Anna, explaining the change in her appearance as a radical beauty treatment. Could she get past border control? Or should she even bother? She could buy another identity in Europe.

“It also makes you a very desirable woman,” said Kurt. “Beautiful and rich.” Then he added with a mischievous grin: “And clever.”

“Which is the more important, Kurt?” said Anna playfully. “Would you, for instance, only be interested in my money, or my body?”

“Well, your body is not yet completely to my satisfaction,” said the Banker. His amusement seemed genuine but somehow threatening. As Anna looked at him she had a sudden vision of him in a Nazi uniform to match his heavily German accented perfect English.

“I’m sorry?” She was worried. Very worried. Perhaps unnecessarily?

“I am not sure where the real Anna might be,” said Kurt. “I suspect that she is not in a happy place. But frankly, I don’t care. I will take the Anna I have got.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about.” Anna was on the verge of spluttering the words.

“Please do not be concerned,” said Kurt. “I have a proposal to make. It is … a very common proposal. Nothing complicated. And, I have come to realize that it is as much driven by the heart as it is the mind.”

“What is it?”

“Anna Thorsen. Will you be my wife?”

“I am sorry. What did you say?”

“It is very simple. As I said, a common proposal. Here in Switzerland, as in the United States, a husband cannot be required to give evidence against to person he is married to. If that were you, your secrets would be safe with me. And in Switzerland, as my wife, what is yours is mine. People think of us as progressive, but do you know that women only got the vote here in 1971? Of course, we would share the money, as a loving couple should. I hope that we will be a loving couple. Do you think that we will be? Anna?”

“I cannot be your wife. I cannot be anybody’s wife. If you know anything as you claim, you must know that.”

“Oh, yes, I know what you are,” said Kurt. “But as for that little thing, the Clinic will look after that.”

The End

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