Becoming a Gill

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Mother

Melanie Gill had been so proud of her garden, but now it was a mess. The illness and death of her youngest and favorite daughter Helen had destroyed her will to do anything but weep. But now she looked out at what had been her pride and joy, with determination rather than despair. Maybe, if she got busy, her mind might be distracted from her grief. Even for a moment, that would be a relief.

But there was so much to do. The shrubs were out of control, the weeds were waist high, and the borders would need to be rooted out and reseeded. The trowel in her hand was useless. There was more substantial equipment in the garden shed.

But when she opened the door, she knew that something was amiss. The bale of straw had been spread in the corner, with shade cloth over it. Behind the bench that she used to hold her germination trays she saw some movement. It was not an animal – it was a person. Small and slight with a mop of fair hair.

“Helen?” She said but she immediately knew that it was foolish. Her daughter was dead. She accepted that now. She had spent weeks believing that she saw her across the street, or in a crowd, but she was over that. And yet for a moment, with blond hair the way she wore it when Helen was 10 or 11, it seemed as if …

The shape moved, the head coming into the light, a dirty face looking at her, with big green eyes. It was a young man – small enough to be called a boy.

“Please Lady, I was just looking for somewhere to sleep”.

She looked around the shed. He had already slept here. It looked as if he had been there for some time.

“Please”. The child was begging her. No mother could fail to be moved.

“Let’s get you into the house and cleaned up,” she said.

He was bad, but he was polite. His mother had told him: “Politeness costs nothing but will get you things”. She was not right about much, but she was right about that. It had got him things.

“Thank you, Ma’am,” he said. He stood up. He was small and looked younger than he was, but she did not know it. To her he was an innocent child – an urchin crying out for a kind heart. She smiled and took him by the hand. He let her, because he had been found out and had to consider his options with care. That would take time.

 “We need to get you cleaned,” she said. “I will run a bath for you. When was the last time you washed? Never mind. We need to get those clothes off.

Near the back door was her husband’s old sweater. On this child it was so big that it hung down to his knees. She could even have him remove his filthy jeans, that were ripped in both legs.

“What is your name?” she asked.

“I would rather not say,” he said.

“A runaway? I see. Fair enough. Keep it to yourself for now. Are you hungry?”

He nodded his head extravagantly, as a small child would. It occurred to him that he was being treated like such a child, so he she be the person that she wanted him to be. That was how it was going to be for this boy.

He ate the cookies ravenously. There was no pretending here. He had been without food other than that scavenged from trash can, for almost a week. There was milk too. Children’s food. The best food that he could ever recall.

She led him upstairs to the bathroom, which was soon full of steam.

“You have hair like my daughter, Helen,” she said. “Let me wash it for you. Don’t worry about being naked. I am a mother.”

The thought of lying in a bath seemed very inviting. And he also found himself willing to follow her instructions. His mother was nothing like this. He had to fend for himself. This was a caring person. He had heard of such people but could not recall ever meeting one.

“Ok,” he said.

She washed his hair and used conditioner to gently comb out the tangles. When wet and combed it was quite long. He scrubbed his back, and used a face cloth to thoroughly clean his ears, which seemed too small and delicate for a boy.

His body was slim and pale, and not particularly hairy. Pubic hair and a slightly deep voice were the only signs that he had gone through puberty. He was clearly undernourished.

She gave him a large soft towel, and then went to find some clothes. She returned when he was dry, but with his hair wrapped in a towel. On top of the clothes were a pair of underpants, but there was something wrong with them. They were black, but were not men’s briefs.

“My daughter’s are the only clothes that I have that are a fit for you,” Melanie said. “You looked ridiculous in my husband’s sweater. It was far too big.”

“I think I might look a little ridiculous in these jeans,” he said. They were pants, but they were skin tight designer jeans with floral patterns on the thighs. The top was black, and could be worn by a guy, if the sparkle detail around the V neck could be ignored.

He put everything on. The panties were tight and tucked away his junk. The jeans were tighter

“You know, with that hair straightened a little, and combed across, you could pass for a girl,” she said. “We would need to put some shape under than top.”

“Why would I want to pass for a girl?” he said. He walked over to look at his reflection in the mirror.

“If you are hiding from somebody then you would not want to be recognized,” she said. “If you looked like somebody else, We could go out. You would not be stuck here.”

He looked, and he realized that she was right. He could be free. “It might be fun,” he said. “Where would we go?”

“We could go for lunch,” she said.

“A burger?” It had been his fantasy. In his hunger he dreamed of such things. He would have worn a nettle shirt to have a burger. Dressing up as a girl seemed no issue at all.

“Sure,” she said. “You need a name. Can I call you Paris? Paris. It is not that you stole Helen from the Greeks, but it is part of the same legend.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” said Paris.

“Of course, you don’t”. Melanie smiled at the new her. “And why don’t you call me Mom. Just while we are together.”

Father

“This is him,” said Frank Gill. He was pointing at a news article on his tablet over breakfast. He held it up so that she could see it. The headline was: ‘Boy on the run after sexual assault’.

“I don’t want to read it,” said Melanie. “She is not like him.”

“Darling, I will humor you because you are clearly attached to this stray, but I will need to neutralize any of the tendencies hinted at in this story”. Frank Gill loved his wife so much it sometimes scared him, and he knew that she was fragile at the moment. This interloper was a project that was more cheering to her than her garden. She was a mother, in fact and by inclination. She needed a child, even an older one, upon whom she could lavish her attentions. The one she now called Paris, seemed to fill a hole in her heart. But he needed to make sure that she was not in danger, and he had an idea how that might be done.

“We have just ruled out a drug for use at the clinic,” he said. “We were using it to treat prostate cancer, but the side effects were so severe that it was unsuitable. Here those effects could be useful.”

“What effects are you talking about,” Melanie asked her husband.

“Complete suspension of the sex drive. Neutralization of male hormones and promotion of female secondary sexual characteristics with rapid effect.”

“You mean that she would ceased to be male?”

“Well, that is not possible,” said Frank. “But the effect would be similar to that – for practical purposes. She would appear even less male than she does right now.”

“It would not do her any harm?”

“No,” he said, faking the appearance of being offended by the suggestion. But he knew the effect of this drug long term. It was used to shrink the prostate that spawned the cancer, but trials at his oncology clinic had established long term damage to the testicles as well. It was no longer an appropriate treatment. But he had the drug in volume, in slow release injectable form, and it would do the job. It would chemically castrate the young man

All he needed to do was to talk to Paris, and, as usual she was slow to rise. He seldom saw her before he went to work. Now he would need to go up to her room. What had been Helen’s room.

He knocked gently on the door.

“Paris, it’s me. Can I come in and talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure,” came the reply.

Paris was still in bed, and was rubbing her eyes. Even without the drugs that Frank would soon administer, she looked more like a girl than a boy. Her blond hair was not long, but Melanie had put it into a halo braid so that it was off her face. The face was open, pale and smooth. Puberty had been late and mild, and Paris was using the skin treatment Melanie insisted on.

Frank sat on the end of her bed.

Paris sat up. She was wearing Helen’s pyjama’s, pink with a floral pattern. Even just woken, when no female expects to look their best, she did. It almost disarmed him. But Frank needed to be pleasant but firm.

“Are you happy here with us?” he asked. His smile was one her wore before bad news, that he was often required to deliver. There was no happiness in it, but there was friendliness and warmth.

“Sure,” she said. “I am grateful Dr. Gill, for everything you and Mom have done for me.”

She said ‘Mom’. He had heard her use it before. He could accept it.

“I want to accept you as Paris,” he began. “A Guest in our house. No, not just a guest, family. But I have read about the person that you were before you came here. And I am worried. I could not allow that person to stay here, with us.”

He was watching Paris’s face. The color drained out of it. The hard part was done.

“As a girl, you present no threat,” he continued. “So, it is a girl you must become.”

“What do you want me to do?” she asked softly, with a hint of fear in her voice. “What do I need to do, to be able to stay?”

“I have a drug I would like to give you tonight when I get home,” said Frank. “It will eliminate male urges. As far as I am concerned, this is not negotiable. If you want to stay you will submit to this and sign the release form. If you don’t, then the people looking for you will find you. I can promise it.”

Paris knew what had to be done. She said: “If I stay, can I call you Daddy?”

Sister

The set was dry, and Katherine Gill was removing the curlers from Paris’s hair.

“I just love these curls already,” said Paris. “You are so clever, Sis.”

Katy smiled at her in the mirror: “Don’t tell Mom I said this, but you are so much prettier than Helen.” She checked the spring from another curl.

“What was she like, Katy?” Paris turned her head a little. Was that a whisker on her chin? How awful. She would need to get her tweezers on to that. They seemed so rare these days, but when one appeared it now horrified her beyond understanding. It just no longer fitted with the face that she tended with such care.

“She was spoiled,” said Katy. “I suppose middle children like me tend to think that they get a raw deal. I suppose that is why I was happy to leave home when I did. But I was devastated when she died. It was such a blow for Mom, and Daddy too.”

“I know she was loved,” said Paris. “I know that you were loved too. Honestly, I am not blood but if I receive only half of what you got; I feel spoiled.”

“Helen was their favorite but I think that she was always going to disappoint them,” said Katy. She paused for a moment as if examining something on the ceiling, but in the mirror, Paris could see that she was choking back some tears.

Paris stood up to embrace Katy. “Hey, Sis,” she said. “We can cry together, but after the comb out.”

They had cried together before, shortly after Katy arrived home after breaking up with her boyfriend of 6 years. Paris knew then that the hormones had a full hold on her. She cried easily. She felt. The person she had been had done his best not to feel, but now this chemistry had opened the gates. She was a feeling person. She could feel sadness, but happiness too, and excitement, and perhaps love. Now she took the drugs willingly, even enthusiastically.

She squeezed Katy tighter. “Sorrow is the price we pay for love, right?”

“Sit down and let me finish,” sniffed Katy. “But I am worried that you are going to look better than me tonight.”

“Never,” said Paris. “But a little rivalry might help us get laid tonight.”

Katy looked at her seriously: “You can’t take risks, Paris,” she said. “If any guy finds out that you are … that you are not all girl … it could be a problem.”

“Katherine Gill, what are you suggesting?” Paris sat in mock indignation. “First base maybe, and if they want second base they can play with my tits.” She jiggled them with her hands. When they had first appeared, she was horrified, but she had learned to appreciate them despite the growing load and their effect on her movement. She had a figure now. A bust and hips and shapely legs. She was attractive. The boy she had once been had never known that: To be attractive. There were many good things that he had never known.

“Thank you for suggesting it, Paris,” said Katy. “I am not sure what will happen, but I need to get back on the horse that threw me.”

“I’ll tell you what is going to happen,” Paris said: “Men are going to throw themselves at you and you are going to realize that you need to be desired.”

“What about you?” said Katy. “Do you want men to desire you?” The last curler was out, and the comb was shaping her style.

“I never would have believed that I would say this, but yes,” said Paris. “I want to be desired. And men do desire me. I want that, so I guess I desire them back. I suppose that I have turned. I never could have imagined it, but here I am, telling you that I am attracted to men.”

“We’ll do each other’s makeup,” suggested Katy.

“You’re the expert, not me,” said Paris.

“You liar. You’re really good with makeup,” insisted Katy. “I think that you could be much better than me. You have a better understanding of color and shading. It is not just skill with brushes, as I am sure you know by now. It’s an art. You could really make it in the beauty business. I am in marketing, but I could probably get you a job in the retail side.

“Really?” said Paris. Her hair looked great. It was now long and had been dyed blond at the ends in an exaggerated ombre style. She shook her head and the curls bounced. Paris felt feminine and she liked the feeling.

Katy was opening up the makeup box. It was full of potential. Full of looks. Full of beauty. Paris had spent time immersing herself in boxes like this. “I think I would like a career in the beauty business,” said Paris. “Being a girl is so much fun.”

“I am not sure what Hamish is going to make of you when he comes home for Thanksgiving,” said Katy.

“I can’t wait to meet our brother,” said Paris, as Katy applied her eye makeup. It would be something suitably alluring for their night out together.

Brother

“Mom, Dad,” began Hamish Gill. “Paris and I have something that we need to discuss with you.”

Katy was there too. She and Paris were playing with the family cat. But Paris stood up and took a place beside Hamish. He had told her what he was doing, and she had made a point of being pretty and dressing demurely for the occasion. That was exactly how she stood.

“We have fallen in love and we want to get married.” Hamish’s word tumbled out like a pile of rocks dumped on the living room floor. He now had to wait for the dust to settle, and those rocks to be seen.

“I see,” said Frank Gill. He sounded serious. What did that mean?

Hamish could see a tear in his mother’s eye. What did that mean?

“Are you ready for marriage?” he father said, to Hamish’s relief. But he knew the hard questions would come next, and he was right. “You understand that Paris can never have children of her own, don’t you? It could mean a life without a family. Is that what you want?”

“We want a family,” said Paris. “We will find a way. We just want to be together.”

She could see that Melanie’s tears were tears of joy. Paris smiled at her, and then moved to hug her.

“Oh, darling Paris,” Melanie said. “You are not a complete woman yet. Do you want to be?”

“Oh yes, Mommy,” said Paris, her tears starting. “As soon as possible. I want to be a woman. We want to be man and wife. Thank you, Mommy for leading me to this. Thank you. Thank you to everyone of you. I knew from the moment I arrived that I wanted to be part of this family, and you took me in, and loved me. And you know I love you back. I love you all.”

Katy was in it now. A three-way hug. Three women in tears.

I think we should open a bottle of champagne,” said Frank. “Have you fixed a date yet, Hamish”.

“As soon after the surgery as we can, Dad,” said Hamish hugging his father. “We want the wedding day to be perfect – and the wedding night too.”

“Let the cost of the surgery be my wedding gift to you,” said Frank.

Paris ran over to him to thank him, spluttering: “Oh Daddy. You’re the best.”

“We have plans to make,” said Melanie.

“I just can’t wait to be Mrs. Paris Gill,” said Paris. “Then I really will be a Gill.”

Because she loved her new family. She really did. Even though deep inside, she was still a very bad person, and she knew it. She would try as she had been doing, to make a different life for herself as a girl and as a Gill.

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