Home Invaders

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

“This could be you, except she’s a woman.” They were the words that started it all. The waitress at the counter was reading an article in the local paper, and she held the image up so that Hal could see it. It was not the best quality image, but he could see that she had a very good point. It could have been his twin sister, if he had one.

“It is an interesting story,” the waitress said. “She was from here – went to high school down the road. Her family had land on the mountain yonder. She and her husband wrote that book about self-sufficiency a few years ago – do you remember? That is them. Keith and Olivia Frew. The book made a fortune, and it is all sitting in a bank in the city. They went back up the mountain where they live and just left it all behind.”

“How much money are we talking?” he said. He was looking at the image and wondering what it would be like to be her – attractive woman loaded with cash, but a woman.

“I dunno … millions,” said the waitress. “Anyway, she called the police from up there in their retreat about a month or so ago and reported that her husband had been missing for a few days and that she was heading out to look for him. By the time the police got up there the place was empty. No sign of either of them. The word is that that they might both be dead. Neither had family, leastways family they had any contact with, so what is going to happen to all that money?”

“No family, you say? Did they have friends? They must have dealt with somebody”.

“We’re the closest town. They have been up there for years and to my knowledge they have never been down here. Self-sufficient remember. Their only link to the world was the phone – for emergencies, I guess.”

“Olivia Frew?” he mused. “Local girl made good, huh?” As he continued to stare at the image, a crazy idea entered into his head. It was one of those ideas that once lodged in there, it could not be removed.

“I’ll have the check,” he said. “Where is the local high school”. He wanted to find out more about Olivia Frew, or Olivia McCaw as she then was, and that seemed the place to start.

He said that he was family and that was believed, even though he did not learn her maiden name until he saw her picture in the yearbook.

“I can see the likeness,” said Mrs. Waldegrave. “Here she is top right. I taught her and I will tell you what I can. She was a very intense child, but a little rough around the edges. A bit of a tomboy in those days, but she could be a lady when she had to be.”

The old teacher also gave him the location of the homestead that she had inherited from his parents. He drove up there as far as the locked gate with the police tape across it, and then he walked up from there.

The original cottage was humble but had been added too recently. The façade of an old country farmhouse had been maintained but the new building behind included solar panels and a wind generator. There was a garage with a truck parked in it. Beside the house were fenced gardens and greenhouses, plus a pigpen (empty) and a chicken coop. He could see that there was plenty of cultivation, but it showed the sign of a month’s neglect.

He used his skill and a pocket kit that he happened to have, to pick the lock on the door. It carried the sign – “Police / Crime Scene / Keep Out”. He left that and the tape, undisturbed. The kitchen was modern, but the living room retained an old country charm. It was as if they wanted to preserve the old him both inside and out, while modernizing living within it. He was almost surprised to see a TV and a PC but they were there, and the telephone still carrying the fingerprint dust. He looked through the desk and the bookshelves and sat down to read some things that he thought might be useful. There was a stack of the occupant’s best-selling book, so he took one and put it in his backpack.

He also took some clothing items from her bedroom. The feminine underwear was from a box seemingly bought in bulk, and the jacket and pants were homemade from fabric that could be found in the sewing room – bolts of cloth and thread to allow clothing for both husband and wife to be made for decades to come. Self-sufficient perhaps, but well stocked with what they could not easily grow or gather.

He left feeling satisfied, locking the door behind him. He felt that he knew her well enough to be her, or would do once he had read the book, but now the hard part was to begin. He was ready to become her, if that was possible.

Men become women all the time – that was his thinking. They become beauty queens and models, so why could he not become her? He had never had a masculine face and all the images of her that he had brought up on his computer confirmed that there was not much work to do. He just needed a softening of his face. The rest was down to modifying his voice and behavior.

He looked up “man to woman transformation” with his browser. He was impressed. It seemed that it could be done. There were success stories. Sure, these were people who were disturbed – men who thought that they were not men. It meant that they were motivated to succeed. He was too. He was thinking about the money.

“Rules for passing as a woman”. He studied until his neck was sore from the screen. “Speaking with your female voice”. He followed the exercises, and recorded himself speaking.

“I am Olivia Frew. I went looking for my husband Keith. I found him but I never got to him. I saw his body at the bottom of the cliff. He was clearly dead. My poor husband. Then I realized I was lost. I found my way out but I am not sure that I could find my way back there. I am Olivia Frew. I am Olivia Frew.”

It sounded like a woman. Surely that was enough?

Hormones. Essential to soften the skin and develop a more feminine body. It seemed like a drastic step, but it put into focus what he was trying to do. He needed to be her. Electrolytic hair removal. People questioning him would be up close. He could not take any chances.

“Your story is very familiar,” the doctor said. “I can give you a prescription for androgen blockers and progesterone. You can back out any time with no ill-effects. Have you got a support group?”

Support group? Cash is all the support he needed. “I need a shot and patches, Doctor. I have a reflux issue with pills,” he explained. “I can pay.”

Time was marching on although he was moving quickly. She would now have been missing for 38 days. What was her explanation? Easy, she had travelled further than the search area. She had got injured. She had set up camp and used her self-sufficiency skills to survive. It was just an ankle sprain. Once she could walk on it, she just walked out of the woods to the nearest town. Not her town, but on the other side of the ranges. It would take time to get up there and fashion something like a camp that looked lived in.

But the wig just did not work. He decided that he would need to travel some distance and have extensions added. Invisible ones would cost more. They had to be. It would have been a while since Olivia Frew had visited a salon.

The hike up to the site was difficult as there was no trail. Bu he marked the root with ribbons as he would retrace it on the way back down the following day. He took a digging tool which he was would bury. She would not have carried such a thing, but it would make it easier to fashion a camp that she could claim to have lived in for more than four weeks, living off the land and what provisions she had brought.

The book was a good guide, but he had to memorize much of what was said. It established that in summer months such as these a person could survive on plants and fruits and grubs for protein. He chose the spot she would have chosen. He made a shelter and a bed a of brush and moss. He would sleep there only one night but claim it was 30.

The following day he walked out, picking off the markers as he went. He disposed of hose with the spade. He presented himself at the police station on the north side of the mountain.

“I am Olivia Frew. I went looking for my husband Keith. I got lost. I am Olivia Frew.”

He was grinning inside. He was good. He looked exhausted. He was. It was more exercise than he had done in years. And he had barely slept. He hated the outdoors. He looked drawn, but his long hair looked very feminine, and his face was smooth and soft from the treatments, although marked with insect bites as should be expected.

A statement was taken.

“It is a miracle walking out after all this time,” said the woman police officer taking the statement. “And now I am to take you around the mountain to your old hometown to speak to police over there. But don’t worry. I have your statement and I’ll be taking that with us.”

“Thank you so much,” said Olivia, accepting the offer of a police jacket over the worn clothes that had been pulled from the homestead closet.

On the drive the officer received a call on her cellphone. She seemed shocked but pleased.

“You’re not going to believe this, Olivia,” said the officer. “It is just about the best news ever. They have found your husband Keith and he is alive! He is at the station waiting for you. He has only just been told that you have been found.”

It was suddenly clear to the newly created Olivia, that the entire plan was about to come crashing down. The first thought was as to how to escape and make a run for it. To be exposed in the police station by the real husband would surely mean arrest and prosecution. It would be a fraud of some kind. Probably prison. Olivia was in the front passenger seat. Perhaps make a run for it.

The car was driving at speed. Perhaps ask to pull over as if to barf? Thoughts were racing, but the vehicle was faster. Before they knew it, they were there.

New Olivia simply had to face the music. Keith Frew would see immediately that this was not his wife. The handcuffs would go on, and that would be that. Perhaps plead some kind of mental issue? Perhaps driven by a desire to cross-dress and to take on the life of a woman?

Olivia was led into a room that was full of desks and police detectives, rather than an interview room. There was a man standing with his back turned, but she recognized the fabric of his clothes, the same durable but comfortable cotton that she wore. Keith. And around them so many witnesses to the impending embarrassment.

He turned and they stared at one another for a moment. Something about him was not quite right. Even though she had only seen him in photographs including those on the wall in the homestead up the mountain, there was something out of place.

“Olivia, my love,” he said. He rushed over and threw his arms around “her”.

He must have seen what she had seen. She was not her, so he was not him.

“Keith, Keith,” she said, wrapping her arms around him. “You’re alive. You’re alive.”

They parted to look at one another. There they were, face to face. Imposter to imposter. One of his eyes seemed to flicker in a hidden wink. Olivia simply smiled. It was genuine relief, not that her husband had survived, but that she had.

His face came to hers. A kiss. A kiss from a man. What could she do? She yielded to it. Thankfully a Hollywood kiss, but then their mouths both opened a little. Surely it was for the sake of the audience, but it also seemed that it was a message. They needed to be a couple in love.

When their lips parted the deal had been done without words being spoken. They were in this together. It would be 50/50. Collect the money and split it. The look they gave could easily have been interpreted as true love, because they both loved the thought of the cash as they looked into one another’s deceitful eyes.

“I guess you two need some private time,” said the officer in uniform, clearly the most senior man. “We’ll just get you checked over by a doctor first.”

“That won’t be necessary,” said Olivia. A medical examination was the last thing she wanted. “I have fully recovered, and it looks like my husband has too. We believe that individuals can cure themselves, don’t we Darling?”

“Yes, we do my love,” said Keith. “We just want to get home. You have my statement, so is there anything more that you need?”

“I have Olivia’s statement here,” said the female officer who had rushed Olivia around the mountain.

“I suppose we are done then,” said the senior officer. “I can arrange to take you back home, but you may have to face the press on the way out.

They held hands and bowed their heads as they left the station, because while it seemed that they were only there for less than an hour, a group of reporters and photographers had appears and were clamoring for photos and for an extended interview.

“Tell us your story! Separated and lost on the mountain for more than a month? The world needs to hear all about it!”

Inside the police car they sat side by side. Keith took Olivia’s hand again, as if to reassure her, and to tell her that he had this in hand. For Olivia she found this curiously comforting, and she squeezed his hand in agreement. The past few hours had been effort followed by the nervousness of a liar, then the tension of being caught, followed by this. It had been turmoil, and there was now a way forward that she waited to learn more about.

“We have two different stories of survival,” he said to her. There were two policemen in front. “I will tell you mine, and I can’t wait to hear yours, but over a cup of your lemon thyme tea.”

She squeezed hand to show that she understood. Their stories must be right. She said – “The garden must be a mess by now. I hope that I will be able to gather the herbs.”

“Leave the garden to me, Sweetheart,” he said. “The house will need your attention. When we are sorted then we will come back down to town to sort out our affairs.”

The officer not driving stepped out to open the gate and remove the crime scene tape, and did the same at the house. The police car drove off and left them both alone on the porch.

“Do you have a key?” said Olivia.

He grinned. “No,” he said. They laughed.

“I won’t complicate things by asking your name, Keith,” she said, pulling the lock picks from her purse. “But clearly if we are going to do this together, we will need to reach an understanding.” The door opened.

“Home at last,” he said mockingly. “How could you live like this. I prefer the city life, it is just that I can’t afford it. Or at least I could not afford it until now.”

“So, you want to take the money as soon as possible and make a run for it?” Olivia was looking forward to a shower. She checked the lights to see if there was power.

“I don’t think they are alive,” he said. “But what happens if their bodies are found? We should act quickly. I have the bank details and because they avoided electronics a signature should do, and I have mastered his. What about you?”

“I have a sample,” she said. “But maybe my planning is not as advanced as yours.”

“It doesn’t matter. We get it and we split it 50/50.” It was not an offer. It was a statement. But of course, it was fair. They needed one another.

“I will make us something to eat,” said Olivia. She went into the kitchen. The fridge was still running even after all these weeks, but much of the food was rotten. There was a freezer with some meat, and there were preserves in the pantry (no cans) and she looked out the window to see what vegetables might be taken from the garden.

She was busy, so she did not notice Keith come in behind her and slips his arms around her waist.

“Mmm. Wifey in the kitchen. I really do feel at home,” he said, nuzzling her neck under the fall of hair that had been fastened to her scalp.

“You need to get me vegetables from the garden. Remember that in the car you promised to tidy that up. It may have been for show, but I will hold you to it. We need to hunker down here for a bit and get our stories straight. We need to act as they would.”

“Like husband and wife,” he purred, kissing her neck. “It means sharing a bed of course.”

“If you like,” she said. “But first I feel I have to disclose something – I am a man.”

She could feel him freeze. He pulled away. She looked straight ahead. It had seemed necessary, and now she would have to wear the consequences. Possibly they could be violent. She should turn around and be ready, but somehow, she did not want to face the horror and cruel disappointment on his face.

“How interesting.” She heard his voice was curious rather than angry. “You are not just saying this to stop my advances, are you? It should be clear to you that I find you attractive. It this is a game then I would not be happy.”

She turned. He stood there, his arms folded. She realized that he was a very good-looking man, or rather there was a power in him that made him so.

“I am not lying to you,” she said, but something inside her wished that she was.

“You look so much like her, but she had a very masculine face,” he said. “The truth is that I always considered her to be very attractive. What does that say about me?”

“Well, I don’t know, but I took advantage of the likeness, just as you have. But she was a woman and I am not, so we won’t be sharing a bed.”

“Not so fast there, Sweetie Pie,” he said with a smile. “Let me get you those vegetables. Then we will sit down to dinner. Just Keith and Olivia. I will select one of the bottles of homemade wine that he has out back. We will share our stories, you and I. Get to know one another all over again. A honeymoon if you like. They who knows what will happen? Honeymoons being what they are, who knows”.

Olivia was speechless for a moment. It was just long enough for him to slip out the back door to the garden, whistling as he went.

It seemed that she had missed the chance to refuse him out right. She was not interested in gay sex. And yet she found herself thinking back to that first kiss in the police station when she seemed to melt in his arms, and the feeling of those arms around her waist as she looked forward to pleasing him with food. What was it that made her want to please him?

It seemed that the character of Olivia was taking over. Not once in the entire exchange with “her husband” had she dropped the voice or the feminine poise – even with the words “I am a man”. She had not wanted to say those words. She had not wanted to send him away. And yet he was still there. She could see him tearing at the weeds in search of food, whistling happily.

She smiled. This felt like home. It was not a feeling that she had experienced since childhood. It made her happy.

She was pleased with what she had prepared. He was too. The wine was surprisingly good. It warranted two bottles. It helped them both to tell their stories of the weeks in the wilderness, both entirely fabricated. They corrected inconsistencies and they laughed.

“Are we in love?” she asked him.

“We live alone on a mountain with only one another for company,” he said. “We chose to push the world away and live a life with only one another. If that is not the truest of loves, then I don’t know what is.”

“We need to show it when we go down to collect the money,” she said. “Something that strong would be hard to pretend.”

“Come to bed,” he said.

Somehow it seemed so natural. The truth is that she had been longing to hear him say those words. He stood and offered her his hand, staring into her eyes. She placed her own hand in his as if it were a delicate orchid placed in his care. They walked away.

They were husband and wife.

In the morning they had work to do. The assumption was that if they were visited for any reason, there home should look like a home. As agreed she attended to the house while he worked outside.

Olivia set about her work with the warm glow still hanging over from the night before, and that very morning. She was a little sore, but she had pleased him, and in the process discovered something about herself. She liked being Olivia, at least for the time being.

When cleaning out the bedroom she found two suitcases that she had disregarded on the first visit. They were cases for each of Keith and Olivia, packed for travel to the city. There was business attire and eveningwear, plus toiletries and other items that did not belong in their self-sufficient world, but would make them fit in the world they had abandoned.

She took the bags downstairs and put them by the door.

She cleaned the house and made it look as it should, which was just as well. A large truck with a stock trailer appeared out the front. A man stepped out.

“Howdy, Keith,” he said. “I don’t know if you remember me, but I am your neighbor beyond the woods, Zach Sanford. The police asked me to collect your hogs, as you were missing and all. I left the chickens as they can peck away, but as you know, you can’t leave pigs. Anyways, here they are, in the trailer here, healthy and heavy.”

Olivia walked over to Keith and placed a hand on him. He drew here close. He smiled as she looked at him, thinking of the moment he came inside her.

“Well Zach, thank you for your care of these, but we are thinking about taking a holiday, so I wondered if you might be interested in buying these hogs, and the chickens too. We will be a few months and we can always pick up new stock when we get home. I will give you a good price for cash. What can you offer us?”

“Holiday huh?” said Zach with doubt in his eyes. “You have only just got back.”

“There is nothing like a brush with death and weeks of separation to remind a man of what matters most,” said Keith. He turned to Olivia. She picked the cue and kissed him tenderly on the lips.

Within a quarter hour Zach was driving off and Keith was counting out the banknotes in his hand.

“I have found our go bags,” said Olivia. “And there is an insurance policy on the house, but it is not much. If we are going on holiday maybe we should up the cover.”

“Which is why I married you, Sweetheart,” said Keith. “You know that I have a still under the house and a little sweet spirit stored there. Why if that were to ignite while we are away, the whole house would go up in a fireball.” He grinned.

“That would be such a great loss,” she said, as they walked back to the house hand in hand. “We might even abandon this place forever, and live somewhere else. On a beach maybe?”

“I would like that,” he said. “I had assumed that this might be a short-term arrangement, but I am rethinking this.”

She felt happy. She stopped him and flung her arms around his neck. She did not have to say anything. She reached down and felt his cock stirring. She was hungry for him again. Less than 24 hours before this would have been perversion, now it was essential to her.

They lay in bed with the afternoon sun streaming in over his naked body. She slip kept a slip on. She was ashamed of her body. It was not the one that Keith deserved to fondle. She could improve it. She could be worthy. It would take more drugs and some surgery. She would do it. She would do anything it took to please him. She would spend money.

“Do we have enough to take over the account and transfer it?” she asked.

“I think so,” he said. I have been working on this for months.”

Her ears pricked up. “You knew them?” she said.

“The family likeness is not an accident like you,” he explained. “I am his cousin. The less fortunate member of the family. He ended up with the strikingly beautiful and brilliant wife. It was all her, you know. He was nothing. I adored her. That is what made it so hard for me. It was easy to deal with him, but not her.”

She found herself recoiling slightly, but she hoped that he would not notice. If he did, would he love her less? Did she love him less, listening to him and understanding more of the kind of man she was?

“There is no risk of them reappearing, is there?” she said tentatively.

“Not alive,” he said. “Not dead either. I have looked after that. A long way from here.”

“Can I compare to her?” she asked. It seemed a crazy thing to say. She should fear him. If he could do that to somebody he cared about, what did that mean for her? She could wake up one morning with an axe in her chest! And yet her concern was that a dead woman might compete for his affections.

He looked at Olivia and stroked her cheek with his hand. It was such tenderness that it seemed to deny who he was.

“She had her man, and she was a fool because of it,” he said. “You are the better Olivia. You and I are cut from the same cloth. It seemed that she ran away from life but you and me, we want it – we want all of it. Don’t we?”

“Yes, we do,” said Olivia. She reached for his cock again, to bring it back to the state she needed it to be.

The End

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*Erin’s seed: A shifty sort has taken over the identity of a young widow in order to get access to her husband's wealth but suddenly the husband shows back up and the imposter is caught but ... is he? a romance develops and the husband seems to be accepting of the impostor as his wife. They are both impostors and live happily ever after*