Inside Crossover

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

**Chapter 1: Audition**

They had already seen 7 actors and none of them had seemed anywhere near right. But for anybody with any experience and film and television there must always be the acceptance that the right person may never walk through the door. No truly creative person likes the word “compromise”, but this business is a business. They would keep looking for now. Matt Garnham looked at his watch. They were behind.

“Send the next one in,” Matt called out. There was a phone, but he knew he could be heard in the next room. It was said that it was not appropriate room for auditions, but Matt didn’t mind if the others waiting could hear.

A young man walked in, wearing a cap but he clearly had red hair underneath. Matt liked that. The character they were trying to fill was Irish – Mike McCann, a tough Boston cop.

“Name?” Matt looked at his pad. There were names and few lines on each – drama school diplomas, past experience in modelling and drama, any credits on film. He had no time for full resumés.

“TJ Albright.”

Matt looked up again. TJ? It could be either sex. A clever touch. He checked the name. It was there as TJ, but with Thomas James in brackets after that.

“Can you do a Boston accent,” said Matt, adding without waiting for a response. “Have you chosen a passage from what we sent out? Just deliver it now.”

“Whadda ya mean deliver it?” TJ responded in that accent. This was not a passage in the script. “Are ya tryin’ to waste my time here? I gotta city to clean up. Dy’a think I got time to spend talkin’ to fuckwits like you guys? Get out of my fuckin’ face here.”

Matt smiled. He looked across at the executive producer and casting director. They were smiling too.

“Why don’t you move to a passage by Megan?” said Matt.

“I’ll take my cap off for that,” said TJ. “I will be reading form Page 34.” He removed his cap, and a bunch of red curls fell out. He adjusted them with his fingers so that they fell about his face. The effect was to entirely mask his masculinity.

“Is that your own Hair?” asked Maddy Unwin, the casting director.

“I can’t afford a good wig,” said TJ. “Just some highlights for my own hair which is naturally close to this color.”

“Let’s here your Megan,” said Matt

“I’m just trying to be a better person,” she said, because for the three other people in the room, this was suddenly a woman standing in front of them. They all leaned forward as she continued. “I am not like him. He just wanted to prove that he was a bad ass. That is not me. That never was me. I am a woman!”

Through the veil of red curls they could see the tears welling up in her eyes.

“Word perfect,” said Del McKnight, the writer, looking up from her script approvingly.

“I think we have found our lead,” Matt whispered to her.

**Chapter 2: Contract**

“It is important that you understand that for the majority of the show, you will be appearing as Megan,” said Matt. He was keeping it casual, but there was a contract on the coffee table between them. TJ had been through it with his agent.

“The producers have set some unusual rules,” his agent had told him the night before. “But this is a great part. You are playing two people, and two sexes. It will allow you to demonstrate your range, and this is not the kind of role that will ever see you type cast. But they are providing for success, and if that happens they want to secure their star. Just remember, that is what you will be. And if it doesn’t happen you will be back on the market as an ex-lead with demonstrated skills. My advice is to sign on.”

“The problem for us is that we don’t want to destroy Megan’s feminine mystique. She has to be 100% believable as a woman, in particular because others on the show will find her desirable. We want men in the viewing audience to desire her too, and perhaps women to be like her as well. The problem is that if the public sees that she’s really a man, that mystique is destroyed. Do you understand what I am saying. We don’t want the public to see the man who is on the screen just pretending to be her.”

“So this was your plan – to have me live my character even off screen?” TJ did understand the what, but not the why.

“To be honest, it was really your name that caused us to think this,” said Matt. “You are an unknown. You introduced yourself to us as TJ Albright. The titles will credit you as TJ Albright. Are you a man or a woman? It is best if the audience does not know for sure. No, this was not our plan, but now we see how it might work, so it is in the contract.”

The words of his agent were in his head – “My advice is to sign on.” The contract was on the table.

“So I don’t have to live as a woman?” TJ asked.

“Keep them guessing,” Matt suggested. “Just don’t appear male and burst the bubble. Look, TJ, we have high hopes for this show. There are police dramas all over the place and they have been around since the first days of television, but this transgender element is brand new and very topical at the moment. This could be a great success, and if it is then we want you to be our star. If it isn’t you walk back to your old life with experience and your name in lights. Or, you can walk back to you old life as it is now, and refuse to sign. It is up to you, but if you are joining this project then these are our terms.”

Matt knew how to be blunt. But he could see the uncertainty. He needed to switch tack.

“But we will look after you, TJ,” he said. “We will arrange a place for you to stay that is private. We will have clothes for you off set as well as on. If you join us in this we will care for you. This can be a tough business, but it is the famous words of that Hollywood titan Sam Goldwyn – the first and last rule is to look after the talent. I guess that would be you.”

TJ smiled. He was ready. He reached for the pen.

**Chapter 3: Cast**

It was a large table in a room barely able to accommodate it, with at least 30 swivel chairs around it. It would be the table they would use for table reads for each episode and would seat the entire cast whether or not they were in the scene.

TJ stepped into the room with Matt, wearing his a cap, but this time a Red Sox one. They took their seats at the head of the table reserved for the production team.

“Welcome all of you, cast members for the new television show “Crossover”. I am Matt Garnham, Del McKnight and Maddy Unwin you will all know, and this is TJ Albright, who has been signed on to play the lead character, or characters, Mike and Megan McCann. I want all of you at the table to introduce yourselves and say a few words about your character as you understand them from the script. Let’s start with you TJ and then from your left around the table”.

“Hi to everybody,” said TJ, in a voice that seemed to lie somewhere between the two that he had displayed during the audition. “My name is TJ Albright. I play a transgender person. A transwoman. I play Megan McCann, who was previous Mike McCann, a tough Boston cop.” 1330

“Hello everybody,” the older man clearly felt entitled to speak second. Others in the cast may have recognized but not quite place him – he was an experienced actor but in minor roles. “My name is Gerry Dunford and I play the officer in charge Captain Boult. It is great to meet all of you and I am looking forward to working with you as a team to make this show a great one.

As they had for TJ, others around the table murmured a greeting in return.

“I’m Jason Beale,” said the intense looking young man sitting next to Jerry. “I play John Cable who was Mike McCann’s partner as a detective.” That was all he said.

Next to him was an athletic looking African American. “My name is Jim Gaines and I play Dylan Clay who is on the beat with her every day. There are very different dynamics at work here. I guess Dylan never knew Mike as Mike, so he has only seen her as a her.”

“Thanks for that Jim,” said Matt. “We can go through the other cast members soon, but let’s explore the central themes of this show in this first meeting together as Jim as raised them. The point of difference in this drama is the transgender element. What is your feeling about that, Jason.”

Matt wanted to draw this actor into the discussion. He had received high praise but he seemed a little withdrawn. Matt wanted to hear more.

“Sure, the trans thing is all over the place,” said Jason. “I can see that the lead character will have issues like I guess trans-people do, and maybe some internal issues of self-confidence, but yeah, how the other characters come to accept her presents challenges, for us as actors I mean. I suppose that my character John might be a little disgusted by what has happened to his old pal? I am not sure how you want me t play this?

“We have some ideas, but Del here, is the writer and we are ready to make changes,” said Matt. “What do you think?”

“I am a cop, so I am guessing he might be asking why a guy would want to chop his cock off,” said Jason. “But I am a detective so I have to understand motive, and I think will all know that gender dysphoria is a thing.”

“Using that phrase shows some research on your part,” said Matt. “That is good. I mean we have to be seen to be sympathetic to the transgender condition, but we also need to be real in our portrayal of attitudes toward transgender people – not just blatant transphobes but those invisibly hostile. What about you Gerry?”

“I think I am the oldest on the cast, and I figure I am of my time,” said Gerry. “I might find this thing puzzling but I am not going to condemn it. I see Captain Boult as accepting all people who abide by the law, as he finds them. I assume I will not be the transphobe in the station house.”

“There will be transphobes but they won’t be in the station,” said Del, speaking up for the first time. “They will be encountered in the course of police work. But it is good that the men of the precinct have limited knowledge as you will learn more by being alongside a transperson.”

“So, for clarification, both Captain Boult and John Cable knew Mike before?” TJ asked.

“Yes, they will feature in flashbacks that we will start filming tomorrow,” said Matt. “We would like all those flashbacks out of the way so that you can start developing your feminine character. We want to show the contrast. Mike is someone who was very masculine and is now trying to conform to a public perception of femininity.”

“Can I ask why I am busted down to uniform in the first few episodes?” TJ asked. “Why is an experienced guy returned to rookie status just because of new genitals.” The cast smiled.

“Perhaps you can guess that, Gerry?” said Matt, returning his gaze to the seasoned actor.

“I am guessing that it is to protect her. The uniform provides protection, just to enable her to get back on the job.”

“I think that’s right? That is right – Del?”

“Sure,” said Del. “Megan will benefit from getting back to work with the advantage of wearing the uniform. Like having the badge to back him, or her. Anyway, she believes that she will get back upstairs, and … spoiler alert … she does.”

“That is down the track,” said Matt. “But we will read through our first filming today. In Episode 1 Megan returns to his precinct, sorry, I meant *her* precinct. Or Mike’s old precinct. His precinct.”

**Chapter 4: Wrap Episode 1**

“Great! That’s a wrap for this episode.” The call came from director Rick Dalby.

Jim Gaines took a moment before making his way over to where the director was checking some of the scenes on his tablet.

“Can I ask a question here, Rick?” Jim asked. “I would just like to know where we are going here. Are we trying to frame it so I have some kind of sexual attraction to the Megan character?”

“Well, this is only the first episode, so I don’t know where you got this idea,” said Rick. “I mean you only have the script for what we have just done and I think two further episodes – right? It is too early to say. But you’re a pro. You go where the script takes you – yeah?”

“Of course … yeah. But my character … he is clearly a manly guy - an ex-football player. Maybe he is attracted to Megan but he is fighting it. I mean, he is not gay. Besides, I have my own following as an actor … an image to protect. Do you know what I mean?”

“Jim, you were great in all the scenes this episode, and you’re right - it was about you and her. I think that coming to this without an experience of knowing transpeople was just right. You played the awkward and uncertain early stages in working together just right. You followed the script but it reflected something of yourself here – right? Is she a woman or a man dressed as a woman? You are not sure. It certainly comes off like that.”

“I guess I was just a little put off when TJ turned up at the studio in women’s clothes,” said Jim. “And then the whole way through he was talking in that Megan voice, even off camera.”

“I think that helps him, and it helps you too. But you may have heard there is a deal that he needs to be seen in public as female or gender neutral, even off camera, until this series goes to air. I am not sure what’s behind it, but if it produces performances like yours today, and some of the criminals and victims in today’s guest artists, I am all for it.

Jim laughed. He said – “Yeah, I think some of those guys weren’t sure if TJ wasn’t a woman playing a transwoman.”

“Maybe that’s what Matt Garnham is going for?” said Rick. “Anyway, you scenes in the car were great. Shots with just head and shoulders can be limiting, but I caught the discomfort. As for romance in the future, well it certainly helps that TJ makes such an attractive woman – don’t you think?”

“Yeah, that’s right,” said Jim distractedly, before correcting himself – “I mean he makes a very convincing female, so maybe the audience will work with that.”

“There are other potential love interests,” said Rick as if to reassure him that his masculinity was not in danger. “There is Jason’s character John Cable, and even Jerry Dunford’s character, although he is more a paternal figure. And maybe there will be guest characters to date Megan. I don’t know. I am not the writer. Just like you, I work the scenes I am given.”

“You were filming last week with those guys?” Rick was on the move now, but Jim was following. It seemed as if he was getting through to the director about his concerns, and he just needed to push through his advantage while he was in space.

“We were doing the flashbacks. There is a whole bunch of them,” said Rick. “TJ was playing the Manly Mike McCann really well. Jason and TJ were doing the whole “bad boy cop” thing really well. I am not sure if you are aware of this but there is a thing about transwomen pre-transition where they tend to act ultra-masculine to fight off their inner femininity. TJ nailed that.”

“No, I wasn’t aware of that stuff,” mused Jim. “This is all new to me.”

“Me too,” said Rick. “But that is the great thing about this job. We get exposed to interesting people with interesting issues. That is what directing is all about … acting too – people.”

**Chapter 5: The Rape Episode**

“Your name is Chloe, right? My name is Megan.” Megan reached out to hold Chloe’s hand as she sat on the gurney. Chloe’s face was bruised and wet with tears. Megan was genuinely horrified. This was what rape was like. The hospital seemed cold and clinical and not the right place to deal with such raw emotion.

“We need to understand what happened,” said Megan. She had not expected a reply. The victim stared down at the floor, but she squeezed Megan’s hand to draw comfort from it. “If you are not ready to talk then that is OK. I know this will be awful for you, but to put this guy behind bars we need information, and as heartless as this sounds, if the information is raw and fresh, it will be more valuable. Do you understand, Chloe?”

It seemed strange. As Mike she would have attended as many rapes, but never truly understood it from a woman’s perspective. But only a day or two before, she had been in an elevator with a man who had stood behind her as she faced the doors. She could sense his eyes all over her body, and could almost sense his breath on her red hair. She felt suddenly afraid – alone with a strange man who wanted to penetrate her, or so it seemed. How many women have feelings like this? One thing was certain – no man would.

“He was white,” Chloe began. Megan pulled out a notebook from her handbag. Such useful things, handbags – with pockets so you could see what you want and not have to feel for it in a pocket. She started to make notes. The description of the assailant was clear and good, but the victim choked when describing what he did.

“I hate having to put you through this, Chloe, but this is what we need,” said Megan

“He was wearing a black hoody with a brand name across the front. It was a band. “Motorhead” I think. It was dirty. He was dirty. He smelt like a garage – like where you drop your car off to be repaired. He had a deep voice, but he didn’t say much. He told me he would kill me if I struggled. I wanted to fight, but I wanted to live.”

“Nobody expects you to fight somebody stronger than you,” said Meghan. “This is good. How tall was he? What build? How long was his hair? Did you see a weapon?”

Chloe could only speak through the sobs, but Megan gave her time. Every male cop in training is taught to feel for the victims of rape, but can they ever truly understand the total humiliation a woman must feel. Megan felt that she was beginning to.

That was why the appearance of the woman from “Rape Action” came as such a shock.

“What did you say your name was? Megan McCann? Oh yes, I have heard of you. This victim is entitled to choose to be interviewed by a female officer. You’re not a female officer!”

“That is not the way the Police Department sees it, and the way the state does either,” said Megan. “But if Chloe wants to be interviewed by another officer, I can arrange that.”

“I don’t understand,” said Chloe in confusion.

“This is a man, Sweetheart,” said the activist sneering at Megan. “Just because he chooses to cut his dick off and where lipstick does not change the fact that he was born and raised into the sex of a rapist.”

Megan stepped back as if reeling from a punch to the gut, which is what it was. She needed to find composure.

“You don’t know me,” said Megan. “I don’t know you, but I judge people by how they behave. Victims need to be protected. Rapists need to be caught. Police need to do their job doing both of those things. How are you helping?”

It was not expected, but a tear ran down Megan’s cheek.

“Cut there, that’s perfect, TJ,” said Rick Dalby

**Chapter 6: Stepping Out**

“There will be flashlights next time you are seen on the town,” said Matt with a smile as he drove TJ back to the studio house in the hills overlooking the sea. “The show is a success, and this is just what we need to build it.”

TJ was momentarily disappointed. “Before you say anything more about why you invited me out for dinner, I want to thank you for doing it,” he said.

“No problem,” laughed Matt. “It’s a great house where you are living, usually reserved for overseas guest stars, but you must be going stir crazy on your own. I just wanted to make the point that if you want to go out you can either be of neither gender, or you can do what I asked you to do tonight and present as a woman. That is going to keep the press and viewers guessing.”

It seemed that it was a stunt – that was the disappointment for TJ. But the evening had brought surprises too.

“It has certainly been an interesting evening. To be honest I enjoyed being a woman. It seems to me that going out like this, even if it wasn’t a real date, is mainly for a woman’s benefit. A woman gets the chance to wear a special outfit, have her hair done, put on some special makeup and be admired. What does a man do? He just provides an arm to hang on to, and a credit card to pay the bill.”

“So why say that it wasn’t a real date? If I supplied the arm and the card, then surely it was,” said Matt.

“I signed up for this, Matt,” said TJ seriously. “I knew that a big break was going to change my life – just not in this way. I still need to be close to somebody. I mean, my family are supportive – they want me to succeed – but … you know.”

“The truth is that fame is never good for relationships,” said Matt, with almost a knowing sigh. “Does a person love you for being you? That is the question. If you are rich or poor, famous or a nobody, even man or woman, I would like to think that the person you seek wants you for the person you are on the inside, not what appears on the surface.”

“It sounds like there is a story behind that?” said TJ.

“I have been burned,” Matt admitted. “I don’t have anybody at the moment. So I am free to date you. Although, nothing sexual for obvious reasons.”

“Right,” TJ agreed. “It was a date – right.”

“I think so,” said Matt. “We fitted in, just as we might have been any ordinary couple – a man and his girlfriend. It was just that we went to a place where some celebrities have been spotted. I did warn you before, and like I said, if we go there again, we will draw the paparazzi.”

Like I said, I signed up for this. You know how to run the promotional side. You know I trust you – right?”

“That’s nice to hear,” said Matt. “I will look after you – you can count on that.”

“We’re here. You can come inside if you like,” said TJ as the gates opened to the remote.

“I’ll get your door,” said Matt as he pulled up at the entrance. He jumped out and skipped quickly around the car to open her door and offer a hand. He had treated her as a lady all night, and he was not about to stop now.

When TJ put a hand in his, it felt soft and small – it was a woman’s hand. The smile he was looking at was a woman’s smile. She swung her legs as a woman would and rose to face him. They were very close to one another. He could smell her perfume.

“It has been a wonderful evening,” he said. He decided that he would do it – kiss her on the cheek. She seemed to tremble as he did it, as if they had both discovered something momentous. “But please excuse me, I have some late night business to attend to.”

He raced back around the car without looking at her standing there. If he had he might have notice the look of shock and longing. But he had to fire up the car and get out of there. He was seriously aroused, and he needed to do something about it, urgently.

**Chapter 7: New Chemistry**

“Are you alright?” Dylan had found Megan lying semi-conscious, her eyes barely open. “I need to get you away from here,” he said.

He picked her up in his arms, and she instinctively draped an arm over his shoulder. She muttered something incomprehensible. Distant sirens could now be heard. Her eyes opened and looked up at him – big green eyes that seemed almost childlike in that state of defencelessness.

“I should have gone in first, Megan,” he said.

“It’s OK,” she said. “Either room could have been the lab.” She was regaining consciousness and was remembering where they were and how they got here. A routine inspection of chemical smells. A meth lab. An explosion.

“I need to check you for injuries,” he said. Her body seemed so light, and so soft and smooth.

He moved into the light, and found a place to set her down, still with his arm around her. With his free hand he moved some of her red curls from her face. There was a single cut to her cheek – perhaps a shard of glass from a chemistry flask. Her hands would carry more wounds.

His face drew close to hers. He could feel her breath on his face. Should he kiss her.

“That’s great,” Rick called out. “We’ll leave it there. The sexual tension is great.”

Jim looked down at TJ who was now smiling at him, but he kept her close, as if unwilling to lose the moment.

“Will you be able to kiss me if the time comes?” said TJ, feeling very comfortable in his warm embrace.

“I have kissed women before,” said Jim. “That is what you are – right?”

“You decide,” said TJ. “But that is what I like to hear. That is what a girl like me likes to hear.”

“A girl like Megan? Or a girl like TJ?” Whichever she was, she was still held close in his arms.

TJ seemed to ponder a little before replying - “A girl like Megan loves being a girl, and TJ loves being the best Megan possible.”

“You are driving me crazy,” said Jim Gaines. “But I guess you know that.”

“We are driving the viewers crazy,” TJ noted as they both got to their feet. “Will we, or won’t we?”

“I could have kissed you just now,” said Jim. “Nothing would have seemed more natural.”

“I would have kissed back,” said TJ. “But I have to tell you that I have a similar scene with Jason coming up on the shooting schedule tomorrow. I wouldn’t want you getting jealous.”

“How is that romance going?” smiled Jim.

“More complicated than ours. John is the guy who sees his close friend and colleague transition into becoming a beautiful woman, so his is a different outlook. He is shocked and confused. I think we can understand why. But, yeah, he’s attracted to her, sure. So which of you gets me is in the hands of the writers.”

“To be honest TJ, I used to dread that it would be me, but now I am rooting for Dylan.”

**Chapter 8: New Policing**

“I think we need to talk this through, guys,” said Rick. “Del McKnight has just arrived so we can talk this over with the writer. Take a break and let’s discuss the underlying themes before we roll again.

“Thanks, Rick,” said Del. “I think that what we need to understand here is that there is a huge conflict between the way that Mike did things, and the way that Megan wants to do things. Megan he is desperately searching for the woman’s way to do things, whereas Mike would simply have punched somebody. Some of the flashbacks reinforce that. The first time he reacted in a “Mike-like” way to help Dylan out in the previous episode. The result was that she was deeply ashamed and was in tears. It was effective, but it was like a backward step in her transition.”

“I think that it is not simply acting like a woman,” said TJ. “It is being a woman, from deep within. I am really feeling that for her. Mike’s violence was a reflection of her frustration of being a woman unable to be herself. As Mike she was perpetually angry.”

“I think a woman can be just as violent as a man sometimes,” said TJ. “But I can understand how Megan was shattered by having reacted in that way. She wants to put that behind her. These incidents disappoint her. These are real issues for transwomen. It is like the male side of them bursting through.”

“Now she is back as a detective working alongside her old partner,” said Del. “It harder for her because as two men they were friends.”

“I get all of this,” said Jason. “Detective John Cable is a simple guy who sees things in black and white. It is like having the person he knew as a man walk in dressed like that, it has blown him away.”

Jason was pointing at TJ wearing a woman’s suit with a skirt and heels, and with her hair twisted up in a casual but elegant roll. The script had called for the pair to visit the mayor’s office and wardrobe had suggested that any policewoman would dress appropriately.

“I am supposed to be attractive,” said TJ. “It adds to the confusion being suffered by most of the men on the show. I am working on it. It helps that I have lost quite a bit weight over filming so far. I have been working on developing a more feminine shape.”

“Is it true you are on female hormones?” Jason blurted out.

“Come on, guys,”said Rick, sensing some tension.

“It’s not hard to lose muscle mass if you are not working out, and I’m not. Just fitness. I was doing weights before the series started screening. You know, I had the Mike McCann flashback scenes. I had to be buff for that. Well, at least solid enough for a tough guy. Now I have to be the opposite – soft and feminine, and maybe a little alluring.” The comment seemed to be directed at Jason.

“I am not just acting confused,” said Jason.

“This role is hard for me too, Jase,” said TJ. “How confused do you think I am?”

As Del and Rick saw Jason look across at TJ they could see the look on his face. It looked like a longing.

“I am sorry, TJ,” he said. “Just when you might have been looking to shed all of this and go back to the old you - back in pants – you learn that we have been renewed for a second season. I guess that’s a bummer?”

“I like this part. I like playing Megan. I even like wearing these clothes. Even the bra is something I have got used to, And I like working with you, Jase.”

Jason tried to smile. As an actor he could turn on one any time he liked, and what he did was enough. But he was hiding it increasingly hard to hide his growing attraction to this person, despite trying to hide it with small displays of anger. This was getting complicated.

**Chapter 9: The Prostitute Episode Read Through**

TJ was the last to arrive for the read through, and surprised everybody by turning up in a floral dress with curled hair up in a messy bun.

“Come on, why all the stares,” said TJ. “The fact is that I felt a bit femmy today so I dressed for that. It is helping me understand my character more, and on a sunny day like today it just seemed so much more comfortable.”

“I think that you look great,” said Gerry. To him, she did. Increasingly he was finding it hard to see her in any other way that as a her.

“It is very appropriate for he script today,” said Matt. “So let’s do that read through and talk about what is going on here. This is where Megan and John are investigating a series of assaults on prostitutes - shemale prostitutes in particular. I hope that is a word I can use, TJ – it is the script.

“I can’t give you advice on this, Matt,” said TJ. “I play a post-op transwoman. I am guessing some of these ladies are pre-op transwomen saving up for surgery, and some maybe happy to keep what they have. They are presenting as women. Why not call them women?”

“Because this creep has a desire to hurt shemale prostitutes,” said Jason. “I think that he is probably trying to emasculate them, but he doesn’t mind it if they die in the process.”

“Are we maybe talking about somebody suppressing their own innate gender confusion?” TJ suggested.

“I guess some people just can’t handle this,” said Jim. “I mean, my character Dylan gets roped in to help. He is already having his own issues coming to grips with Megan as his ex-partner, and now he has a bunch more to deal with.

“I guess the most interesting part for me in this episode is that when they catch the guy Megan loses it,” said TJ. “The Mike McCann inside her comes out. It is like a backward step for her. She needs to seek comfort from Dylan to restore the women in herself.”

“Are you going to be comfortable with this, Jim?” asked the director, Rick Dalby. “I want Dylan’s embrace to restore her. She feels so womanly in his arms. I want this to be a special moment. I don’t mind uncertainty here, but I think that you understand how this is progressing, Jim – Dylan is falling for her.”

“I understand that,” said Jim with some exasperation. He was an actor, or trying hard to be one. “I don’t have an issue with this – he is coming to see her as a woman.” He looked across at TJ who was smiling at him with that pretty face.

“We have a talented guest star playing the attacker,” Matt explained. “I am sure that he will do a good job, and that means presenting his excuses in a way that some viewers may find convincing. That will make Megan’s violence all the more hard to explain. I think she sees this person as the embodiment of all the transphobia she has to face.”

“But not within the police she works with?” said Gerry. “I think that Captain Boult is doing a good job of encouraging a supportive environment. I am certainly playing it that way.”

“Yes, after initial discomfort among her colleagues, Megan is now in a supportive environment,” said Rick. “Now she faces a predator who sees all transwomen as men who have cast aside their genitals and by that fact have rendered themselves lesser people that he can take advantage of. She is having trouble with this on so many levels. That is why she has lashed out. That is why she has let Mike come back.”

“Can we do it?” said TJ. Come on Jim. Let’s stand up and do it. I am Mike again. Make me Megan.” TJ stood up and walked around the table to him, with a look of deep distress forming on her face.

Jim stood up, and moved clear of his chair. He saw Megan and only her. The red hair tied up, small drop earrings shaking with the emotion she was feeling. She had turned into a monster. That was not who she was. He saw only her fragility – her femininity. He could smell it now. Perfume or just the very essence of a woman. His arms reached for her even without willing them to do it. She slipped in between them, and her body seemed to meld with his.

“That’s great,” said Rick.

It was. Jim suddenly understood that this was a woman in his arms. TJ Albright was a woman.

**Chapter 10 Family**

TJ opened the front door as it was unlocked in such a quiet suburb, ushering Matt in before calling out – “Mom! Dad! It’s me, with my friend the producer.”

Matt could hear some sounds before TJ’s mother appeared in the hallway. She was attractive and a redhead as Matt might have expected. She stopped for a moment, to look at her child.

“I warned you,” said TJ before pulling off a brief twirl to show off the feminine attire.

The smile that broke out boomed with love. She raced down the hall to embrace TJ, barely noticing Matt.

“This is Matt Garnham, the producer of Crossover,” said TJ.

Matt offered a hand but she hugged him too.

“We have you to thank for TJ’s big break into acting,” said the woman, before adding – “I am Patricia … the proud mother.”

“And I guess that makes me the proud father!” He had appeared in the hall. “Tony Albright.” This time there was a handshake for Matt, before the father stood before his son.

“I am still coming to grips with this, but you had better come in and hug your father, TJ.” Tony opened his arms and TJ laughed as he glided between them.

“Come through, Matt,” said Patricia. “Take a seat over here. I am sure this may appear humble to you Hollywood types, but we do love our home. We have raised 5 children here. TJ is the youngest. The dreamer of the family. But look – those dreams have come true.”

“We are doing very well with Crossover,” said Matt. We this is the second season we are in and now we are discussing a third season.”

“We watch it,” said Tony. “We never miss an episode and it is not just because our TJ is in almost every scene. It is a great show. All the characters are good. You must be very pleased.”

“I am. We are,” said Matt. “It was just that because of the contract terms I wanted to meet you and discuss wit you how things are working out and how they might affect TJ.”

“That sounds great, but can I ask, are we going to meet Megan’s family in Season 3. I just want to know who will be playing me. And I hope that you will find an actress pretty enough to play Patricia!”

His wife blushed and waved a hand dismissively.

“We actually filmed a few hours of footage as Mike covering some scenes for planned story lines including “Mike tells his wife”, “Mike tells his parents”, “Mike tells his brother,” and none of those people have been casted yet We did all of this because we knew then that it wold become increasingly hard for TJ to play a convincing Mike. I mean you just have to look … look at her.”

There was a moment of awkward silence.

“You are saying that you only want our son to play a woman from now on?” asked Tony.

“I am saying that at this stage we don’t need Mike anymore,” said Matt. “Megan is our central character and the referral back to stock footage of Mike is not well received by audiences. And that is just as well because TJ has … become less male.”

TJ felt he should say something. “The producers are happy for me to be less male because that is the way the character is headed. Of course, Megan and I are very different – she has had gender confirmation surgery, obviously I haven’t. I mean this is still just a role, but it has been my decision to take it further … to be the best Megan I can be.”

“I don’t really understand why this has happened,” said Patricia. “I mean, looking at TJ … it is like having a second daughter, and I like that. But what about the future?”

“Why it happened Mom, is because Matt as the showrunner, decided that it would be better if the audience thought I was a woman or trans. It makes it easier for them to accept that the scenes between me and the male members of the cast are between a woman and a man. Viewers out there still have an issue with intimate scenes between men, even if they are only acting.”

“I get that,” said Tony. “God knows on that show you are a woman as far as I am concerned. But your mother is right to ask about what is next. I mean you can’t always play transvestites.”

“I do have options,” said TJ. “I could take female roles. Matt has said that at the end of this season I could do that before filming of Season 3 starts. It is just that I can’t act as a man while I am under contract to Crossover. There are roles out there.”

“And is this a role?” asked Tony, gesturing towards TJ dressed in a floral print.

“We had an interview for a morning show this morning,” said Matt. “It was not worth changing.”

“No Matt,” said TJ. “I wanted to wear this. I feel comfortable in this. I look good in this.”

“You do look good,” said Tony. “You look like your mother when she was your age. But is that a good thing?”

Matt Garnham thought it was.

**Chapter 11: The DNA Episode**

“Please don’t be upset, Detective McCann, but I am fairly sure that you are a transwoman?” said Diane. “I am only saying this because if I am right, I feel that I can talk to you about something very important.”

“You’re right,” said Megan. “I am trans. Being recognized as that can disappoint me, but I will not let it upset me.” She smiled. This person had something to say, and police work is all about listening. “You can talk to me.”

“I don’t want the police to waste their time looking for a man they will never find,” she said. She looked distressed, and it was nothing to do with the home invasion and the injuries suffered by her and her husband. She had seemed so collected throughout the ordeal and the questioning over the days since. Megan had put it down to class. This woman looked to be special – late middle age, attractive, intelligent, sophisticated. But here she was, at the station, clearly distressed

“We have descriptions of the two men and we have DNA from three men, and we have just eliminated your husband. We are looking for a match on the other two samples, and we think that we have one.” Megan was pleased that they had been able to use science to get to this point so quickly.

“I did explain that only one of them bled a little,” said Diane. “The other did not. I bled. You have not referred to my DNA.”

“We focussed on the samples that were male,” said Megan quickly, but then she paused to consider what she had just said. Where were the results that might be immediately excluded? Where were the references to the female samples coming from Mrs Diane Hornby?

“One of the samples you have is from me,” said Diane. “As I said, I am hoping that you understand. I have male DNA you see – just like you.”

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**Chapter 12 Jason**

“I still can’t understand why TJ can’t play Mike in these scenes,” said Jason. “Having a stand in and splicing in old footage seems like such a hassle.”

“Have you seen TJ lately?” said Rick. “He can’t even move like a man anymore. And he is as soft as butter. This is all about the scale of the transformation and it has gone too far. Besides, we have the footage. We were prepared for this.”

“TJ is supposed to be an actor,” Jason protested. “He can have all that hair put up in a cap and just act the part. To use the obvious phrase she needs to man up.”

“Did I just hear you call her “she”?” said Rick. “Not that I don’t do it as well. She actually told me that she doesn’t mind being referred to as “she” when she is dressed as a woman, and I guess that is all the time now. That ender neutral look seems firmly out the door.”

“Yeah,” said Jason. “If you are finished for the day then I will find her before she leaves the lot. I have some scenes for tomorrow we could run through.”

“Sure, we’re done Jase,” said Rick. He like dealing with Jason Beale. He was talented and keen, but sometimes a little over-immersed. He watched him rush off the set. There was material he could work with. He had already decided that TJ had no role to play when it came to the past. She had moved on.

Jason found TJ in her dressing room. He knocked and she called out for him to enter in that high voice that seemed to have become her own.

She was sitting at the dressing table wearing a robe. The lights around the mirror made her face shine. There was no make up and yet it seemed so smooth and bright. Those lights should reveal any flaw, but here there were none.

“Do you have an extra copy of the script, T?” he asked. “I thought we could run through some stuff for tomorrow?”

“Sure I have mine here. I was just working on expressions. But there is another copy over there, under my bra.”

The word made Jason drop his glance back at her, and caused a jolt. He could see TJ’s chest, or half of it. There was a perfectly formed breast visible. It was not very big, but it was not small either, but it was perfectly formed. He could not help but stare. TJ could not help but notice him staring.

“I really must learn to hide these,” said TJ pulling the robe together. “It is the hormones you see? They were just supposed to help soften the face, and something else as well. They have certainly worked with that, but these seem to have sprouted. It is genetic, they tell me. My mother had big tits, so mine will grow to about 75% the size of hers.”

“That would be another reason why you can’t play Mike,” said Jason. “I have just come from working on the flashbacks.”

“Yes, I am afraid that Megan has left Mike well behind,” said TJ. Which page of the script do you want me on?”

“What about you, TJ? Have you left somebody behind too? I’m sorry – you don’t have to answer – I am just curious.”

TJ looked at Jason for a moment. He was a serious young man – intense some might say. This was a serious question he was asking.

“We have all change, don’t you think, Jase?” said TJ

“Our characters change but I have always told myself that I won’t,” said Jason. “Perhaps I will get better at what I do, but part of that is not allowing your characters to interfere with your personality. That is not good. That is close to an illness. Real actors don’t do that.”

“You are a real actor,” said TJ reassuringly.

“John Cable has fallen in love with Megan McCann,” said Jason. “We are pussyfooting around this to keep the audience guessing, but sure everybody knows it. Even Megan, I hope.”

“She loves him back,” said TJ. She spun her chair just a little to face him, and let go of the robe so that it slipped apart to reveal both breasts. “I mean she is very close the Dylan, but she now works side by side with John and she feels what he feels.”

“But that is acting – right?” Jason had a look of restrained distress on his face. “I mean you have to be acting because you are not even a woman the way Megan is. So how cane you explain the way I feel?”

**Chapter 13 Red Carpet**

“Good evening everybody. This is Cherry Baum reporting to you form the red carpet at tonight’s award ceremony, and straight away I see the lovely TJ Albright the star of “Crossover”. Let’s see if I can get a word with her and her escort – the show’s producer, Matt Garnham. Hi TJ! Can your fans for a moment.”

“Hello, Cherry. Sure.”

“First, we have to get this out of the way – who are you wearing? That is gorgeous!”

“It is – right. It is a new young designer, Fiona Gunn. The label is “Shott” with 2 Ts. It is a bit risqué for me. Showing off more of my bust than what I normally wear.”

“And Matt … here you are escorting one of the most beautiful stars on screen at the moment.”

“She is, isn’t she.” Matt took her by the hand and twirled her around.

“So “Crossover” has done really well and has picked up a few nominations. You must have high hopes for tonight?” asked Cherry intently.

“It is an honor just to be nominated,” said Matt. “Against such great competition. We are a small production by comparison.”

“But does the success put the pressure on for next season? What do you think TJ?”

“There is little pressure on the cast. We believe in our producers, directors and writers. If they continue to bring these scripts to us, well, that’s half the job done. I think we feel that next season will be great, just based on the sketch outlines that we have.”

“And the transition from male to female by Megan seems to have been reflected in the same process by you in real life?” This was the question that would ring out. Cherry changed her stance to field what was coming.

“For so long as “Crossover” is on the airwaves any other gender for TJ Albright has been shelved,” said TJ. “But an actor is always ready to adapt. We have a season 4, and a season 5 in negotiation. Let’s see what happens. But can I just say this – who would be a man on the red carpet if you can be a woman? Right? Now if you’ll excuse us, we have to keep moving.

“Thanks to you both … and good luck. And now we don’t have to leave “Crossover” because I see veteran actor Gerry Dunford who plays Captain Boult on the show, with his wife. Gerry! How are you? And how are you? I have just been talking to TJ Abright and her partner tonight is your producer, Matt Garnham. I think in the dress TJ is wearing all that talk about her gender must be dead and buried.

“She has come a long way. I think we all have.

“So, I have to say to you guys, that this has got to be interesting, working with an actress, who is actually an actor. I didn’t mean this to be the first question I asked, but well, TJ does look incredible. Like, so not a guy.”

“I can’t see TJ as anything other than an actress,” said Gerry.

“So the word is that the season just ended will be your last – is that right?”

“I think that my role in the show has been decling so maybe it is time to move on, that’s all. To be honest, I was feeling a little uncomfortable with where the story line was going. Not that this has anything to do with my reasons for leaving the show at the end of the season, but … just uncomfortable.

“Are you talking about the developing love triangle, or would it include your character, with possible gay overtones? “

“I don’t know what you are saying, Cherry. There is no gay character in the show. TJ is a woman. I mean Megan is a woman. Transgender does not mean gay. I may have had another view at the beginning of all of this, but I understand it now. Some people are female despite the form of their body. TJ has proved that. Sorry, Megan has proved that, as portrayed by TJ. TJ is an incredible actor. She is 100% into this role. I think that it is no secret that she lives the role 24/7. That must be hard on her. And it’s hard for the cast around her too. Maybe that is the problem? The producer has asked TJ to become female, and she has done it. I mean, total success. And the guys around her, we think of her as female. Jim and Jason and me too. It is confusing. It’s the producers call. Who am I to say whether it is right or wrong? It can be unsettling for other cast members, that is all I am saying.”

“And there is a rumor of some on-set romance?” asked Cherry

“Are you taking about me?” Gerry Dunford was getting increasingly annoyed.

“Well, both Jason and Jim have both had steamy scenes with TJ. But what is going on between you and TJ?”

“You know what acting is? Right, Cherry? You are on screen and then you are off screen. On screen Captain’s Boult has perhaps paternal feelings for Megan. Off screen is none of your business.”

“Thank you for those comments,” said Cherry Baum with Gerry’s back as a distant backdrop.

**Chapter 14: After Party**

They had been offered a room in the same hotel that the after party had been held. They had been promised a suite, and this was, but it was the bridal suite with only one very large bed. They laughed when they saw it. They were a tired and a little drunk, but still fizzing over their victory. There was one for TJ, and one for Matt.

“It is almost like a scene from the show,” he said. “Thrown together with a single bed. Wil he or won’t he? Will she or won’t she?” He had already taken off his jacket and thrown in on the sofa in the small lounge area.

“She definitely will,” he heard her say behind his back. He was ready when he turned around. He soft lips latched on to his and her arms wrapped around his body.

“Are sure about this?” He took a breath before going back in with his tongue in her mouth.

She pulled her head back. “Will you or won’t you.”

“You know the answer,” he said. He turned her to unzip her dress, and it fell to the floor. She kicked off her heels. She unbuttoned his shirt. He reached for his belt.

“I’ve wanted to do this for so long,” said TJ.

He reached around to unfasten her strapless bra which fell to the floor spilling half its contents. The other half sat resplendent of her chest, the nipples pert. His eyes went down to her panties, that were far from skimpy, still he wanted to tear them from her. But her hand dropped.

“Not that,” she said. “Not yet, anyway. I feel awful about what is hidden there. It stands between like a stinking swamp.”

“Nothing stands between us, Darling,” he said. He had never used that word to address her before, but now it seemed right. It was just the two of them, and a bed, and now his pants and boxers were down and she held his very essence in her warm hands at it stiffened.

“It love yours but I hate mine,” she said. “It scars me, and it has done ever since I realized that I was transgender.”

“When was that?” he said taking her face in his hands and setting about kissing every square inch of it.

“TJ: Looking back on it, I suppose that since I was little, I always wanted to be an actor because I was always playing a part. My life before now was just me pretending to be somebody else, while I never knew who the real me was. Then I walked off stage as Megan for the first time and I was me. I was me for the first time. Not the male TJ but the female TJ. I was myself. I was comfortable for the first time. I can’t help but wonder if I ever would have discovered had you not put me on that stage.”

“It is, without doubt, the best thing that I have ever done in my life, and I have two prizes to prove it.”

“Are you appropriating my prize too,” she teased.

“No, Darling, the best show award was one prize … the lesser one. The real prize is you.”

The End

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