Third Wife

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I had always had long hair. My mother let me grow it. She said that she had long hair when she was younger but cut it when she had children. She liked to brush it.

At high school I wore it in a long braid oiled so that it did not have too much volume. After it was washed it would gain volume and look like girl’s hair, which was not a look I wanted. It was interested in girls and so I wanted to be masculine. In fact, girls used to like to play with my hair.

I liked long hair on girls too. In particular one of the girls I liked was Hannah, who was sexy but religious. She was part of a breakaway Mormon group. There was talk of them being polygamists, but they always denied it. Polygamy is illegal, even in modern Mormonism.

I got together with Hannah when I could. We would kiss and cuddle and she always said that sex outside of marriage was never a possibility, but she said it in a way that it might be. It made her doubly exciting to be with.

We got close. About as close as I was to anybody. The truth is that I never had really close friendships with other guys. I used to say it was because they were all potential rivals in my pursuit of women, but I now understand that I was pushing them away for an entirely different reason.

It is hardly surprising that when I got into trouble, I went to Hannah first.

The trouble was not of my doing – I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I was delivering circulars as a way to make a few dollars and I walked past a house that had three big motorcycles parked outside. I knew that they would likely be ridden by members of “The Knights of Death” our local bike gang, so I should have just crossed over and looked the other way, but I didn’t.

To make it worse, I even knew the name of the guy I saw stabbing the sad victim in the chest. It was Gus Johannsen, who had a much younger brother in my class at school. As he pulled out the knife he looked towards the street and saw me. I was transfixed for a moment and then I just dropped the bag of circulars and ran.

I needed to hide. I had witnessed a crime and I knew that was a death warrant. Our local police force could not protect me – I knew that just as the whole town knew it. My parents would just be added to the list if they tried to shelter me. I could not go home.

Hannah had left school suddenly, but we still kept up our encounters. She told me that she had been betrothed to a man named Abel. Within days she would be travelling with another girl to a distant farming settlement. I arranged to meet her to ask her whether she knew anywhere I could hide out.

“You could come with us,” she said. “If only you were a girl, you could come with us.” And as those last few words left her mouth one by one, I could see her looking at me strangely. “You could come with us!”

The other girl’s name was Claire. She lived nearby and was part of the same religious group. Hannah took me around to her house while both her parents were out.

“This is Larry,” she told Claire. “But from now on he has to be Laura, and he will be going west with us the day after tomorrow. So, we have less than 48 hours to turn him into a convincing girl.”

It was simply presented to her as if I had agreed, which I had not. I imagined that Claire would disapprove for so many reasons, or at least ask why. But she just clapped her hands and looked at me with glee.

Honestly, a hopeless man dives into a pipe to escape death will slide down it wherever it leads. That was how it seemed. A slippery and confusing tumble into womanhood, driven by desperation. They set to work on me, and I let it happen.

They stripped me naked and stripped me of all body and facial hair. They washed my long hair and braided it wet with some styling product so that it would dry in waves that made it look voluminous. They plucked my eyebrows and applied mascara and light lipstick – both girls never used heavy makeup. They found undergarments that would give me shape, and put me in a dress.

They required nothing from me while they did all of this, and then they commanded that I act and speak as if I was female. That is something not easily done, but they said that I had time. They had other things to do, but I was given some exercises and I researched links on the net. I was motivated to get this right. The way I saw it, my life depended on it.

That night I spent hidden in Hannah’s room. I had a nightmare about Gus Johannsen, standing there with the bloody knife is his hand, and then chasing me as I ran. I felt his arm across my shoulders. I woke up with a start.

“Are you all right?” It was Hannahs arm, not his, and it was holding me. “You were shaking like a leaf.”

I took to the task with renewed vigor. At her suggestion I accompanied her and Claire on some last minute errands around the town. I was Lauren. I was shy and uncertain then, but most importantly I was not Larry. He had gone missing. My parents would be worried. But I could not contact them until I was safe.

That night Gus Johanssen was in my dream again, but he was not chasing me. He was trying to chat me up, but I was with Hannah and Claire, and I felt secure.

That afternoon I Hannah and I trailed suitcases around to Claire’s place where a large SUV was ready to take the three of us out of the state.

The vehicle was driven by a man called Matthew. He described himself as being Claire’s future husband, but he barely paid her much attention on the drive, and when we stopped for the night he put her in a motel room with us, while he slept in a separate room.

“I know that he is a good man,” said Claire, when I expressed my confusion. “I will be happy to be his wife. But until we are married all three of us will live together in a separate house, supported by him.”

That sounded great. I had a hideout a long way from trouble, where I would be looked after, and be in the company of people who knew my secret. Beyond that I am not sure what I expected would happen. I guess I was hoping that Gus Johanssen would end up in jail for what he had done, without thinking that my evidence was needed to put him there. One thing that I knew for sure was that I would not be doing that. I was in hiding.

We drove into a large town and we were invited to look around as this would be our new hometown. We walked around with Matthew did what he had to do. It was a regular town, with a regular name - Saltonville. It struck me that it was less religious than my own hometown, which seemed to have churches and religious hoardings everywhere. I liked the place.

But then we got back in the SUV and drove for an hour from that place. Right out in the mountains was a settlement. It was really a collection of houses and a church and hall, and some industrial looking buildings. There were four farms with homesteads right in town, with additional houses, and there were another 11 homesteads with their own farms nearby.

It turned out that this settlement operated as a community. There was some cattle but most farms produced grains in bulk, and some produced vegetables that were prepared and packed in one of the buildings. Some grains went to a chicken farm, and some went to a piggery which was also fed from the vegetable processing, a small dairy and waste from a small butchery that prepared chicken ,pork and beef. There was work for everyone, and proper pay which could be saved or spent on trips to Saltonville. But the settlement was self sufficient in food.

The church was the focal point. Sundays were important, but there were also evening prayers which were well attended. The three of us were expected to attend every evening except Saturday, when there might be a function in the church hall, or a movie put on – something suitable and uplifting.

Alcohol was forbidden, and other “stimulants” but I knew for a fact that some of the men would go into Saltonville every now and again, and drink liquor.

And women outnumbered men. It was easy to see it. This was a polygamous community. Matthew already had a wife named Rebecca. Claire was to be his second. Rebecca made welcomed Claire to the community, but not warmly.

Hannah was to be married to a man called Isaac. He came to introduce himself to her. He was old, but strong and vigorous. He had a wife called Mavis who had died, leaving him with one remaining wife called Mabel. She came with him and Hannah asked me to stay with her as we sat in our small living room.

But Mabel was nothing like Rebecca. After Isaac had announced his intentions and expectations of Hannah, in a warm way, Mabel asked him to wait outside while she spoke with Hannah, while I sat in.

“My Dear, I cannot wait for you to become a part of our home,” she said to Hannah. “Isaac still has needs that I am finding it increasingly hard to satisfy. He is a great provider and a good soul, and you will not be disappointed when bedtime comes.”

She giggled and Hannah laughed. She may have been disappointed that her husband was older than she had hoped for, but in many ways she understood that she was marrying Mabel as well, and that they would make for a happy household together.

“And what about you Laura?” Mabel turned to me. “After Matthew and Claire are married all those who are ready will have two wives, and our community is very clear that only those who can support three wives should take a third.”

“I am simply here to support my friends as they take husbands in your wonderful community. I am not ready for marriage just yet,” I told her.

“I understand,” said Mabel. “But let me tell you that marriage is a marvelous thing. People are not meant to be alone. They should be joined. Our faith believes that a marriage between one man and one woman is a powerful thing, but a wider marriage with two or even three wives adds so much more strength. You should consider it. Love will always come through prayer and faith.”

It seemed a little strange to me. Claire said that she loved Matthew, but Hannah had been with me (sort of) until recently. She did not even know Isaac, and he was nothing like me. But she had Mabel telling her that they “Hannah and Isaac) would be in love within weeks, by God’s grace. I did not really believe in God, but it seemed to me that the Creator would not be sitting in heaven creating love where none existed, whether asking prayers or not.

Or maybe Hannah did pray. I am sure Mabel did. Maybe God did sprinkle some love into our little cottage, and some of it landed on me.

I had nothing to do with that first visit by Isaac. It was for him and Hannah, and then him and Hannah and Mabel. I am not sure that he ever saw me. I saw him but just in passing. All I knew was that he would be coming around to the house to get to know Hannah, before making a formal proposal of marriage. The marriage was going to happen, but he still wanted it to be done right.

But before the second visit Hannah came down with something. It was a very nasty cough. She was concerned that it might be contagious. But Isaac was on his way round and he had talked to her about going for a drive up a nearby peak to admire the view.

“Put him off, or you can go with him,” said Hannah between coughs. And then she forced a smile and said: “Just don’t steal my man.”

In the living room Isaac was disappointed, but unprompted by me he suggested that we go out together. I had dressed to receive him, trying to look as feminine as possible, but he said that I might need more practical shoes. I actually had a pair of my boy boots, so I put those on over some socks, but still in a dress, and we went out.

We drove across the cultivated land and the higher pastures and then through a forest area.

“Are you are follower of our faith?” he asked.

“I am a friend of Hannah’s and I have come to be a friend of Clair,” I replied. “They sought my support so I am here for as long as they need me, but I am not really a member of any church.”

“That’s all right,” he said. “Faith is a personal thing. We are a small sect of a church that seeks new members, but we do not look outside for members. We seek to purify the church from within. Don’t worry. I will not try to convert you, but I will pray that God will accept your soul.”

“I don’t pray much,” I said. “But if I did I would pray that you will be a good husband to Hannah.”

“You are a good person. A loving God would take you in. I hope that a loving man will take you in. I promise you that I will love Hannah.”

We stopped where the trees stopped, and where a path through tussock led up to a small rocky peak that would have a fine view of the valley. The boots were needed. He let me go first to keep the pace, but I walked strongly. We sat down on the top.

“Tell me that it is not a God who would make something this beautiful,” he said. “And below us you see the valley that he has blessed us with, and there is Saltonville in the distance, which is a town full of good people, not all of them Christian.”

“How could he let that happen,” I asked. It was a flippant remark. A smart-ass thing to say.

“God does not make mistakes, but he sometimes leaves wrongs for us to put right. Forgive me but as we climbed up you were above me, and the wind was blowing your dress. I saw something that I should not have seen. I saw your deformity. You hide it well. You are a very beautiful woman, and a worthy woman too. It is not a curse from God. It is a challenge that you have been set, and which you are meeting with grace and fortitude.”

Isaac had seen my dick and my balls that had broken free of their restraint on the hike.

“Please don’t tell,” I said.

“Laura, all women are entitled to their secrets. But secrets can eat away at you if they are not shared.”

“Hannah and Claire know,” I said. “Only them.”

“And now me,” he said. “Let me embrace you.”

It was as if it was the most natural thing in the world for him to ask, and for me to rest in his arms. And there we lay, man and pretended woman, on the peak, with the sun falling and the beauty of our valley and the whole world in front of us. It was magical, and so was the effect on both of us.

It was dark when we got back. We stood on the porch of the small cottage we three women occupied and he kissed me on the lips before he left. We three women, because somehow I had become one.

Hannah recovered from her cough and she had her private time with Isaac, but he did not take her up to the peak – that was our place and always would be.

Isaac proposed to Hannah a few days later, and then the day after that he came and proposed to me.

“You know that is not possible. There is an obstruction to any marriage to me, and you know what it is.”

That is not an obstruction in the eyes of God,” he said. “God blesses the union between a man and a woman, and you are a woman. As for the laws of man, there is an obstruction to that my marriage to Hannah as well as you, and that obstruction is my senior wife Mabel. We do not recognize the laws of man that are contrary to our faith.”

To him the obstruction that I was talking about was anatomical only, but I was telling him that I was a man. Sure I had laid in his arms and felt his strength and smelt the man in him and loved it; sure I had walked down from the peak with my hand in his and felt that I wanted to belong to him, sure I had kissed him on the lips and wanted all the rest of his body in contact with me like that; but I was still a man.

“Be my wife,” he said. “I will wed you both on the same day and in the same place. Hannah wants children, and I know that is not possible for you. You will be my special wife. My mountain-top wife.”

It seemed impossible to refuse. There was no logic in it. It was all love.

But Isaac said it was the hand of God. He had prayed for my agreement, and God answered his prayers.

“See, he said with a grin. “God is real.” It was the beginning of my journey into the church.

But there was just one more thing to do. As he said, secrets can eat away at you if they are not shared, so I had to tell him that I could never go home because of what I had seen Gus Johanssen do.

“I will not have my wife live in fear,” was all he said. The next day he got into his truck and drove away.

Mabel, Hannah and I waited for him for four days, worried sick. But then Hannah saw his truck coming up the road to our farmhouse on the slopes below the peak. He was back safe an sound, and all three of his wives wanted to be the first to hug him.

“It is done,” he said. “By the power of man and the strength he can give to the faithful, evil has been vanquished.” And that was that. I later found out that Gus Johanssen died in a motorcycle accident. What role Isaac might have had in that I do not know and I will never ask.

How could we not all love him as we did?

And he had a few private words for me: “Forgive me but I visited your parents as well. I told them that you had left you home to become a woman and that you were now my wife, and that we would visit them soon. You father seemed shocked, but you mother seemed not surprised. She said that you had always had hair like a girl.” He stroked my hair. I adored him even more.

Did I say just one more thing to do? There was another thing, and that was done soon after. I wanted to be able to be a proper wife to him once Hannah was in the final trimester of pregnancy. That is my role more and more. That and being the one who walks with him up to our peak so that we can see laid out before us, all the gifts that God has bestowed on us.

The End

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*Author’s Note: Erin vaguely mentioned hiding among polygamists as being an interesting idea*