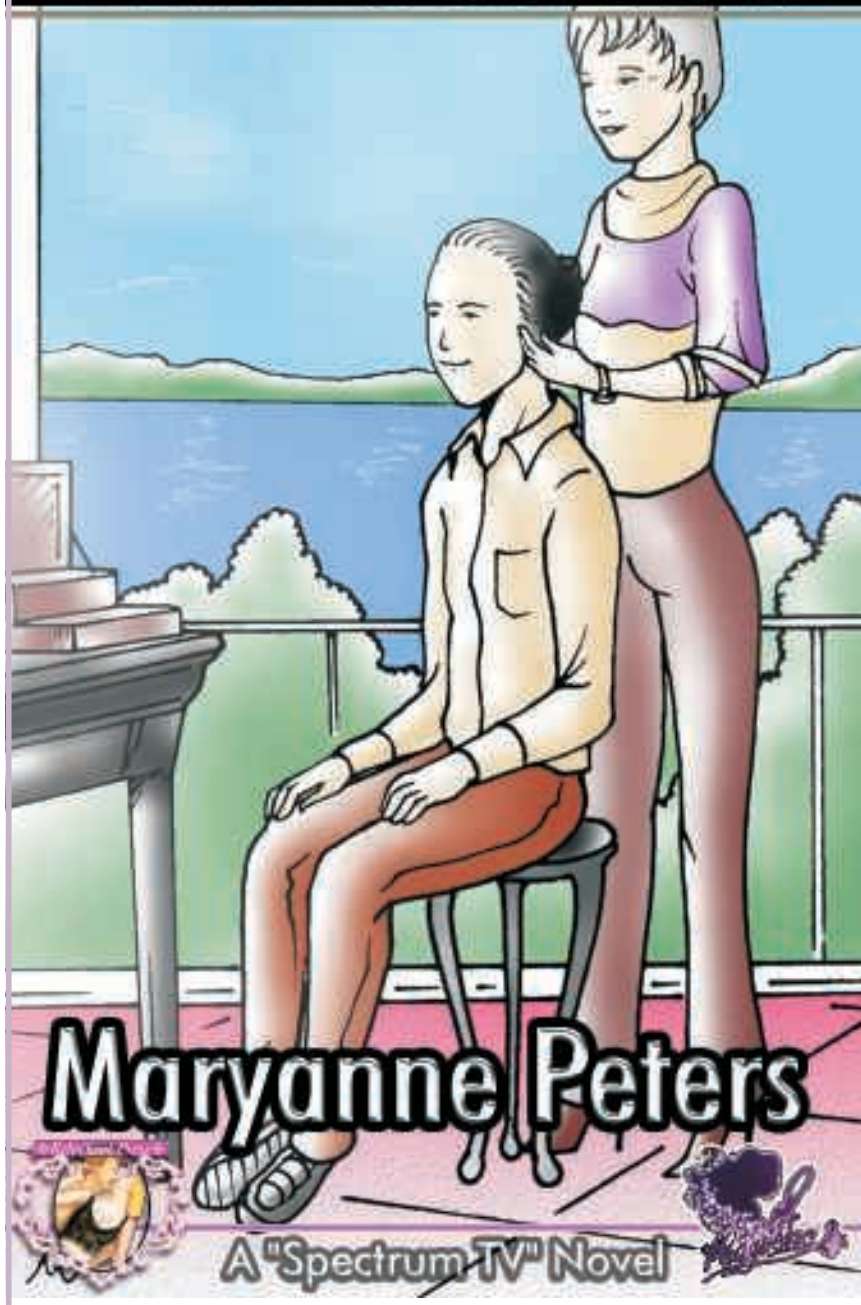


Five Stories



Maryanne Peters

A "Spectrum TV" Novel

Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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A Crime of Love

By Maryanne Peters

I used the beach house mainly in the summer. It had been in my family for generations. I think that my great grandfather built it with his own hands, or the first part of it anyway. It was a jumble of additions and renovations, in a high patch of the sand dunes, sheltered but with a view of the sea. But occasionally in the winter, I would go there just as a release.

The life of a surgeon can be very stressful. I blame it for the failure of both of my marriages. Not so much bringing my problems home to either of my husbands, so much as blinding me to their needs. I had never said to either of them that I would never have children; I just had no time.

I think that I had always wanted a daughter. I feel that I missed out on so many things that a girl should have relished but I was studying and disinterested in other people. It was not until I started work that I found out that I needed social interaction. I suppose I

re-invented myself a little. I wanted to be an interesting person at a gathering and I was reasonably successful in that regard. I wanted to be attractive to men. In that, I was less successful but as I have already said, I did marry twice.

I suppose that as I got older, I learned the value of being alone. I had to. That is why I went to the beach house that January. I could shut myself off and get my head straight.

I parked in the carport at the edge of the dunes and covered it with the tarpaulin to protect it from the salt. There was a small handcart for my provisions for a week and I headed up the boardwalk to the beach house. As I neared, I saw that a blind was open. Not up but open. I parked the handcart and approached the house with caution.

As I could see nothing, I went to the back door, the customary entrance, and opened it. The first thing I noticed was the smell. It did not smell as it should – musty and deserted. It smelled occupied. I knew somebody had been there. The bolts to the French doors were open. My shoulders slumped. There had been a break-in. It would not be the first. That is why we kept nothing of value in the house itself.

It never occurred to me from that point that he was still there. I went out to collect the cart of provisions and as I came back to the door, I bumped into him rushing out. He must have been hiding under a bed or something.

He was fairly small and slight, with straggly hair, a wispy beard, and a small sharp nose. He was wearing an old pullover that I recognized from the trunk full of old clothes and a pair of my father's shorts, far too big for him and inappropriate for the weather. And on his

feet were a pair of flip-flops. My father used to call them “zories.” I recognized them.

“Those are mine,” I said, pointing to his feet. Somehow I knew that he was more afraid than I was. He was not as tall as me but he was a man and could have knocked me over but I knew that he would not. He just looked to be in shock. No, it was fear.

“You had better come back inside,” I said. “I am happy to see the place has been warmed up for my arrival but I think that you’ve got some explaining to do.”

“I’m sorry, lady,” he said. His voice was soft. The apology seemed genuine. “I was just seeking some shelter from the cold.”

“Let’s get inside then,” I said. “You can help me with my stuff. If there has been no damage done or anything taken, I might not even call the sheriff.”

I could see that he knew that his options were limited. He looked at the handcart, then he took a box and carried it inside for me.

I made us some tea while he finished unpacking. I powered up the fridge but I would not load it until it was down to temperature. I could see him eyeing the provisions hungrily.

“How much of my food have you eaten?” I asked.

“There were some cans. Beans, fruit, sardines, old cans.”

“Past expiry, most of them. I don’t care about that. But you cannot take the clothes. Where are yours?”

I caught him glancing across at the wood burner in the corner. I turned around and I could see a small

piece of fabric caught in the door. Why would somebody burn their clothes?

“I can pay,” he said. “For the food and some clothes. Not with cash maybe, but some work around the place. There are some things that need to be done around here.” He looked very worried. Maybe he could see something in his face which prompted him to say, “Please don’t tell anyone about me.”

“You are on the run,” I said. It was not a question.

“I am in a little bit of trouble but I promise to be no trouble to you. Just keep it between us that I took shelter here. If you let me stay for just two days, I know what a man can do around here. All I ask is some warm clothing, Then I can be gone.”

“That won’t do,” I said, pointing at the short pants and bare feet.

“Your husband is clearly a big man,” he said.

“Those are my father’s,” I said. But then I added by way of protection: “But my husband is a big man too.” Neither of them was. They had both had clothing stored here in their time but I gotten rid of it.

“Is he joining you?” he asked.

“Not if you are going to do the work he was going to,” I said. It seemed as if we had a deal.

There were new planks to go on the boardwalk. The fascia needed replacing and some spouting that I had in the shed needed to be put up. It struck me that he was not a handyman, but he was willing. He worked as hard as I had hoped he would.

For working outside, I loaned him a pair of my leggings. He announced that they were a perfect fit and

practical too. I could not help but notice that his legs were shapelier than mine. Not thin and not overly muscular. Shapely.

I walked alone on the sands and I read but we ate together. I learned to like him. It struck me that he was a gentle soul. I could not imagine what kind of trouble he was in. It could not be violent, I thought. He was not strong or aggressive enough. Dishonesty? There was something about his face that hinted that would be unlikely. What then?

A storm came in and when he had finished what little work could be done outside, we played cards together. There was no TV or internet at the beach house. It was its special charm. There was a radio. The same old radio that I had listened to as a child. I did not use it often. But some music seemed in order.

“Don’t turn it on,” he said.

It was cold and the wind was blowing outside. The fire crackled. Somehow we ended up cuddling. And then we ended up in bed. We made love. It was more strange than tender. I needed sex and he gave it. He was so much younger than me but men the same age as me or older are generally inadequate. He was not a great love-maker but then neither am I. It was good. Good enough to keep him in my bed and wake up with him beside me.

“What is your name?” I asked him. It seemed incredible to think that here was a man who had been living in my house for four days and with whom I had just had unprotected sex, but I did not even know his name.

“John,” he said. He was still sleepy. I wonder if he would have lied had he been slightly more conscious.

For me anyway, there is something invigorating in the air the day after sex when it has been a long time coming. I was in the kitchen making some eggs for breakfast for two. I was entitled to feel good. I just needed to add a little music.

There was a bit and then the new bulletin crackled into clarity.

“Law enforcement is seeking the assistance of the public in finding serial sex offender John Wesley Dillon. Dillon, who escaped custody following his conviction for raping three young girls, escaped from police custody early last week. He is 26 years old, described as 5 feet 5 inches tall, slim build with long brown hair and a beard. He was last seen [click] ...”

I turned around to look at the radio. John was standing, his left hand on the nob, his right hand raised as if calling for silence.

“That is not me,” he said. He could have easily seen the disbelief in my eyes. “I mean, I am not that person. Not really. I have control issues. I am a good person. You can see that. I am not a violent person. I don’t force myself on anybody. Really. I don’t. I just have too much love in me. I love people, you see. That is my crime.”

I had a monster standing in my living room but strangely I did not feel in danger. He was telling the truth in saying that he was not violent. Rape does not need violence. As a doctor, I knew that.

The overwhelming feeling that I had was disgust. With him for certain, but also for me. This man had penetrated me. I let him. But to me now he was just pathetic. It seemed to me that he was shivering, although the room was warm enough. Maybe fear, like

the look in his eyes the first time I met him. Fear of being caught. Fear of suffering for his actions.

“You’re sick,” I said. “You need treatment.”

The psychology of deviance is not my field, but I knew enough to know that there are no effective treatments for pedophiles.

“I’ll leave,” he said. “Just give me a head start.”

“And have you go out there and destroy the lives of more little girls? I don’t think so, John.”

“What then?” It was the first thing that he had said to me that was not timid. But still I did not fear him. Instead, I was thinking. I was thinking what the future might hold for this small, timid man, in a prison full of violent offenders. I was thinking about his pathetic plea: “Love is my crime.” It was nonsense of course, but I think he believed it. He was a loving person. I had felt that love. Even now it was inside me, or something of it. Maybe some of what had made him this. His genetic material in my vagina. I needed to shower.

But I was thinking of the victims too. Like me, they would not have a childhood. My father had robbed me of that not by assault, but by his ambition for me.

Little girls. Victims. I had an idea.

“If you want treatment, then maybe I can offer you that,” I said. “If you don’t want that, then you can leave now. But you must know that you will be caught.”

He stood in silence, for quite a while, and then he simply said, “I’ll die in prison.”

“I don’t doubt it,” I said. I could feel it, like holding a dying bird in your hand.

“What do you propose?”

“Well, you can stay with me. But you are far too young to be my boyfriend. You are young enough to be my daughter.”

He looked puzzled, but slowly his face cleared. “Are you suggesting that I disguise myself as a woman?”

“Not just a disguise – a therapy. Girls don’t rape girls.”

“What would be involved?” The fact that he said that meant he was at least considering my plan.

“I will need to go back to the city. To the hospital. I will need things. You will need to come with me but stay hidden. It is only a matter of time before they search summer houses on the coast. I am talking about covering for you. Being a party to your crimes so that I can help you. Keep you alive. Keep you out of prison. Do you want my help or not? Because there are no choices here. It’s my way or there’s the door and take your chances.”

“I promise that I will do anything you ask,” he said. And he kept that promise.

I hid him under a blanket on the back seat of my car. I called into the local Sheriff’s office and offered him my keys. I said to the attending officer, “I heard about the child rapist on the news. I would be grateful if you could do a search of my property.”

“We are going from South to North,” he said. “We can be at your cottage tomorrow and certainly out of it by the day after.”

That meant hiding him for two nights. It would be difficult. My block had cameras everywhere. Then I had an idea. I could admit him to the hospital as a patient. He would need to be disguised with bandages. And it would be the first part of my modification of his nature and his behavior. That could start as soon as I prepared an appropriate skin peel compound.

Cosmetic skin peels are, in fact, chemical burns. As a physician, I do not approve of them but as a woman, an aging woman, I confess that I have been subjected to this treatment on two occasions. The formula for the acid compound is basic chemistry and the ingredients are available from any substantial drug store, certainly in a hospital pharmacy.

Of course, it is not comfortable. John whimpered a little. I gave him pain relief. With that, he never noticed the injection into his testicles. His days of child molestation would be over, or at least substantially compromised.

Treatment for chemical burns is soothing creams and cover. If the face is affected, it is usually well covered. I brought John in myself, as a transfer, under an assumed name. It was just for two nights. He just had to lie in a bed for 48 hours. Nurses would look at his charts but his status would be for observation only. I would be putting in two shifts at the hospital over that time to check on him.

But for some reason, I was constantly being contacted by nursing staff over problems with that burn victim I brought in. "He is requesting more pain relief".

In a quiet moment, I got close enough to whisper: "I'm tiring of this. John. You are not here to get high."

I gave him a substantial injection. Miraculously, it calmed him immediately. Miraculous because it was nothing more than a massive dose of female hormones. I shot a slow-release capsule into his thigh as well. Endocrinology is not my specialty but I knew enough to know the maximum the body can stand without liver damage.

I checked him in. I checked him out. Back into the car and under the blanket. Back to the beach house.

When the bandage came off, he asked what had happened to his beard.

“Gone,” I told him. “Gone for good. Your face will be smooth and without those skin blemishes you had. Face peeling is painful but effective. You should view it as a fresh start.”

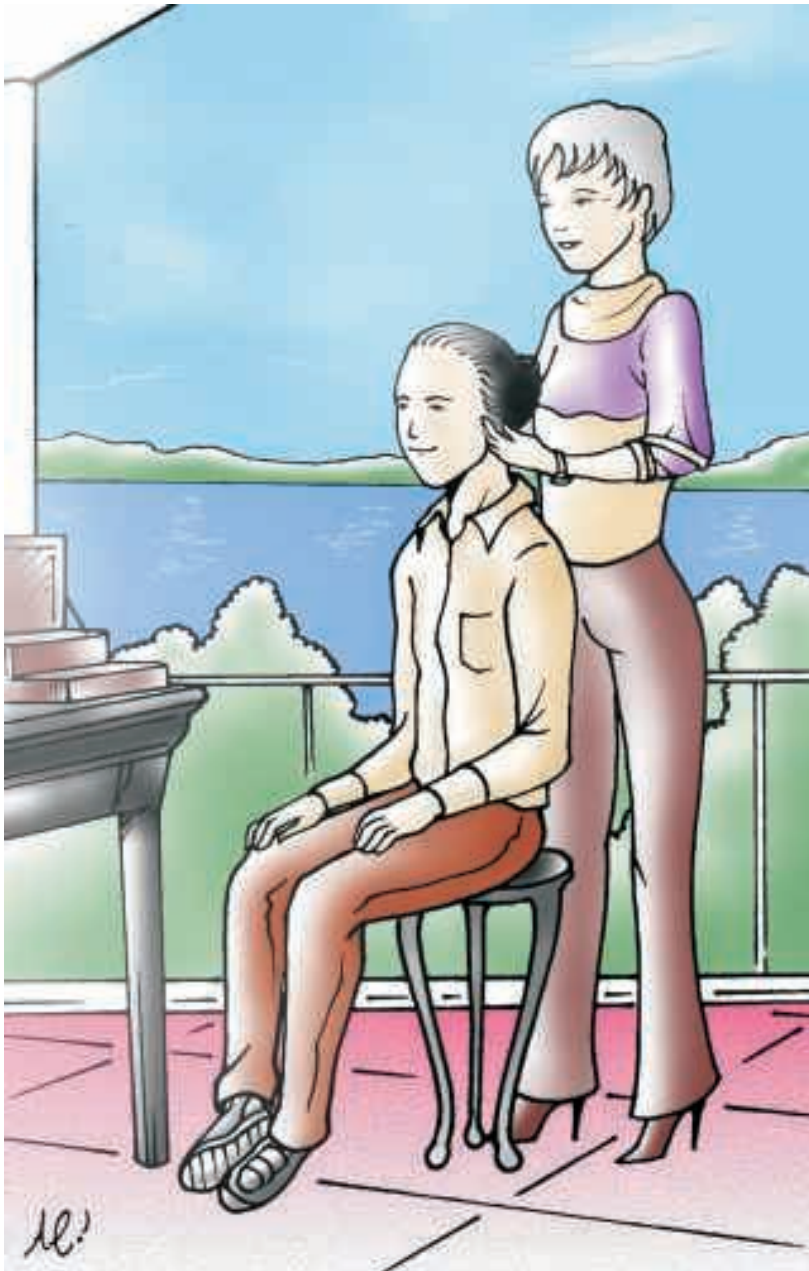
He looked a little horrified. But it was as I said. He was no longer a he but a she. She was my daughter and I decided to call her Clarissa.

“We can’t stay here,” she said.

“Just until you learn the way a young lady should behave and then we will head back to the city,” I said. “I have a spare room in my apartment and potentially I could get you work at the hospital.”

I could see her thinking. She really was the simple timid person I had first met in this very place. She was thinking about how she could survive. About what kind of future she might have. Would she wear this feminine disguise for the rest of her life? When could she step out of it? Would I let her?

“Let’s get you dressed,” I said. I had a sudden thought that I had never played with dolls as a child. Not the kind you dress up anyway. I had two plastic



dolls without clothes that I operated on. My father bought me a 'Junior Doctor' set when I was seven years old and he added to it a real scalpel. I cut into a lot of things. Sadly, I ruined all my dolls. Now after all these years, I had something to dress up.

Clarissa was the same size as me. That made things easy but perhaps slightly unsatisfactory from a fashion perspective. Fashion is not my thing but I know enough to understand that younger women would not wear what I wear. I would need to spend some money on something a little more in style for my new daughter.

I am not particularly good with hair and makeup either but she got the hang of it quite quickly. Rather than use my sparse makeup supplies, I bought her a cheap kit with lots of colors. She just looked at it in disbelief.

It was posture that seemed difficult for her. Perhaps I was not a good example of that myself. I decided that she only needed to appear not masculine. Because I had always been a woman, I found it hard to know how to do that but I knew what did not look right and I told her. Initially, my constant criticism annoyed her but after a while, it became a game between us. She began to adjust.

Within a few weeks, I felt that she was competent enough to pass, even if she appeared a tomboy, an unsophisticated one at that. If I was to reveal her, then I would need to come up with an explanation as to how my daughter could be like this. It was a worry. I told her that we would need to go back to the beach.

Still, this time when we got into the car, she rode with me in the passenger seat, her freshly washed hair tied back in a high ponytail with a ribbon, and a little mascara and lipstick on her face.

She held her head up. It occurred to me that I had never seen her do that. Up until that point I had only ever seen her hiding. Now she was confident in her disguise to the extent that she was able to see the world from an upright position. My earlier worries were fading.

We went into the local town where I was known; my family had owned the beach house for generations. They never knew that I had a daughter but I explained that Clarissa had been living with her father, one of my ex-husbands.

"You must remember her playing at the beach when she was little," I said to one of the older residents who asked about her. The woman looked confused, doubting her memory, but it was of no significance. Clarissa was accepted. I suppose that she looked ordinary. I regard myself as looking stylish and fairly attractive, and Clarissa was a little better than plain. It suited that she be unremarkable.

We went to a boutique or two and bought some clothes for her. She seemed to enjoy herself.

After that we had sex at the beach house, with limited success. A woman should not have sex with her daughter but I saw it as a last gift to the person that she had been because I knew that endocrinology would soon end all of that. There were signs even then. He was barely capable. The hormones had done their work. Sex would never be as a man after that night.

My mother had a bunch of old women's magazines at the beach. They were so old I wondered if they might even be valuable. They had advice on clothing, hair, and makeup, but of a bygone era. I told Clarissa that they were compulsory reading. She must have read them. I found her in front of the mirror

back-combing her hair once following some style instruction in the beauty section. Another time she was making hair ornaments out of seashells, straight out the craft pages that you never see in more modern magazines.

She started playing with the makeup kit and proudly showing me the looks that she had reproduced from the magazines. Those magazines were old and the quality of the cosmetics poor, but it was a good start.

On our next trip into town, she went to some effort to look pretty. She had decided that unremarkable was not a look she was happy with. When she walked to the car, I told her that the look she had for the day was inappropriate – just short of slutty – but I had no time for her to change.

If I said that on her first trip to town she was confident, now her attitude was something else. She was truculent. She wanted some independence from me. She was darting into shops ahead of me without telling me. If I suggested something might look nice on her, she called it old-fashioned or downright awful. I was not about to chase her around – that would be demeaning. Nor was I going to give my daughter a dressing-down in public. That would be awkward.

I told her that I would meet her at the “Fish Shack” restaurant for lunch at 12:30 and she was on her own. I was now free to visit the stores that were more to my taste. I never dreamed that Clarissa would do anything but stay as my daughter and companion. She was beholden to me; she was dependent on me. Maybe she even loved me, in some fashion.

She did appear for lunch, but not until 1:00pm. I was just starting to get concerned. I was relieved

when she appeared, but then a little shocked. She had a young man with her.

She introduced him as Shayne – I found out the spelling of the name later. He seemed intense. He barely spoke. He spent most of the time watching Clarissa as she babbled on. He called her Clara and it seemed that this was the name she preferred for herself. She thought Clarissa was too old-fashioned.

If she intended to agitate me, it worked. It was a performance for Shayne, full of the silly stories that she fabricated in a seemingly endless diatribe interspersed with giggle and tosses of her hair to have the poor boy panting with lust.

When it was obvious that he was not leaving, I offered to buy him lunch but made it clear that we would be going home straight afterward.

I tried to talk to the young man but I admit that I am not good with strangers at first meeting. I learned almost nothing about him other than that he was somehow involved in commercial fishing.

Clarissa made a point of not introducing me as her mother; I suppose that the boy must have thought that I was an aunt or somebody with less control over her conduct than a parent. He put his arm around her a few times and with her movements she made it clear to him that she enjoyed the contact.

I suppose that it was jealousy of a sort but to me Clarissa was no longer a lover - I had put an end to that with the hormone treatment. I think that it was that we had an exclusive relationship of a kind and this was about proving to me that it was not necessarily exclusive.