

Love's Double Agent

[This is another example of my hating to leave a good character in “writer’s limbo.” I wrote this because I felt the first story had another short tale to tell about Marnie and set her up for later on, for I’ve decided to make her a principle character in one of my mystery novels, *A Case of Identity!* She and Cilla (my mystery series detective) will become good friends over the course of the story. – T. H. Pine]

∞ **I** ∞

Sitting in Dr. Khan’s office, Marnie wondered why she even made the appointment. She had done it on a whim, a whim sparked by a conversation she had with her husband, Garth. *Her husband, Garth.* What a wonderful juxtaposition of words! Marnie thought back to that fateful day when she had met him in that bookstore. That meeting had totally changed the course of her life and definitely for the better. She laid the unread magazine in her lap and allowed her thoughts to time travel back to her courtship with Garth

∞ **2** ∞

During the year before they wed, Garth took her on a journey of self-discovery. Little by little, he had brought her out of the carefully constructed shell she had built, into a world of intimacy she had only imagined.

By the time six months had passed, and because they were on a course to marriage, Marnie allowed Garth the liberty of undressing her and seeing her naked. She had wanted him to do it for months, for him to see *all* of her—to be unabashedly naked with Garth—emotionally and physically.

One night when they were together at his apartment, she nervously broached the subject.

“Garth, when I was recovering from my accident, I used nakedness as my therapy.”

His brows knit into a questioning look. “What do you mean, exactly?”

“Well, I always thought I had skinny legs and got embarrassed when people saw them. After I lost them, I decided I’d never allow myself to feel embarrassment again. I insisted on being naked in my hospital bed, shocked the psychologist I had sessions with by pulling off my gown in her office. When people asked me about it, I’d tell them it was because I wanted to.”

“So you used your nakedness to overcome your shyness over what you perceived as your skinny legs.”

“Exactly.”

Garth smiled. “Why did you bring it up tonight?”

“Because I want you to undress me. I want to be naked before you.”

His smile faded. “And you’re not worried it will lead to something else?”

“No, I understand your desire to wait until we marry to make love and I trust you not to go too far.”

“I’m flattered you trust me so much.”

“Will you do it?”

“Yes, but without any foreplay. I don’t want either of our libidos humming.”

“I see the wisdom in that. Can you do it now?”

Garth swallowed hard and nodded.

∞ **Q** ∞

Garth undressed her slowly and deliberately, first removing her prostheses. Marnie found that in itself exciting, something she had never allowed another person to do. He removed her shorts, then her blouse. Soon, her bra followed, along with her panties. She lay totally bare under his loving gaze.

“You have a beautiful body,” Garth breathed.

Marnie’s skin prickled with goose bumps and her passion rose. Though Garth tried to keep it clinical, she felt she would explode—like a balloon under a pin—if he touched her anywhere. But, Garth being Garth, he never went beyond that liberty, loving her with his gaze alone.

“I love you so much Garth,” was all she could think to say.

“And I love you, Marnie. You are exquisite; so very, *very* beautiful, in every way.”

His words music in her ears, Marnie felt as if she could go on stage, legless and totally bare, to calmly discuss living without her natural legs. What the world thought no longer concerned her; she had given her love to the most wonderful man in the world and, most amazing of all, he loved her equally!

∞@∞

Sharing her nakedness with Garth that night made Marnie bold in other areas. Garth ran as part of his daily exercise regimen, so Marnie had herself fitted with a pair of specially designed legs, made specifically for running, and asked to run with him. It took some practice to develop the skill necessary to run. Running, even walking, for a biped, proved an exercise in “controlled falling.” Amputees found it harder because they didn’t have the sense of touch and pressure in their extremities, save for stump sensitivity. But advances in technology provided some “feedback,” and made it easier to develop proficiency in walking and running.

Soon Marnie had mastered running and she reveled in the stares of passersby, as she flew along on her “magic legs,” a name derived from the joy of running with them. That she wore a tank top and runners’ shorts, revealing her handicap, made it even more delicious.

After Marnie’s “unveiling,” in every sense of the word, she often went unclothed at Garth’s place, though he chose to remain clothed. Since she liked to go without her prostheses, she had practiced and mastered “hand-walking.” It allowed her to get around at home and at Garth’s place easily and quickly. Garth loved watching her do it, delighted at her ability to balance on her arms and hands.

“It’s really not as difficult as you would think,” Marnie explained, as she plopped back on the sofa. “Without the weight of legs, I can easily support my torso, and the balance point is easier to maintain without legs to throw me off balance.” Garth then got up from the sofa, executed a perfect handstand, and did six pushups. “Oh, thanks; humiliate the handicapped chick.”

“Sorry. I was pretty good at gymnastics in school. Then, I got too big and clumsy. I’m afraid six pushups are about all I can manage these days.”

Marnie fell forward onto her hands into the handstand position. She tried a pushup, but couldn’t make it back up and fell on her side.

“Are you okay, honey?” Garth asked. He knew better than to try to help her.

Marnie rolled over onto her stomach, executed a fold at the waist into an *el* position, and got back onto her hands. She went back to the couch and dropped herself next to Garth. “I guess I need to work on that.”

“Handstands take a lot of arm strength,” Garth encouraged. “Just work at it, say by leaning against a wall and, before long, you’ll be able to knock off a few.”

On future visits, Marnie would have Garth practice with her. With the addition of practice at home, Marnie soon could do three reps and eventually got up to six.

∞@∞

Three months after he undressed her, Marnie asked if she could undress Garth. He worried about having an erection, but Marnie assured him it would be all right—that she fully understood the reason. So, without any coyness, Garth allowed it.

She started with his shirt, followed by his shoes and socks. She then unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned his trousers and let them fall to his ankles, so he could step out of them. She could see the bulge in his briefs and gingerly worked them off, releasing him.

Seeing him naked for the first time, Marnie remembered her comment when they first met. She had brazenly told him about wondering if he proved to be as beautiful naked. Faced with his male beauty—*beauty* being the operative word—Marnie had not been disappointed. Garth had a cleanly muscled build—not “ripped” like a body-builder’s, but more a swimmer’s physique—all smooth angles and planes. Because of his leanness, she could see his muscles working under his skin, hinting at power and grace. Even his urgent manhood looked beautiful to her—a tribute to the love and respect that had brought them so close.

“You’re every bit as beautiful as you say *I* am,” Marnie breathed.

“Beautiful, not handsome?”

“Handsome doesn’t do you justice; you’re nothing short of beautiful.”

“Please don’t say that to my male friends; I’d never live it down.”

“I won’t. Your beauty will be our secret.”

“So, now that I’m naked, what next?”

“I join you.”

“Do you think that’s a good idea?”

Marnie nodded as she began to disrobe. “As long as we agree to just be naked together, we should get used to it. I mean, what do nudists do?”

“I have no idea.”

Marnie removed her clothes and stood before Garth wearing only her prostheses. “Do I look strange to you like this?”

“No, you look gorgeous.”

“You’re biased, I think.”

“Definitely.”

By the time their night together ended, they had both grown used to being naked together and it felt like the most normal thing in the world. From then on, Marnie looked forward to spending time with Garth, sans clothes—their own private retreat from the world. Yet, even then, Garth never crossed the line, reserving full-blown sex for their wedding night.

∞ 3 ∞

One year from that Valentine’s Day, when Marnie had brazenly showed Garth her stumps, revealing her most intimate fears—and he had come through with flying colors—they had been married. She stood with him before the minister, in her white wedding gown, just like in one of her novels. It pleased her no end that most of the people in the church had no idea that, under the long, flowing gown, the bride stood on lightweight, titanium-alloy legs. After the reception, they went to their hotel room and, when the time finally came for them to consummate their union, Marnie suffered from “first night jitters.”

∞@∞

They began with the usual kissing and caressing, igniting Marnie's passion and dispelling her nervousness. They undressed each other, panting with desire by the time they both stood naked. This time, with nothing to hinder them, Garth carried her to the shower and sat on a stool in the tub with Marnie in his lap; that tender act the second time Marnie allowed anyone to do anything for her. He washed every square inch of her body, slowly and lovingly, including her hair. Then, he allowed Marnie to do the same for him. By the time they were done, Marnie's libido-engine revved near its redline.

After drying them both off, Garth took her to the bed. Marnie quivered with anticipation, every nerve ending sensitive to his slightest touch. As he had done so many times before, Garth kissed the ends of Marnie's stumps. She moaned at the familiar touch and thought of how kinky it would seem to others, for her to be aroused in this way, but she didn't care what others thought.

Marnie did nothing to take the initiative. On this special night, she wanted Garth to *take* her, *own* her, *make* her body do his bidding, until she exploded from the pressure of her passion at his owning every square inch of her quivering flesh. She sighed, moaned, and writhed under his touch, like a goddess adored by the worshipful ministrations of a loyal devotee. On this night, Marnie's romantic fantasies would find fulfillment. Garth rose to the occasion in every sense of the word, making her fantasies real, her world reduced to the scope of her body's sensations. She vibrated like a well-tuned instrument; every sensation amplified, enhanced, tuned to its highest pitch and wondered how much more she could bear before she found release.

"Take me, Garth!" she gasped, like one of the characters in her romance novels. As corny as the words might have looked on the printed page, they expressed the desire of her heart at that moment. She wanted him to take her, take the virginity she had hoarded until this night, something she had never imagined she would be able to give after her accident. She offered it to him, a token of her devotion.

Garth obeyed her command, and *took her*. After the split-second of pain from her torn maidenhead, Marnie's pent-up heat exploded in galvanic bliss. She cried out from the intensity of it. How unimaginably wonderful it felt! As she writhed under his tender ministrations, she felt his release. Marnie threw her arms around him, squeezing the breath out of him, feeling him fill her, wanting to surround him completely with her body ... with her love. When their passion subsided, they lay back, sweaty and fulfilled.

"Oh Garth, it was just like I hoped it would be!"

"I'm happy that it was."

"It was; it was! I love you so much, darling!"

"And I, you."

Marnie rolled onto her side and laid her hand on Garth's chest, listening to the rapid beating of his strong heart. "I almost can't believe you came into my life. I convinced myself I'd never find my one true love, that no one could *truly* love a woman with no legs."

"Well, believe it. I love *all* of you there is to love. I don't even notice what's supposed to be missing."

Marnie responded by pushing herself up and kissing Garth with all the love and gratitude she held in her heart. She wriggled on top of him and stretched her abbreviated length along his.

"I want to fall asleep with you as my bed."

"Then sleep, my princess, with your head on my shoulder."

And Marnie did just that, sinking into a deep, fulfilled slumber.

“The doctor will see you now,” the receptionist said, interrupting Marnie’s erotic memories. She blushed at thinking such wanton thoughts in the doctor’s waiting room, wondering if her expression betrayed her lust to the other waiting patients.

Marnie levered herself into a standing position—she wore a skirt and her cosmetic, “walking legs—and followed the receptionist. Marnie noted that the woman wore the abbreviated head covering of a Muslim sect. Dr. Khan, seated at his desk, rose as she entered. Marnie liked his courtliness.

“Good morning Mrs. Kalisher,” he said, extending his hand. “I must admit, though I read your file, I’m having difficulty remembering you.”

“It’s been nearly twelve years, doctor,” Marnie replied, shaking his hand. Then she sat in the chair in front of the desk and raised both her legs. “Perhaps this will help? I was the seventeen-year-old double-amputee you worked on nearly twelve years ago; the result of a car wreck.” Marnie saw recognition enter the doctor’s eyes.

“Ah, yes,” he said. “Now I remember, but ... why are you here, after all these years? Is there a problem?” A look of concern spread over his kind face.

“I ... now that I’m here, it seems silly, but I wanted to thank you.”

“Thank me? Why?”

“For doing such a good job on my legs.”

“I don’t understand.”

“My husband often says that the surgeon, *you*, must have been a Michelangelo for doing such fine work.”

Dr. Khan raised his eyebrows. “He does, does he? Tell him I appreciate the compliment, though, I must say, I don’t hear it often, especially in a case like yours. You seem to have accepted your, your lot in life with equanimity. I noted you walked in here unaided in any way and moved fluidly. I commend you for the hard work you must have done to achieve such a level of proficiency with your prostheses.”

“Thank you, but, with these prostheses, it’s easy. I’m glad it happened to me during our time; to have such technology available to me. I even have a pair for running.”

“Would it be okay for me to ... uh, see the results of my work?”

“Certainly,” Marnie answered.

“We could go to my examining room—”

“Not necessary.”

Marnie proceeded to take off her prostheses and stump socks. Dr. Khan walked around the desk and squatted in front of Marnie. He reached out reflexively—as if touch could be the only definitive way to verify what he saw—and traced the fine, almost invisible line of the scar on her stump end. Then, he gently squeezed the end, looking up at Marnie.

“Is there any pain?”

“Not at all, yet they’re extremely sensitive to touch, thanks to you.”

“The muscle tone is remarkable, and there’s no deformation, or redness.”

“I get a little redness when I run, but that’s to be expected.”

The doctor stood, his eyebrows rising at her mention of running. “You run?”

“Oh, yes. I had a pair of runner’s legs made for that purpose. I can really move on them and my husband can barely keep up at times.”

“Ah, you’ve married. Again, I commend you on your successful life after your ... uh, setback.”

“You can say it, doctor Khan. I experienced a double amputation of my legs. Yes, it threw me for a loop at first, but I made up my mind I wouldn’t allow it to cripple me altogether.”

“Again, I commend your positive attitude. You may put your prostheses on now.” He walked around the desk. “I wonder if you would you do me another favor?”

“Certainly, name it.”

“I’d like you to demonstrate the range of use of your prostheses. Would that be all right?”

Without answering, Marnie finished “putting her legs on” and stood. Then, she walked around the office, first slowly, then faster, then jogging in place. She finished up with some jumping jacks and toe-touches.

“Remarkable! Your proficiency with your replacement limbs is amazing.”

“Believe me, it’s the result of a great deal of hard work.”

“You say you run as well?”

“Yes, they’ve made a great deal of progress with sports legs. There are even built-in shock absorbers in some designs. The ones I prefer look a lot like big springs, and give me a lot of bounce when I run. I can really move along with them. They might look funny, like something out of science fiction, but they work like a charm. Of course, if I want to look more stylish, I can wear other, more conventional legs. I can’t run as fast though.”

“Incredible. I had no idea.”

“Excuse me? You must come across this all the time in your line of medicine.”

Dr. Kahn smiled. “I happened to be on shift the night you arrived. I’m just a trauma surgeon, not a specialist in amputations. Fortunately, I had just read up on the subject, so I was able to do what I did for you. I’m happy that it worked out so well.”

Marnie stared in shock. “You mean ... you’re not ... I can’t believe how things worked out that night.”

“Mrs. Kalisher, I’m just a humble surgeon, and a Muslim. Because my sect is a strict one, I’ve been essentially exiled because I operate on women, as well as men.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You see, I’m not supposed to touch, or even *see* a woman’s body, shall we say, uncovered. Personally, I think the proscription is backward and foolish. What sense does it make to deny a skill to half of a doctor’s potential patients? Had I followed my faith to the letter, I would have gone far in my home country, but I choose to use my talent for the benefit of all. It limited what I could do at home, so I came here. I have come to terms with my choice. Because my skill is, and may Allah forgive my pride, above average; you benefited from that choice. That I worked in that hospital when you were brought in, and was the one to perform your surgery, was in Allah’s hands. We have a saying, ‘Mā šā’ Allāh,’ God has willed it. You seem to have been beneficiary of his will that night.”

Marnie looked at Dr. Kahn with new appreciation. “Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Because of you, my life is what it is today.”

“You’re welcome. I’m just happy that my talent has made a difference. Thanks again for coming to see me. It has meant a lot.”

“It was the least I could do, Dr. Kahn.”

“Please, call me Salim.”

Marnie stood and shook Salim’s extended hand. “Thank you, Salim. I’ll remember you in *my* prayers.”

Salim nodded, with a small smile on his face, bowed, and made a twirling gesture from his forehead to the floor. “As will I.”

Marnie turned and left.

∞@∞

When she entered her car, Marnie went to fasten the seatbelt. She paused, and looked down at the slight swell of her abdomen. At four months, her condition still didn't show much. She placed her hands on her belly, closed her eyes, and instinctively moved her hands in opposing circles.

"Grow, little one. Grow strong and healthy," she recited, not for the first time. "Mommy and Daddy love you very much and can't wait for you to arrive." Marnie then clicked her seatbelt into place and started the car to drive home.

She drove home with a smile on her face, completely forgetting that night, long ago, when the click of another seatbelt presaged the course of her life.

∞ 5 ∞

A week later, Doctor Salim Kahn entered his office and noticed a special delivery postal box laying on his desk. He opened it and found a book inside—a novel, written by Marnie Loveless, the well-known romance novelist—its title, *Under Allah's Eyes*. Dr. Kahn opened the book to a bookmarked page. The top of the page contained Marnie's florid autograph, with a date. In the center of the page, he found a printed dedication.

Dedicated to Dr. Salim Kahn, whose skill and compassion has made a difference.

Dr. Kahn sat back in his chair and smiled. Then, for the first time in his life, he turned the page and began to read a romance novel.