Sunset Beach

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

From a personal perspective, the conference was a disaster. They had listened to her but from the podium she could see that wave of realization start to take hold in the audience. Although she could not hear, she could see the lips and guess what they were saying. “That’s a guy.”

‘Why can’t they just watch the presentation and listen to my logical exposition of these very important points? That is what this conference is all about. It is not the who is talking but the what are they saying that matters’. These were just thoughts passing through her head and causing her to stumble on her words.

She could see their eyes too. They look at the face. They might think – ‘she is pretty good looking’. Then the breasts – “Yeah, they look real. Implants?’ Then their eyes go down to her crotch – “What’s she got going down there?’

The afterwards the transphobes don’t approach. Sometimes she wished that they would so she could raise her voice and say something about the rights of transgendered people. But no, the people come up with compliments that sting more than attacks. Things like: “You present very well. When you started I had no idea you were trans.”

Then over drinks at the evening function: “I think that you make a very attractive woman. Do you mind me asking, have you had the … the operation down there?”

Everytime she wanted to scream in their face – “Fuck off, you weirdo. I don’t ask what you have ‘down there’ so why ask me?” But transwomen don’t do that. “I don’t discuss such matters.” That is the reply that is recommended by counsellors.

Counsellors. “Brace yourself for a rocky ride!” She remembered those words. You soot along at home, you bump along at work, but the street is a river bed full of boulders. At least you can raise your gaze and walk on. The podium traps you. All eyes are on you.

The thing is that as Chuck he was so good at this. As Cherise he was just the same in that he knew the same stuff and he could talk about it fluently. But Chuck was not a curiosity. Cherise was.

Did she really want to live like this? She had to face a cold fact – that she was not very good at being a woman.

She thought that she had the voice licked. Over the phone to a stranger the response would always come back – “Yes Lady” or better still “Yes Miss”. It was her own hair, and it was just as good as many women. Her skin was good enough, although even with all that electrolysis and hormones every now and again an ugly black hair popped up out of nowhere.

She felt that she needed a good amount of makeup to soften the hard edges of her face. She needed to choose clothes that hid her shoulders. She needed heels to make her legs and butt look good, even if they took her height above the average guy.

She worked on gestures. She knew that was a weakness. She needed to consider where she was putting her hand. She was told that the right bag will keep your hands where they below, but watch your elbows!

Why was she even bothering if half the audience knew that it was all a lie; and act; pretense. Perhaps she was kidding herself and they all knew.

She thought that now was the time to back out. The surgery had been scheduled. The surgery “down there” was only a couple of weeks away. After that, how could she back out? After that if she tried she would be in that nether world – neither one thing nor the other.

“Gender fluidity”? My ass! Men (including transmen), women (including transwomen) and freaks … anatomically speaking, of course. There are all types of personalities but when it comes to genitals there are basically two types.

She wondered just how easy it would be to go back. She sat on the plane in her blue suit with the tight skirt and wondered how long it would take to get hair back on her legs. Living by the beach meant that would be the marker. Cover up the legs, get a hair cut and have the implants cut out and thrown in the trash.

By the time she got to the cab she had more or less decided that was what she wanted to do.

“Where to Miss?” Just as suddenly she had doubts. She liked being called Miss. It made her reply in the voice she always did when that question was asked.

But it was not real. This man was deluded … no, deceived. She was a deceiver – dishonest.

As she stepped into her apartment, she decided that she needed a drink. Was there any in the house? She could go down up to the bar on the rocks. “Sunset Beach” - overlooking the sea. It had been a while.

He looked at herself in the mirror. The makeup had help up well. She had acquired some special skills in this, as so women complimented her. But it had to go. She had to be real. Enough of these lies. She reached for the cream.

It was warm. She had pants somewhere. She would go as the person she was in clothes that did not speak of her gender. She was going back. It was over. I had been fun … had it been? Anyway, it was over.

The bra came off. Did she have a loose shirt? There was a time when her closet had nothing but men’s clothes, and now it had nothing but women’s clothes. She found something that would do. It was loose. It was actually a dress, but she could tuck it in her pants if she could find some. What about shoes? Nothing. Flip flops would do.

She just decided that the drink was needed more than the pants.

It was not far to walk. She strode it. That is the way she wanted to. But somehow her gait slipped into the one she had become used to, as she entered the bar.

“What will you have, Miss?”

If the barman had not used that word she probably would not have replied in the voice she did.

“I will have a beer.” It was her female voice, but the change was that it would not be wine. The voice could come later. “Maybe that one, the American pale ale.”

She took the bottle and ignored the proffered glass. She would drink it like the man she was and the barkeep could disregard the dress and the high tone of voice.

“Are you headed for a swim?” It was not the barman. There was only one other person in the bar that early in the afternoon. He was closer that she realized. He was tall. A good-looking man. Better looking than he was, and she might be again. She had known good-looking men – in every sense. Surely this was not a chat up line? Was he blind? A man would choose a low growl and say: “Fuck off, Loser!”. She just look at him as if puzzled, which she was.

“It is just that your hair is dry put you have removed the makeup you seemed to have been wearing. I thought that you might be considering going for a swim?”

“This is how I look,” she said. That voice persisted. Where was the low growl? “This is the real me. And I am drinking a real beer.” She raised the bottle as if to prove something.

“A natural beer, if you look at the label. A natural woman drinking a natural beer.”

“Is it?” She looked at the bottle. “Oh yes, naturally brewed it says. Whatever that is. Right here, locally, it says.” And her had called her “a natural woman”. He needed to know what a fool he was.

“Yes. Just around the corner. In my brewery,” he said.

His eyes seemed to sparkle in a way that seemed beyond nature. She took another swig to settle herself.

“It’s nice,” she said. “I like it. Complex, in the way that wine is complex. I am over wine. This could be my drink.”

Somehow, they were closer. Had he moved to her, or she to him. It was time for the truth.

“Thank you for the comment about being a natural woman, but nothing could be further from the truth. I am transgender. Not natural at all. And not even complete. Surgery scheduled in a couple of weeks.”

There. It was said. The ultimate turn-off. And he will not have to ask: “Have you had the operation down there?”

“Interesting,” he said. “Honestly, you must be so confident in your beauty to step into a bar without makeup. You have every reason to be. You are beautiful. I never would have guessed that you are not a born woman. Even now I doubt it.”

“These are all words a transwoman loves to hear,” she said. But that was not what she was. Not anymore.

“I am trying to reach women as a market for my beer,” he said. “You have changed to beer … my beer. I wonder if you would consider helping me with my marketing program? You look like just what I want – strong, intelligent, decisive”.

“You don’t want a transwoman promoting your product? You want a woman.” She had to smile.

His eyes sparkled again. He smiled back. He said: “Well, you just said, in a couple of weeks that is what you will be. I suppose I could wait until then, but I would rather that we get started immediately.”

Something happened. She did not quite understand it. He did. He had fallen in love with a woman before. For her this was a first.

And then, as if fate were driving all things, there was a text on her phone.

“Excuse me for a minute.” It was from the clinic. Confirmation of surgery. Some instructions about when to arrive and what to bring. Press 1 to confirm. She looked up.

“I do want to start immediately,” he said. “Somehow, I feel that I have known you before, but I need to know you all over again. Would you let me take you to dinner tonight.

She smiled. She said – “I would love to have dinner with you. By the way, my name is Cherise.” She proffered her hand. It was not as she had recently. Not like handing a man a wet fish. But not a man’s grip either. Something new. Something natural and honest.

She pressed 1.

The End

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*Erin’s seed: A transwoman decides that this is not what she wants to do after all because she just doesn’t think she's very good at being a woman. She perfectly intends to go back to being a man. She goes down to her favorite beach [bar] and just automatically, she goes as a woman then is annoyed about having forgotten about what she wanted to do and of course she meets a guy and falls in love …*