Married Quarters

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I am slightly embarrassed that I did not pick her sooner, having worked with transwomen before. I am not even sure what tipped me off, but it must have been enough for me to give me confidence to say: “You’re trans aren’t you?” She looked as if I had pulled her whole world down around her.

I reassured her by saying: “I am not going to tell anybody if that is the way you want it, but I just want you to know that there is great support for the transgender community right here on campus.”

“I am not part of the transgender community,” she said. “Are you bound to keep it secret if I tell you my situation?”

“I am a teacher, not a practising psychologist or psychotherapist, and you are my student, not a patient” I explained. “But yes, I consider myself bound by the APA *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*.”

And so, she told me her story:

Her name was Ashley which is one of those names that may be used by either sex, and that had clearly worked for her. She attended high school as a young man and secured a modest academic scholarship to attend our university, but she had missed out on accommodation. The truth is that we are a small university town and if you cannot get into a fraternity house or a hall of residence, other options are very limited and often expensive. She was desperate for somewhere to live.

Her brother suggested that he had a solution. Her brother knew somebody attending our university who had secured “married quarters” for the new term, being engaged to be married to another student over the break. The problem for that man was that his prospective bride had called everything off on the eve of the wedding. This man was left ineligible for married quarters without a wife. Ashley’s brother suggested that Ashley might be that person.

I am not sure whether they believed that the university simply accepts the name on the occupation agreement without scrutiny, but it quickly became apparent to Ashley and “her husband” that she would need to take residence and attend classes as a woman.

A lesser person may have walked away, but Ashley was not like that. She was determined to complete her studies, and that meant making drastic changes to her lifestyle.

She told me that she had the added advantage of not really knowing anybody at our college who knew her as a young man in high school. Even her husband barely knew her, but he had the same interest in ensuring that she presented as a convincing woman.

As I say, I had no idea, so that you give you some idea of just how well she was able to achieve her masquerade. She explained that she was not transgender but that she realized that the only way she could succeed was to make the effort to feel that she was. By that she meant that she had to feel as if she really was a woman tragically trapped in a male body.

She enrolled in my “Introduction to Psychology” course to get some assistance in that. But it is on the list of courses for the pre-med degree that she was pursuing.

She presented an interesting case of a normal heterosexual man driven to pretend to be a transwoman. It aroused my curiosity from a clinical perspective, but that is not why I invited her into my rooms for a chat. No, I had read a piece that she had written which exposed a real talent in the “young woman” and I wanted to meet her one to one.

I had double reason to take an ongoing interest in her unusual circumstances.

The man who was her “husband” was Hadley Stapleton, and he came from very different background. His family had money, but the married quarters were still the best option after leaving his fraternity house. He had been a student at our establishment for two years, but he found things harder that she did. It was not that he was much less intelligent – he just lacked application, and the frat life did not help him. He thought that it had all changed when he found the woman he wanted to marry. The frat life was behind him now. But then she walked out.

Without proper consultation I cannot really comment on his mental state, but clearly being jilted at the altar had shaken his confidence, and Ashley felt that she needed to help him past that. There was a problem in that some of his old pals had met his prior fiancée, so explaining his new wife Ashley, would be a problem. For that reason, and to promote his study habits, he distanced himself from his old fraternity associates.

That left him and Ashley pretty much on their own. It was an unusual situation. They lived together, they studied hard, and when they went out, they were pretending to be a couple.

When Ashley first explained these circumstances to me, Hadley had the bed in their apartment and she was sleeping on the couch, but as the fall semester wore on, she told me that things had changed. Apparently, there was an evening inspection which meant that the couch bed arrangement had to be concealed, and the couple held hands to prove the relationship. It was cold that night, and they were tired. As she explained it, they simply fell into bed together and slept. But somehow in the morning things were different.

As a psychologist I find it hard to explain what was going on here, but my best guess is that Hadley found himself attracted to Ashley, he being such a convincing woman, and Ashley’s response was really driven by her highly empathetic, and somewhat impressionable, personality.

Ashley was simply a nice person, and still is. While “niceness” is hardly a term used in psychology, I think that it was the largest factor that brought about the unusual events that followed. Hadley needed a woman and Ashley could fill the role if he could accept her, and she was too nice to say no.

Some of the deliberate self-delusion that I have already referred to may have assisted. I said that to assist in appearing female she had started to consider herself as a transwoman. That now became so real to her that, without consulting me, she attended a clinic and obtained hormones. Apparently, she easily convinced the expert that she was a genuine case.

When she told me, I was less than happy. This was false pretences. And besides, to be properly therapeutic, psychoanalysis requires honesty.

“But I want to be more of a woman for Hadley,” she said. Nobody could doubt her sincerity.

“Are you having sex?” Again, I point out that I am not a practising psychologist, but as a college professor I take my pastoral obligations towards my students seriously. It was a relevant question.

“Yes,” she said, looking somewhat ashamed of herself. “I submit to him. It’s actually not so bad. And it gives him so much pleasure.”

Here was a person who was so devoted to the happiness of others that she could not say no. It was hard not to smile.

“So, you acknowledge that you are gay?” Even we psychologists never use the word ‘homosexual’ these days. But it was meant as a challenge. I was not even sure that she was homosexual.

“Am I?” she said. “Is Hadley gay? I guess I am. I am not just accepting him. I want him.” I could see her sitting there wrestling with her emotions. From a purely professional viewpoint that is more than interesting, but sometimes we tend to look at such things too clinically. This was a real person who was confronted by a real situation, and an odd one.

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| “How does Hadley feel about you?” I asked her. “You clearly have feelings for him. These feelings should not be considered unnatural. But he have the same feelings for you? Do you think that you are being taken advantage of?”  “He likes being married,” she said.  “But he is not married,” I pointed out, perhaps a little coldly.  “He treats me as his wife,” she said. “I sort of like that. Some people find that to be fulfilling in itself.”  “Some women, you mean?”  “Yes,” she said.  I am a woman, and a college professor. Sometimes I find the very idea of a housewife appalling. But she seemed happy. Who am I to judge?  The End | © Maryanne Peters 2019 |