Outed

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Ned’s big mouth is sometimes useful, and sometimes cringeworthy.

For instance, it was he who was able to talk the conductor into shifting us up the train to one of those special cabins when the soccer team in our carriage started to get rowdy. We had chosen the train over a flight because it was city center to city center and we needed cellphone coverage throughout, but it would get us there late, so the contract signing would need to be short.

Then he would open his mouth when it was just not a good idea.

There was a lady in the cabin, sitting near the window. She was about 40 would be my guess, very well presented – classy you might say. She wore a dress that was short enough to show off a great pair of legs. She had styled hair and she was attractive, but with what I would call, heavy features.

I thanked her for allowing us to share the cabin. It was not clear whether she had consented to us being there, but was the polite thing to say.

She said something – I forget what – but it was a deepish voice I suppose.

“If you don’t mind me saying, I am guessing that you might not have always been what you are now?”

Oh no! Ned had to open his big mouth.

She looked at him as if he was a cockroach that had appeared on the floor of her five-star hotel room. I thought she might just turn away and look out the window, but she just gave a slight shrug. She said – “Well aren’t you observant. Yes, before I was a supermodel, I was an accountant.”

I burst out laughing, partly a nervous release from the tension I felt, and partly at my friend, caught out by his words.

“I didn’t mean any offence.” It seemed that Ned was incapable of stopping. “I mean, I find you a very attractive lady, but I am guessing that … you have not always been one?”

“You’re wrong,” she said. “I have always been a woman, but just not in the physical sense until a few years ago.”

“Right,” said Ned. “Like I say. You really are very attractive. I can’t imagine you as a man.”

“Neither can I,” she said. “Like I said, I have never really been one.”

“I am sorry,” said Ned. “If you are uncomfortable discussing your special circumstance then I understand and apologize.” This gave me a moment of relief. We could talk about something else?

Why would she want to talk to this man – this interloper? I fully expected her to decline.

“I am not uncomfortable,” she said. “I am very comfortable with who I am. Maybe you are in discomfort? Are you comfortable with who you are?”

“I haven’t made any changes,” said Ned. “You have. It must have taken some determination I suppose. Even courage, to step into unknown territory.”

“Perhaps,” she said, taking a little time to consider. “I knew that I would love being a woman, but I knew there would be problems too. But let me tell you this, it was every good thing I thought it would be and much, much more. And all the problems, well, they’re just not mine. They’re somebody else’s.”

I was still not sure why she was wasting her time talking to Ned. She was clearly intelligent and self-assured. She did not need to talk to him. But she was looking at him as if she was doing him a favor. I could not quite understand what was going on. But I had decided that I was not taking part. I pulled some papers from my bag and pretended to immerse myself in them.

“I don’t have a problem with it,” said Ned. “I am happy to have more women in the world.”

“I know what that means,” she said. “Are assuming that I am not a lesbian, who might compete with you for the attention of women. As it happens, I am not, but I know men better than most, for reasons you will understand.”

“You don’t strike me as a lesbian,” said Ned. “But you are clearly not a passive person.”

“I am a good lover as a woman,” she said. “I have never had any complaints, and more than a few compliments. Can you believe that?”

“Yes,” said Ned, suddenly in awe of this woman, and a little taken aback.

“It is because I understand men,” she said. “Men think with their cock, so when you hold it, and suck on it, you have his mind and will held in your hand. Men are easy to control and to please. Women are much harder to deal with, but perhaps you have never thought about that?”

“Umm.” At last Ned was at a loss for words.

“Give me your phone, and let me give you my name and number,” she said to Ned. “Perhaps you should try it. Perhaps you should experience a woman who has experience from both sides of the bed, although that is not to say a bed would need to be involved.”

Ned looked at me and I nodded. I was suggesting that he do the polite thing. He handed over his phone add she went to work on it with her long, painted nails.

“Can I say it, you remind me of myself a few years ago,” she said. “You have a big mouth, but then so do I, as you have probably worked out. And you are trying to make fun of me, or at least make me feel uncomfortable. I recall that I did just the same thing when I was living as a man. I think that sometimes people make fun of other to drive out the very same thoughts in their own head.”

Ned looked dumbfounded. What was left of the smile drained from his face for just a moment, then he visibly adopted a grin that didn’t seem real.

“It’s been good to talk to you, but we have some papers to go through,” he said, reaching a hand out to me. I put some papers in his hand with which he could appear interested. “Please excuse me.” He said.

We didn’t speak with her again for the rest of the journey and we only spoke with one another sparingly, in connection with the changes to the document that had already been agreed on, but as the train pulled into the station where we would all leave the train, Ned had a few more words for the lady we had shared the journey with.

“I have your number, Sweetheart,” said Ned, as we left the carriage. “Who knows – I might even call.”

Which is where this story might end, but it doesn’t.

We signed the deal, and it was Ned who drew the short straw and had to head back down to that city to work through all the details. It took him out of the office for several weeks, and we only stayed in touch by email, including lots of short messages at the beginning, because even if he is not talking, he likes to chat.

I have to say that I wondered whether he ever did get in touch with that transwoman we had met on the train. I never got her name – he did. I wondered whether curiosity might get the better of him and whether he might be tempted to “experience a woman who has experience from both sides of the bed”. He might, but somehow I doubted whether she would. For all her talk she did not strike me as the person who would have sex for no reason, which left me wondering why she had given Ned her number at all.

And then the next thing I had heard was that Ned had resigned. Apparently he had been offered a job with the company we were doing business with, and our employer (now only mine) was happy to see him move on.

All I got was a brief message – “Look me up if you are ever down here again. I like the place. It’s a good town to start over in.”

I was not sure what that meant, but I shelved it. He did not return any of my calls but he responded with texts in a friendly way. I guess we were only colleagues and he owed me nothing more, but I took the hint and made no further effort to stay in touch.

In fact it was a year before I had a reason to head down, but it was short notice and a quick visit. I took a flight and an overnight bag.

I texted Ned and asked whether he was interested in catching up. If he had said no I would have been okay with it, but he sounded keen in his reply and he sent me the name of a bar and a time to meet.

I was just a little late, and it was after the work crowd had moved on so the bar was not busy. The most visible customer was the lady in the tight red dress and shortish blonde curls sitting at the bar. I looked around, and not seeing Ned I approached the bar and sent off a quick text.

In front of me a pink cellphone on the bar beeped, and a hand with long painted nails swiped to see the message – from me.

“Ned?” I said.

The lady in red turned to me. She was pretty and she was Ned.

“I suppose I owe you an explanation,” she said, because she was a she.

I was momentarily short on words, but then I was not the talker he had been. I stammered – “Only if you want to explain …”.

“You will remember the lady we met on the train? Well, she asked me to look her up and I did. It was not for a sexual experience. It was something she said – you might remember it – something about people making light of transwomen only to drive out the very same thoughts in their own head. It sort of resonated with me. I can’t really explain it, other than to say that I am transgender, and I guess I always have been. You laugh about it and say it is somebody else’s problem, and then you meet a transwoman for the first time and she sees right through you. It is like people recognizing their own. She had me pinned within minutes of meeting me. She knew what I was and she reached out o me and offered me a chance to do something about it.”

I knew the eyes of the man that I had worked with, and those were the eyes that I was looking at, but now so very different. Painted and lashed, and wide and wet, and so clearly female.

“So I made that call when I had only been down a day or two,” she continued. “She was expecting it, and she knew that it was to seek her advice on my inner feelings. She suggested that I make a clean break. New city, new gender. She offered to help me. That company we met, they offered me the job but said that they could not pay a big city salary. I told them that I would take it as a woman, and they agreed. It doesn’t say much for pay equity.”

There was that mischievous smile that I knew. It was like she was all the good things about Ned without that conceited bluster that made him less than popular. Somehow those things now in such a beautiful package made her unbelievably attractive to me.

“So I have go through the whole thing – all the way,” she said. “I had surgery a few weeks ago. I am still healing, but I am just so relieved to at last be unburdened of all male stuff. I am free to be me. She was right you know. Remember? Every good thing and much, much more.”

“You’re gorgeous,” I said. It just spilled off my lips. I am sure I have never said it to another woman.

“Are you staying over?” she asked.

I did.

The End

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