Ambiguous

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

My name is Tracy. It was before and it is now. When I was young I never really thought of it as being an ambiguous name – like, for either a boy or a girl. Maybe it was just because we had no female Tracys at middle school. I mean, you think of Tracy McGrady and maybe Tracy Morgan, or the guy I was named after – Tracy Lawrence – some country singer that my Dad still loves to listen to. Then in high school somebody said – “Tracy is a girl’s name”. Suddenly the world seemed full of women called Tracy.

People started saying to me – “I’m sorry, I thought you might be a girl” – shit like that. Mom said it did not help that I wore my hair long and that I was not a particularly big guy. I got a bit sick of the whole thing and seriously thought about telling everybody that I preferred to be called Tom, but then I decided that I was just going to live with it. It was about being confident in myself.

I am not sure why I ticked the “not stating” box under “sex” on the college form. I was applying with a couple of other guys, and I suppose that I was just fooling around. The guys said that because of my name I could be either – let them guess. My contact number was on the form. They could have sought clarification at any time.

It was just that positions for on campus accommodation were becoming scarce. Before I knew it, I was assigned to the girl's dorm. I knew it the moment that I walked up. Who wouldn’t – there were girls milling around, and me. I should have turned around then and there, but I strolled through the dorm and lounge areas. It was way better that the male dorms I had seen – clean, comfortable and with more facilities. The contrast was like the difference between a hotel and a vandal-proofed prison.

The truth was that I was serious about college whereas I was not so sure that the guys I was with felt the same. They were not my close friends but it seemed that they fully expected me to be a part of the heavy social program they had in mind, largely based on consuming large amounts of beer. I never ever like beer – I still don’t.

I wondered if I could take up the room that was assigned to me. After all I had ticked the box. A had been assigned the room. The sign said “all male visitors must be out by 10:00pm” but I was not a visitor. But it was pretty clear that I was not female, or at least that was what I thought.

I was standing in the room when a couple of girls stepped in. They introduced themselves as Dotty and Lena – my neighbors.

“Tracy huh? Maybe that explains it. It is a girl’s name I guess,” said Dotty.

I could argue, but I decided not to. The room was great. And neither Dotty nor Lena seemed to mind that I was a guy. In fact, they helped me move in and I helped them with some heavy stuff, and even in that first couple of hours it seemed like we were destined to become friends.

I made all sorts of jokes about being a fox in the henhouse, or the sultan in the harem, but they just laughed. It was like they did not see me as a sexual threat, which was nice in a way, but also a little hard on the male ego. Why wasn’t I a threat? The truth is that I was a bit of a virgin. I had been with girls, but I could not be called experienced. I probably considered myself clumsy and inadequate, so I was not active that way.

But whether they realized that or not, they wanted to include me. They talked about me “giving a man’s perspective” on personal relationships or even on courses being studied. It was like they had decided that I might be useful and worth keeping around. They did suggest that it might be easier all around if I adopted “gender nonspecific clothing” around the dorm, just because it was supposed to be women only. It so happened that both Dotty and Lena were the same size as me and they could help me with some items.

I also decided to dip out of the welcome ceremony and go through some of my textbooks. It seemed to me that I had lucked out in securing my own great room in a much quieter dorm than my male pals had to put up with. I could just get on with my study and catch up with the guys when that suited me.

After the welcome ceremony Dotty and Lena were gushing about all the fun they had, and telling me that I should be able to do “some girl stuff”, but that might mean dressing as a girl.

Of course, I said – “No way!” I said it more than once, but after a while my resistance faded. You have to understand that we were close and getting closer. We were always in and out of one another’s rooms. There were always feminine garments, makeup and hair styling stuff around. I even had some of their clothes hanging in my closet, because I did not have much more than a jacket and a raincoat – both “gender nonspecific”. Beyond that I had jeans and T-shirts and a few sweaters – come to think of it, it was all pretty “gender non specific”.

I would go to classes as a guy, but somewhere on my way back to the dorm I would turn into something else – maybe something neutral. Then when either Dotty or Lena came into my room, I was one of three girls.

I remember the first time we went out as three girls I was not wearing much different from what I normally would. I was wearing jeans and trainers and a check shirt. It was just that they were not mine. I was just wearing a padded bra under the shirt, and some of Dotty’s “shaping panties” under Lena’s tight jeans, and the effect was 100% female, even without the work that they did above the neck.

But it was there that my gal pals really went to work. They just washed and styled my hair and applied makeup and just brushed my eyebrows – maybe just one or two hairs between them removed that first time.

“But it is how you carry yourself that will make sure that you appear female,” said Lena. She showed me how, and she was right. We went out to a bar and had guys hitting on us and buying drinks. It was a wonderful night, and not because of the attention and the free booze. No, I was among friends, and it made me realize that as a guy I had been a loner, and that was not who I wanted to be.

I have to say that I was looking forward to our next girl’s night out. And then the one after that.

Somewhere along the line I lost touch with the guys I had come to college with. The truth is that I was doing arts and they were doing commerce, and that would probably do it over a year, but also they were noticing that I was changing, even though I didn’t.

“Hey Trace, are you plucking your eyebrows? And what’s with the hair? You look kind of gay, Man.”

I was doing my best to stay gender fluid I suppose – to have the ability to be both male or female as I liked, but slowly and perhaps without me even knowing it, I was drifting into the other camp.

I did not want people to think of me as gay. I did not feel gay. I lived in a woman’s dorm among women, and I felt like one of them. I did not think of myself as attracted to men. I preferred the company of women, but it was for companionship, not sex. We liked to go out together with me as a woman, starting to experiment with hairstyles and makeup and dresses – all of us – not just me. It did not seem weird.

And we studied together too. We used to laugh at boys in our class who never seemed to be as smart as us because they were distracted by things as most freshmen are. We were clever and studious, but also pretty and desirable.

Like I said, I was not attracted to men, but that is not to say that they were not attracted to me.

I cannot recall when the hormone therapy started. Dotty and Lena were both on the pill, and I think that the suggestion was that I should go on it too, “to keep our cycles in sync”. It was a joke, but it got me thinking that maybe I short visit the student medical center and discuss my general health.

The attending (female) doctor assumed that I was female until she asked me to remove my blouse and (empty) bra.

“Are you on hormones?” she asked. “Birth control pills are not for you. I think that you need patches or suppositories, or maybe both. They are more targeted and less damaging to the liver. Let me write you up a scrip.” I never even said that I was transgender. Mind you, I did not deny it either, and perhaps if I wasn’t I would have.

Somehow it just seemed right for me. It made me feel that I belonged where I was. The effects took a while to become visible, but the mental effect seemed to have been immediate. In many ways that drift across was already complete.

So, when Paul came into my life, that seemed like no big deal. He was studying astrophysics. He called me “Goldilocks” not just because of my blond hair but because in astronomy Goldilocks means just right.

“Dotty is too chunky and Lena is too scrawny, but Tracy, you are just right,” he said. I said that I was too flat chested and that I did not have a booty, but that was changing.

“Dotty is too chirpy and Lena is too high and mighty, but Tracy, you are just right,” he said. It is true that I was more cautious than Dotty, but more needy than Lena. I wanted to have somebody think of me as perfect – is that wrong.

I worried about what my parents would say when they saw how much I had changed, but for Paul I wanted to be as feminine as possible. I wanted to be beautiful so that when I clung to his arm people would think that he was a lucky guy. That is what I wanted.

Stupidly sex never entered my head. If it had I would probably never have got involved with him. Because once he was involved, he would want to undress me, and then everything would turn to shit.

It was going to happen, as sure as night was going to follow day. I just kept putting it off.

I even considered running away, and just leaving him a note, but I loved college life and my studies were going really well, and I had the two best friends in the world, and Paul … who said that I was just right.

I decided that I would need to tell him. I thought about doing it in a public place, for my own protection, but that would be wrong. I needed to truth that he was the person he was, and that I was in no danger. In some ways I would have been happy to take a pounding because I knew that the true agony would come from him walking away, which seemed certain.

But it was not like I had a choice. He needed to know, and I needed to face reality. Once he was out of my life I could make my own decision as to whether Tracy was a man or a woman. It seemed that as a person without Paul, I was ambiguous – I could be either one or the other. With Paul I could only be what he wanted me to be.

I had asked Paul to come by my room, and I asked Dotty and Lena to be in their rooms to back me when needed – to be there when I collapsed in tears.

I sat him down and explained that I was devastated to disappoint him, but that his Goldilocks was not the perfect anything, except perhaps the epitome of lies and deceit. I just sobbed it out, keeping a distance from him. I said that I was a boy, not a girl at all.

“You are transgender?” he said. He sounded surprised but not disgusted. I suppose that surprised me too.

The funny this was that nobody had ever asked me that question. I didn’t even know the answer.

“I want to be a woman. I would like nothing more than to be your woman, but…”. It was true.

“It is a condition,” he said, like the scientist he was. “You are a woman with a physical problem that can be corrected with surgery. It means that some doors will be closed to us, but it is our task to work with what we have. Have you heard of Fermi’s Paradox? In astronomy the presence of planets in the Goldilocks zone suitable for life has been proven, but in an infinitely large universe why have we yet to see life? It is too much to ask that true perfection is common. It may not even exist anywhere, but you Tracy, are as close to it as I want.”

Dotty and Lena heard my cries and came running, but they were cries of joy. Unambiguous cries of joy.

The End

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Erin’s Seed: “A guy with an ambiguous name gets at college and gets assigned to a girl’s dorm. He doesn’t complain and neither do the girls. He enjoys their company without being really sexual about it though he calls them his harem in joking, and they like having him there to get insight into how guys think. It is all going well until they decide he needs a boyfriend.