Cherry on Ice

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Not every gay man falls for somebody like Chesney, but I did.  I suppose because I was brought up in a household where I needed to deny my true self, I was always masculine, where Justin was the opposite of that.  His family were understanding.  He was always prone to tears.  I think that they knew he was gay very early, and they encouraged him to express himself.  It is hard to imagine anybody more overtly gay than Chesney.

I was never ashamed to walk down the street with him.  He marked us as a gay couple I am happy with that.  I am proud to be gay – now.  Some guys may have sniggered, but I would pull him close.  He was a beautiful man.  He was proud and effeminate.  There is nothing wrong with that.  At least not in our country.

I got into ice skating because I am from Minnesota.  Ice is our thing back home.  I played ice hockey and I was interested in speed skating.  I only got into figure skating because my sister needed my support.  I started doing some pairs and ice dancing, and I was good.  My sister teased that it must be because I was gay.  She knew before anybody else.

I found another partner, a girl who was lighter so that I could do more throws using my strength.  We did very well, and we climbed up to nationals.  We never got to the top, but we were good.

I also did some solo stuff.  I always scored very well on the technical side but not so well on the presentation or “artistic” side.  That was the way things were scored up to and including the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City when the corrupt judging scandal there forced a change.

Those Olympics are also important to me because that was the pinnacle of my skating career and because I crashed out during the men’s short program in spectacular fashion.  If you had been there you would have remembered.  People have told me that they could hear my ankle break to pieces.

I got back on skates, but I never competed again.  I went into coaching.  I suppose that people sought me out because of my technical skill.  One of those people was Chesney’s manager at the time.  He said that he had a bright young man who had raw talent but needed structure and to work on nailing his jumps and landings.

Chesney was from California, not known for ice.  But the 2012 US Figure Skating Championships were scheduled to take place in that state, and Chesney wanted to qualify.  His family had money and were, as I have said, very supportive of their son, and prepared to hire me.

That was how I met Chesney.  I guess I fell in love with him at first sight.  I remember thinking what a pretty boy he was.  No “gay-dar” was needed.  He was clearly that.  His parents did not realize I was gay until much later.

I have to say that I tried to keep it professional at the start, but in coaching you need to be literally “hands on” at times and the truth is that I could hardly keep my hands off him.  He knew what I was and he said that we could work through it.

We kept our kissing and cuddling quiet while we went about our work.  The priority was to qualify.  But when we did that we consummated our relationship with such wonderful sex I knew that Chesney was the only man for me.

Chesney came to the attention of the Olympic selectors at those champs in San Jose in January 2012.  They were looking to build a strong team for the next winter games to be held in Sochi, Russia, in February 2014.  Chesney wanted to be in it.  I was ready to put in two years as his coach to make it happen.

People may remember that about this time Vladimir Putin started a concerted attack on homosexuals in Russia.  He made it clear that anybody coming to the Olympics would be subject to Russian law.  The rest is history.  Many gay female athletes thumbed their nose at this, but Putin was not concerned about them.  But President Barack Obama made an example of our very own Brian Boitano.  Brain was ready to carry the flag for gay athletes at the Olympics, although some said that he should have boycotted.

When it came down to it, for Chesney it was less about principles than it was about fear.  As the battle between the presidents of world powers hotted up into a battle about queer rights, Chesney backed out.  It was a blow for both of us.  But by then we were a couple and we had one another.

The US Team did well with a gold medal in the ice dancing and a bronze for the teams events.  Some promoters in Russia were impressed enough to propose for an exhibition tour of Russia by a team of “US All Stars” the following year, January and February 2015.

Chesney was down-hearted as a result of the whole Sochi thing.  He felt ashamed that he had not gone and he withdrew a little.  When he received the invitation from the Russian promoters it did not help matters.

“If they took one look at me they would throw me into jail,” he said.  “They only look at my results and reviews.  And look, they cannot even get my name right.  The invitation is says: ‘Cherry’, not ‘Chesney’!”

He says that it was my idea but that is not the way I remember it.  He says that he always wanted to perform in Russia.  Ice skating of any kind is big over there.  Exhibition performances draw huge crowds, and tours pick up a share of the gate, but it was the crowd that Chesney wanted.  In particular a crowd that could appreciate his skills and style, the way he doubted many American crowds could.

Whoever came up with the idea it was I who ran it past the people bringing the team together.  What if Chesney accepted the invitation but performed as a woman?  Because if that did not happen there was no way he was going to Russia as a gay man.

Brian Boitano is a gay man, but he got away with it because of who he is, and with the presidential send-off he got when going to represent his country, he was in no danger.  This was a private thing.  If my Chesney got locked up in some town in the Urals, he would never survive the experience.

“This is not a competition, so Chesney can pretend to be a girl if he wants,” one of the organizers said to me.  “But the big risk is being found out.  If he cannot pass as female it could be big trouble.”

Chesney said that he had done a little drag, and been a Halloween princess more than once, but I said to him that if he was serious about doing this, he would need to pass himself off as a woman among strangers.  So I arranged a meeting with a group that would be underwriting the tour from the US end, and I would take Chesney along as one of the performers.

I have never done drag.  It is just not my thing.  But I am gay, so I know plenty who do it all the time.  Chesney and I had help with that, but it does not always translate to passing.  For that we needed to be introduced to a transwoman.

I know that this is an awkward subject among many within the gay community, but I have always been a bit uncomfortable around transpeople.  Sure, I had a boyfriend who was girly, but before all this happened, I have always thought that he could not be anything but a man.  The thought of taking a beautiful male body and adding breasts and curves is bad enough, but then taking that most wonderful part of him, cutting it away and throwing it is the trash was to me anyway, offensive.

There, I have said it.  But if we were going to do this we needed help, and Stella could give that.

“You are not big, and you have a pretty face.”  Stella some minutes after the introduction examining and assessing Chesney.  “The voice is high but not feminine, and some of these gestures are not the way a woman would present herself,” she said.  “We have to tone it down.”

To be honest, Chesney looked excited.  He had in his head that he could make this work and it would mean that everything he wanted to come to pass.  He would be going overseas and performing there.  He would be showing his stuff to a discerning audience surrounded by others with skills he admired.  And I would be going with him as his coach and partner.

He did not even have a passport, but as Stella pointed out, that was a good thing.  The passport would need to look like Cherry, not Chesney.  That would be the name on the playbill too.  Cherry.

Stella whisked him away to carry out that first transformation, and then display the new Cherry before me an hour or so later.  I confess that I was doubtful.  I wanted what Chesney wanted, but if he was a hopeless failure as Cherry, I would hold him close and promise him that we would find even better things to do, in the years that came ahead.

So I was smiling and supportive when they re-entered.  But that smile did not last.  What I saw shocked me to the core.  Beside Stella stood a woman.  The dress was understated but feminine.  It was short and the legs were waxed smooth, and not the legs of a man at all.  Rather than put a wig on his head Stella had styled his hair, which he wore quite long and pulled back, into a curly hairdo with some color highlights.  The makeup was not caked on by looked almost as if there were none – that this feminine beauty was not art, but reality.

“Well, what do you think?”  The voice had been rehearsed too.  It was not as good as it would become, but it was not his voice, which many had said was girlish for a man.  It sounded natural when looking at the person.  The kind of voice she would speak with.  She.I was shocked.  It seemed for a moment that they had taken the man I loved and put in his place this outrageously pretty, simpering young woman.  I do not dislike women, and I can certainly appreciate female beauty, and that is what I was looking at, but where was Chesney?

“Cherry?”  I addressed her as if she as a stranger, which she was.  Quite why I said that I cannot explain.She smiled.  It was the kind of smile that might send a room of men into rapturous applause.  Heterosexual men, that is.“I think we can do this,” she said, in that same little girl voice.

It was not as if I had any say in what followed.  I was never in a position to say stop.  That would be to destroy those dreams, and my love would not allow that.  I had to go along.  I had to work on the team and the programs of performances, the schedules, and the training.  And all the while Cherry was growing, and Chesney was slowly disappearing.I cannot describe just how difficult this was for me.

Perhaps people who are not gay cannot understand, but if you are a man, try to think of the woman you love slowly growing a huge black beard.  It was in a way, revolting, but underneath I could still see what I had fallen in love with.  My only hope was that it would end, as if you might look forward to the day that beard falls out.Everybody in the team knew about who Cherry really was.  Everybody was very supportive.  Nobody could ever countenance the behavior of the Russian authorities toward gay men.  The female members of the team were particularly supportive and took Cherry in as one of their own.  Increasingly she became one of them – they knew it, and I did too.

This was an exhibition tour.  That meant solo performances, and teams and pairs.  Cherry agreed to do a pair routine with one of the other girls – it would be mainly synchronized like the team performances.  But in most ice-skating pairs implies a male and a female, and Patrick stepped forward to suggest that he do a performance with Cherry.

A gay man has the comfort of knowing that any challenge upon the affections of his partner are limited.  Straight people have half of the population to worry about, whereas a gay man has only other gay men to consider as a threat.  I was not worried about Patrick because I knew that he was not gay.  In fact he had a wife who had work commitments so would not be part of the entourage in Russia.  Patrick had initially thought that their exhibitions would not involve aerial work, but be more dancing, on the assumption that Cherry might be too heavy for the lifts.  But they worked at it and started to develop their own program with some very athletic move.  It included Patrick lifting Cherry, and then Cherry lifting Patrick.  Other members of the team were impressed.

Cherry had Chesney’s artistry as must be expected, but with a different eye somehow.  She was building a grace in her movements on the ice.  It would carry across to her gestures too.  But this routine was something very different, and enthralling.Cherry was a vision of loveliness on the ice except for just one thing.  Jumps and balance moves expose the crotch.  That is unavoidable.  It was not uncommon in training and rehearsals to have a costume malfunction.  Some of the others had a word for it: “Balls”.  It was in good humor but when that word was called or even whispered, Cherry was mortified.

“We cannot have this happening on tour,” she said.  “I need to find some way of fixing this.”  So she sought some advice.  That resulted in her taking hormones to “temporarily reduce the size and any tendency to swell”, as she explained it.I should say that our sex life remained good through this period, but the hormones changed things.  I had always enjoyed Chesney’s penis, and one more good thing about being gay is that you have tangible evidence that you are arousing your partner.  That was important to me.  Hormones put an end to that.  Any “tendency to swell” was gone.  I could only be the dominant partner in sex, and even then, I could never be sure that my orgasms were shared.

But there is no doubt that the hormones allowed for the taping and undergarments to do their job.  The call of “Balls” faded into memory.  Instead there was spontaneous applause and sometimes the scream of “You go Girl” from her fellow female skaters.  That is because that is what she was.

We had only one moment of concern and that was at passport control on arrival in Russia.  It must have been a lucky break.  The first of many grumpy Russian faces was the border official at Moscow airport.  He must have thought that Chesney was a girl’s name, as the pretty face on the passport and in front of him were clearly female, so he clearly did not notice the “M” on the page.  We had a convoluted back-up plan but it was not needed.  The entry stamp was slammed down and for the rest of our stay (hotels request passports) we had a small blot placed over the offending letter.

Russian audiences know our sport.  If you get seated applause and people looking to the person beside them, that is about as good as you get.  Russians are not known for being effusive, or even smiling much at all.  Our local promoter Ivan told me that if a Russian sees somebody walking down the street smiling, they assume that person is mentally ill.  The first performances of our first show were greeted with that respectfully clapping, but then Cherry and Patrick took to the ice.

I am not sure whether the Russians knew was to make of it at first, but while I wanted to see the performance I had to look around.  They were transfixed.  So much so that when Patrick and Cherry stopped, there was silence.  And then cheers, and people were standing up to put their hands together.

“she is your woman, yes?” said Ivan.  “Russians like strong women.  But she looks quite thin to be so strong.  And very beautiful.”

I could only smile, but this all seemed very strange to me.  I had always thought that Chesney was beautiful, but I suppose a man in love would say that.  But nobody says: “Your boyfriend is just so pretty”.  This was new to me.  I was proud, but yet confused.

But what was clear is the this particular routine was a hit.  Everybody wanted Patrick and Cherry to come up with another to match it – one to close before the interval and get the audience talking, and another to close the show, even after the ensemble performance, so that they would go home amazed.

We were getting a name.  So much so that the tour needed to be changed.  The trip to eastern cities of Russia needed to be shortened to that we could come back for back to back shows in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

That was where we started, and after that Kharkov, Rostov and Volgograd, then north.  In all of these cities Cherry and I shared a room, but in the next city (maybe it was Kazan?) the accommodation was a series of twin rooms with no couples.  Bonnie offered to share with Cherry, in the part of the hotel set aside for the female performers, and I ended up sharing a room with Ivan in the men’s section.  Somehow after that, this was how things were.  In all the other cities east of Gorky I never shared a room with Cherry.

She said that we needed to focus on work anyway, which we did.  The schedule had been gruelling as we had planned it, now it was even tougher.  And the distances in Russia are huge.  East of Novosibirsk, said to be the edge of Siberia, travel by train was replaced by flights, in some cases special flights laid on by the local promoters who were doing very well out of us.

We would do well too.  Our tour was based on a good share of the box office, but new venues and added pressure added the percentages.  The promoters had little to argue about – audiences were now well ahead of targets.

People started to talk about a bonus for Patrick and Cherry too, as they had become drawcards.  I remember Patrick putting an arm around Cherry and waving away the suggestion, but it was the way that Cherry looked up at Patrick that startled me.  It was a look of adoring admiration that I was thought was reserved only for me.

The way others looked at Cherry was something that I had grown used to.  Women would admire he style and grace, and men would look at her with lust.  But I always imagined that they were looking at a delusion, or a creation of art – a character invented by Chesney, and Stella, and even me, but somebody not real.  At least that is what I told myself.  One day the tour would be over and Cherry would be gone, and Chesney would be back.  One day soon, I hoped.  Then my boyfriend would only have those eyes for me.

In some empty function room in a hotel in Yakutia or some place, Cherry and I found some private time to kiss, and then she dropped to her knees to suck my cock.  I remember looking down at the top of her as she went about her work.   Her hair had grown so long since this whole thing started that most of the time she wore it up. In an ornate style on ice, or otherwise as it was then, in a messy bun but then with a bow clip.  I was just so feminine that it was like being blown by a woman.

It was our last time having sex of any kind.

If we needed any reminding of it, in that same city or the one before it, we witnessed tow gay men being publicly beaten one night after the show.  The older man had been caught propositioning the younger who was clearing selling his body to make a living.

“We don’t like homosexuals in Russia,” Ivan stated coldly, as if this was complete justification for this violence.  I had seen a similar thing back home when I was very young and I could do nothing, but in a foreign country I seemed even more helpless.  That is what I told myself, anyway.

Back in Moscow Cherry had her own room.  Organizing such things was not up to me.  It was a much better hotel given our increased status.  We all had good rooms.

I decided that I would call upon Cherry, so I went to her room late at night after our second show.  I put my ear to the door just to check whether she might still be up and moving around.  I could hear something but it was not what I wanted to hear.  It was the sound of sex.  I could hear Cherry’s voice.  It was not Chesney’s.  It was a woman’s voice softly squealing with joy.

I was destroyed.  I think that I sunk too my knees, the wet of my tears leaving a stream down the door.  I crawled away for a yard or two and then pulled myself up and ran back to my room.  Whether gay or not you may have experienced something like it – for your sake, I hope not.  The sense of betrayal and then the knowledge of lost love.  My heart really did, hurt.

I had heard a man I the room, but I could not know for sure that it was Patrick.  But who else could it be?  I was too heart-broken to confront Cherry, but I thought that I could at least confront Patrick.  As we were flying to St. Petersburg rather than taking the train, I had time to corner him and talk to him in private.

I said: “If you hand intentions towards somebody I am involved with you should at least have warned me that you were gay!”  It was something like that.

“I am not gay,” he said.  “If it’s Cherry you are talking about, she is not gay either.  She is a woman.  And when we get back stateside, she is going to correct nature’s mistake.  So maybe you should go looking for a guy, because she is not one of those.”

I was completely unprepared for this, but it now seems so foolish to say that.  I had watched Cherry go from being my effeminate boyfriend to a woman over a period of months right by her side for most of it.  The body was changed by those hormones that were just intended to help conceal any sign of manhood.  The skins had become soft, and it even smelled like that of a woman.

And somehow the personality changed too.  It was not just the gestures and what Stella had warned about “floppy wristed gay man behavior” – it was at a deep emotional level.  This was somebody ery different from Chesney.

I should have realized it, but it is just that I felt that I knew Chesney so well because we were so close.  We were in love, you see?  I like to think that I am still in love with Chesney, but somewhere along the line he ceased to be.  Somewhere along the line Cherry came to life and the man I loved disappeared.

I heard later that the last vestige of that man ended up in a hospital furnace just as the thought that disgusted me went.  Patrick had left his wife for Cherry so it was the least that she could do.  I received a wedding invitation last week – everyone on the team which toured did.  That is what prompted me to open up about this whole thing and reopen the wounds and the tear ducts.

But there is a young man coming into my life at the moment.  He is another skater looking for my help.  He is not as good as Chesney was, but he is a little less effeminate, so I am hoping he will not cross over to other side and leave me desolate.

The End

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