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Friends' Night Out

by Norbert Kovacs

Irene McNulty had not really cared when Roger Truman, her colleague at the insurance company, told her he was gay. She thought being gay an interesting way to be, nothing else, and, when Roger mentioned breaking up with his boyfriend, Daniel, she had only a casual thought about gays having trouble to commit to serious relationships. No, the real reason Irene was interested in Roger was that he had proven so funny poking fun at the dysfunctions of their workplace. It was refreshing to hear Roger spin his humor on break at the water cooler after facing a long, drawn out meeting with the stuffy, highbrow managers of their department. She liked Roger's wit enough that one day, after hearing him ridicule their boss's unreal expectations for them, she invited him to go on a friendly night out together.

"It'd be fun," she said. "Neither of us has a partner. There's no one to fear making jealous."



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Roger smiled. "I'd have no problem with going out as your friend."

So, the two went to a busy bar downtown on Thursday the same week. The two took a tall corner table and, after a drink a piece, Roger gently held forth on their co-workers as Irene listened gleefully.

"Poor Marjorie!" he began. "You should have seen her the other day. 'Oh, my goodness! How can the boss ask that all these letters be typed at once?'" Roger rolled his eyes and warbled like the woman in question. He was a boyish man, who had a light brown crewcut, dark, happy eyes, and an attractively thin body.

Irene laughed through her red glossy lips. Her dark clusters of curls and fine blue eyes danced at him.

"I don't think she gets that her voice becomes old maid-like when she's excited," Roger continued. He put a quaver in his voice as he tried to imitate her. "Leave that file there on the shelf! Make these copies!"

"She can be a hoot."

"She may not suspect anyone thinks it."

Irene laughed. How ridiculous Roger made Marjorie out! She encouraged her friend to new humor.

"What do you think of our boss, Mr. Turley?" she asked.

"I have to say he sadly overestimates his leadership. He claims we're doing well when our morale is poor."

"An oversight by any means. Do you feel encouraged by our department because of it?"

"I see my limits staying with our unit. I can never become chief like Mr. Turley, for one. I usually understand how things go really."

Irene shook her head with a expression of mischief.

"What do you think, generally, of the other people in our department?" she asked.

Roger took a sip from his water and reflected. "Well, do you ever notice how most of them are uneasy when someone is promoted? They immediately start hoping they had been instead. And the person who was hired up becomes guarded, dropping doubts about anyone paid less than him." Roger shook his head. "Our co-workers might stand being a little more relaxed. "

"I agree."

"Of course, I would never accuse you of being too tight, Irene."

Irene smiled, so that a light came into her eye. "I may be ambitious all the same."

"How so?"

"I'm not aspiring very high. I only heard our chief is hunting for a new liaison. I thought to try for it. I might like the role, helping connect our company's departments."

"The job would challenge you. The departments in our company communicate too little. They each follow their own track without mind for much else."

"What if I got them to communicate and to mind?"

"They'd scoff at and spit at you for it."

Roger knew how to kid her, Irene felt.

Roger moved his glass of water to a side. "How is your friend Amy doing at the firm around the block? Still seeing that boyfriend of hers?"

"Oh, yes. He calls to talk with her three or four times a day. Sometimes it gets a little much for her."

Roger's eyes widened with surprise. "I don't see how."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if someone has a problem with a boyfriend, it should be for hearing too *little* from him. Isn't it easy to forgive someone else for doting on you too much?"

"Maybe, maybe."

"I think many people would like a boyfriend who gave them that problem. If she doesn't like him for it, I might be happy for his attention..."

"There you go talking."

The waiter came over. He set a diet Coke before Irene and an orange soda before Roger, the second round of drinks they had ordered. Irene took a long swallow of her soda as she looked warmly at Roger.

"How is your friend Shirley?" Roger asked after putting down his own drink. "Is she still seeing that guy whom they say is so possessive?"

"She is, and he *is*. He wants her only to talk to him, nobody else. The other day he called her out because she phoned her friend, Carl, whom she has not seen in an age."

"Wow."

"Her boyfriend watches her like a hawk around other guys. He asked once what she meant bumping into this guy's seat at the club."

Roger shook his head. "If you love someone, you don't mistrust her like that."

Irene nodded. "I think so too."

"Or else be suspicious back to show him a lesson."

"Shirley brought up the idea. She might."

"I tell you there'll be fireworks."

"We will see. So what has been going on with you? I don't remember hearing that much of your gracious life this evening."

"Oh, I'm blue. Still getting over Daniel."

"Oh?"

"He'd been seeing someone behind my back. I didn't learn until he said he was going. He might have been more honest with me. I mean, I always was up front with him. He should have done the same."

Irene studied the bubbles rising in her soft drink. "It is terrible when two can't get along like that."

"I'd been with him over two years. I don't like to think of what he did without telling me. Or what our