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Motherhood had never been part of Mel's plan, and Steph had never imagined herself in a relationship with anyone but a woman. They had divergent goals, but despite that, they'd made the decision to pursue these goals together. Like two children leaning outwards to make a merry-go-round spin faster, their vectors of energy brought dynamic balance to the relationship.

Plans rarely end up following the straight road, of course. After five years they both had surgical scars to show for their ambitions, and more questions than answers about their place in the world.

Steph at last had her baby: a seven-month-old girl. The child came into existence through the most tenuous means. Conceived *in vitro*, practically sealed in her mother's womb to delay premature birth, finally released into the world by the surgeon's knife, she was sickly and inconsolable, seemingly unable to find her home in the universe.

Mel, on the way to becoming male, had stumbled into a place between pronouns that felt natural for the first time. With wispy beard, unexpected Adam's apple and hoarsely melodious voice, Mel appeared boyish, and allowed their friends to call him 'him', though masculinity could not express his full sense of self. In relationship to the child, neither the title mother nor father suited him.

'Parent' though, parent seemed to fit. He realised it the morning Steph roused him, tugging urgently at his shoulder. Since the baby's birth, Mel couldn't remember waking except to the wailing infant and exhausted Steph. This time the house was silent, and as Mel recognised a tense focus in his partner's eyes, he felt an inward lurch.

Aunt Janice had once told him women in their family were linked by a fine ethereal cord, and whenever one strand broke, other members would detect it. She claimed to have known about Mel's grandmother's death before the call came. Janice and Mel had speculated together whether the net might still bind him, despite his gender shift and the wide cushion of alienation that separated him from the rest of his family.

Mel thought immediately of the baby.

'Is she alright?' he squawked.

Steph smiled palliatively.

'She's sound asleep. It's your Aunt Janice. She just dropped over. It's 7.30 a.m. You'd better come talk to her.'

Mel's inner geology shifted seismically. He rose without a word, pulled on sweatpants and a tee-shirt, and went into the living room. Aunt Janice's arrival, in itself, was no surprise. She was the only relative who had accepted Melanie's relationship with Steph, and had never flinched at Mel's transition. In fact she embraced it. Living only a few blocks from the young couple, Janice visited frequently. Still, she had an old-fashioned sense of courtesy, arriving always in immaculate apparel and with careful regard for the bounds of privacy. This morning she had appeared unannounced and in haggard condition. As Mel sat down next to her, she managed to place a calm hand on his arm and speak steadily.

'It's your brother. He and two other soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan yesterday.'

Jason: the kid brother whom Melanie used to love and beat up mercilessly. Later, becoming a pacifist, she had blamed herself for turning him to the military to compensate for childhood impotence against her. But what an asshole Jason had been over the revelation about Steph. Melanie blamed him for convincing Mom and Dad she was nothing more than a pervert. Brother and sister had flown off in opposite directions, without any symmetry except bitterness. Mel had not spoken to Jason or their parents in more than three years. He had given up hoping, but imagined drifting back together as two brothers might, with the benefit of age and wisdom. Mel didn't even know Jason had been sent to Afghanistan.

He met Janice's sympathetic gaze, blankly. He didn't need to explain. She had witnessed the sundering, heard Mel's grieved diatribes again and again. She couldn't know what he felt, but said what social conformity demanded.

'Your parents need you now, Mel.'

Seizing the hand that rested on his arm, Mel rose and tugged Janice down the hall. Steph fluttered in the background like a moth in the wind. Mel reached the bathroom light and flicked it on, then stood in front of the long mirror and slowly, with emphasis, pulled the tee-shirt over his head. His chest was muscular and hairless, like he remembered Jason's. But two red scars, like faint smiles, underscored his breasts, where feminine tissue had been removed.

He pulled at the elfish beard on his chin.

'I'm not going to shave this to comfort anyone. I don't look anything like Melanie. They won't even recognise me.'

Janice said, 'Of course they'll recognise you.'

'I'm not the daughter they think I should be.' Mel insisted. 'I'm certainly not going to be a replacement son. I'm just me. And they don't know anything about me.'

But Janice said, 'You don't have to change anything. Just show them you can accept who they are, and maybe they'll do the same in return. If you don't go now, while they realise what's missing, while everything is in flux, they'll...you'll...never have a chance.'

Steph slipped into the light and encircled Mel from behind with her hands, covering the scars but not the masculine pectorals. Jason had said awful things to Steph during their one and only meeting, but now her eyes drew up the tears Mel himself couldn't find.

Steph said, 'We'll all go. It'll be okay. They have a granddaughter they haven't even seen.'

The child had just started stirring miserably in the next room. And since, in Mel's deepest, most instinctive part, he had only understood the baby that morning as his own, he saw a new symmetry start to form.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Van Waffle.*