Brothers

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Albert and I were both adopted, but we were OK with that. We had the good fortune to have been found at the orphanage by a loving couple. And we were adopted together.

Mom told me that when they got to the orphanage they were only intending to adopt one of us, but Al and I were in the same crib just looking at one another, so they decided to adopt both of us. She knew we were not real brothers – Al is a few months younger than me – but she just felt like we should be together.

And growing up with a brother close to you in age is a great thing. We did everything together. We played on the same ball team, and the same soccer team. We were doubles partners in tennis. We were unbeaten partners at euchre in the card games before class at school.

I suppose as the oldest I led the way in some things – mostly anything involving physical danger. Al always followed. Maybe he was not always courageous, but he was loyal and supportive. He would follow – no question about it.

When it came to doing embarrassing things, like being cheeky to strangers, Al led the way. I never liked being made a fool of, but if Al led us into something stupid, I was with him. Some of the things that he had us doing came out alright, but most of all I think it built character in both of us.

That was how we were described: Characters. “A couple of real characters those boys of yours,” people would say.

We exasperated our parents, but they loved us. And we loved them back – most of the time. When we got into trouble we had a code of silence. We took any punishment together, no matter who did wrong, even if the other warned the offender so many times. It was just what we did for one another.

We had a code. We would look at each other and sometimes say it, sometimes we did not need to: “Brothers forever”.

Me being older and quite a bit bigger, it was Al who got the hand me downs. He was OK with it, but I remember now one of the first things (except underwear and tee shirts of course) that Mom bought for him: It was a sweatshirt with a pattern on it. I had no idea of how significant that thing was, at the time.

“That’s not really a boy’s sweater,” Mom said.

“I like it,” said Al. He wore it a home all the time, because Mom was right. It was not a boy’s sweater.

That was not long before Al announced that he wanted to be a girl.

He told me first. He said: “I am depending on you to support me. You are my brother and the most important person in the world to me. Not many people can say that they have had their brother longer than their parents.”

Of course, I was going to support him. Or at least I wanted to. I was there beside him when he told our parents. They were just dumbstruck. It took a long time before my father came to grips with it, but Al had a winning way and it was just a matter of time.

Al assured him: “Daughters are always closer to their fathers.” And she was, eventually.

Mom was easier to convince, after she got over the initial shock. She said: “I always wanted a daughter. If we had adopted just one of you we would have gone back for a daughter later. I guess we’re going to have one anyway.”

“It will be neat,” said Al. “We will do mother and daughter things together. We can go shopping and get our hair done together.”

All of this talk just seemed so weird to me. Here was the person that I thought I knew better than anybody talking like a total stranger. Somewhere deep inside my brother, this tragic secret has been lying and swelling up, until it became unbearable. Why had I not seen it. I was ashamed that I had not.

We were just entering our teens and Alice (as she was to be known from then on) wanted to stop puberty. She had been reading all about it and knew what had to be done. She had to convince a doctor that she should go on a course of drugs to stop maturing as a boy.

I felt so dumb that while all this research was being done, I had never noticed it. Worse, I had never spotted any sign that Al was not a normal guy, like me. Somethings like a sweater and few other things, that seemed odd at the time, only came to make sense after we knew.

But after we did know, and after the doctor prescribed the shots and tablets, everything changed. No more tree climbing, no more sports, no more trouble making. Alice wanted to be the most girly girl she could be. I guess to overcome all those years as a boy.

We would still throw ball in the back yard, just the two of us, but her throw seemed to get worse as mine got better. The truth is that if I wanted her to throw me a pitch or kick a ball around, she would never say no, but she had other interests now, interests that I could not share – girl stuff.

When it was announced at school that Al would from that point on, be Alice, it all went surprisingly well. There were a few gasps. Everybody looked at me strangely, almost as if it was me switching sides. But I just shrugged and nobody treated me any differently.

But Alice developed a new group of friends – girls who wanted to introduce her to the joys of being female. I was left to biff any guy who called her a “fag” or a “tranny slut”. I was packing on size and muscle so after a while I managed to stamp out most of that shit.

Alice and I still played tennis together, but of course she played in the girl’s grade. The problem there was that she was too good, so some parents raised questions. It was difficult for her.

We still went to the courts together and played against each other. It was almost the only thing that we and in common all the time, and that was great. But otherwise we seemed to be growing apart. It was as if a brotherhood that we both thought would last forever was gradually fading.

Then she started to get pretty.

Alice went to see the doctor a few more times and then started to take drugs to let her develop like a girl. Her skin became softer and her hair too. Her face seemed to change shape. Her body certainly did.

She grew her hair out, and she kept it looking great with washing and daily brushing. It seemed to me that when I wanted to do anything with Al, she always washing her hair, and when we went outside to do anything active she was worried that it would mess up her hair. But it was beautiful hair.

As she changed shape too, she made the most of showing off her assets. She wore short dresses to show off her long legs, and tops with a neckline that revealed her developing cleavage. Instead of grabbing a guy’s ear for calling Al a “fag” I was doing it when they leered at her, or made a suggestion about her that I didn’t like. I always defended my younger sibling.

Everybody seemed to accept that she was now a girl. I understand that some guys even asked her out. She declined, which I thought was just as well. The thought of my brother being on a date with a guy was just weird.

We found a few other things that we could still do together. We went skateboarding, but it was not her thing. She spent more time watching me and encouraging me to do more jumps or tricks. We would hike up to our favorite fishing hole, and spend the day there just lying in the sun and talking about the world. We would play on the X-Box at home, but she now chose female avatars. I kept telling myself that it could be the way it used to be.

But there were more differences than consistencies. She spent a lot more time getting ready in the morning. She hogged the bathroom we shared and took up most of the bench and cupboard space with her stuff – blow drier, hair straighteners, cleansers, makeup, perfumes and stuff like that.

And I didn’t touch her like a I used to. As boys, we used to back slap or push one another around – just in fun. Now I was so much bigger and stronger than her, that it didn’t seem right. And she was a girl after all. I sort of missed the physical contact.

She took up ballet. She said it was to improve her movement – to make it more graceful. She was a late starter, but I guess she quickly became good at it, because she moved to a dance school across town. I was old enough to get my driver’s license by then, so I ended up driving her across town. I like driving so I did not mind being her taxi. She looked good in the passenger seat and I could see guys looking at us at the lights, and I was guessing they were thinking ‘look at the pretty girl with the gorilla’, or some such. I liked to drive her.

Then one night she stayed out late. She said it was for a special dance recital. But I got a call on my cell: “Victor, don’t tell Mom and Dad, but please come and pick me up.” I dropped everything and went to the address she gave me.

She had been dancing. She had her hair up in a bun and her face was made up, but she was in jeans and a tight fitting top that showed she was now far too busty for ballet. She had been drinking, and she was upset.

“Some of the older girls invited me round to their place after and we had some boys around. They gave me some wine. Maybe too much. I’m not used to drinking.”

“It’s OK,” I said. “Did anyone hurt you?”

“Some of the boys were just mean, that’s all,” she said. I knew that she did not want me to make a scene. “Please, Just drive,” she said. I did as she asked.

We drove on in silence, and I said: “Maybe you should just forget boys. Maybe you should get with a girl. They are more understanding. They wouldn’t get violent with you. I worry about you and boys. Somebody might hurt you.”

“I am not a lesbian,” she said. “But I worry that I may never enjoy true love.”

“Why not?” I asked. “You’re gorgeous, and a really good person. Why would you think you won’t find someone?”

There was like, a huge pause, like she was wrestling with something.

“Because I love you,” she said. “I always have”.

I suddenly felt awkward. Maybe even afraid. I pulled over to the side of the road. I said: “Well sure, you love me, but not … not in that way?”

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| “Yes,” she said. “In that way. And all I have ever hoped is that you might love me back. In the same way. I know you couldn’t do that, before. But …”.  “Hang on,” I said. “You didn’t become a girl because of me?”  “No,” she exclaimed. “I have always wanted to be a girl. I just hoped that I might be your girl.” There were tears appearing in her blue eyes, all the prettier for being surrounded by dark painted lashes.  What can a guy do in a situation like this? She was the talker. I was not good at this kind of thing. In any other situation Al would help me out. Now she was looking at me. Sad and beautiful. Looking for love. | Image result for ballerina in tears |

“I have never loved you in that way,” I said. I watched as her full bottom lip started quivering. “Until now”, I added. “Well until, about three months ago to be exact. When you first wore that lacy black dress. That did it. That made me fall in love with you. I just felt so strange about it. I couldn’t say anything to you.”

She burst into tears and threw her arms around me. Happily for us both. Tears of joy.

“Brothers forever”

Well, not quite. Forever – yes. But lovers not brothers.

The End

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