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| DisplacedA VignetteBy Maryanne PetersMy mother had chosen to live in a commune when I was quite young. She told me that my father was “a filthy capitalist who lived in the city and spent his life working out ways to make poor people poorer”. I believed it, of course. Everybody around her would nod, even though none of them had ever met my father. I remembered him only vaguely, as a man who had given me presents and had thrown baseballs or footballs in my direction.I have heard that place described as a place for “hippies”, but I never heard that words. We were “environmental activists” and animal lovers. We ate no meat. Even boys like me, grew our hair long. “Gender” was something invented by capitalists. I could choose to be whomever liked and act however I liked. That was freedom, and we were free. | A person with blonde hair  Description automatically generated |

But we were not free of disease. My mother got cancer. She did not want to go to hospital so by the time she got there it was all through her. She had always said that with a clean diet and through clean living no illness would strike her down, but she was wrong. She seemed so wrong in many of the things she did.

She never told my father when she was dying. She expected “The Community” we lived in to care for me, but the hospital found out that she had a husband, and I had a father, and when she died he was notified. He came to collect me.

I could see that he was shocked when he saw me. He said that I barely looked like a son of his, or of anybody really – more like a daughter with my long blonde hair.

“They call me Dale, not David,” I explained. “I don’t believe in gender. I am not going to cut my hair.”

“If you want to be called Dale, then I am OK with that,” he said. “If you want to wear a kaftan and have blonde tresses to your waist, then that is fine. I am just happy to have you back. But in the city, we have gender, and maybe you need to choose which one you are – male or female?”

I never believed that I would need to, but I soon learned that the world outside the commune was a very different place. There was talk about gender fluidity, but it was strictly for the weirdos. I wanted to fit in. Back in the commune I did just that. Now I was a fish out of water – displaced. Dad was right. I needed to make a choice.

“You have a male body,” my father said. “It may not have developed yet, but when it does there will be no decision to make. If you are like me and mother’s father, that hair of yours will fall out before you are 40. But you should develop well. Maybe you can even play sports. I had high hopes for you when you were young. You need to learn how to compete. You may have learnt other things from your mother, but let me tell you, to succeed in the real world you have to learn to do better than the next guy. It doesn’t mean that the next guy has to be worse off – just that you should do better.”

I suppose I learned that my father was not like my mother had said, but he was also nothing like me.

I don’t like competing. I like beautiful things. I like music and laughter and the feeling of the wind in my long blonde hair. I like just being me and loved for being that.

For me that choice of gender was simple. I found my place.

The End

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