Maternal Instincts

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

It seems like my life is full of complications, and it all down to who I am. I used to think that it would all serve to make my life a tragedy, but I was wrong.

For instance, when Jimmy asked me to move in with him, I was excited and yet horrified. We have known one another since middle school and we were close enough that it should be no surprise that when a roommate moved out, he would come to me. I was just moving back to the city after trying to find myself as far away from there as possible. I was keen to find a place, and happy to be back with him. I was horrified because I was in love with him, and as far as I am concerned, I always have been.

It was just that he was a regular heterosexual guy, and so was I – or that is what I had always assumed. I had always kept up with him as best I could, and that meant sex with women. I enjoyed it. I can’t say that I was good at it, but I brought women to orgasm (I made a point of doing that) and there were no complaints.

The fact is that I moved away to try to find out what was wrong with me, and the answer never came despite all my experimentation. I went back to the city, and he told me that he had a room available. What I had to wrestle with was my feelings, as I was now so close to the man I adored.

I could have said no, but then that would demand an explanation, and I was not ready for that.

But I had only been there for a few weeks before my whole life changed, and all my struggles found resolution in the strangest way.

A young woman came to the door one evening. I had cooked a meal as I often did, being a better cook than Jimmy. We eaten it watching TV, which was a good way of distracting me. Jimmy went to the door and I had my back turned.

“I know you are good friends with Rick,” I heard her say, but I did not turn around upon hearing my name. “It is just that he left town last year and I have lost touch with him. I thought maybe you might know where I could find him?”

I recognized the voice, so I turned around and smiled a greeting. By chance, I had been found.

Jaylee Hixon was standing in the doorway – not a one-night stand but maybe 3 or 4 nights tops - and in her arms was a baby.

I suppose most men might put two and two together and tell you it equals fourck. But I have to say that there was something about the way Jaylee looked that made me jump up and beckon her inside. She looked awful, and her face was the very portrait of despair.

Just having an arm around her made her burst into tears. I pulled her over to the couch and asked Jimmy to make her some hot sweet tea. It was not until she was settled that I looked upon the face of the baby. I think that I knew it even then, although all logic tells us that one baby looks much the same as the next, at less than six weeks old.

“You remember my parents … at least I spoke to you about them, Rick?” she said.

“I remember,” I said, although I was struggling. We had enjoyed sex. She talked a lot and I listened well.

“They have turned me out, or rather not allowed me to come home, even though that means they will never see me again.” Behind her I could see Jimmy in the kitchen drawing his hand across his throat. But then he was making the tea.

“They are religious,” she continued. “To them the child is sin, and the cancer is my punishment.”

“Cancer?” Somehow that was hardly a surprise. She looked like death.

“The pregnancy promoted it. They did warn me. They said that an abortion was my only hope. A pregnant body accelerates growth – the baby and the cancer. It is over for me. I am living in the hospice now. Just me and Amelia.” She pushed aside the shawl the baby was cradled in to reveal her beautiful little face.

“Oh my God!” I said. What else could I say? I was looking at the baby.

She took the child and placed it in my arms. Behind her I could see Jimmy gesticulating, waving his hands to say - “no,no,no!”

“I have just a few more days. Then she is all alone. Perhaps only her father is left for her to count on?”

Father. That would be me. This child was my blood. Perhaps that was why I felt so drawn to her. I pulled the little thing close to me and I knew that she was mine. It was confirmed later, but I knew it even then. And then the strangest thing happened. I started to lactate.

I had been away for months as I said - “trying to find myself” and that had involved estrogen. I had started to wonder if I might be transgender. It seemed to me that it would explain a lot of this about me – my feelings of inadequacy as a man, my friendships with women that were ruined by sex, and the vivid dreams of being Jimmy’s bride. I decided that I would leave everything behind me and look at a possible transition of my gender. It was just that my first attempt to appear as a woman had been a total disaster, so again I chose to retreat.

I had burned no bridges, so it seemed easier to go back to the city and back to being a man, and I just had to ‘grow some balls’ when it came to dealing with Jimmy.

It was just that my balls were still much reduced, and my breasts were still there, under the loose shirt, and bound a little with a bandage. Before I knew it, that bandage was getting wet. Milk was pouring out of me. I had the desire to let the baby feed from me, and it seemed almost to be a physical craving that I had to suppress.

Amelia was making noises. I placed a finger near her mouth and she seemed to latch on. It occurred to me that she could smell my milk. She wanted to take my nipple into her mouth.

“I think she is hungry,” I said.

“I can’t feed her myself,” said Jaylee. “I am on pain killers and have been since shortly after she was born. I bottle feed her. I have some stuff in the bag. I brought it all over with me. I am leaving it here. I am leaving her here. She needs to be brought up by her own blood. That’s you Rick. I am sorry, but I will not see her an orphan. If you feel that you can do that, then I can understand it. But I don’t believe it of you. I am sorry to land this on you. It is very sudden I know. But death is close – I know it.”

“Give me the bottle,” I said. “Jimmy, do your best to talk her out of this while I take this poor little mite into my room and feed her where it is quiet.”

The moment that I was alone sitting on my bed with my child fastened on my nipple, I finally discovered who I was. I was a mother. It seemed as if I was always destined to be that.

I switched her on to my other breast, and felt her tiny lips start to suck. I experienced such joy that it is hard to explain it. Here was a tiny human being, taking sustenance from me, being dependent on me, bringing out these feelings in me. I cradled her tiny head, her skull still soft with the blood feeding her tiny growing brain pulsing beneath the fine soft hair. She was so beautiful, and so fragile.

“Rick! You had better come out here,” I heard Jimmy call for me. I gently pulled Amelia away from my breast, but it was easy. She had stopped suckling and had fallen asleep. I buttoned up my shirt after casting the milk-soaked bandage aside. I arranged the shawl around her and stepped back into the living room holding her.

Jaylee was on the floor unconscious and Jimmy looked to be doing CPR. He called out over his shoulder – “Call an ambulance”.

I carefully put Amelia down in an armchair and grabbed my phone. I then found Jaylee’s phone in her bag. I figured that those she had called last would be close to her I should call. There were only two numbers. The one that did not go through I later learned was her parents, who had barred her calls. The other was the hospice.

“Ask the ambulance to bring her here if she is still alive,” the lady said. “Jaylee has requested that there be no attempts at resuscitation.”

She was not dead, but she soon would be. I went with her in the ambulance holding Amelia. Jimmy drove to the hospice to meet us, but even though he was only minutes behind us she was dead before he got there. She never recovered consciousness. She never had time to say goodbye to our daughter. I like to think that when she saw me take our baby and go to a quiet place with her, she understood that I had accepted the role of parent and that she cold depart this world in peace.

“I assume that you are the father?” somebody asked me.

“She is my daughter,” I said, holding Amelia’s tiny form and kissing her on her forehead. But I was not her father, I was now her new mother.

I gave them my details. The only legal consequence was that I had to get my name put on the birth certificate. Her parents were contacted and at my request, they were given my name and contact number, but I never heard from them.

They had Jaylee’s belongings too, but they were meager. I was the apparent next of kin, so they offered them to me. When I saw the nursing bra among the stuff, I agreed to take it all, and I assumed I would donate it to a charity, but when I looked at some of the dresses, I remembered that Jaylee had been a big girl, before the cancer had ravaged her body. She turned out to be the same size as me, with the muscle I had lost during my time away.

“If your friend is driving you home then you will need an infant safety seat,” a nurse said. “I will get one from the obstetrics ward for you to borrow.”

That reminded me that Jimmy was still there. He had put up with everything that had happened – he had even become part of it. Once we were in his car with Amelia in the back, it seemed that he was breathing properly for the first time.

“That was a tornado,” he said. “A few hours ago, we were two guys sitting down to a TV dinner and now here you are, a solo parent and you never even knew you were a parent at all. We have a kid in the back seat!”

“When you asked me to share your place you never could have thought this would happen,” I said, apologetically. “If you can’t handle what comes next then I will understand if you want me to go.”

“Hey Man. Forget I,” he said. “That is what I am here for. We will figure this out. So, it seems that you want to be a real father.”

“That’s just it, Jimmy,” I said. “I don’t.”

He pulled in his parking spot and looked at me in disbelief, even horror. I had to clarify, then and there.

“I want to be Amelia’s mother,” I said. Sitting there in the passenger seat of his car, I unbuttoned my shirt and exposed my breasts.”

Jimmy’s mouth fell open. He looked at them. He looked at me.

“What the fuck, Rick?” he said. “What is going on here?”

“These didn’t just sprout this evening,” I said. “But my milk came in the moment that I held my baby.” He stared at me, and at the breasts again. “I couldn’t tell you, Jimmy, but I am transgender. I always have been, but I never felt that I could make it as a woman. Now I feel that I have to, for Amelia.”

“Like you want to wear dresses and everything?”

“Tonight, I found out what I am,” I said. “I am a mother. Somehow I now understand that I was always meant to be that, and fate has suddenly made it reality. You must be freaked out by this whole thing, Jimmy. You probably want to run a mile…”.

“Hey, stop,” he said. “Let’s get Amelia to bed and we can talk.”

I have found out since that men have nurturing instincts too. They say that a nursing mother has smells that trigger a reaction in men. They start to develop feelings that allow them to bond with the child coming into their home, even if there is no blood relationship. The chemistry of motherhood is truly wonderful.

I borrowed some of Jaylee’s clothes that night, and I never dressed as a man again from that day on.

Amelia slept in my room for weeks, but when the time came and my night-time feeds from my burgeoning breasts were no longer needed, it seemed sensible that she have that room to herself and that I move in to sleep with Jimmy.

I think it was time for him to become a parent too, and he is a great father to our child. It may have been his response to her need that pulled us together first, but I know that now it is our love that will keep us together.

I am feminine now, mainly for him. Because I have never been mistaken for a man since I became a mother. How could I be?

The End

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Author’s Note: In Erin’s seed – “a young man and a friend are camping and discover an accident where a husband is dead and his pregnant wife injured…”. I took this in a different direction