Better Half

From the moment we met Janine and I knew we were meant to be each other. It was like looking in a mirror and seeing your image the way it was really supposed to be, for the very first time.

Until then I hadn’t known I was supposed to be a woman. I didn’t feel like a woman on the inside, I didn’t look like one on the outside. I was just an ordinary guy who’d stumbled upon his better half while shopping for fish at an outdoor market.

Janine felt the same way. She inspected me from head to toe. I remember what she said: “That’s my face you’ve got there, mister.”

I said, “Then we’re even, ‘cause you got mine.” She laughed, and we’ve been together ever since. I dumped whoever I was seeing at the time; she did the same. A few months later we got married.

But we never made love, before or after the wedding. Janine said she was saving herself, for herself. In other words, she wanted to remain a virgin until we could be together as woman and man, instead of man and woman—if that makes any sense. I didn’t argue; after all, it was my cherry.

We scoured the Earth for years, but failed to find any tribal talismans or books of secret lore that would magically exchange our souls. We never met any time-travelling thrill-seekers who would swap our bodies just for the decadent thrill of seeing how we’d cope. And we were never abducted by aliens who would morph us into each other to further their study of this human emotion called love.

We did get to know a great deal about each other. I taught her how to strip down a motorcycle until she could do it in her sleep. She ended up knowing more about football than I did.

At the same time, she taught me about fashion and women’s underwear, and how to use makeup like a pro. I practiced on her face until I was better at it than she was. I brushed her flame-red hair every night and waxed her arms and legs when necessary, while she kept me clean-shaven every morning.

To an outsider it might’ve looked strange, me doing all that for her and her doing much the same for me. But to us it was just regular upkeep for our own bodies, albeit from the outside.

“But what if we never swap,” she said to me one day. “It’s awful. Every day I look in the mirror and see my wife, the woman I love, the woman I want to be with. And she’s me. I was born in her body and I’m afraid that I’ll die there.”

I took her in my arms. “I know. Every day I see the man I want to make love to, right in front of me, and I’m stuck in his body. It’s not fair, for either of us. I wish I knew what to do.”

She began to cry. “There, there,” I said, “you’ll ruin my makeup.” I daubed her eyes with a kleenex. Then I re-applied her mascara, powdered her face and freshened her lipstick.

She smiled. “You always look out for you.”

“If it had to be anyone but me in there, I’m glad it was you,” I said gallantly.

“I’m glad you’re the one in my body.” She kissed me on the cheek. “Since I can’t be.”

To fund our search we wrote travel books, the off-the-beaten-path kind. They were popular enough that we got to keep doing what we knew we had to: explore the lost places of this world, hoping that the next ancient city or ruin or mausoleum would hold the secret we sought.

But it never did.

After seven years, tired of life on the road, we went home. In the city where we met we bought a house and settled down. On the second night in our new home, Janine turned to me and said, “It’s time.” My eyes sought hers. “Are you sure?”

She looked very sexy in my body, wearing a short leopard-print robe. “I’m sure.” She put her arms around my waist. “We failed, so there’s no point waiting any longer.”

I removed her robe and brushed her hair, then stood still while she undressed me in the dark. We met under the covers of her bed.

“Sorry it had to be like this,” I whispered.

“Me too. Now let’s get me all nice and hard.” She found my penis, which was really her penis, and began stroking it gently. It was the first time she’d ever touched that part of her body.
I prepared my body by stroking its breasts and the moist area between its legs. We did that for awhile, while we kissed each other, and then it was time.

We couldn’t decide who should be on top, so we settled on a clumsy side-by-side embrace. Just as our parts touched, a low chuckle echoed across the room. That killed the moment.

The voice was high-pitched, with a syrupy quality I associated with small children. “They are so mixed up,” it giggled. “Who’s who, nobody knows, not even me—and not even you.”

Janine rolled out of bed and hit the lights. Across the room, by the sliding door to the balcony, stood a young woman dressed in a floor-length evening gown, with puffy sleeves and a flaring skirt over multiple petticoats. Her curly blonde hair sparkled. I thought: Oh great, the neighborhood nut case.

Janine stepped between me and the intruder. “Who the hell are you? The tooth fairy?”

“No, my dear,” she said sweetly. “If you lost a tooth you’ll have to wait for another night. I am Cheri, the cherry fairy.”

Ever practical, Janine sidled past the woman and checked the door. “It’s locked. How’d you get in?”

Cheri waved her wand, trailing sparks. “I have no need of doors. As for why I’m here…” She seated herself at the vanity. “The cherry fairy appears when a woman is about to lose her cherry in an unjust way. As you were about to lose yours.”

I snapped at her. “Oh, yeah? What about all the sexual assault in the world? Where were you?”

“Hey, I’m only one fairy. I can’t be everywhere.” Janine sat on the bed where I slept. “Let’s listen to her, okay? She knows about us.”

Cheri smiled. “I certainly do. Fairies can read the thoughts and fates of mortals like you can read books. You two are lit up like a beacon.”

“So what kept you?” I ignored Janine’s attempt to hush me. “Haven’t our beacons been lighting up fairy-space for the last seven years?”

Cheri was unperturbed. “They have. But I could not act until the cherry itself was touched.”

I smacked my head. “So all we had to do was get busy seven years ago—and poof, there you are?”

Cheri nodded eagerly. Janine looked miserable. “We were saving ourselves,” she said softly. “Perhaps not the best strategy,” Cheri said sadly. “But the good news is, now that I’m here I can fix you up, lickity-split.” She waved her wand in a tight circle overhead, trailing bright stars, then pointed at Janine. A ball of sparks enveloped her, jumped onto me, and grew until I thought it would set the sheets afire. Curiously, the sparks were cold.

The room spun out of control. The lights went out, or maybe it was my eyes. Next thing I knew I was lying on my back, staring up at the ceiling.

Next to me a man said, “She’s gone.”


“You are,” he said tenderly, “and I’m not. Not anymore. Everything’s the way it should be.”

“I’m glad.” I felt my breasts, my womanly curves and my wonderfully soft long hair.

He took me in his arms and pulled me up to him and kissed me, and I used my hand to get him ready and bring him to where our parts touched, and when he pushed his way inside it hurt just a little, but I didn’t mind because I’m Janine and this is what I was meant to do with the man I love.”