

Metamorphosis

by Sarah Robin

“I’m not going!” I throw my arms into the air with frustration. My dad pokes his head around the door to see what’s going on. Seeing that the coast is clear and there aren’t any objects flying across the room, he enters my bedroom and stands behind me looking at my reflection in the mirror. I stare at his large hairy hands placed on my shoulders.

“Deep breath, son.” He picks up my tie, untangles it and drapes it around my neck, tying it into a perfect knot.

“What if he sees the chair and changes his mind?” I scowl, my head cloudy with negative thoughts.

“Then he’s obviously not the one for you.” My dad had a hard time accepting my sexuality, but he took it far better than knowing I’ll be stuck in this chair for the rest of my life. So what if I date other guys? I can’t swim, I can’t play football, I can’t go motorcycle racing with him. I can’t do all the things with him that we loved doing together as father and son. Being gay is trivial compared to the loss of my ‘old life.’

In the car, I sit staring out the window, my stomach turning over with nerves, my dad humming ‘Streets of London’ as we make our way to the restaurant. Once I’m in my chair and ready to go, he pauses for a moment and his eyes go a little red.

“Hey, son.” He looks me up and down. “You look great.” He sniffs, smiles and then leans forward and nudges me on the arm. “I’m proud of you, son. Now you go and have a good night.”

I tell him I love him and start to roll away as panic starts to set in. What if there are steps? What if the table is the wrong height for my chair? What will he think of me? Will he be annoyed I didn’t tell him I use a chair? Thoughts race through my head as I approach the entrance to the restaurant. Great, no steps. Good start. I reassure myself silently. I arrive at the doors and

just as I go to reach the door handle, a middle-aged guy and his wife spot me and they hold the doors open for me.

“Cheers!” I thank them. So far so good. I begin to ease a little.

A young waitress strides over in her white blouse and black apron. “Reservation?” she squeaks. I confirm my name. “Great, your party has already arrived. Just this way, please.”

Oh god, he’s already here! I don’t have any time to settle in and make sure everything is ok. I follow the waitress past many tables, conscious of the odd person looking up from their tables to look over at me, especially children who gawp at me until I’m out of sight.

We turn into a quieter area with a log fire and an impressive chimney breast. “There we are. Can I get you some drinks?” The waitress’ voice sounds muffled in my overwhelmed reaction to meeting Ryan for the first time after speaking online for a little over six months.

“Same again for me, please.” His voice is lower than I thought it would be.

“I’ll have what he’s having.” I stammer. He smiles warmly at me, the orange glow from the log fire flickers onto his face.

“Great, I’ll move this chair over.” I thank her and park myself into the spot. I stay silent for a moment, unsure as to what to say. I decide to let him speak first.

“Well, isn’t this a surprise.” He grins, looking at the chair. I immediately spill out apologies and try to explain the many reasons why I didn’t mention anything about the chair beforehand. Before I could go any further, he raises his hand and I instantly stop my spiel. He calmly leans over to one side and points towards a wheelchair folded up behind him. “Me too!”

He laughs. I sit open-mouthed and we both giggle uncontrollably. “No way! What are the chances?” We echo each other. This perfect ice breaker relaxes me and the twisting sensation in my stomach eases. Our drinks arrive and we order our food; our starters and mains identical with a dessert to share.

“How long have you used a chair?” I ask.

“Parachuting accident four years ago. I did a jump for charity and the parachute got tangled and we had a pretty hard landing.” He explained. “What about you?”

I tell him about the car accident; about how mum had died and dad blamed himself, even though it wasn’t his fault.

“I’m sorry” he frowned.

“This is my first time out in public on my own since getting the chair, so I was pretty nervous about not having someone with me in case I got stuck. But then again I didn’t fancy my dad joining us!” I joke. Ryan explains he had a few guys stop talking to him online after he told them he uses a chair so he figured just to get to know someone well enough to meet up and take it from there.

We speak a little about the emotional and psychological effects of using a chair and it comforted me to know he is fully independent, lives on his own, has a great job and plays a lot of sports.

“You’re welcome to come along on Tuesday night and meet the team. Bring your dad along, too. It can be something you can do together,” he said enthusiastically.

“How could he play?” I ask, confused.

“He would need to use a spare chair from the sports hall,” he explained. I didn’t know if wheelchair basketball would be his thing, but it was worth mentioning, I suppose.

We finish our dessert, argue over who pays for the bill and get ready to leave. I watch him get into his chair quickly with ease. Once outside, we say goodnight and say we’ll talk later. I roll around the corner to the car park, a contented smile on my face. I enter the carpark to find, to my surprise, my dad’s car already waiting for me. I knock on the driver’s side window and wake up my snoring, drooling dad. After some disorientation he rolls down the window.

“How long have you been here?” I laughed.

“I never left. Just in case, you know, you needed me or things didn’t work out,” he admitted.

“You silly sod!” I go round to the passenger side and heave myself into the car with his help. He pushes the door shut and hauls my chair into the boot when I feel my phone vibrate;

RYAN

It was great meeting you tonight. See you
Tuesday for Basketball 😊 I’ll msg you
later to sort out our next date, my treat this
time xx

