

Co-parenting

Short story from *It Sparkles*

An extract

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At the thrift store, two girls are standing ahead of me in the line for the fitting rooms. A knit sweater hangs between them, each girl gripping a sleeve. Giddy over their find, they swing the sweater back and forth. It's a shapeless thing in gaudy colors, embroidered with the image of a man's head in a hunting cap.

The girls have a plan: they'll both try the sweater on, and whoever looks best in it can keep it. They hug each other in excitement, squishing the man and his hunting cap.

Two fitting rooms become available at the same time; I end up in the one next to the girls. Curtains are drawn and clothes fall to the floor in a heap. Then comes the question I was afraid of.

"What if we both look good in it?"

Apparently, the other girl has already thought about this: "Co-parenting."

"Like, every other day?"

"I was thinking more like every other week."

"But what if it's my birthday or I have to go to a party and you have it?"

Her counterpart agrees there should be room for exceptions, but only on the condition that they give each other at least three days' notice.

From there, the list of requirements grows. Before every exchange, the sweater must be washed. And a fixed time will have to be set for the hand-off.

"Cause you're always late."

"Am not. You just think that because you're always so freaking early."

I wonder if this is the moment when I should get up on the stool, peek over the partition, and deliver my Solomonic judgment: "Girls, I see no other option than to cut the sweater in two."

But I don't have to intervene, because the girls have come to a conclusion on their own: they don't want the sweater anymore. It wasn't that special anyway.

On my way out, I see the man with the hunting cap on the "didn't fit" rack, slouched over his clothes hanger. His face shows no emotion, though I could have sworn I heard him squealing with delight just a few minutes ago, when the girls were swinging him back and forth.