

A Letter to Eleanor

by

Jacqueline Thoms

Darling Eleanor, How strange it is to write your name. I feel a mixture of pride and sadness. Pride because it's wonderful to see you blossom and sadness at the loss of my beloved son. Mostly, I'm filled with gratitude that you're finally happy.

I've followed your struggles and seen your torment as you tried bending your heart to fit a world that rejected you at every turn. I watched helplessly as you slid down a path of self destruction, hating your body and even your name that I'd so lovingly given you.

For years, you hid your hopes and dreams from everyone, and tried to be who you thought you should be. Eventually, the secrecy became too much and it mentally broke you. I held you in my arms as you cried shuddering tears of shame, and finally admitted to me what you'd always known. I couldn't believe I hadn't realized sooner, and it hurt me that you had been suffering so much right in front of my eyes. Now, the person I thought you were has vanished and the someone you needed to be is slowly growing in confidence every day. I held your hand as you woke from surgery. I listened as you raged against the hormones. I laughed with joy as we shopped for clothes.

How different life is for both of us now. You have found acceptance, both within yourself and your wider circle of family and friends. It's not always easy though. Sometimes I forget and call you by your dead name. Sometimes I say "he" instead of "she" because I've loved you as my son for twenty five years. My mistakes are never done with malice or a wish to return to the way you were, just a mother struggling to break the instinct of loving her son. I still give you gifts and acknowledge your actual "birth" day, but now we celebrate your "Fanniversary" as the day Eleanor was truly born.

Your life isn't perfect. I know you have been physically abused and emotionally attacked for choosing to live your life so openly. I've been shunned and pitied for supporting you because people say "It's not a real girl" or "You'll never have grandchildren", but I don't listen. I've seen the agony you went through and you're definitely a real girl in my eyes. CIS women can be childless, so why should transgender women be treated any differently? Non transgender people can spend years trying to work out who they are and still never find themselves. You are my child and gender is irrelevant to me. I look at your face and I see your eyes shine, so I know you're the woman you were born to be.

I may have given birth to a son all those years ago, but I am proud to be the mother of a beautiful and brave daughter today.

I love you.

Mum