

JESS WELLS

THE SEE-SAW FAMILY



“Tuxedo Shirts”

I was standing on a street-corner when I felt the tilting and, though it might have been someone’s brakes or the door to the diner behind me, it sounded like the screech of old metal pressed into service. Two dapper young lesbians walked by in perfectly pressed tuxedo shirts and short hair, dressed for night though it was early morning, striding in that way that my sisters walk, but even in San Francisco discreetly not holding hands. For 23 years of my lesbianism, dapper butches had been my favorite. A woman in slacks. Cognac, the New York Times, erudition.

But today, as a single lesbian mother, I clutched my son’s hand tighter and felt chilled by how remote they seemed.

I had left yet another relationship but this break up was more devastating, more profound. Three years of cautious weekends and separate arrangements only to hear “gosh, I don’t really want to be in a family.”

I had been an idiot, I see that now: I thought we could win her over, that time would draw her to this marvelous life spent raising kids, and to my incredible child.

After she left I started dating, but was told by my beautiful, witty artist that “she didn’t want kids.” And not knowing any better, telling her that I didn’t want her to discipline my child or cover my finances, that I could keep my family life separate. How deluded was that? She knew better, and disappeared.

No, separate wasn’t going to work. It was family or celibacy and my friends point out that I’m really not built for celibacy.

Searching the internet, this time for lesbians who clearly stated a desire to be in a family, I found only femmes. Any woman who checked the box “would consider it” was ruled out. “Yeah, I like kids,” they’d say, and it