Beyond the Belly

by Celia Irving

JULIAN - 29. Spencer’s partner. Working-class background.

Theatre in the round, audience seated above, looking down upon the stage. Light blue moonlight, a messy bed in the center with two bedside tables. A large glass of water is placed on the right side table, a smaller glass of water is placed on the left side table.

The light comes up on SPENCER lying in bed, waiting for her partner Julian. She cannot see beyond her pregnant belly. JULIAN brushing his teeth, stage left.

[running water, JULIAN shaving]

SPENCER waits somewhat impatiently, clearly uncomfortable, alternating her gaze between stage left and the ceiling. She tries to peer over her belly, but fails. Grunting, she tries to reach over to the right side table to grab her glass of water, but ends up spilling it over herself.

SPENCER:

(mumbles) Ah shit. (looks over stage left, calls) Julian?

JULIAN:

(calls from stage left) Water?

SPENCER:

Yeah.

(JULIAN enters stage left, approaches the bed and gives SPENCER a chaste kiss, and replaces her glass with a new one full of water on the right side table, before crossing stage downstage-right to the dresser. He pulls out a light-pink maternity negligee, turns to walk back towards her).
SPENCER:

(tilts her head and smiles) Could you actually get the purple one? The tshirt?

JULIAN playfully narrows his eyes at her - she feigns innocence. Pause. He turns and grabs the purple shirt, tossing it at her as he walks back towards the bed. He still brings the negligee, placing it beside her.

JULIAN:

Here, okay (lies the purple shirt beside them, helps SPENCER sit up). Okay, up. SPENCER lifts her arms above her head, as he grabs the bottom of her red shirt and gently tugs it over her head.

He kisses her naked belly, and she frowns slightly, out of his sight.

SPENCER:

(humorously) Julian, the shirt.

JULIAN smiles and pulls the shirt over her head. They kiss, and rest their foreheads on one other.

JULIAN

I am so lucky. (Gazes back down at her belly)

She is so lucky. Lucky to have an incredible, beautiful (strokes cheek) mother like you.

SPENCER moves her head out of his hand for a moment, but he cups her chin and brings it back to face him. She avoids his gaze as he searches her face.

JULIAN

(softly) What is it?

(strokes her hair) Spencer?
She gives him a kiss on the cheek and attempts to stand with ease, soon realizing she will need JULIAN's support. He helps her up, to her frustration. She waddles across downstage right to the dresser, attempting to walk quickly, but with JULIAN following her steps.

JULIAN

Spence, c’mon.

She reaches the dresser, and begins folding the pink blouse.

SPENCER

Hm?

JULIAN hugs her from behind.

JULIAN

(half-smiles) What’s troubling you, momma-to-be---

SPENCER

She interrupts JULIAN. SPENCER stops folding and breaks from his grasp around her. She moves to stand in the middle of the stage, in front of the bed:

Why is it that you always talk about me as a mother and not us as parents?

PAUSE

JULIAN

Walks to stand across from her as he speaks. (slightly stunned, mostly confused, says almost humorously) What do you mean? (smiles, strokes her hair) I always talk about how happy I am to be a
father. Obviously, I’m worried, as all fathers are - but I know we’ll do a great job, especially you as a mother-----

SPENCER

(interrupts him again, half-step back) Okay, let me rephrase. Why is it that you always talk about me as a mother and not as a parent?

JULIAN pauses and ponders this for a moment

SPENCER

(clarifies, gesturing) Not us, but me.

JULIAN

(confused, meets her eyes) Well, I mean, aren’t those things fairly synonymous?

SPENCER

(almost submissive) I suppose so. (regains her voice) But motherhood has an inherently… feminine connotation.

JULIAN

Well, yeah, of course it does. (he chuckles) But I mean, you are a mother.

SPENCER

But I don’t always feel like one.

Pause. SPENCER moves back to sit on the bed.

JULIAN

(takes a moment to process, moves to sit across her on the bed) Spencer, what the fuck? We’re eight months pregnant, and now you fucking tell me you don’t want to be a moth--
SPENCER
(rubs her eyes with her knuckles) -- JULIAN! You're not listening. Of course I want this child... of course I want to raise it with you. Just because I don't always feel like a mother doesn't mean I don't always feel like a parent.

JULIAN
(passive aggressive, sarcastic) So your issue isn't with fucking parenting, but with motherhood?

SPENCER
Julian, my issue isn't with parenting, my issue is with... expectations. What I'm supposed to be as a mother.

PAUSE

JULIAN
(turns away from her, angled to the front) So when you say you don't feel like a mother, what you really mean is---

SPENCER
I don't feel like a woman.

Julian still tries to conceptualize this revelation, holding fistfuls of his hair in his hands. Spencer now becomes fearful for the future of their relationship. Julian still remains not facing her. Spencer reaches out to Julian, holding their hands in his lap. He turns to face her - seeing her desperation - but returns to looking down at the bed.

SPENCER
Julian, it's not that I don't feel like a woman at all. It's not that I never feel like a woman. It's just that there are those days that I don't feel like a woman.

Days where I feel like this whole idea that I have …something apparently concrete that is associated with my sex is so… vague, and indefinite, and faint - intangible, really. Days where I even look over at you, and as cliche as it sounds, it’s like, what makes us so fucking different? — (smiles/chuckles lightly) only in terms of this strange abstraction… (she runs her hand through his hair. He looks at her, almost as if there is a brief return to “normalcy”) I mean, ultimately, we perform 99% of the same bodily functions as one another - you’re just a fucking person, we’re all just fucking people (she touches her belly).

JULIAN

(Julian returns to his perplexion: he hasn’t been really listening - should be a noticeable change in his eyes and physicality)

But, Spence, you said that this isn’t always the case. PAUSE. Most of the time, you still do feel like a woman.

SPENCER

(holds fistfuls of the pink negligee in her hand) Well, of course there are many days when I feel like such a woman, a mother, a girl, a daughter. Days where I resonate with my femininity and with the female experience, empowered by my “womanhood”. (she lets go of his hand, lets go of the negligee, drinks a sip of water. Begins to toy with the hem of her t-shirt) But I can’t deny the days that I don’t… the large fractions of definite time where I feel like this is all just (frantically gestures with her hands, trying to conceptualize) - nothing. I mean, fuck Julian, sometimes I wonder if I’m just a woman out of…. (searches for the words) convenience.

JULIAN

(somewhat hostile) What the fuck is that supposed to mean.
SPENCER

(looking up at the ceiling, lying down) Like, if… if I didn’t shy away from or if I wasn’t scared of the hardship of this reality, would I still identify with womanhood at all? More importantly, maybe, if I was not raised to be a mother, a sister, a daughter, (gestures towards him) if you weren’t raised a son, a husband, a brother, if everyone wasn’t raised in accordance with this weird, intrusive gender binary, would we still be this way?

(she sees Julian looking confused, somewhat irritated) Look, the point is - the question is, do I still identify with womanhood because I don’t want to face…whatever’s… in between? Grips the negligee in one hand as it lies on the bed.

PAUSE

JULIAN

I mean, Spence, I don’t know.

SPENCER

Well, I mean you don’t have to. it’s not necessarily your question to answer --

JULIAN

-- No, Spence, I don’t know how I feel about this.

SPENCER

(confused, then mumbles) Once again, not necessarily your --

JULIAN

Stands from his seat on the bed
-- No, Spence, don’t give me that bullshit. Of course it has to do with me. I’m your partner, you’re the future mother - *(corrects himself in earnest)* ‘mother-slash-parent?’ of my child.

*Spencer sighs in frustration.*

**JULIAN**

*(crosses downstage to lean against dresser)* Like, if you’re serious about this, like you really think you want to stand up and to piss in the morning and sit down in the afternoon *(uses flippant gestures)*, and you want to *do* something about that - that’s difficult for me. I mean, fuck, Spencer, I love you, I really do, but not only are we going to have a fucking kid together, and you don’t know about motherhood or parenting or womanhood or whatever the fuck you’re talking about, but imagine: my partner of four years springs on me that she’s not who she is supposed to be, or that she’s not who she is in *my mind*, at least - how do you expect me to suddenly cope with that?

**SPENCER**

I never said you had to fucking cope! I’m not expecting you to suddenly cope with that, *(aggressive)* all I ask is that you just try to have a grain of fucking sympathy - a single grain Julian, one fucking grain of understanding -

**JULIAN**

But that’s the fucking issue! I *don’t* understand! How can you expect me to fucking understand this thing that you can’t even say yourself?

**SPENCER**

*(all the while mumbling)*

I never said anything about coping, *anything* about you and what *you* have to do, *(looks up at emotional Julian/breaks down) --- PAUSE ---* I’m sorry. *(tries to stand up to approach Julian, struggles, Julian comes to her instead. They sit together)*
PAUSE

JULIAN

Look, Spence, I’m sorry too. And I’m sorry that this wasn’t the reaction you were expecting.

SPENCER

-- (whispers) Honestly I don’t know what I was expecting (falls back on the bed) ---

JULIAN

-- And that’s okay. (takes a sip of water - this larger glass is now empty - falls back next to her) We can talk about parenting with this later, but (almost sarcastically) let’s talk about me for a second? Okay? Spencer laughs. Spence, I love you, you know that. But I don’t know that I…love or really see you this way. I know that I see you as a woman, I love you and your beauty and your intelligence and all that you are, really (she faces him and smiles) - and I know that those aren’t necessarily things exclusive to womanhood, but when I think of you and those things, I see them, not tied to you being a woman, but I almost see them from the lens of you being a woman.

SPENCER

That makes no sense.

JULIAN

(banter) You make no sense---

SPENCER

---But I still get it - gender is fucking confusing. And I guess that’s something we work on together - you know, you’re not the only one that’s going to struggle here (they smile). (stares at the ceiling) I have to figure out how I deal with the fact that some days I’ll feel like a mother and some days I
won’t, how I deal with that inconsistency - I mean, I have been dealing with it (smirks). But also, how I deal with all this as a parent: beyond womanhood, beyond motherhood - beyond the belly.

She looks back down at Julian, who is already looking at her. He briefly touches her belly, but catches himself - and moves to cup her face instead, pointedly dropping the negligee in his other hand to the floor. He looks beyond her belly, and seems to see something on stage left. He reaches over her belly to hand her the smaller glass on the bedside table stage left. He kisses her forehead and hands her another glass of water, helping her drink it.

They touch their foreheads to one another. The light blue ‘moonlight’ dims.