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TRANSFER REACTIONS: TOMMY & THE RADAR

Tommy, Mary's little brother, was just 2 ½. Buoyed by his first major triumph in life, potty training, he was ready to tackle the world. Due to his size, his limited vocabulary, and his apparent inexperience, Mommy and Daddy tended to underestimate him. They didn't realize that their little boy was in possession of one of the most advanced radar sets ever invented.

Tommy's radar set was the latest model—state of the art after several million years of evolving development. It wasn't your usual object-detecting radar: Tommy had eyes and ears for that sort of thing. Tommy's radar was the atmospheric type. It was designed to monitor the family weather. It was extremely sensitive; and it was always on, even when Tommy was sleeping. (He had not yet learned how to turn it off: for example, by playing video games, or by holding a beer in one hand and a TV remote in the other, or by shopping, or by taking pills.) Tommy's radar could pick up the slightest variations in the family space. He could tell Mommy's or Daddy's mood at ten paces, before they even said anything. His radar was especially good at detecting the quality of the invisible space between Mommy and Daddy. When this space was clear and loving, Tommy's radar was quiet and the screen was clear. The slightest ripple in this space caused a blip, which always got Tommy's attention. A storm would scramble his screen with all sorts of static and zaps, and alarms would go off. This was actually painful for Tommy, and he would cry, or get cranky, or have a tantrum. Mommy and Daddy didn't realize it, but Tommy's radar was stealth-proof; no clever design or maneuver would allow escape from its detection.

The family weather, especially the space between Mommy and Daddy, had not been good for some time. Tommy's radar had been getting storm warnings. This made Tommy get busier, and his radar wasn't letting him sleep as much. Tommy felt a thunder and lightning storm was coming. But this didn't happen. Instead, Daddy moved out, and the weather totally changed to a tense, dreary drizzle.

At first, Tommy was confused. His radar couldn't find the space between Mommy and Daddy. So it reverted to its earlier, backup mode, focusing on Mommy. His radar had initially been synchronized with Mommy before he was born. Now he could feel himself and Mommy tuning into each other like the old days. In stormy times, this always helped him and Mommy. Tommy and Mommy stayed close and synchronized. Mommy was good at keeping things comfortable and consistent.

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When Tommy went to visit Daddy, they didn't spend much time on the weather. Daddy was more tuned into Tommy's curiosity and penchant for adventure. He took Tommy out into the world, showed him all sorts of new things, and played with him a lot. It was always something different and new. Tommy got excited and had fun.

Tommy was used to Mommy and Daddy being different in this way. He actually liked it—comfort and excitement seemed to enhance each other. It worked fine as long as his radar told him the weather between Mommy and Daddy was okay. But now with the separation, something was going wrong. The frame of reference—the ground plane—on which his radar depended for static-free operation was the space and weather between Mommy and Daddy. His radar couldn't locate this grounding frame of reference. And he didn't yet have the equipment to switch like his older sister, Mary.

Transfers were particularly difficult. This was the only time when Tommy's radar could get a read on the Mommy-Daddy weather, and it wasn't good. Mary looked for smiles at these times, but Tommy just checked his stealth-proof radar. The radar was always screeching with alarms, and it was beginning to hurt. Tommy's radar set had gone from grounding to no grounding way too fast, before any chance to slowly adjust its settings and programs.

Tommy always knew what to do when his radar was causing pain. No matter how much fun and excitement and adventure he had with Daddy, he would show his pain as soon as he was alone with Mommy. He would show Mommy how he was all out of sync. He would misbehave, he would have tantrums, he wouldn't go to bed, he would yell and cry, and he might even throw his food. Sometimes he even wet himself. It would take a day or so for him to settle down and get in sync with Mommy. He really missed Daddy, but he had no way of thinking or talking about this. He only had his ultra-sensitive radar, and it was on the fritz causing all kinds of trouble.

Mommy, whose own radar was hyper-sensitive these days, figured Tommy must be having a very hard time seeing Daddy. This did not entirely surprise her, as her own experience of Daddy had not been pleasant for some time. She knew Tommy needed help. The most obvious help would be to stop seeing Daddy, or at least to see him much less frequently.

Daddy, whose own radar had been switched off temporarily in the interests of pain reduction, was certain Mommy was either lying about Tommy's reactions or causing

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them herself by her own emotionality. It didn't surprise him that Tommy found Mommy impossible.

But Daddy had a more serious concern, which up to now he had kept to himself. When he moved out, Daddy's secret fear and nightmare were that he might lose his children—his precious little girl, Mary, and his baby boy, Tommy. When Mommy made noises about Tommy not seeing him as often, and definitely not staying overnight, Daddy knew he had to nip this in the bud.

The very next day, Mommy's lawyer got papers from Daddy's lawyer. Tommy's radar began to pick up serious storm activity at transfer times. There was even some thunder and lightening. Tommy still had fun with Daddy, but his reactions back with Mommy got worse and worse. The storm gathered momentum. The more Mommy and Daddy blamed each other for Tommy's

reactions, the worse they became. Finally, the lawyers sent Mommy and Daddy to the divorce doctor.

The divorce doctor first acknowledged Mommy's and Daddy's fears. He helped them acknowledge that both of them were of utmost importance for the children, and that neither of them would ever lose the children. Then they all focused on Tommy's reactions. The divorce doctor called them "**transfer reactions**". He explained how these were not caused by anything Mommy or Daddy was doing. He said such reactions were common with children this age. He figured they were caused by the suddenness of the separation, which was too much for Tommy's radar, and by the stormy weather.

The divorce doctor had an unusual idea for helping Tommy with his reactions. He suggested Mommy and Daddy take Tommy to the park next Saturday, and then take turns playing with him every 15 minutes or so, being careful to smile and be pleasant at each exchange. Doing this for a couple of hours would help Tommy's radar to readjust and get used to taking turns, in a peaceful atmosphere. Next, the doctor thought they could on Sunday, or the next weekend, arrange to transfer Tommy every couple of hours or so. This would be like backing up the separation and doing it all over again (as far as Tommy was concerned), in slow motion. Tommy's radar would get a chance to adjust, and he could experience that Mommy and Daddy were extensions of each other, just like back in his good old days.

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Luckily, Mommy and Daddy, once their fears were addressed and they stopped blaming each other, were able to do these things. Tommy's transfer reactions quickly subsided. Even when he did occasionally get out of sorts, it did not produce fears or blaming, or thunder and lightening.

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