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## Boy-Girl that Wasn't

... and the 'Sane Mad Man'

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**T**he phone rang. I lifted the handset to my ear and recited my parents phone number into the mouthpiece. I could hear my own voice echoing back at me through the ear piece. It had an unmistakable crack of masculinity to it.

*I felt like an animal that was being studied like a prized anthropological specimen in a zoo and quite unlike a medical patient.*

My senses woke at this bizarre experience! "Wayne?" my confused uncle's voice implored as he mistook me for my brother. "No no, it's Karin" echoed the male voice. What followed were several seconds of mutually surprised silence as, presumably, we both explored for an explanation as to why a fourteen-year-old girl's voice would sound this way.

"Have you got a cold?" asked my uncle. It sounded more like an explanation than a question. I ran a quick mental check over my body; throat, head and finally the chest. I felt fine, although still confused. Actually I felt exceptionally well. But I agreed that I might be coming down with something. Ultimately we discussed the whole thing as a temporary ailment and I surrendered the phone to my father.

Over the next couple of weeks I become more and more aware of my voice. As the weeks became months I began to notice the hair on my legs getting darker and thicker. Soft white downy hair became apparent on my upper lip. Finally I found myself at a G.P.s surgery. He had all the charm and grace of Adolf Hitler at a Bar Mitzvah. I was told to strip (embarrassment) and after some quiet words with mum, a specialist referral was made.

The specialist was colder than the G.P. and I was asked to strip again (more embarrassment) and he inspected and touched me. He produced several instruments. One of them was a handle with several ring shaped dials that he rotated as he held it in front of my face and peered through it into my eyes. I studied his face as he 'mapped' my eyes. I could see that he didn't like me. He was disgusted. He shoved me and his language was curt. I was weighed, my height and other measurements were taken and his findings were written down. I felt like an animal that was being studied like a prized anthropological specimen in a zoo and quite unlike a medical patient.

He sat me down and asked me a series of extremely personal questions in a bungling attempt at psychological analysis. He was like a bull in a china shop; I answered him with all the insincerity of a typical embarrassed fifteen-year-old. Later, I was relieved of some blood and saliva for pathology.

I never learned the results of the examinations. I refused to go back and as time went by I began to look more and more boyish. The more boyish I became the more I was picked on at school and the more I was picked on at school, the more I tried to avoid it. When I wasn't at school I would dress as a boy and go on long bush walks with the family dog. We became inseparable and but for him I was a loner.

I felt alienated from everyone, including my parents. However, support came from the strangest place, my father's step-father. He hated everybody and everything, especially my father. He violently beat his own family and my father was so terrified of him that he would sleep with the window open as an escape route. His home was like a gaol. Any visitors, including family, were treated curtly and were often physically dealt with.

For all his imperfections, his violent, hateful disposition, he never once raised his voice to me. He took me under his wing. He would tell me stories of his life at sea during the war. Stories of countries and places he had been. Stories that would keep me gaping in awe. He took me on big trips to the city. We visited the dockyards and he took me through the ships. We visited museums and art galleries and at every turn he would have an amazing story to tell me that related to everything that we saw and did together.

In him I had a confidant and in me he had an audience for his outrageous stories. We were both contradictions. i.e. he was the 'sane mad man' and I was the boy/girl that wasn't.

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