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The Day the Sky Fell on Me

Elaine's Revelation, both Shocking and Freeing

by Elaine

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... she asked me if I knew of my strong feminine energy.

The idea hit me like a truck, as if the sky had fallen on me. Most of my life I have struggled to be a man in a man's world and I could never get it, why I never quite made the big time. That my life of struggle and pain and apparent failure could be explained in this single truth: that I am a woman who was born with a man's body, was a revelation, at once both shocking and freeing.

... while my mates were all out testing their testosterone, I was at home wearing a pair of oranges or tennis balls down the front of my jumper.

It answered in one go, everything I have never understood about my turbulent past. When I left school I had foolishly believed the advertising world would give me a career in which to express my early signs of creative ability. How wrong I was! This was undeniably the world of big business, the corporate world where men were men and woe betide anyone who was not a member of the club.

Believing I was a man, I would subconsciously summon any maleness I could muster in order to be one of them and I tried to play their game. But I was playing by different rules. The more macho the client or colleague the more serious and destructive were the games they played with me. They must have sensed I was not one of them but couldn't understand

what was going on. Or maybe I was threatening to their maleness ... I don't know? Whatever the reason - an unconscious thing certainly - I would invariably find myself in the uncomfortable position of victim.

At one advertising agency, for example, the staff was invited to social drinks after work every Friday in the boss's office. Here the blokes were blokes and would gather in one corner of the room while the women would huddle in the other. This was social? One night I became tired of the males-only conversation and dared to cross the floor to join the women. The men never forgave me. Life was made so difficult for me that, as "Creative Director", I was unable to function and I had no choice but to leave. I have always been drawn to the company of women, not men, but I've never understood until now why it's landed me in so much hot water when my motives were never those usually attributed to men. At some agencies, to be in the club was to attend the late night male drinking sessions at which important decisions were made. I learnt that to be absent from even one of them was detrimental to my career. But hey, all the grog was free, so what was my problem? I'd often console myself by seeing those around me in the corporate world as warriors defending their kingdom (the company), aspiring to their roles of the "Boys Own" comic book heroes, bravely setting out from their castles (homes) every morning on their trusty steeds (cars) to go into battle in their suits of armour (business suits).

Their ties were their swords and those who wore the loudest ties, especially if splattered with red, tended to be the killers. I'd beware the blue tie wearer who would often be the deceiver, the colours of his sword not always matching the colour of his intentions (it's the politicians favourite tie). I've read that a man's tie is a symbol of his erect penis but then, symbolically, what is the difference between a penis and a sword?

There was the time when I landed my first big client soon after going out on my own. They were a well known party plan company where the saleswoman sold their product in the home. When I was invited to their week-long annual conference in Fiji to present my campaign I thought I had it made. I had written and designed a series of black and white double page spread magazine ads and a radio commercial using two of their sales women doing their thing in a real home environment. So of course I'd become friendly with these two women before the conference.

We arrived at the resort at 4 o'clock in the morning so, since our time was free on the first day, I decided to take an afternoon nap in my room. On emerging, still groggy, I was confronted by a number of hostile senior women and the male Managing Director, accusing me of spending the afternoon in bed with Mrs. X (who was one of the women in the ads). What? They were so sure of their assumption that they hadn't even bothered to knock on my door or try my phone. My denials and my "what are you talking about?" seemed to cut no ice.

What I was being accused of was their expectation of me, as a man. Of course they were not to know about the ad campaign and how I came to know the photogenic Mrs. X beforehand. My presentation on the final night of the conference, a formal affair, was a great success. I'd engaged a top songwriter, Mike Brady, to compose a jingle which was so good I had him record a full three minute version

of it hoping it might make the charts. The song went down so well that the fifty or so delegates danced and sang to it all night as I kept playing the tape for them. I was on a real high. This was surely the launch of my successful freelance career.

I had a new family of two beautiful blonde blue eyed little girls aged four and two, and we just bought a modest timber house in a trendy inner Melbourne suburb. Everything was going well. Soon afterwards the clock struck midnight and everything turned to pumpkins. The client cancelled the campaign and asked that I place no more advertising.

There were perfectly good internal reasons why, but I have no doubt the first nail in the coffin (and perhaps the last) was the imagined episode between me and one of their staff on that first steamy afternoon in Fiji. It was a year before I got paid for the campaign in spite of much persistence on my part (I had equally persistent creditors to pay).

Can you see how easy it has been for me to get myself into trouble - even when I'm asleep? It's not as if I were incompetent or lacking in talent. I ran my own freelance business for over ten years, against the odds, and once wrote and directed a campaign of award-winning television commercials for a famous brand of pies and donuts.

My Mother wanted a girl. She was convinced her first child, me, was a girl. So sure was she that she had lovingly made a pile of beautiful embroidered and smocked dresses for her newborn daughter to wear. To her great disappointment I arrived in a little boys body but I got to wear the dresses anyhow.

I wonder, did my mother know I was a girl resting in her womb or did she will it with her thoughts? I'm sure you've read books which say, like the title of the first chapter in Napoleon Hill's famous book *Think and Grow Rich*, that "Thoughts are Things". Or was it through wearing all those beautiful dresses my Mother had made with such love and anticipation? There were a number of telling episodes as I was growing up.

Like the time my Mother took an axe to my writing desk in which were stored all my pet projects after I refused to go outside and play footy with my brothers. That little drama surely sent the female in me ducking for cover for years. Or when I became deeply impressed by a classmate (at an all-boys school) who played the female lead in the annual school play and was transformed into a beautiful woman.

This made such a deep and lasting impact on the teenage schoolboy who had just reached puberty. But while my mates were all out testing their testosterone, I was at home wearing a pair of oranges or tennis balls down the front of my jumper. I'd reached puberty, so where were my breasts then? When they failed to appear I had innocently (and instinctively?) created them as best I could.

In later years, without having any understanding, I was filled with shame and guilt over that incident. Yet all my life I've been ashamed of my man's body (especially my short, unmanly legs with my thin ankles and calves) and have usually worn boring unsexy grey clothes.

Always I've sought to be invisible in the crowd. Like a car only running on two cylinders my car eventually blew up and I was declared bankrupt. I was a real mess. I retreated, broke and broken, to live in a friend's leaky old caravan parked outside their home on the edge of a small country town in the hills. Everything I owned was inside that caravan. There was no new Porsche parked outside, not even a beaten up Mini-Minor. I'd lost my home, my business, my savings, my car and even my credit cards which I'd surrendered to the Official Receiver. I had failed at everything.

My life was over (or so I thought). In spite of being homeless (unless you call a leaky old caravan parked by the roadside a home), unemployable and a stressed out basket case, miraculous and mysterious things began to happen.

When everything stopped, when all the activity and the chatter and the struggle stopped, a new me peered out from behind the facade. the mask, the ugly body that was the male me. A little at a time I could see, or recall, the signs which had been there all my life. Without yet having understanding.

It was as if I had begun a whole new life. Even my identity was non-existent but a new one had begun swirling around in my mind and my actions and my sense of who I was.

A few years later I'm on a plane to New York - with no money or credit cards, it was insane! - and I lived for six months in a luxury apartment block on the Hudson River overlooking Manhattan with a pen-friend who paid for everything including my air fare.

One day we're walking through Provincetown at Cape Cod and she announces there is a group of gay guys showing an interest in me. Yeah, right! We met a psychic woman from New Jersey who told me I was 60 percent female and only 40 percent male. I was stunned but I was listening at last. My friend was a feminist and I became absorbed in her library of feminist, gender and goddess literature.

By the time I left, I too was a feminist and a student of the goddess. Back home, I continued to think about and study these issues. I was changed by Riane Eisler's brilliant book *The Chalice and the Blade*, (chalice = feminine, blade = masculine) and the sequel *Sacred Pleasure*. The soul (which is also not our physical body), I decided, is the sum total of every lifetime we have lived which includes both male and female genders, regardless of whether we happen to be living right now in a male or female body. All of us, I believe, are on different points on a scale between the extremes of all-female and all-male.

Like our false personas we all have false bodies which mask who we really are, so our beliefs about who we are, and who others think we are, becomes a deception. I could never see what was so glaringly obvious to others.

A good looking young woman in a mini skirt approached me in a bargain shop in the city. I wondered why she was engaging me in conversation beyond the usual polite few words then she asked me if I knew of my strong feminine energy. She could feel it from the other side of the store, she said. She explained she was a lesbian, then took out a pencil and wrote an address on a scrap of paper,

inviting me to meet her gay and lesbian friends.

I never did. I was living in a caravan in the country so I let it pass. I have never forgotten that meeting. It took two great explosions to wake me up. The first was bankruptcy which demolished my old persona. The second was an article headed "A Woman Trapped in a Man's Body". Instantly I knew it was about me.

That was when the sky fell on me and I awakened to the truth which had been there, had I bothered to notice, since the day I was born (or before). Now I can love and be proud of my "woman's body" without the guilt or the shame. For the first time in my life I can love myself. What a confession!

Recently I was walking the one kilometre to the shops from the rented furnished flat by the sea where I'm now living. Along an unmade road around the side of a hill, enjoying the expansive ocean views, when I heard someone say the name Elaine. I looked around but no-one was in sight. I heard the name again and knew it was coming from inside my head. By the time I'd reached the shops I knew that if I broke it down into three sounds it was the reverse of my given male name. El-ai-ne reversed is Ne-ai-el (Neil). The one dollar rack at the local op-shop became a gold mine for a new colourful wardrobe. I took some photos of myself in a full length mirror and couldn't believe what I saw when I got the prints back. There were my horrible man's legs transformed into LEGS! I decided to take a huge risk and discuss my secret with my doctor, a woman who is both a G.P. and an Alternative Therapies Practitioner. Two years ago she had rescued me when other doctors had failed to diagnose a number of stress related illnesses from my past.

My new revelation, I believed, could explain a great deal about my health and could become part of my healing. She looked through a selection of my photos, as I sat there trembling, then looked up and said in a matter-of-fact voice: "I knew about this a year ago but didn't know whether I should raise it with you"! Even my doctor knew? This has not been a choice, a whim, an impulsive flight into fantasy. It's an honest recognition of what is and what always has been in spite of a lifetime of denial which has cost me dearly in every aspect of my life. We are all different, in so many ways. We should be encouraged to cultivate and celebrate our differences, our uniqueness, instead of trying to become a world of clones. I'm proud to be a woman trapped in a man's body. It's who I am. I'm not homosexual and I'm not attracted to men. Where that leaves me I'm not sure. But that's okay. I'm on an exciting new adventure as a new person with a new gender - I prefer the word "androgynous". I'm free to be and enjoy who I really am. I'm well into my second full-length book manuscript where my feminine voice can at last be heard.

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