Dreams Made Real

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

I was told that testicular cancer is often suffered by young men – men as young as I was. And cyclists too – a disproportionately larger number for young men who spent a lot of time on a bike, as I had. But the removal of one testicle should do it, and as I was told more than once - “you only need one”. And then the words - “we can collect sperm and bank it, so if the worst comes to the worst...”.

I went into hospital on a Tuesday night. I did some work that day just to take my mind off things, despite being urged to take time off. They had to run some tests and then they would operate in the morning. Up until then it was liquids only then nil by mouth from the tie I lay down to sleep.

I had my first strange dream that night. I dreamt that I was running along a beach with the sun on my face, just for the joy of running. There was that sense of joy that you experience in the middle of a hard ride, when it suddenly becomes easy. But this was not gliding – my whole body seemed to be bouncing and swinging. I looked down at my chest and I could see that I had two substantial breasts jumping around, barely constrained by the tiny triangles of a shocking pink bikini. And beneath that another two triangles of the same color barely covered my but in the back but neatly contained my pubic hair in the front, and that was all. I had no male genitals. I had a woman’s body. I stopped to check myself, my hands going to my crotch and feeling the soft hairless thighs. Long hair which had been trailing behind me as I ran, now fell about my shoulders with curls at the tips bouncing in a warm sea breeze. I cupped the mound between my legs, not in horror but with something that felt like satisfaction. Running with an empty groin seemed easier, it was just the breasts that were an issue. I seemed ready to run on, but before I could, I woke up.

It was morning and the doctors on their rounds were already on the ward, and coming over to me.

“We have had to remove one of your testes as we thought,” said the Surgeon, Dr. Heath. “As for the other, there are some irregularities that require investigation. We have removed some tissue which we will test. We are hopeful that there is no cancer there, but we will now soon enough. You should stay here in the meantime.”

There seemed no reason for concern. My dream had been more troubling. The pain was minimal. I sat up in bed and watched a football game on TV, although I seemed to lose interest even though the contest was tightly fought. It was not like me, but I was in hospital so I could hardly be blamed if my mid was elsewhere.

The result came back that afternoon. There was no cancer in the surviving testis, but still the doctor suggested that I stay in another night.

I had another strange dream that night. I was looking at myself in a mirror, but it was not me. It was the girl who had been running on the beach – me, but in a female body. I could now see the breasts, but this time in a nightie. I could see the hair too, long and shiny. Their was a hairbrush in my hand. I was sitting at a dressing table strewn with cosmetic and hair accessories. I raised the brush and ran it through my hair to the tips, feeling the gentle tug on my scalp as if it were familiar.

It was me and yet it wasn’t. I could see myself in the eyes and certain features, but it was the face of a pretty young woman. I tied back my hair and applied hand and face cream. Perhaps I had seen it being done before, but my movements seemed so fluid it was as if this was a routine I had followed for many years. I smiled at my reflection. The face staring back at me seemed to be there to reassure me – at least that was how I felt. I was ready for bed. Tomorrow would be a new day, and a better day. But instead, I woke up.

Just as the day before I had woken up just before the doctors stepped onto the ward, with the head still filled with strange images.

I wondered whether I should tell my surgeon about the dreams that I was having, but it struck me that I was over-reacting. He seemed to have his own concerns, as he explained to me that afternoon.

“We were satisfied that your other testis was healthy, but it seemed to be atrophying,” said Dr. Heath. “It is losing volume in a most unusual way. We simply cannot understand why. There is no sign of infection, and yet it seems to be getting smaller and retreating upwards. We will be checking your blood for hormone irregularities.”

I asked for him to be direct with me. Was I going to survive? Would I have at least one testicle?

“You will not die of testicular cancer, as far as we are concerned, but your remaining testicle is in danger. If it is not viable, it should be removed. At least we have harvested sperm. As for sexual relations, there are ways to engage even with any testicles at all. Just get some rest.”

It was disturbing news, and I spent a good part of the day in discussion with my family about it. Strangely it seemed that they were more concerned about it than I was. It seemed that I was surprisingly positive for a man who had just been told that he faced the prospect of being unmanned within the week.

I wondered if I would be able to sleep, but I did so almost immediately, and I dreamt. I was in my parents living room. It was all very familiar. My parents were very proud of their two sons and there were photographs on the walls and the mantlepiece and over the side table my mother called her “memory table”. The images covered the lives of two boys who had become two men, and they all seemed usual, but yet there was a difference. I reached out to pick one off the table and I could see that my hand was soft with long manicured nails painted red. There were splashes of the same red in the print dress that I wearing. I was a woman again in this dream, with my hair loosely pinned up and wearing heels, walking across the room easily in them.

The photograph in my hand was of me and my brother with my mother, on the evening of the high school prom. There she was with her son and her daughter. To her right was me, in a ball gown with my hair styled and my makeup way to overdone, and on my wrist was the corsage given to me by Fabian Halberg, the basketball captain and my boyfriend at the time.

I woke up, and this time I was in a slight panic. It is one thing to imagine yourself in another body, but here I was reimagining history. I was imagining that the person I was had never existed and that instead I had been somebody else. I had always been a woman. It was like having the foundations of your life swept away by floodwaters.

Dr. Heath appeared while I was still trying to settle myself.

“Have you been told? You seem agitated. You haven’t? Well there is no easy way to say this but we will have to remove the other one of your testes. It will poison you if we leave it in place. It has effectively died. We don’t really know why. I am sorry. The procedure will be quick. We can do it with local anaesthetic and sedation. I think that we should do it immediately.”

That was it. I was told that my days as a true man were over. It seemed as if all those dreams were telling me that my future was not male.

“You should be aware that we can maintain your male hormones,” said the doctor. “You can function as a male, just not able to reproduce with using the reserved sperm. We should probably put you on androgens as soon as possible because we did not some hormonal abnormalities on those last blood tests – higher levels of female hormones. It is all quite puzzling.”

Was it? Somehow it seemed to make sense to me, although whether the hormones were causing the dreams or the dreams were causing the hormones, was entirely unclear.

It was only a few hours later when I was taken into a surgery and sedated. So I was conscious but beyond caring when Dr. Heath went to work on my groin. My legs were put into stirrups as I imagined they might be for women being examined. I remember hearing the sound of liquid and almost feeling the doctors hand enter me, as if pulling something from a vagina I did not have – not then anyway.

He looked at me and smiled, and he said something like – “All done”, as if he should be congratulated or thanked for his work. I felt exhausted, emotionally more than anything. I was taken back to the ward and I fell asleep.

This time the dream seemed more vivid than the other three that preceded it. It ay have been the same beach as the first dream, but this time I was further up, in a small grove of shrubs and palms around a grassed area. An archway of flowers stood in front of me, with the sea beyond, and the smell of salt in the air mixed with the perfume from the flowers clutched in my hands. Beside me was father, smiling at me, and I saw my mother and my brother too, and many others on either side of me. And in front of me was a man with a book – a marriage celebrant. And beside him, in an ivory colored suit that seemed perfect for a beach wedding, stood Fabian Halberg, tall and handsome, with a smile and eyes full of love.

I was walking forward, in wedge sandals better suited to the grass and sand below it, with my white wedding dress just dragging a little. My breasts were on display, and I wore a gentle corset to give me shape with comfort, and I could feel my silk panties with the tenderest part of my womanhood. I was smiling, and I knew why. This was as happy as I had even been or could ever hope to be. Music played – something romantic that was drawing tears from the sentimental. But in that moment that did not include me – I was determined to say my lines, and drink my champagne, eat my meal and do my dance and get this man to bed. He belonged inside me, as a husband should be.

There was no panic this time. There was no waking in a cold sweat. This was a happy dream. I should be lucky enough that it should last forever. It almost seemed to. I cannot remember how it ended.

“Can you receive a visitor?” the nurse asked me. She was not talking about my family – they had a distance to come and stuck to the visiting hours. “It is somebody who says they are an old school friend of yours.”

I still had that smile on my face. There was a slight pain in my groin, but I was open to a visit, and I told her.

Then suddenly he was standing at the end of my bed, his tall frame looking like an angel.

“I am just here visting my father,” said Fabian Halberg. “He had a heart-attack yesterday but it looks like he is going to make a full recovery. But what about you? I heard that you were in the next ward. Somebody mentioned cancer? I hope you’re okay. Are you going to come through it?”

“I think I am going to be fine, but I will be a changed person,” I said, as if the words were emerging from my mouth spoken by another.

“I heard that it was … like, down below, so I am guessing what that might me,” he said. “Hey Man, I am sorry to hear it.”

“No really, it’s alright. I am up for this. I think that it gives me the chance to head off in a new direction. Who wants to be half a man, right? I am thinking that maybe I might cross over – maybe try to live life as a woman. What do you think?”

He smiled. It seemed that he was certain that I was joking, but I wasn’t. The silence made him realize that I was serious. His brow suddenly set to show that he was too.

“I hope you won’t think this too weird,” he said. “But somehow, I am not surprised to hear you say that. It was like, when we were at school … I always thought that you would make a hot-looking girl.”

“Really,” I said with a smile that could only have appeared to him as flirtatious. “Well, maybe we should catch up when I have got a little further down this track?”

The End

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*Erin’s Seed: “He keeps dreaming while he is laid up in the hospital - it's almost another life he is leading in his dreams - he is always a woman. Somehow it works out that when they release him, after time in a rehab unit, he is released as a woman.”*