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FOUND & LOST: A RARE PEARL

By Mardee Louise Prynne

Merton was a different sort of kid as far back as I can remember. He was bright but very much a loner even in elementary school. His father was never around but that was true for so many of us during those days of World War II. Fathers were off fighting the Nazis or the Japs or, if they were too old or too nearsighted to serve in the military, they were off working in defense related jobs far from the New York neighborhood where we lived.

Most of us were left on our own after school let out at the end of the day but not Merton who sat with a book and dreamy look on his face on the front stoop of the house where he lived in an apartment with his mother. The apartment was really a garret atop the two floors of a large old house occupied by an elderly lady who was some sort of relation to Merton's mom.

None of us had ever been inside the house until a couple of years after the end of the war and then only to make a delivery from the local grocery that used a few of us as delivery boys on an occasional basis. There was a side door that opened onto a set of stairs leading to the kitchen entrance and to the upper floors. The stairwell was its own entity; the kitchen being entered through a solid door which was almost always locked. Lately I had been glancing up the side stairs as I carried the boxes of groceries into the kitchen wondering if this was how Merton came and went.

At age ten I had been strangely fascinated with this odd boy who was probably about my age. For one thing, he didn't go to our local public school. Nor did his father ever return from service in the war but there was no gold star flag in any window of the house to

indicate he had been killed in the war. Perhaps, we speculated, when we saw Merton or his mother pass by, his parents were divorced, a thing rarely mentioned in our comfortable, smug, prissy, and very narrow world.

At the start of high school I got a Brooklyn Eagle route which gave me pocket money for the next four years. (The Brooklyn Eagle was a six day a week, well respected newspaper published in Brooklyn, New York from October 1841 to March 1955 when it succumbed due to labor strike. Its editors included Walt Whitman.) By chance, my route included Merton's house. The subscriber was, to my disappointment, Merton's older relation. I was puzzled as to why I felt let down by this seemingly irrelevant fact.

Mrs. Cohen, the older woman who owned the house, was a generous tipper who asked that I drop the paper inside the side door which she usually left unlocked. Considering the generous weekly tip she gave me, I was more than happy to comply with this seemingly pointless request.

In addition to the liberal tip I was given each week, there was a payoff to my accommodating Mrs. Cohen. It came about by chance. One day as I opened the side door to toss the paper in front of the kitchen entrance a few steps up from the door, I was startled by a yelp and the shadow of someone standing on the stairs above. Looking up I saw a pair of tanned, slender yet well shaped legs in turned down white socks and low sneakers. The legs ended in a pair of white short shorts. The blue tee shirt might have been meant for a boy or a girl. The smile caught my attention as I realized this was none other than Merton!

"Oh, Mitchell, I'm sorry to have startled you but I wasn't expecting anyone to open the door just now." A smile slowly appeared on his delicate, regular features. "I guess we really startled each other."

"That's okay, Merton. Say, how do you know my name?"

"I guess I remembered it because you're one of the nicer boys around here. You've never ever catcalled after me. It's really sweet of you."

"Thanks for saying I'm a nice guy...."

I paused before going on as I became aware of this funny feeling in my belly.

At that early time I couldn't begin to understand it, let alone explain it. I stood awkwardly thinking of something to say, some way to prolong this spontaneous contact, Merton knelt down to pick up the paper. In kneeling down his tee shirt slipped from the waist band of his shorts to reveal the upper edge of white cotton underpants. This was pretty ordinary for a boy in his teens back then but I would have sworn that there was no flat waist band like on the popular briefs boys wore but rather the narrow cotton covered elastic of girls' panties!

"Well, I gotta go now," I said really not wanting to leave for reasons I didn't know. "I need to finish my delivering my papers."

"Sure thing, Mitchell. Say, maybe we can spend a few minutes chatting someday."

"Yeah, that would be okay."

"I just know it would be peachy," added Merton with a strangely fascinating lilt to his voice.



Merton all but disappeared from the neighborhood once we were into high school. It was in the summer before our senior year when the group of guys I hung around with was sitting in the school yard resting our backs against the wall when we noticed a kid in shorts walk by across the street. The honey colored hair and fair but tanned skin were enough to make some of us stop the bull session and stare after the attractive image. Having realized with more than a little embarrassment that this was Merton and not a new girl in the neighborhood, one or two guys commented that the "fruit" was back. This thinly veiled attempt to cover their own mistake fooled no one although no one was willing to admit that their first reaction was that they were looking at a real cutie. One or two of the guys nodded as they furtively watched the figure disappear along the street.

"Hey, just 'cause someone doesn't play ball or hang out with other guys doesn't make him a fruit or a queer. Maybe he had some sickness like rheumatic fever or something or polio." This came from one of the tougher but more considerate guys. No one was going to argue with him especially when he had a point.

"I don't know. Maybe you're right but I still think he's a queer, sickness or not." Paul was getting on everyone's nerves with his prattling on about Merton being a queer.

I decided to put my two cents in and, hopefully, shut him up for a while. "Yeah sure, Paul, he could be anything. So tell me, how come you're so interested in him being queer?"

That brought a burst of laughter from the guys. Paul turned red, got to his feet and left but not before telling us what to do to ourselves. Paul was on the fringe of the bunch of guys who hung around the schoolyard playing pickup games of stickball or handball. Paul was often the last picked for a game. He was a harmless kind of guy, the kind who sometimes has a mouth but wouldn't back it up for two reasons. Number one was that he wasn't much of a fighter; he lacked both the temperament and physical attributes to fight well. Then again, you never know when someone is going to boil over. The other reason was that any guy who took a poke at Paul would, due to Paul's temperament and tall but slender build, would be branded a bully and shunned by the guys.

I watched Paul leave the schoolyard wondering what he was up to. Once on the street, he turned left which was away from his house and away from any shops where he might go to get a soda or an ice-cream. He was walking quickly, too quickly. Shit, I thought to myself, is he trying to catch up to Merton so he can bug the kid or is he following him so he can find out where he lives?

I got to my feet and moved closer to the street so I could see if Paul was really following Merton. I started throwing a ball I had in my pocket against the wall as if I were just practicing pitching. Sure enough, Paul was going after Merton.

After another few minutes passed I said "Okay, guys, I'm going, got to take care of something. Anyhow it's almost time to do my newspapers."

I headed out the schoolyard gate and walked casually toward home which was in the same direction that Merton had been traveling and in which Paul had also gone. As soon as I was out of sight, I quickened my pace. I got close enough to see Merton turn up the driveway alongside his house and Paul stop briefly and stare after the androgynous boy.

It turned out that Paul did nothing but stare after Merton and then turn back toward his own home. I not only wondered what Paul was up to but also why I was being protective of Merton. That coupled with the funny feeling I had inside when Merton said nice things about me made me wonder why I was showing concern for this aloof sissy. A horrible feeling came over me, guilt that I had used the word "sissy" in thinking about Merton.

After picking up my bike at home, I went over to the store front that was the local distribution center, got my papers, folded them, put them into the bag on the front of my bike and took off. It was not the usual route I took in throwing my papers onto porches and in front of doors but it allowed me to drop off the paper at Merton's house last of all. I admitted to myself that I was hoping to catch a closer glimpse of Merton and, even better, to exchange a few words with this inexplicably fascinating teen.

I opened the side door to the house and stepped in with paper in hand only to hear a voice from above me snarl "Get out of here this instant or I'll crack your skull..." I glanced up to see Merton a few stairs above the first floor landing with a bat in her hand! Before I could get out a single word Merton who had paused with his mouth open continued. "Oh, my gosh! It's you, Mitchell. Thank goodness it is you and that I realized it. I was so afraid that it was that creepy boy you play ball with. He follows me so often that I get scared. Why can't people just leave me alone?"

With that Merton started to cry softly. I felt an almost irresistible urge to take him in my arms and console him. I stood stock still knowing that if I moved I would embarrass Merton by holding. Worse still, I might lose all chance of ever talking to him again. He looked up at me and then, as if reading my thoughts, leaned his face against my shoulder and put his arms around me.

"Has Paul, tried to hit you or garb you or ..." I started to ask hoping to offer some sort of protection.

"No, nothing like that. He just follows me now and then, staring at me. He once started to talk to me, trying to be friendly but the way he leers at me is so creepy. I don't know why I'm so upset by that revolting drip."

"May be if I talk to him, set him straight..."

"Please don't. I don't want anyone like that to think they have power over me."

Merton paused and put his finger tips against my face. "It's really makes me feel good that a nice guy like you can be concerned for someone like me." Merton took a deep breath and let it out slowly. It was as if he were about to do something that wasn't very easy to do. "I feel so secure when you hold me."

Merton's words made me realize that we had somehow shifted our stance and that my hand was on Merton's back gently pressing him against my chest. It also occurred to me that Merton was wearing a tank top style under shirt under the blue polo shirt that contrasted with the white short shorts. Why, I wondered, would someone wear an undershirt

on a hot and humid day? I moved my hand slowly up toward Merton's neck feeling the curve of the upper edge of the undershirt. The edge curved lower than I would have guessed and, under the light touch of my finger tips, felt different from any boy's undershirt than I could have imagined. Quickly my hand dropped back to the small of Merton's back. I was feeling a gentle flow of electricity in my groin as Merton turned his head so that I could feel his warm breath on my skin.

Merton's hand was on my wrist and then, with a gentle but firm grip, he moved my hand away. I thought I had gone too far, that I might be upsetting this strange boy with what could have been taken as trying to pet with him as if with a girl. To my delight, a delight that surprised me, my hand was guided to the area just below the small of his back, a place that was no longer his back but not yet his bottom. Merton must have been on tiptoe so that his warm, gentle breath was on my neck giving me a tingling sensation unlike anything I had ever experienced with a girl.

Merton's groin was pressing against my thigh, telling me beyond doubt that he was aroused as I was. Again his hand was on my wrist guiding me toward the cleft of his bottom. Then a voice through the door interrupted us.

"Mordecai, what ever are you doing out there so long?" I wasn't sure whether I was feeling relief or frustration at Mrs. Cohen for having broken the spell of this unique interaction, one that I would have welcomed had Merton been a girl but didn't at all reject even though Merton was not. Of course Mrs. Cohen being right behind the closed door could have opened it any second now prompted me to drop my hand from Merton's back.

"Just having a quiet chat with Mitchell. He was delivering the Eagle and we got chatting."

Merton anticipated my question. "Mordecai is my Hebrew name. Family members and people close to me use it. Sometimes they call me Mordie or even Mord for short. Too many people think it's Maude. Oh, just in case you're wondering about my first name; Merton is my mother's maiden name. Of course you're thinking Maude is a girl's name. Now I bet you're thinking I should be a girl."

"I'm just thinking that you're really so different from anybody I've ever known; classier, more refined. Maybe it doesn't matter to me whether you're a boy or a girl as long as you're the special person you are. I hope you get what I mean because I know I'm not making sense." I knew I was running off at the mouth so I took a breath before adding, "Maybe it doesn't matter anyhow."

"Oh, I do get what you mean and I appreciate what you're saying. What you say matters to me; all the more so because I know you mean it."

"Thanks, Maude. I'm going to call you that but maybe it'd be better when no one else is around. That okay with you?"

"Better than just okay. It'll be just super."

I started to turn to leave but Merton was still holding my hand. He drew me back and looked up at me. "Promise me we can be together again."

"I promise. Can I phone you later?"

"Please do."

“Okay, Merton. Talk to you later.”

“What did you call me?”

It took me a second or two to catch on. “Maude! I’ll talk to you later, Maude.”

Merton and I had spent more time together than I had realized so I headed home and showered before dinner. Thinking about Merton as I showered, wondering what sort of thing he was wearing under his tee shirt started to get me hard.

Got to start thinking of her as Maude. I was thinking half out loud as I tried to rationalize that Maude was really a girl’s name and therefore this sprite like being was some kind of girl. Okay, so maybe Merton’s a boy but when we were talking he was more like a girl. Yeah, sure! Kidding myself is what I’m doing. Merton was still a boy and I was kidding myself into thinking he was a girl to keep from acting like a queer. People are one or the other and that’s all there is to it. Nah, there are always exceptions to everything.

After toweling dry, I slipped on a pair of white briefs, put my pillow against the headboard of my bed and began reading *The Odyssey* which we were discussing in my honors classical literature course. Odysseus went to the underworld to consult with Tiresias. Ordinarily I would have just kept reading but there was something about the blind seer whose name meant nothing to me that made me want to know more about her. Perhaps I had known some things about Tiresias, facts which were stored away in the back of my mind. I smiled openly as I read that Tiresias was man who was turned into a woman! Somehow I was soothed by the notion that a being like Maude existed in tales told thousands of years ago.

A knock at my door and I reflexively said “Enter.” My older sister opened the door and, pleased at having caught me in my underpants, smiled mockingly. “Phone call for you and it looks like you’re dressed for it. Very sexy, soothing voice. Girl named Maude. You can take it in my room.” Having said that, her smile turned pleasant as she squeezed my rump as I stepped past her and into her room across the hall. “Never fear. I’ll give you all the privacy you need. I’m going out for some cigarettes.”

“You’re a pal, Mim. Say, why go out? I’ve got a couple of packs in my desk. Help yourself.”

Mim, short for Miriam, was four years older than me. He had done well in high school, gone on to a two year secretarial school and was doing pretty well. She had sworn me to secrecy when she told me her plans to get her own apartment and leave home. If you knew our parents you would understand why she wanted to keep it a secret and she was ready to pack-up her things and get out. She was always advanced for age in what would have been called world matters back in the fifties so I wondered how she didn’t catch on that the “sexy, soothing” voice named Maude was not a girl.

“Maude!” was all I could get out before he or she, I still didn’t whether to think of this very alluring sprite as male or female, she began to speak. It was instantly clear why Mim thought Maude was a girl.

“Mitchell, why on earth do you sound so surprised? I just thought I’d call you in case you were just being nice when you said you would call me.”

"Oh, no. I really do want to talk more with you."

"That's swell. I thought it might be nice if we could just get together where none of your fiends could be around, just so we could be ourselves and really open up to each other. Maybe go to Bear Mountain, some place upstate, and hike and have a picnic. The weather should be nice on Saturday."

"That'll be great. I'll ask my folks if I can use the car. Hang on for a second."

I put my hand over the mouthpiece and looked up at Mim who was taking her cigarette lighter from her pocketbook.

"Sorry to seem like a busybody but I couldn't help overhear." She reached into the pocketbook and extracted a set of car keys, dangled them in front of me and dropped them onto my crotch. "Just bought it a week ago. I'm garaging it near my new apartment. Why look for a fight with Dad? Take it for the whole weekend if you like. My plans don't call for it."

I blew her a kiss by way of thanks and resumed my conversation with Maude.

"Maude, this is peachy. My sister told me I could have her car for the weekend."

"Neat! How early can you pick me up? I'll have a picnic all packed."

Mim was sitting in my room smoking and doing a crossword puzzle when I came back in. The way she looked me up and down made me more than a little self-conscious.

That wry sardonic smile of hers reappeared as she spoke. "My, my; you're going to make some woman very happy. I guess I can't call you little brother from now on. Take it from big sister, though, those white briefs are just too boring. You really ought to try getting them in colors."

I somehow doubted that men's briefs came in colors but I kept my mouth shut rather than seem naïve. Then again I didn't want to piss Mim off when she was being so generous with her new car.

"I'll leave you to your special thoughts now. One thing, though." She was standing in front of me now. "Just be sure of one thing. Don't even hint to Mom and Dad about the car or the apartment. Understand?" With that she put her face to mine, cupped my balls through my skimpy briefs, and slowly applied pressure, lots of pressure.

I wondered if I was getting hard anticipating a day in the country with Maude or from the bizarre thrill of having had my balls squeezed by my older sister.

Glancing at the alarm clock on my night table, I realized it was a lot later than I thought. I pulled on a fresh tee shirt, sat on the edge my bed and slowly pulled on clean crew socks. As I stepped into my jeans I caught a glimpse of my thighs and underpants in my dresser mirror. Mim's right about those white briefs being boring. I should find out where I can get the colored kind. Got to remember to ask her.

My father was reading the newspaper at the kitchen table at the same time throwing out negative comments about Mim to no one in particular. He grunted at me by way of greeting. I gave Mom a peck on the cheek and set the table. I meant to be helpful but only succeeded in getting a disapproving sneer from Dad who managed not to accuse me of doing women's work. No wonder Mim wanted out this household.

A light drizzle had ended when I finished clearing the table. Dad already had the TV in the living room tuned in to the news with John Cameron Swayze. He beckoned to me to have seat as he got up and turned off the huge set.

"I know I don't get on with my own kids but that doesn't mean I don't care. Spoke with my partners today. We'll take you on as a helper after school. That doesn't mean you can't join the Marines or the Army or whatever you want after graduation. It'll give you better money than you get from that Eagle route and you'll start learning a trade."

"Swell, Dad, real swell. I'll give it some thought and tell you later."

"Mitch, I just hope you're not too high and mighty to learn the plumbing and heating trade."

"Well, to be honest with you, Dad, I'm thinking about college on the GI Bill once I finish my military service."

Given Dad's moods I figured it might be best to stay out of his way. I opted to take a walk rather than retreat to my room.



I decided to head down to the commercial shopping street and maybe hang out in the candy store if any one was around. (Candy store in nineteen-fifties referred to a soda fountain that also sold cigarettes, newspapers, magazines as well as candy bars, and light meals.)

On the way I noticed Paul across the street. He was looking in the display window of Rae's, a ladies specialty shop. I didn't make much of it thinking he might be shopping for a gift for his mother or sister. Then again, he didn't have a sister.

Paul turned and, as we made brief eye-contact, waved to me from across the street. I waved back and called to him. We had never really been friends but maybe I was feeling a little guilty about putting him down in front of the guys so I crossed over and asked him if he wanted to walk to the candy store with me.

"That would be really neat, Mitch... You know I feel badly about what happened in the schoolyard this afternoon. I simply don't understand what came over me." I had never noticed his flowery way of speaking before or maybe he just was more reserved, lower key when he was with the guys. "Oh, please don't think I window shop in Rae's. I don't; at least not very often. I just ducked into the entrance way to get out of the rain." He looked at me with a strange, almost pleading expression as he spoke. "Gosh, if some of the guys knew they would really give me a hard time."

"It's okay, Paul. Lots of guys like to look in all kinds of store windows. I was just thinking you might have been looking for a gift for your mother or something. It's no big deal so I don't think it's worth mentioning, and it's nobody's business." Paul seemed relieved by what I had just said.

“Mitch, I’d love to walk over to the candy store with you.” Again that flowery speech! The tilt of his head when he spoke wasn’t exactly ‘guy like’ either. I began to wonder if I had hit on the truth with what I was thinking when I asked him how come he was so concerned whether Merton was a queer. But like I said to Paul; it’s nobody’s business.

“Then let’s stop standing here and get going. Otherwise we’re going to get real wet.”

I turned my jacket collar up as Paul and I started for the candy store. There was no one in the store but the owner’s niece who often worked the evening shift by herself.

She greeted us with a nod and looked like she was about to say something to Paul. I caught him shaking his head in the mirror along the wall. Aw, let it go. He’s just shaking the wetness out of his hair.

“How about a coffee? It’s on me.”

Paul nodded reluctantly it seemed to me. Was he embarrassed to say he didn’t drink coffee?

“Hey, Paul, if you don’t like coffee, maybe a cup of tea or a hot chocolate?”

“Sweet of you to notice. Hot chocolate would be super.”

Again with the flowery language. Not just the words but the delivery and the intonation. The thing was that he was more relaxed talking like this than I had ever seen him around the guys in the schoolyard. The way he tilted his head off to one side when he was enthusiastic made me think of a girl. I walked back to the counter and ordered the coffee and the hot chocolate. I turned back to Paul and asked if he wanted some cake or ice cream. He declined, citing calories as the reason. When this guy lets his guard down he comes across like a girl. Funny, but I think I like him better this way. Say, I’m beginning to wonder whether his following Merton is out of jealousy ‘cause Merton could pass for a girl.

I set the cups on the table and slid into the booth. Paul rested his finger tips on my hand, took a deep breath, and started to speak softly. The softness of his voice might have convinced anyone that this was a girl if only they had closed their eyes.

“Mitch, this is ever so sweet, so nice of you. I never ever get included in what the guys in the schoolyard do. Truthfully, I hate it, being there. My mom wanted me to be more of a guy so my father would stop picking on me, stop calling me a sissy...”

Tears were running down his cheeks. I took a napkin from the dispenser and handed it to him. It took a minute or two for him to pull himself together. He turned apologetic.

“I’m so terribly sorry. I’ve said too much already. Please, Mitch...”

“Like I said before, what passes between us is no one else’s concern. I swear to you that I won’t ever do anything that might make trouble for you.”

“You’re a super luscious guy and I trust you but I can’t say any more right now. I suppose you’re wondering why I said such ridiculously macho things when Merton passed by the schoolyard.”

“My guess would be you were trying to be more like some of those jerks who hang around...”

Paul reached across the table and put his index finger over my lips.

"Yes, of course. But I followed her, er him. I was trying to figure out how she can be so attractive. Mitch, I would sell my soul to be able to pass as a girl."

We emptied our cups in silence. I felt good to see Paul relax.

"When we came in I signaled to Nadine not to say anything about some magazines I asked her to put aside for me. I was afraid of how you might react. Now I know I can trust you with everything about me."

We got up to leave, put our cups on the counter.

"Nadine, thanks for holding those magazines for me. I'll take them now."

The young woman, with an expression of disbelief on her face, opened a cabinet behind the counter and took a copy of Seventeen and Young Miss. She placed them in a paper bag and handed them to Paul.

Paul reached for his wallet but Nadine held up her hands in a sign of rejection.

"This is on me, honey. Your bravery deserves a reward."

Paul giggled as he responded. "Thanks ever so much but Mitch is a real gentleman."

The rain had stopped but I noticed Paul was starting to shiver. Could it have been that he really did duck into the entrance way of La Rae's just to get out of the rain? I took off my jacket and draped it over his shoulders. I was rewarded with a smile that would have been seductive if Paul had been a girl or even a girl like Merton. He took my hand in his and squeezed gently. There was no doubt that he was trying to turn me on. That my cock was starting to strain against my pants was proof that he was succeeding.

A relaxed mood as we walked to Paul's house. "See me to the side door. We can say goodnight and I can return your jacket."

I was happy to oblige if only to get my jacket back. It would be easier for me if no one finds out that I had been so gallant to the kid whose father called him a sissy. Paul unlocked the side door and pulled me inside.

"Mitchell, this is the first time I have ever let any boy know that I really am weird. You make me feel so special, so accepted, and so real."

His arms were resting on my shoulders as he looked up at me. "Oh, don't worry about my father catching us. He's not around." He brought his face up to mine and we kissed.

The kiss resumed with greater intensity as I felt my balls being massaged through my jeans. Paul's thigh was between my legs and pushing against me. The magazines fell to the floor as I slipped my hand down the small of his back, under the waist of his tight jeans. I shivered as my fingertips felt the smoothness of his satin panties. Paul stepped back a few inches and undid his belt buckle, opened the button at the waist and wiggled his jeans down below his hips. I held my breath in anticipation as he undid the front of my jeans. We fell to the stairs as our tongues tasted our mouths. Paul freed my cock from the confines of my briefs. I sighed as his fingers wrapped around my cock head. I tried to shake loose, not out of fear but because I was enjoying this heavy petting with another boy! Perhaps he sensed my fear and shifted so his body was on top of mine pinning me to the stairs.

“Mitch, Mitch,” he whispered as he guided my hand to the front of his panties. “You know real boys never wear undies that feel this smooth. Let me be your girl even if it’s only this once.”

“Yes,” I moaned as I kissed his face, a face as smooth and as soft as any teenage girl’s could be or even hope to be. Tentatively at first, I began tracing the outline of her very hard cock through her panties. She had succeeded in convincing me that I was with a girl; it took no convincing for me to know I was enjoying it!

Her hand was under my ball sack, caressing me and creating sensations I never dreamed possible. My cock began to twitch as a wave of ecstasy overtook me. I came violently, loudly. An instant later my lover screeched as she joined me in orgasm.

Paul led us to the basement laundry room where we washed our hands. As we gently kissed goodnight in the doorway, Paul whispered. “Don’t feel that you have to call me or be nice to me again. I’ll understand. And Mitchell, I won’t ever kiss and tell.”

“Paulie, I promise we can be friends, very special friends.”

A closed mouth smile appeared on Paulie’s soft features as she spoke softly to me. “No one’s ever called me Paulie. I do like it; so much more girly. Promise to call me Paulie when we’re alone again.”

I nodded as Paulie kissed her finger tip and touched it to my lips.

Despite the cold chill of the drizzly night I began to sweat as I walked toward my house. I had gotten off on heavy petting with Paulie and I liked every second of it. But what about Merton or Maude who was a much more convincing girl all the time? We were supposed to get together. Did that count as two-timing and who would I be two timing anyway? It was a wild thought but I convinced myself I wasn’t queer. Paulie was wearing these really soft, really smooth nylon panties which made her a girl. She sounded like a girl, didn’t she? Okay, so she has a dick instead of a pussy but she’s still some kind of a girl.

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It rained after school the next day so there was no hanging around which meant that I wasn’t going to see Paulie or even Paul. I hurried through my paper route, changed out of my wet clothes and phoned Paulie. As the phone started ringing, I began to wonder if I should ask for Paul or for Paulie. Then I remembered that she had said no one ever called her Paulie before last night. My dilemma was solved when Paul picked up the phone. I took a chance on a move that would either end our bizarre friendship or put me in solid with Paulie.

“Hi, this is Mitch. Can I speak to Paulie... if she’s available?”

Oh, hello Mitch. Paulie is right here.” Paul had answered the phone. There was a pause and then Paulie’s voice was there. For a few seconds I wondered if it was a real girl on the

phone. Paulie's voice was softer, slightly higher but with no hint of exaggeration or parody that one would expect from a boy trying to sound feminine. In my mind's eye I saw Paulie in white shimmery panties, the outline of her cockhead showing against the delicate fabric.

I swallowed as I tried to sound nonchalant. It didn't work; I was too delighted to be talking with Paulie.

It was as if Paulie could read my mind when she said, "I was thinking about you when I should have been doing homework and studying. Were you thinking about me?"

"I was, really."

"Were you thinking naughty thoughts?" Her voice was breathy. At that moment I felt I would do anything she asked me to but I was determined not to let on.

"I was thinking how you would look in white panties, standing there brushing your hair."

"Were you able to see what I have in my panties?"

"Just enough to know your secret."

"Mitch, honey, it's our secret. I've got to hang up in a second. Meet me in front of school tomorrow before homeroom"

Paulie was waiting on the steps at the school entrance when I got off the bus. I knew I had to be careful, to be sure to call her Paul, to think of her as the guy I thought her to be before yesterday.

"Hi, Mitch. Nice morning, isn't it?"

The smile reminded me that I was no longer able to react to Paul as I did before that incredible, bizarre make-out session last night. There was no doubt that he wasn't ever going to think of me like before. I caught myself as I started to reach out to squeeze his hand.

"I know you don't owe me anything on account of last night and I know you'll never talk about what I told you or what happened between us; at least I hope you won't. If you never want to be alone with me again, that's okay. I'll understand,"

I looked around to make sure no one was in hearing distance as I sat down next to Paulie. "Paulie," I whispered, "no one's around to hear me so I'm calling you Paulie because that's how I want to think of you from now on and I do want to be alone with you again and not just in your house or my house but..."

"Mitch, that's wonderful. If we could meet somewhere out of this shitty neighborhood...I could find a place where I can turn myself totally into a girl...Oh, forget it. That's just a stupid dream that'll get me killed if I'm not careful."

"Why don't we start by just hanging around, going to the movies like two buddies?"

"That would be super."

"Maybe this weekend. Oh, no. I've got something coming up!"

Her look made me feel like a grade "A" bum.

"But I heard you broke up with Jane."

"Not exactly. She dropped me. Listen to me, Paulie, please. It isn't anyone from this school."

Paulie folded her arms across her chest like the petulant girl she was hoping to become.

"Honest, Paulie, I swear I'm not trying to give you the run around. Just give me one more chance."

"Of course I'll give you another chance. I have to because there's no other boy who would dare to take a chance with me." My face must have betrayed the disappointment I felt when Paulie said she was going to give me chance because there were no other possibilities open to her. She glanced around, seeing no one near us, gave me that ironic smile that so fascinated me. "There's a better reason, though. I am so terribly attracted to you. And, Mitch... thanks for putting up with my moods."

The warning bell for homeroom sounded. I extended my hand to Paulie and helped her to her feet. Paulie's body language changed as she started up school steps ahead of me. By the time we reached the door Paulie had been replaced by Paul.

At dismissal time I found a note in my locker. It was from Paulie suggesting that it might be better if we didn't stick together in school.

"If we're suddenly with each other a whole lot, the other kids might take it the wrong way. Or would they be taking it the right way?"

I reread the note two or three times before I put in the pocket of my jeans. The image of Paulie, Paulie dressed as a girl in Bermudas with just a hint of lipstick, with a playful, self-satisfied smirk on her face was an image I couldn't get out of my mind. The little hearts that she used for dots over every 'i' were no longer a clichéd affectation used by girls who were just too cutesy; but like everything else about Paulie was fresh, original, and totally enthralling.

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I decided to do my paper route and get that out of the way. Maybe I was getting hung up on Paulie because we had made each other cum in that very brief, very intense petting session? No real girl had let me feel her through her panties like Paulie did. I wondered what I would feel if Maude ever made out with me like that. But Maude was classy, different from any kid in this neighborhood. Compared to her Paulie was ordinary, without style, without imagination. No imagination! That's a joke. What other boy, sissy or worse, would ever dare to go out wearing panties under his jeans? But Paulie was turning out to be more girl than boy and I had a wild crush on her which was totally okay with me. Okay with me until I opened the side door of Mrs. Cohen's house. I just stood staring up the stairs hoping that Maude would appear. No such luck.

What the hell is wrong with me? Okay so I'm playing around with Paulie like she's a real girl. It's a real kick as long as we keep it to ourselves. That doesn't make me a queer. Then why am I trying to get something going with Maude who's so far out we aren't even in the same world? I better stop kidding myself. I want Maude so bad I can taste her. Taste her! Yeah.

I rode my bike back home and decided that I was going to give up the paper route as soon as I collected my Christmas tips which would happen in two and a half months away. I would take Dad's offer to work after school as a part time apprentice. It'd be good to learn the plumbing and heating trade. Besides it'll give me more money than this paper route. I'll just have less time to hang out with the guys. That's really good 'cause I'll have no time for Maude and Paulie with their queer, make like a girl shit! I don't need them or anyone like them to get off.

There was a note under my bedroom door when I got home. My mother had taken a message "from a very lovely girl named Maude. You should call her as soon as you can. She says she needs to talk to you."

This was my chance to put some distance, permanent distance between me and Maude. All I had to do was not call her back. Lead pipe cinch; at least it should have been. I gave in and dialed her number.

As soon as I heard her voice I all but forgot about Paulie and lost all my recent resolve to give up trying to make out with Maude and Paulie.

"Hello, Mitchell," she purred. "Good you called. I was thinking about Saturday, what to wear for the ride up and what to wear once we got there. There's a lake on the way that has a lovely sand beach. I'm sure we'll have it all to ourselves if we decide to be by ourselves. You're not afraid to be alone with me, are you? I mean all alone with no one else to see us."

She wasn't letting me get a word in edgewise which was oaky with me. Her voice was somehow sexier, more of a turn on than the voice of any real girl I had ever heard. I wondered what she meant by what to wear.

"I just don't want to be too boyish when you pick me up. Don't dare cancel no matter what the weather is like. Mitch, honey, this is a chance for me to show you how you should be treated, to treat you the way you deserve to be treated."

What did she have in mind with that talk about how she would treat me? I was supposed to see it as meaning she would let me get passed first base. What did that mean with a girl who was really a boy? By now I was only half hearing what Maude was saying. Would this be anything like what went on between Paulie and me? Getting off with Paulie was so wild because of the panties she had on. Not she, but he. I had to keep things straight in my mind or I would lose the boundaries between boys and girls.

"Mitch, Mitch! Have you heard a word I said?" I couldn't tell whether she was annoyed, angry or concerned about me.

"No, no. I mean my sister opened the door. You see the phone extension is in her room."

“Okay, I’ll see you at seven on Saturday morning, rain or shine. I’ll bring a picnic lunch. Now I’m going to ask you one more time and I expect an answer. I told you I’ll wear cotton...”

“Cotton?” I interrupted and proved I hadn’t heard what Maude had been saying.

“Yes, cotton, you big dope! Cotton undies. Do you prefer white or pastels on a girl?”

“I guess it depends on her mood.”

There was a pause and then a musical laugh that convinced me that I wanted to be with Maude even without her teasing about whether I liked white or pastel undies on a girl. As soon as I hung up my doubts again surfaced. What difference is it to you what kind of panties I would like to see on a girl considering the undeniable fact that you are not a girl?

There was a soft knock at the door and Mim entered. Considering it was her room, I had no complaint.

“Your date still on for Saturday?”

“Yes. It’s on all right.”

“You were all excited about it the other night but now you look like you’re hoping it gets called off.”

“Maybe I am.”

“So why not just cancel?”

“I promised...”

“There’s got to be more to this than just having promised.”

“Yeah, there is.”

“Out with it, little brother. You know I can keep a secret and I won’t tease you about anything you tell me.”

“I know, Mim. Maybe I do need to talk. Just don’t laugh or get pissed off at me. I promised to go on a sort of date with a weird boy, a kid who can pass for a girl with no trouble. What does that make me and where will it end up?”

“It makes you a smart guy and a brave guy; one who’s not afraid to explore his feeling or to taste things that are out of the ordinary. I’ll let you in a secret, too. My interests also run in unusual directions.

“Let me tell you there are circles in which beautiful and talented women, women with pricks are highly valued. Let’s say specialized cafes have performers that are men passing as women. Trust me when I say that plenty of important men and women, too, enjoy the company of these female impersonators; transvestites they’re called.

“Go with your instincts or you’ll end up wondering what you missed. Remember that Thoreau was right when he said something like ‘The great mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.’ I never wanted to lead a life of quiet desperation and I hope you don’t.”

“Mim, thanks for setting me right.”