

# Pandora's Box

BY COLLETTE YVONNE

*L'auteure raconte comment elle a initié sa fille à l'anatomie de la femme.*

Colleen was instantly interested in my idea. I didn't have a hand mirror so the next best thing was to lift her up and set her on the vanity counter facing our big bathroom mirror. Her spindly legs were spread wide with that loose froggy flexibility of a five-year-old's. She stared hard a moment and then stretched her thin labia farther apart with her fingers to better view her vagina.

"What's that, Mummy?" she asked, pointing.

"Your clitoris."

"What's it for?"

Oh dear.

I hadn't anticipated this question and wondered if she was ready to understand the concept of orgasms. Or if, indeed, I was ready to explain.

"Ummm ... it's a part of your vagina. Uh, see how it sticks out a bit? Below that is a little hole where your pee comes out. That's called the urethra."

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"Oh." With her forefinger, she wiggled the part that sticks out a bit.

"But what's it for?"

All my repressive English-style upbringing was suggesting to me that if I told her that the clitoris is for fun and pleasure, I might trigger her on some kind of masturbation mania and then she'll be wiggling it all day long at kindergarten and in front of shocked grandparents and under the noses of the checkout clerks at the local IGA. So I dodged and launched into an informative discussion about birth canals instead.

Bored, she soon wanted to get down from the vanity so I helped her back into the bathtub. She bent her head down and continued to examine herself, pulling hard on her labia. She pointed at her clitoris again. "I thought this was where the pee came out."

"No." Glad to have set her straight on something, I pointed at her abdomen. "You also have inside you a very special place called a uterus where babies can grow ... but that won't happen until you are a grown-up woman like Mummy." Her face became worried. I added quickly, "And only if you want that to happen."

I was beginning to congratulate myself on the fact that I had no doubt outsmarted two big-shot male theorists, Freud and Lacan, by showing Colleen that there is something down there after all—instead of a missing penis, the big lack, nothingness. It's just awkward to get a good view, that's all.

She had another question for me. "What if everything gets mixed up?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, the 'gina and...." She was clearly unable to articulate the question but I sensed what she was asking.

"Do you mean can a person have a

girl's parts but be a boy inside?"

"Yes!!"

When I decided to try to outsmart Freud and Lacan I hadn't counted on this. Was it prudent to tell her that sometimes men can have a sex change to become women? And that women can take their own measures to become men? Is a five-year-old ready to hear this? Or would this information confuse her just when she is establishing a sexual identity of her own? Already, she is adamant that she prefers boys and would like to be one. A confirmed case of penis envy. Should I provide her with some glimmer of hope that all is not lost?

"Girls are girls and boys are boys. You are a girl," I reply, cringing inwardly.

At least I'm decisive. I stared at her as she floated in the bathtub dreamily rubbing her clitoris, obviously beginning to figure something out for herself, with or without me. I want her to grow up being proud of her femaleness and not consider her gender as limiting in any way. But maybe she is a boy in a girl's body. Then who am I to stand in her or, indeed, his way? Gee, now I was getting very confused about sexual identities.

The next day I talked it over with my friend, Lucy, who has three kids, including a school-age daughter and a toddler.

"I think I succeeded in opening up Pandora's Box more than anything. What do you think?"

"Hey, girl, I don't blame Colleen for wanting to be a boy. My Natalie is the same. After all, boys get to have all the fun or at least it must look that way to girls. Take TV for example. All the little cartoons, all the shows are about little boys having adventures, doing the fun, exciting stuff. And

look at me. Nat sees me changing diapers and scrubbing the can all day and why would she want to grow up to this?"

Lucy is right, of course. She's too sensible to let big-mouths like Freud and Lacan mess her up. I thought about all the little muppets on Sesame Street and that big dope, Barney, the purple dinosaur. All males. The female muppets and female cartoon characters make rather poor role models. I mean, Miss Piggy? Yes, most of the female characters wear large pink ribbons and simper and giggle alot.

And what about the videos Colleen's watched lately? *The Neverending Story*—a boy stars in that. *Home Alone*. *Robin Hood*. *The Lion King*. The features that star females—for instance, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* all emphasize physical appearances above all. The goal is always to look beautiful and win the prize—a prince or a prince of a man.

And too much of the standard fare in children's literature is the same old story. Where are the female Huckleberry's, the female hobbits? What's a little Colleen to do? Does she really have to reject her glorious gender to gain her freedom? What can a mother do to help a daughter grow up and cope in a world that never stops telling us that females are weaker, inferior, and in need of a rescue, or a man, or maybe even just a good fuck to fix up the problem?

Colleen ought to know the truth: that the clitoris is for pleasure. Her pleasure. Whenever she wants or needs it. I think it's time to throw open Pandora's box and toss away the key.

*Collette Yvonne graduated from York University in 1996 with an Honours B.A. in Creative Writing and the Humanities. Since then, she has had several articles published in the Toronto Star on topics such as breaking traditional gender roles, violence against women, and living with a disability. Collette recently finished writing her first novel.*

## MARINA TRUDEAU

### My Daughters and I

*Dedicated to my six daughters.*

My daughters are so precious  
And are as happy as could be.  
They tend to be cautious  
And this is between you and me.

It must be faith  
That I should have six girls  
For there is no hate  
In all my beautiful loving girls.

My daughters are my precious joy.  
To me they are like the queen's pearls.  
All sadness they tried to avoid  
Lucky am I to have six girls.

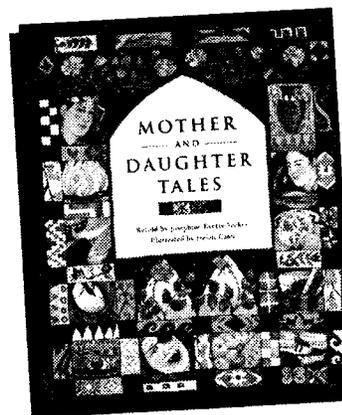
My daughters, I love you all  
No one will take my love for you away.  
If ever you are in trouble, all you do is call  
And I will be on my way.

*Marina Trudeau is an Aboriginal woman from Wikwemikong First Nation. She is the mother of six beautiful girls. Her poetry was published by the National Library of Poetry in 1995.*

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