



OF RIBBONS AND BOWS

Of Ribbons and Bows

by

Cooper

Ryan became aware of a feeling of sleek, cool fabric against his skin. Silk? He felt silk-- against his legs, his chest. Drifting somewhere between dreams, he felt sunshine warming one side of his face. A breeze. The damp, vegetative smell of a lake. And then, bacon. He smelled bacon. And he opened his eyes.

Where am I?"

Four poster bed with a diaphanous white canopy, draped in mosquito netting, that gave the room outside a hazy, impressionistic quality—large, marble fireplace, paintings, ancient oaken wardrobes that gleamed in the morning light with the kind of rich, deep color that only came with years of careful care and polish.

Ryan had no memory of this place. Of how he'd gotten here. He rubbed his face. How drunk was I? He wondered. When he tried to think back, his mind returned a blank, an absolute blank—blackness.

Reaching out, he searched for an opening in the mosquito netting, fumbled around, seemed to get tangled up in the soft material, then finally burrowed under it, crawling off the bed on his hands and knees. He stood. The room spun for a moment, and then he stumbled to one of the big, open windows of lead-glass, leaned on the sill and looked out to see.... A large, neat yard or verdant green, a fieldstone wall and then a large, glittering blue lake and behind that

forested mountains. None of it looked familiar. He looked around the room. Where were his clothes? His cellphone?

Bacon. He smelled the bacon. His stomach growled.

He was bare chested, wearing a pair of white silk pajama bottoms. They were too big, bunching up around his feet. *Whoever owns these must be a giant* he thought, tugging on the pant legs.

Pajamas. Guest room. He must have been invited, right? Bacon. He decided. When in doubt, always follow the bacon.

He found the pajama top, tugged it on, ran a hand through his hair. The door led to a narrow hall. Cool. Dark. Gleaming wood floor. Old fashioned paintings with elaborately carved wood frames crowded the hall. Ryan glanced at them curiously as he followed the smell of bacon-- portraits, lots of portraits, and interspersed among vogueish works from past ages of moneyed gentility—hunting scenes, vanitas compositions, historical epics—Napoleon at Waterloo, Joan of Arc driving the English from French shores, the victorious Roman legions marching into the city with the spoils of...

His eyes were drawn to a girl-- a woman, with golden hair and big, green eyes, she was in a cage, a slave, one of the Angles. Ryan felt a wave of dizziness overcome him as he looked at her, and he had the strangest feeling that he knew her.... Knew her well. Her name was Methilde, and she had been the daughter of an Angle warlord before being captured by the Romans, before becoming a slave. Her whole life seemed to be coming to him now, like a memory, and he stared at her image, remembering the smell of horse and elephant dung, the smoke that wafted through the streets of Rome as fires burned to thank the Gods for the victory,

people shouting and yelling in some strange language, looking at her naked body, and she'd been scared, so scared—lost, afraid-- and there had been no one there to...

“Something caught your interest?”

Ryan jumped. Startled. Immediately felt ashamed. Down the hall, a woman's silhouette framed by sunlight from a stained-glass window at the end of the hall. The dark shape—all negative space, moved toward Ryan like a specter. “I didn't mean to frighten you.”

As she got closer Ryan started to make out details—tall, lean, blonde hair to her shoulders, a sassy, crooked smile on her mouth. A memory...

“The alligator swam toward me, cold, yellow eyes full of death and destruction. I was up to my waist in the Okefenoke Swamp, boots stuck in the muck. I had no choice. I raised my rifle and took aim, putting the crosshairs right between the Gator's eyes...”

“Did you kill it?” The young blonde asked, tossing her hair, eyes wide with excitement.

“Just calm down and let me tell the story,” Ryan said. “Do you talk back to the screen when you're at the movies?”

“I do!” The blonde giggled. “Omigod, that's me!”

“Are you this impatient in the sack?” Ryan said.

“Buy me another drink and find out!” The girl said, still giggling.

“Yeesh. Well, can you at least pretend you want to hear the rest of my story?”

“Oh, I do,” the girl said, putting a hand on his arm. “Tell me how you shot the crocodile!”

“Gator, and as I was saying, I lined up my shot, the gator swam toward me, unhinging it’s jaw, opening wide, rows of razor sharp teeth flashing against the fetid swamp water, now it was only five feet away, and I pulled the trigger... and nothing. My gun jammed.”

“Wait, what does that mean?” The girl asked.

“Jesus, don’t you know anything?”

“Not about guns!”

“You’re lucky you’re hot, you know that? My God. It means the bullet didn’t fire. Just a click, and now the gator is almost on me, and I am stuck in the mud with a useless gun.” He paused for dramatic effect, took a drink.

“Were you scared?” The girl said, thinking could you please just finish this stupid story so we can get to fucking?

“No. I’ve been in danger lots of times.”

“What did you do?”

“I shoved the gun into the gator’s mouth. The gator clamped down, thrashing, and I held on with both hands while it gnawed at my weapon. It went on like that for... I don’t know how long... me and the gator, there in the swamp,, man versus nature, in a battle to the death. I waited and waited, my arms aching, sweat pouring down my face... and then... I felt the gator tire, slacken... it relaxed just for a second, regaining its strength for another attack, and that’s when I grabbed the Bowie knife from my belt and stabbed it right into the monster’s brain.”

“Oh! Gross!”

“It was kill or be killed, babe. Law of the jungle.”

“I thought you were in the swamp?”

“Law of the jungle is... never mind. God, you’re dumb.”

“It’s cause I’m drunk,” the girl said, and then she rubbed her foot against Ryan’s leg and said, “and horny.” She licked her lips.

“Let’s take this party up to my room,” Ryan said.

The woman smiled, a sassy, crooked smile. *Got ya.*

She stumbled against him, clung to his arm, giggled and laughed and bit her lip, tossed her hair. Ryan puffed up, the big game hunter, bagging a prize. As soon as the door closed he shoved her against the wall, kissed her while squeezing her ass, slipped the slender little spaghetti straps down off her smooth, round shoulders, kissed her on the neck, her breasts. He picked her up and carried her to the bed, tossing her onto her back, her blonde hair spreading out around her smiling face as she pulled up the hem of her dress and then slipped off her panties.

Ryan got out of his clothes, climbed onto her soft, eager body, tuned her up good and then took her, hard and furious, like a bull, and she screamed in a tiny little voice as he grunted, released and then collapsed on the bed next to her.

The blonde laughed, plucking at a strand of her long blonde hair, and then she laughed some more.

Ryan, eyes heavy, drifting off to sleep, didn’t like the sound of that laugh-- it sounded like--- she was laughing at him. But he decided to ignore it. Women were crazy. They never

made any sense. He closed his eyes and sank into sleep, but just before he fell fully into darkness he thought he felt her kiss him on the cheek and say, “Good girl.”

“Good morning,” Ryan said, searching for a name.

“Good morning,” the woman said, running her fingers over his bicep. “Did one of the people in the painting catch your eye?”

“What?” Ryan looked back at the painting, the girl in the cage, and the feeling that he was the slave girl in the painting came back over Ryan as he glanced at the painting—he even felt the weight of swaying breasts on his chest, and he looked away, disturbed, crossing his arms over his chest. “No. Nothing. Where are we?”

The girl’s crooked smile grew wide, her bright white teeth flashing in the dark as she watched him girlishly covering his chest. “My house.”

“This? Is your house?”

“Yeah,” she said breezily walking down the hall. “Hungry?”

“Bacon,” Ryan said, following her. *Shelly? Sarah? Something with an S.*

“Bacon?”

“The smell. It’s what woke me up.”

The girl turned and hopped onto the banner of a marble, spiral staircase that swooped dramatically down to a large, ornate hall lined with glittering suits of armor, more portraits, vases

and ancient old world furniture. She slid down the banner laughing, hopping gracefully to her feet at the bottom of the stairs. “The dining room’s down here!”

Ryan reached the top of the stairs, looked down and grabbed the banner for support as the room seemed to spin, and he saw the hall bathed in candle-light, crowded with costumed men and women, their happy voices floating up to him as he stood there nervously in his tights dress and heels, terrified he might fall down the stairs if he lost his balance--- He looked down and saw creamy white breasts pushed up inside a plunging, lace neckline---- what?

“Come on!” The girl called from the bottom of the stairs.

Ryan looked down and saw his hard, flat muscled chest. The empty hall. The blonde girl. He started walking down the stairs, keeping a hand on the banister, the feeling of anxiety from his strange vision nearly paralyzing him. “I feel... dizzy...” He said, feeling embarrassed to be making his way down the stairs so carefully after she had been so... bold.

“Do you want some help?” The girl asked, a mocking edge to her voice.

“Haha,” Ryan answered, annoyed. He would have to put her in her place, he decided, remind her who was boss. He finally got to the bottom of the stairs and sighed with relief, the girl taking off and leading him through a couple halls and rooms before they finally emerged in the dining room, where steaming plates of bacon and sausage warmed over small flames, and a woman in chef’s clothing stood behind a station, her arms behind her back.

“You can get anything!” The girl said excitedly. “Just ask! Omelets, pancakes... waffles.... French Toast! Good morning Chef Marguerite.”

“Good morning,” Chef Marguerite answered, and Ryan cursed her for not giving him a name.

“Good morning,” Ryan said, blearily.

“What would you like this morning, sir?”

“Um... Everything,” Ryan answered. “I am starving.”

The girl laughed. “Let’s sit,” she said, and they sat down at a table near a pair of French doors that opened out onto a flagstone patio. “You’ll need your strength for hunting.”

“Hunting?”

“You don’t remember,” the girl said. It was a statement.

“Last night is a little bit of a blur,” Ryan answered.

“Last night.” The girl glanced at the chef and then back at Ryan. “You don’t remember last night.”

“I had a lot to drink.”

“Yes. That must be the reason. I remember everything.” She shrugged. “And you promised to take me hunting today!”

Ryan nodded. This girl... he kind of didn’t like her. She was pretty... even prettier than she’d seemed at the bar... but there was some kind of mocking aggression in everything she said to him, like she was in on some big joke and he was the punch line. He wanted to call it off, get the hell out of here... “Hunting. I’m not so sure that’s a good idea after all.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t feel so well. I should probably get out of here anyway. Where am I?”

“You promised to take me hunting.”

“Sorry, babe, but...”

“You. Promised.”

“Well, I’m not going hunting with you. I’m tired. I don’t feel well. We had a fling. It was fun. It’s over. Where am I, anyway?”

The chef brought them plates of steaming food--- pancakes and eggs, sausage and bacon for Ryan, an omelet for the girl. Ryan’s stomach rumbled. He decided to eat through the awkwardness. The food would take the edge of his hangover, and...

The girl made an audible sobbing sound. Ryan looked up, a forkful of pancake dipped in egg yolk on his fork, and saw the tears as he shoved the food into his mouth. Oh shit.

“I’m so stupid,” she said through the tears, her body shaking. “I’m just another stupid slut to you...”

Ryan glanced at the chef, who watched, her eyes hard with angry judgement. “No,” Ryan said. “No.”

“I told you I don’t do one night stands, and you said it was more than that, and how dumb am I to believe you?”

Ryan swallowed his food, shocked to find tears filling his own eyes. *Men can be such assholes*, he thought, getting up and putting his arms around the girl’s shoulders, kissing her on the top of her head as his own tears poured down onto her golden hair. “I’m sorry,” he said. “Of

course I'll take you hunting! I was just feeling tired and... anyway, you are great and I would never think of you as a one night stand or any of that!"

Ryan couldn't see it, but the girl was smiling through her tears as she reached up and grabbed his arms, still wrapped around her shoulders, squeezing them. "Promise?" She said.

"Yes. Absolutely. Anything for you."

"Okay," the girl said. "I forgive you. Let's have a nice breakfast and forget this ever happened."

Ryan sighed, relieved, and went back to his seat, wiping away his own tears.

"You were crying," the girl said, that same mocking tone back in her voice. "Do you want a tissue?"

Ryan didn't answer. He felt confused and ashamed by how he was acting, how she was acting, everything felt wrong, and he had no idea how to respond to anything, so he took another bite of food, chewed swallowed and said, "The food is great."

The girl took a bite of her omelet, staring at Ryan, smiling. Smiling.

After breakfast, a young female servant led Ryan to a guest room on the first floor where he found a hunting outfit laid out for him. It looked like something a British gentleman would wear to go pheasant hunting in an old MGM movie, and Ryan chuckled, amused as he pulled on the knickers, khaki shirt and floppy round hat, finishing the outfit with a pair of knee high leather boots and two ammunition belts slung over his chest. It looked ridiculous, and yet dressed and gearing up for hunting he felt more comfortable, more himself, the strange visions and emotional

turmoil of the morning seeming to fade and grow ephemeral, like a dream. Still. He would do this little hunting trip and then get the hell out of Here. He still didn't know where the hell they were.

The serving girl had waited outside the door, and when Ryan came out of the room she said, "Milady is waiting to meet you in the armory."

The girl led, Ryan followed her along the maze of corridors and rooms.

"Pardon me. But, your... the lady of the house? What does she like to be called?"

"Milady."

"But, what is her name?"

"Chris."

"One more question. Where are we?"

The girl glanced back, raising an eyebrow. "You don't know where you are?"

"No. I was a little drunk last night."

"Last night.... Hmmmmnnnn... well... this is Newborn Manor. "

"Newborn... yes, but what state is this? Where on the map?"

"Canada, on the border of the First Nations."

Canada? Ryan's last memory was meeting the blonde, Chris, in a bar in Manhattan. How the hell had he ended up in Canada? He thought back, searching his memory for any recollection of a trip... a plane, a helicopter.... But nothing. The last thing he remembered was falling asleep in his hotel room after they'd had sex. How much did a drink? He'd never

blacked out so completely that he'd forgotten every detail of a night, woken up in a strange place without the slightest fragment of ... something. *Was I drugged?*

Before he could pursue the thought, the serving girl opened a large, iron bound wooden door and he saw... weapons. Lots of weapons. Chris stood in the middle of them all, a musket in her hands, which she polished, smiling down at it like a favored child, and when Ryan entered she looking up, smiled and said, "Hey, babe."

Gleaming display cases lined the room, each one full of rifles, pistols, swords, knives and more exotic weapons-- maces, morning stars, bo sticks, scimitars and katana. The collection seemed to include mint conditions examples of weapons from every era right up to the present, and Ryan nodded, impressed. "You collect these?"

"My family had always collected. Weapons. Paintings. Anything beautiful. Anything precious. I think this musket is gorgeous, don't you?"

Ryan walked up to her, reached out. "May I?"

Chris smiled and handed him the musket. "By all means."

Ryan took the musket in his hands, sighted it, caressed the wooden stock, admired at the brass fittings. H. Newborn had been burned into the stock along with a symbol:

"H. Newborn?" Ryan asked, looking at Chris.

"One of my ancestors. He fought in the revolutionary war. That was his gun."

"It's remarkably well preserved. I've never seen one that looked this ... perfect."

"The hunting rifles are over here. Or do you still prefer a bow?"

“I never went much for bow hunting,” Ryan said.

Chris laughed, that same laugh like there was some inside joke he wasn't getting. He ignored her and, looking over the rifles, spotted one with a blonde stock carved with intertwined roses, and a long, narrow chrome barrel. It was so bright and Pretty. It looked more decorative than functional, but he opened the case and took the gun out, and checking it quickly determined not only that it functioned, but was actually a superior weapon. “This is a beautiful weapon,” Ryan said, staring down at the gun, loving the way the light flashed off the chrome barrel, the blonde wood. He traced the elegant flower pattern carved into the wood with his fingers.

“How interesting,” Chris said, putting a hand on Ryan's back and rubbing against him like a cat. “That gun belonged to my great aunt Ryan.”

They headed off into the forest outside Newborn Manor. Chris had declined to bring a gun, said she just wanted to see Ryan in action after all his hunting stories. Ryan had brought the rifle, a pistol in case he needed a mercy kill, a bowie knife. “Maybe you can kill our dinner!” Chris had said, excitedly.

“Let's wait and see what happens. We may not find any game.”

“Oh,” Chris said. “I'm sure a big, strong man like you won't let me down.”

The forest was thick with undergrowth, vines, leafy trees, and Ryan saw that some of the leaves had already turned and begun to fall. Clearly the summer was well over this far north. He and Chris climbed over huge, twisting roots, brushed away invisible spider webs that

fluttered between the trees, pushed through thick walls of brush and weeds. Ryan found some droppings, bark eaten on the side of a tree, followed what looked like a vague, twisting deer trail, and then the two of them came to the edge of a clearing, where they saw a snow white buck drinking from a small spring the bubble up in the middle of the thick grass.

An albino buck. Rare. Beautiful. The way the white coat glistened in the sun, showing off its lean, muscled body, the glistening rack rising nobly from its head-- Ryan counted at least 14 points, and looking at the proud, strong animal, so rare, so beautiful, Ryan hated the thought of shooting it. But with Chris just behind him, one hand on his shoulder, he felt he had to, had to show her he was every bit the hunter and man she thought he was. He raised the rifle, lined up his shot. Chris silently dug her nails into his back, the sharp pain stabbing at him even through his khaki shirt and he ignored the pain, took a breath and pulled the trigger.

The rifle cracked, echoing through the clearing, crows launching into the air in croaking terror. A twisting gray plume of acrid smoke rose from the gun's barrel. In the same instant, the buck went down, and Chris gasped, now ripping her nails into Ryan's shoulders, then bounding past him into the clearing. She was laughing gleefully, even as the buck struggled to get back to its feet, collapsed, and then tried again.

Ryan shouldered the rifle, and walked calmly into the clearing, unholstering his pistol.

Chris glanced back at Ryan, her eyes wide and wet, and she began to dance around the wounded, dying buck, laughing and clapping, whirling and kicking her feet in the air like some kind of pagan war dance.

Ryan saw the terror in the buck's eyes as it struggled to get to its feet, tried to drag itself to safety, and he raised the pistol and shot it through the heart. It collapsed, and did not move, blood oozing from the wound on its chest.

Chris threw her arms around Ryan, kissed him on the cheek and laughed, "You killed it! You killed it! Oh my God, you are such a man."

Ryan held her to him, kissed her back, but he felt... numb. Cold. Ashamed? Still, he felt he had to play the part, and so he pushed all those feelings away and nodded down at the dead beast. "That's a good trophy. A good kill. You want me to carve out some venison steaks for us to eat tonight?" He would show her cold. Detached. A real man.

Chris grabbed him by the collar and pulled him down for a kiss. Then she whispered, "I am so wet. Let's fuck."

Ryan tried to push her away, but she gripped his collar, hard, and pulled them both down to the ground. Ryan found himself on top of her, and she snaked her legs around his midsection, locking him inside her powerful thighs as she stared up at him with those mad, gleaming eyes, still gripping his collar, and trapped in her body, Ryan felt a flash of anger and his passion rose. He reached down and started to undress his pants. "You want it?"

"Yes."

"I'll give it to you."

"Fuck me."

Shoving down his pants, Ryan grabbed her breasts through her shirt, squeezed and then viciously pinched and twisted her nipples. Chris squealed and let go his collar, wrapping her

hands around his head and digging her nails into his scalp, and Ryan grabbed a hank of her hair and yanked, and the two of them yelped and grunted as they ripped and tore at each other. The woods seemed to swell with sound as they went after each other, the insect humming thrumming through the wood, leaves of golden brown tumbling all around them as they shed their clothes and began to kiss and lick and suck on each other's bodies. Ryan closed his eyes as he entered Chris, and he began to rock back and forth, in and out, finding his rhythm, letting the pace quicken. He felt something warm and wet on his face, and opening his eyes he saw Chris grinning up at him, her palms on his cheeks, and when she pulled them away they were dripping with deep, red blood. She smeared the blood across her own cheeks and forehead, grinning, those same mad eyes, and Ryan grunted, she panted and then gasped, and wrapping her legs more tightly than ever, pulling him in deeper, deeper, and then just as he finally came she punched him in the eye.

Ryan rolled off, his back against the slick, soft grass, he covered one eye, the one she'd punched, and stared up at the blue sky, tasting blood in his mouth.

"You're a good fuck," Chris said. "A real good little piece of ass."

Ryan didn't answer. Had no idea what he would say to that.

They lay there for a time, naked under the sun, listening to the sounds of the forest. Then, Chris pulled on her bra, her khaki hunting shirt. "Up and at 'em, sweetie," she said, pinching Ryan along the ribs.

"Ow."

"Lunch soon. Let's get back and--- oh! Croquette!"

Ryan sat up. His left eye was partially swollen shut. “You punched the shit out of me.”

“Oh, poor baby,” Chris said. “Does it hurt?” She leaned over and gave him a kiss.

“It’s mostly numb.”

“Get dressed,” Chris repeated, pulling on her pants.

They dressed. Chris picked up the rifle and slung it over her shoulder. Ryan reached for it, but Chris shrugged him off. “I got it, babe.”

Ryan winced. It seemed wimpy to let her keep talking to him like that, and yet he didn’t want to come off as a whiner, either. Chris led them on their way back to the house. Ryan enjoyed the view of her firm, round ass. She felt him looking, glanced back and smiled knowingly. “Enjoying the view?” She said.

“Hell, yeah,” Ryan said.

“Drink it in,” Chris said. “While you still can.”

Back at the house, Chris gave him a kiss and a pat on the ass, sent him off with the serving girl, who led him along the usual twisting maze of turns and doors until she finally led him to a marble room, candlelit and featuring a large, ornate bath filled with steaming, sudsy water. “Your bath,” the girl said. “Enjoy.”

Ryan stood looking at the bubbly bath as the girl left, closing the door behind her. *Of course. Should’ve figured she would do something like this.* He almost took a stand. Walked out and asked for a shower instead. *What do I care if I stink? I need to get the hell out of here.* But the girl—what was her name? Had gone to the trouble, and besides, he ached and wanted to get that damn blood off his face and body, and.... That steaming water, those bubbles.... They

did look so good. So relaxing. Ryan stripped off his clothes, stood naked next to the tub. He realized his heart was racing, and suddenly he felt certain someone was watching him.

Putting one hand over his groin and another across his chest, he looked around the dark, candlelit room. Saw no one in the shadows, nor any sign of a slit or peephole. His skin tingled. He stood there, looking at the water, his nipples getting hard in the cold, and, holding his breath, he lifted one foot and stepped into the tub...

The water felt warm and scented oils clung to his smooth leg, the sweet odor of eucalyptus rising up to meet him as he stepped in completely, sliding down into the luxurious waters, and the candles flickered and he sighed as the water rose over his soft, swaying breasts, and he sighed softly, arching his back as he ran his hands his breasts, lifting them and squeezing his legs together as he remembered the way Chris had fucked him...

Ryan opened his eyes, looking down at his hands on his flat, muscular chest. What the hell? He'd seen himself as a woman. Again. Had... loved seeing himself as a woman. It had felt so good, so real, so.... Right?

Everything was wrong. So wrong. What had Chris done to him? He sank back into the tub, feeling dizzy, exhausted, letting his whole head sink under the soapy waters, rubbing his hands over his face, wanting, needing to make sure he got all the blood off, all that sticky, red blood from the buck he'd killed, that strong, beautiful perfectly formed embodiment of masculinity. So strong and proud. Holding his breath, Ryan stayed under the water as long as he could, finally pushing himself up and gasping for air, the taste of the blood now replaced by the pretty, perfume scented taste of the bath water, and he propped his head on the back of the tub, closed his eyes and drifted to sleep, a strange peaceful sleep of ribbons and bows.

“You are not good at croquette,” Chris said, laughing as another of his shots careened off the grass court.

Ryan shook his head. “I don’t know what’s gotten into me. It’s like I have no coordination at all.”

Chris kissed him. “It’s okay. A boy as cute as you doesn’t need to be good at sports.”

“I am good at sports,” Ryan said. “Real sports. Not... goofy rich kid sports.”

“Whatever you say,” Chris said, effortlessly sending her ball through the hoop., her little pleated skirt swaying and giving Ryan a glimpse of her panties. “That’s the way it’s done!”

“Nice shot,” Ryan said. “Listen, anyway, I probably get going after this. I really need to get back to civilization. Work and all.”

“You told me you were between assignments,” Chris said flatly.

“I did? Well, I am, it’s just that, well, you know. I have to prepare for the next assignment.”

“You are a terrible liar.”

“Shit. Well, okay. I kind of want to leave. Get back to the city.”

“Well, you can’t,” Chris said, forcing a plastic smile on her face.

Ryan looked at her. “What do you mean I can’t?”

“I mean you are my prisoner, and you can never leave.” The plastic smile got wider. The crazed look returned to her eyes. “Clear enough for you, babe?”

Ryan clutched his croquette mallet. Stared at her. “Are you kidding me?” He said.

Chris burst out laughing. “You are so stupid! What? Do you think I’m some kind of psycho chick? God, you’re dumb.”

Ryan shook his head. “I can’t believe I almost fell for that.”

“Are you kidding me?” Chris said in a flat, mocking tone. “I totally had you going! Take your shot.”

“Good God. Okay. You did. Jeez.” Ryan took his shot. Chris came up behind him, one hand snaking around his waist while with the other she gave his ass a squeeze.

“Of course, you actually can’t leave.”

“What? Fucking with me some more?”

“No. There’s a monster blizzard on the way.”

Ryan looked up at the sky. “Are you serious this time?”

“I’m afraid I am, sweetie. We’re both stuck here for at least a couple days. If the forecast is correct.”

“Shit.”

“Hey, don’t be so glum. Let’s make the best of the situation.”

Ryan looked up at the cottony grey clouds. Down where they stood it didn’t seem all that windy, but now that he looked up he could see that they were moving, and moving fast.

“Smile, babe,” Chris said, putting her hand on the small of Ryan’s back. “I’ll make it fun for you.”

“Sure,” Ryan said, smiling half-heartedly. “It’ll be fine.”

After croquette, Chris announced that she needed a nap, gave Ryan a kiss and wandered off into the house. “Make yourself at home. I’ll see you for cocktails at 6.”

Ryan found himself standing on the back patio. The wind whipped at the trees now, sending great sheets of yellow leaves tumbling and twirling through the air. He shivered as the cold cut through his cotton sweater, and decided he’d better head inside. The house was murky with shadows. The lights were all off, and with the sky outside darkening he moved carefully in the deepening shadows that crowded the rooms and made them seem smaller, more confined. The house seemed deserted. Where were the servants?

“Hello?” He called, and heard his voice echoing through the large, empty spaces.

He found himself in the grand foyer, went up the majestic spiral staircase, turned and went down the hall, but when he pushed open the door to his room he instead found himself looking into a library crowded with large, leather bound books crammed onto ornate iron shelves that stretched from floor to ceiling. Ryan took a step back, looked down the dark hallway. He was sure he’d taken the right staircase, turned the right way, but this was not his room. Still. Those books. They looked so old. So mysterious. He went into the library, searching around inside the doorway and finding a light switch, flipping it and the room flooded with warm, soft light from globed lights that hang from the ceiling.

Ryan’s eyes got wide—the books looked so beautiful, so full of rare and ancient knowledge. He walked along the shelves, letting his fingertips glide gently across the covers, glancing at the titles painted on the bindings in fancy gold leaf—he couldn’t read them, but they looked like Greek, Latin, Arabic, and he randomly chose one of the books and pulled it from

shelf—it was large—two feet by two feet, with thick, vellum pages, and he carefully carried it over to one of the reading tables, set it down and opened the cover, the smell of dust and linen greeting him as he looked down at the image of a grinning grotesque, some kind of laughing demon with the body of jackal and a forked, serpentine tongue.

He turned a page, the room seemed to tilt, and then he stared at the words, a flutter passing through his girlish heart as he realized the words were Latin, and he could read them! The message made him weak in the knees with excitement as well:

The Secrets Ways of the Witch Crafts of the Celtic Women Who Dwell On The Isle of Eire in The Bleak North Seas Where the People Yet Retain Knowledge Of The Old Gods And The Ways To Consort With Them and Taste Of Their Power.

Ryan sat, turned back to the image on the previous page--- no. Not a demon at all. A nature spirit from the Old World! Yes. It was coming back to him now, and he flipped through the pages, eagerly, remembering something though he wasn't sure what, and finally, halfway through the book, he saw the page, the one he'd remembered, the one he knew was here because he'd once found it as a girl:

A Spell for Binding The Heart Of Another With Undying Love

Ryan smiled. He remembered casting the spell. And something else. Down at the bottom on the page, in flowing feminine script, inside the shape of a heart, he'd written the name of the boy who'd he bound to him. He stared at it now, smiling, touching the letters with his fingers--- the name was Chris.

The room tiled. Ryan looked down at the name, the heart, up at the meaningless Latin. He stood, his heart racing, chest heaving. He looked down to see that he was a man, still, and not a girl, and yet those feelings, those memories seemed to claw at his brain, to be ripping away at his... him. He couldn't read Latin. Had never been able to read Latin. Didn't know, couldn't have known to turn to that page, to find that heart, that name. It was some kind of... accident. Coincidence.

He wanted to run. Needed to run. To hell with the blizzard. He had to get out of this room, this house, this madness. But he couldn't move. He just stood there, heart racing, breathing, sweat breaking out on his brow, and he stared at the stacks, the stacks and stacks of books, and he saw a girl—a young woman.

She wore a pleated skirt that came down to her knees, socks, clunky girl's shoes with silver buckles. A starched blouse that hugged her blossoming figure. She was pretty--- prettier than she knew—and she was standing on her tip toes, peering at a book, a little smile on her face. She bit her lip, glanced over her shoulder, and then turned, creeping around one of the shelves. Ryan found himself walking forward. What was she doing? He had to know. Had to see. It was the most IMPORTANT. THING. EVER.

He turned the corner. Saw her kneeling in the corner, brushing her long hair back from her face, a book on the floor, and she was writing, writing, and then she looked up, right at Ryan—he heart leapt as he stared into her wide, green eyes, and she took the book she was writing in, shoved it behind some of the big, ancient books, hopped to her feet and ran, right at Ryan, and as he raised his arms and shouted NO she ran right into him--- through him—vanishing in into shadow as he stumbled, fell and found himself on his butt, staring between his knees at the corner of the library where the phantasmal girl had been kneeling.

What the hell just happened? Ryann looked down at himself. Touched his chest, the place where it had seemed like the girl had passed through him. His skin felt... cold... and looking at his arm he saw that a cool mist was rising from his body, a mist as soft and cool as a winter fog. Ryann slapped at his arm, his head, his legs, trying to get the fog to stop, and then compelled, again, consumed with a need, he got on his hands and knees, crawling along the floor toward the corner, toward the place where he'd seen the girl hide whatever it was she'd been writing. He got to the spot, knelt just where she'd knelt.

No, he thought, shaking his head, feeling the long, flowing hair he didn't have tickling his cheeks. Get up. Leave this place. He nervously twisted a bracelet he wasn't wearing, hooked the hair he didn't have behind his ear. If you don't leave now, Ryann thought, kneeling there in his skirt and blouse, there is no going back. Run!

But instead he reached behind the books, and his hand closed over the hidden book, the book the girl had left there, and Ryann pulled the book out, saw the age dulled, heart shaped clasp, the cloth binding with covered with embroidered unicorns, and his heart fluttered, and he smiled and hugged the diary to his chest like a long lost friend.

A sound? Footsteps.

Ryann stood, looking around frantically for a place to hide. He ran back to the reading desk and grabbed the spell book, and now clutching them both he hurried to the furthest back corner of the library and curled up into a ball, squeezing his eyes shut. He didn't anyone to see him like this—a girl in his skirt and knee socks.

The noise definitely footsteps—echoing down the hall outside the library. The steps were slow, measure. There was a wooden clacking sound, like someone tapping a cane against

the wall. The footsteps drew closer. Closer. Ryann covered his mouth with his hands, afraid he would scream. The footsteps came closer, sounded like they were just outside the door, the door thumped, and the footsteps stopped.

Ryann's heart pounded and pounded, his breasts rising and falling, and he kept his hands over his mouth, not moving, not shifting, not making a single sound. He felt a pressure building, a desperate need to pee, and he squeezed his knees together.

Nothing. Silence. Then clunk. Clunk. The footsteps moving away, down the hall, and Ryann sighed with relief, realizing he had tears in his eyes.

Clunk. Clunk. Clunk. The footsteps hurried back. Ryann made himself smaller, cowering in the corner, hiding beneath the curtain of his long, fine hair.

Creak. The door to the library opened.

“Who's in here?” A voice as dry and scratchy as fall leaves shouted. “Who's in here?”

Ryann felt urine tinkling from between the lips of his vagina, dripping on the inside of his leg. He felt tears pouring freely down his cheeks, but he remained still, curled up, tiny and afraid, not making a single sound. Go away! He thought. Oh, please! Just go away! He knew, could feel, that he would be in BIG TROUBLE if they caught him here, found out that he'd turned into a girl.

“I know you're in here! Stop hiding! If I have to come in there I'll tan your hide, missy!”

Ryann didn't move. Didn't breath. Stayed frozen and unmoving even as the tears poured down his smooth cheeks, even as he felt more urine dripping down the inside of his leg.

“Harrumph.” The lights went out. The door closed. The footsteps and the clacking moved on down the hall. This time Ryann fought the urge to sigh, to gasp with relief, to move or even breath, and he cowered in the corner, a terrified girl, until he fainted into darkness.

Ryann woke with a start, sat up in the pitch black dark of the library and reached to brush his long hair back behind his ear, but brushed back only air. He touched his chest and did not feel his soft blouse of his young breasts, but a flat chest and a man’s rough, khaki shirt. “Am I a man?” He wondered, momentarily confused, his thoughts and memories of jumble of images and faces—he was a woman, a girl, a Roman slave, a wife, a daughter, a boy, a man. Yes. A man.

Ryann. He was Ryann. And he’d been a man. Always. He remembered the footsteps, the voice. Reaching down, ashamed, he felt his crotch, his pants leg. Yes. He was a man. And he hadn’t peed himself. No. His pants were dry. Bone dry. Had the whole thing been just some kind of strange dream? He felt around the floor, found the books—the two books he’d found, the books that he felt or almost knew would have answers--- answers to what was happening to him, his strange dreams, visions, feelings. He picked them up and began carefully groping his way through the dark, toward the door, beneath which he could now see the glowing of warm, yellow light.

He made his way to the door, remembering the strange, dry voice, the threats. Whoever it was—they had to be gone now, right? But then he straightened his back and laughed at himself. I’m a man, he reminded himself. A grown up. He pulled open the door. The hall was empty in both directions, but no longer dark-- the lights had been turned on.

Ryann hurried down the hall. He must have taken a wrong turn when he came up the stairs earlier, and he wanted to stash the books in his room before anyone had a chance to spot them. Just make sure they remained his little secret. One thing Ryann knew about himself was that like any man's man, he loved secrets! The confusion from earlier seemed gone, and he strode right down the hall and found his room, let himself in, and without hesitating hurried over to his bed, lifted up the mattress and slid the two books side by side between the mattress and the box spring, then pulled the sheets and quilts back down, smoothing them over with a smile. The answers would be in there. He knew it. A boy's intuition was never wrong.

A rap on the door.

Ryann jumped, then sat down on his bed, doing his best to look nonchalant. "Yes?" He said.

The door opened. Chris poked her head in, gave Ryann a once over and smiled. "Where have you been all afternoon?"

"I took a nap," Ryann said.

"Oh? Where?"

"I got lost," Ryann said. "Found a couch somewhere and found asleep."

"Hmmmnnn," Chris said, slitting her eyes at him. Then she smiled. "Want to see something amaaaaazing?"

"Sure."

Chris bounded into the room, and Ryann saw that she was wearing a tuxedo, spats-- like something Fred Astaire would wear in an old movie. She spun and started tapping. "Do you like it??"

Ryann laughed. "You're amazing!" He said.

Chris kept tapping, smiling, did another spin. "Let's do a costume party! Have some fun!!!!"

"Sure," Ryann said. "Why not?" He looked at Chris in her tux and said, "but I am not wearing a dress."

Chris laughed, her tap shoes clattering rhythmically against the floor. "How did you know I was going to try and get you to wear a dress?"

Ryann crossed his legs. Tilted his head to the side, smiling. "I have you pretty much figured out."

"Is that so?"

"Oh, yeah."

Chris laughed. Increased the tempo of her dancing, the intensity, laughing and laughing, arms waving while Ryann watched. "You have me *pegged* do you?"

Ryann shrugged. Absentmindedly reached up to hook his hair behind his ear—saw the look in Chris' eyes as she, still dancing, watched him, and he felt himself blush as she laughed and said, "Maybe you need to Know Thyself!" She laughed, then did a twirl and said, "The girl will be here with your clothes in a sec. See you at the party!"

Ryann stood at the top of the stairs in top hat and tails. The pants were made from some kind of stretchy material and hugged his legs like skinny jeans, ending just above and showing off his bare ankles. The starched white shirt and jacket likewise smothered him. His hair had been slicked back with some kind of old fashioned hair oil that smelled like witch hazel.

Chris stood at the bottom of the stairs, also in top hat in tails—a matching outfit, an outfit worn by the now three serving girls who busily scurried about preparing for their costume party, carrying trays and platters here and there, while a small orchestra composed of pretty young women played “Sentimental Journey.”

Ryann reached up with a white gloved hand and tipped his hat to Chris,, who mirrored the gesture,, and then Ryann started to make his way down the stairs, carefully, one hand on the banister, once again strangely nervous, frightened, really, that he would trip and fall, and everyone would laugh at him just as they had when he’d been a girl...

Shut up! He told himself. You were never a girl. Stop this crap!

At the bottom of the stairs, he sighed with relief as Chris took his hand and pulled him onto the dance floor in front of the band. “I’m not much of a dancer,” Ryann said, reluctantly letting himself get dragged along.

“Just follow my lead,” Chris said, putting hand around his waist while taking the other, holding out to the side.

Ryann struggled for a moment, stumbled, finally just gave in to the music and to Chris, moving along with her, finding a graceful flow by just mirroring what she was doing.

“See, honey?” Chris said, smiling up at him. “You are such a graceful dancer!”

Ryann laughed. "I guess I'm okay after all."

"Now let's really show up what you got!"

"Oh no....."

"Girls, how about hitting us with something hot?" Chris said, her eyes wet with excitement.

"I don't know...."

"2... 3...4..." the conductor said and the band effortlessly slid out of Sentimental Journey, the tempo speeding up, intensity rising as they began to play "Take the A Train." Ryann felt himself panic as Chris began to pull him around the floor, their feet moving faster and faster, but she had a firm grip on his hand, a strong arm around his waist, and his terror over tripping drove him to keep moving, moving, steps forward, steps back, the two of them forming giant overlapping parabolas as they swirled around the dance floor.

Ryann saw the room flash past him like stills in a slide show... the band.... The blazing sconces on the walls, throwing cool buttery light up at the ceiling... the face of the serving girls, smiling, watching... the great stair glittering brightly in the lights... a painting, a vase.... The flashing brass of a trumpet.... The twirling of a wooden drum stick... Ryann felt dizzy, heart racing.... Faint... no! Don't. Faint!

"Stay with me!" Chris shouted, and Ryann looked back down at her, at her handsome face, those deep green eyes, and he felt calmer, went back to following her, moving with her, and when she smiled, he smiled, where she led, he followed. As the music crescendoed, echoing through the great hall, Chris dipped him, and his eyes went wide as he found himself bent

backward, staring up into her bright, confident eyes, then she pulled him back to his feet, brought him around and then with a powerful, whiplike move, she sent him spinning across the floor, Ryan instinctively rising onto his toes and raising his arms above his head, spinning and spinning, snapping his head around until he suddenly found himself caught in a woman's arms, staring into her bright, smiling face. She had big, dark eyes and long black hair piled on her head in an artfully messy updo, diamond chandelier earrings flashing at her ears.

The woman laughed, her arms around Ryann, and said, "You're such a good dancer!"

Ryann was shocked and surprised, mumbled thanks even as the serving girls and the band cheered and applauded, wolf whistled.

"Take a bow," Chris said, the wicked smirk back on her face.

Ryann, uncertainly, bowed, grinning, confused and embarrassed, though he wasn't even sure why.

The woman who had caught him as he'd been spinning across the floor took him by the elbow and led him across the room to Chris, who was silently applauding.

"I assume this cutie belong to you?"

"Yes, he does," Chris said, taking Ryann by the forearm and pulling him to her side.

"Where did you find such a pretty man?" The woman said, looking Ryann up and down, mentally undressing him. "And more importantly does he have a brother?"

"He is a limited edition model and he's all mine," Chris said, giving Ryann's arm a squeeze.

Ryann held out his hand. "My name is Ryann."

“Where are my manners?” Chris said. “How rude of me. Ryann, this is Georgia.”

Instead of a handshake, Georgia took Ryann’s fingertips in her hands and squeezed them while leaning in for a hug and a kiss on the cheek. “Delighted,” Martha said, still looking hungrily at Ryann.

“The pleasure is mine,” Ryann said. “You look...” He noticed she was wearing the same tuxedo as he and everyone else seemed to be wearing, and the word “...handsome...” came out, though he immediately regretted it, with both Georgia and Chris laughing out loud.

“I mean pretty,” Ryann corrected. “Lovely.”

“You had it right the first time,” Georgia said, patting Ryann on the cheek.

“Time for some champagne,” Chris said. “The clock has struck seven and we’re all still sober.”

“Scandalous,” Georgia agreed, and the three of them walked over to a bar service that had been set up in the corner next to long tables now loaded down with finger foods.

The champagne glowed, golden, bubbles rising in the narrow stemmed glasses. “Shall we toast to something?” Ryann asked.

“Yes. We must!” Chris said, and they all raised their glasses and Chris said, “Let’s drink to something!”

“To something!” Georgia said, laughing.

“To something,” Ryann said, though he felt the women were making fun of him somehow, in some way he didn’t fully understand. Still, he forced a smile, raised his glass and drank.

“When did you arrive?” Ryann asked Georgia after the toast.

“Oh, I probably won’t arrive until next year,” Georgia said with a wink that sent Chris into peals of laughter.

“No, I mean...”

But Chris grabbed his hand and dragged him back out onto the floor, and he drank and danced, spinning and stepping, in and out of Chris’ arms, then Georgia’s, losing himself in the music and the champagne, which he drank with abandon until he was laughing and dancing and the swirling flashing room became his world, his life, and he felt that he’d always been here, and that he never wanted to leave.

He found himself sitting at a long dining room table. Georgia sat next to him, and across from him were two little girls in tuxedos, their hair in bows. They kept looking at him, then whispering to each other, their little bodies twisting and bouncing with excitement as they burst into fits of giggling glee.

“What’s so funny?” Ryann asked, his speech slurred.

“You’re dressed like a girl!” One of them said.

“You’re dressed like a boy!” Ryann protested.

The girls burst out laughing and hugged each other, looking at Ryann with wicked, taunting eyes.

Chris stood at the head of the table, a carving knife flashing in her hand as she carved the roast beef off in great, steaming slabs of red, bloody meat, the servants expertly catching each slice, slipping it onto a plate and then delivering it to the guests, and Ryann looked down the

table and saw it was crowded with faces, women, young and old, girls, all dressed in tuxedos just like Ryann's. *Where did they all come from? Why am I dressed just like them? This is a suit. It's not for girls.* He dressed the bangs away from his eyes. Reached up to fix the bow in his...

The girls burst out laughing again as he sat there, arms over his head, mouth hanging open. Frustrated, he picked up his fork, his knife, but Georgia reached over and plucked the knife from his hand. "Let me do that for you sweetie," she said, beginning to cut his roast into small, bite sized pieces.

"I can do it," he protested, reaching for the knife, but Georgia gave him a stern, motherly look.

"I know you can do it," she said. "You're all grown up! But just let me do it for you tonight, okay, honey?"

Ryann put his hands in his lap and nodded, biting his lip as the two little girls sitting across from him giggled, picking up their silver and cutting their own food up.

They are. Drank. Chris took Ryann by the hand and led him through a maze of hallways until they came to a room with a glass door, and when she opened it she said, "My humidor."

Inside the walls were lined with shelves and boxes and boxes of cigars. "Pick one," Chris said.

Ryann wobbled around the room, head swimming with booze, vision blurry. He finally picked one out—small, slender—it smelled like chocolate. When Chris saw which one he'd picked, she gave him a kiss and said, "That's perfect for you."

He found himself sitting on a leather couch, the cigar in his mouth. He held it with his fingers in a V while Chris lit it for him. Georgia sat across from them in a large leather chair, her head shrouded in thick, white smoke from the thick, dark brown stogy she clenched in her teeth. She held a glass of brandy in her hand and watched Ryann with cold, hard eyes.

Chris lit her own cigar and blew a thick steam of white smoke into the room, sighing with pleasure. Ryann pensively puffed on his own cigar. It tasted like tobacco and chocolate, and as soon as he took a puff, he found himself choking, coughing.

The women laughed.

“Babe, maybe you shouldn’t...” Chris said, putting a hand on Ryann’s back.

“I’m fine,” Ryann gasped between coughs, tears in his eyes. He got himself under control. “That was weird,” he said.

Georgia and Chris exchanged an amused glance. Ryann saw it. He frowned. He would show them. His fingers still cribbing the little cigar in a V, he crossed his legs. “I smoked Cubans in Havana,” Ryann said, petulantly. “I once smoked five Cohibas in one night while waiting out a wounded tiger.”

“Impressive.” Georgia said.

Ryann brought the cigar back to his lips, took a little puff, blew a tiny little puff of smoke out. Tossed his head.

“You look so sexy when you smoke,” Chris said.

“Glamorous.” Georgia purred.

“Okay! Just stop! Stop!” Ryann said, his voice rising in pitch, getting tight.

Chris and Georgia laughed. “Stop what?”

“Stop... making fun of me! I’m tired of it! You’ve been making fun of me all night and I have just had it up to here! With both of you!”

“Calm down, babe,” Chris said in a soothing, mommie voice. “We’re just teasing you a little.”

“Having a little fun.”

“Busting your balls.”

“Lighten up,” Chris said, patting Ryann’s knee. “Don’t spoil the party.”

Ryann sat back, mollified, frustrated, but he didn’t want to spoil the party. Maybe he was over-reacting. “I’m... sorry,” he said. “I think I’m a little drunk.” He took another toke on his cigar, and at the same time, he felt his stomach turn, his face start to sweat.

“You okay?” Georgia said.

“You’ve had enough of this,” Chris said, reaching for the cigar.

“No. I’m fine.” Ryann took another toke. Blew out the smoke. His abs clenched. He clamped his jaw shut.

“Oh, shit,” Chris said.

Ryann lurched to his feet. “Bathroom?” He said through gritted teeth, one hand on his tummy.

“There,” Georgia said, pointing to a door.

Ryann ran, hurrying, the need to vomit growing stronger with each step. He threw the door open, lurched across the room and dropped to his knees in front of the toilet just as the nausea overcame him and he sent a stream of champagne and beef, tiramisu and half eaten oysters gushing into the toilet. Chris held his hair for him as he puked again, and again, while Georgia stood in the doorway, smoking, watching, grinning.

He was back in his room. In bed. His head ached. The room spun. The curtains had been pulled back, and outside his window he saw thick gusts of swirling white snow. The wind rattled the window, shook the house, filled it with eerie moaning and creaking, odd whispering voices that seemed to be calling, calling, filled with longing and hunger and need....

“Ryann....” They called. “Ryann. Ryann.....”

Ryann sat up. Startled.

She stood there at the end of the bed. The girl he’d seen in the library. The ghost. She stared at him with hard, hungry eyes. He pulled the bedclothes up to his chin, kicked his feet until he felt his back press against the headboard.

The girl slowly raised her left hand, slowly, slowly, her index finger extended, and she pointed it at Ryann, right at his heart. “Who are you?” Ryann whispered.

The girl stared, pointing. Pointing at Ryann’s heart, a heart which began to race, faster and faster. Ryann’s breathing grew quick and shallow, his chest heaving.

“What do you want?” Ryann whispered.

The girl opened her mouth. No sound came out at first. The vocal chords in her neck bulged, she opened her mouth wider, wider, her tongue red and swollen, lolling about behind her white teeth, and her eyes bulged, her face twisting and contorting into a mask of agonized tendons, her finger now jabbing, jabbing at his heart.

“Stop,” Ryann said, in a high, clear voice like a young woman’s. Squeezing his eyes shut, the covers clutched beneath his chin, he said, “Please!” The air grew cold, frigid. His hair stood on end and his skin dimpled.

The mattress shifted. The bed creaked. It felt like a cold, heavy mass of air was moving over his legs, chilling his skin right through the covers, freezing him down to the bone. It moved up to his knees, his waist. He kicked his legs, trying desperately to move away, away from the cold deadness that crawled over him, but his back just pressed against the headboard, and he murmured “please. Please.”

A pair of cold, bony hands touched him on the cheeks, sending a jolt down his spine. His eye opened, and he stared into the contorted face of the girl, the bulging eyes, the mouth open so wide it seemed to have come unhinged and the cold hands held his face as she leaned in and licked him with a dry, cold tongue – rough and yet sticky like a lizard’s—and Ryann finally screamed, a high-pitched scream like a terrified girl. He closed his eyes and screamed, and screamed again, and he screamed until he couldn’t scream anymore, and he sat there gasping for breath, his ragged throat throbbing with pain, tears pouring down his cheeks, the covers still clutched under his chin, and when he opened his eyes again the ghost had vanished.

Ryann wiped his eyes. The room stood empty. Outside the blizzard still raged, the wind shaking the window, the thick white snowflakes swirling behind the thick lead glass. Ryann

didn't feel drunk anymore. Or tired. He felt cold. Very cold. His whole body felt chilled to the bone, and he shivered even under all of his blankets and quilts. And then he saw it--- sitting there on the end table next to his bed, resting just beneath the lamp. The diary. He reached over and touched the cover, the brass lock, and warmth seemed to flow into him, and he picked it up and hugged it to his chest, and warmth flowed into his body. *I need to read this*, he thought. *I have to read this! That's what she was trying to tell me!*

He looked at the brass clasp, but he didn't even need to wonder where he could find the key, because he felt it dangling from a necklace he hadn't known he was wearing, and the key was resting on his chest, just above his heart.

Ryann opened the diary and smiled at the sight of Ryann's cursive writing-- rounded and lithe, dancing across the page with feminine vibrance. The first sentence at the top of the first page, underlined three times, read:

This is the private diary of Ryann Paige Cavanaugh. **YOU ARE TRESPASSING!!!!**

Ryann began to read and soon found himself drawn into Ryann's life, her hopes and dreams, her friends and trials-- it came to him like memory, like a dream— her long hours in the library, studying to be... a doctor... a scientist.... A mathematics wizard who breaks codes! Whatever books she read or movies she saw in the estate's screening room she would latch onto and immediately begin to dream... setting up a makeshift operating theater in a spare room, where she performed surgery on her dolls, or going down to the local school and convincing them to let her use the lab after school to perform "experiments"-- until one day she came in and saw a bucket full of dissected frogs, and she cried and the teacher told her if she wanted to be a

scientist she would have to cut animals open and look inside their bodies, and that night she wrote: Scientist? NEVER! I hate them!

With great, unstructured hours to herself, Ryann roamed the grounds of the estate, climbing trees, swimming in the lake.... She studied the birds and animals, insects and plants.... Filling her notebooks with drawings that grew more intricate and precise with passing years, and adding notations in Latin and Greek from her hours studying in the library.

Months and years passed, and Ryann grew from a precocious girl into a young woman. Her parents told her the time was coming for her debutante ball, and Ryann stopped and re-read the next entry over and over:

I must run away. The day of my 16th birthday approaches, and I am to make my debut into society as a young woman! I am supposed to be excited, but I feel only dread at the fate that awaits me. Mother has told me that after my ball I must give up on my tomboyish ways. She says I must cease my sweet wanderings in our woods, my tree climbing and gathering of specimens. She says these are not the proper pursuits for a young woman, that I must prepare to be a wife and mother, but I don't want that for myself!! I want adventures like Allan Quartermain or to explore exotic lands like Stanley and Livingston! She sends me to spend mornings with girls from town, or to babysit my nieces, sentenced to tea parties and chit chat when I would have LIFE! True Life! It is a curse to be a girl. A curse! I do not think, though, I should want to just be a boy, either. I want to be everything! To do everything! And so I must run away to some place far away where I do not have to choose, but can be a boy or a girl as I choose

A knock on the door. Ryann gasped and slipped the diary under the covers, letting it rest against his heart. “Yes?” He called, his voice high and girlish.

The door opened, and the maid looked inside, a smile on her face. “Your bath is ready.”

Ryann cleared his throat. “Thank you....” He said, still sounding like a girl. He coughed into his fist and repeated “thanks” relieved that this time his voice dropped into his normal register.

“Of course,” the girl said, putting on a mock deep voice, then giggling before closing the door.

The storm still raged outside, snow still fell, but some limpid rays of sunlight cut through the swirling clouds of snow, and Ryann was shocked to realize that he’d been reading all night. He didn’t want to stop. He needed to read Ryann’s story. He had to! But, his tummy growled, and he reluctantly got up, his soft, bare feet chilled by the floor, and he slipped the diary under the covers of the bed before scampering to the bath on his tip toes, one hand held out to the side, bent at the wrist... his hips swaying Just a little too much for a man.

As Ryann slipped into the scented, bubbly bath waters, he once again felt the weight of breasts settling onto his chest, felt his body reforming, reshaping, taking on a woman’s curves. He looked down and saw his hands, his flat chest, even as he felt the weight of his swaying breasts, felt the suds tickling his big, meaty nipples. He put his hands on his chest and felt them now in his palms—felt his soft mounds, his sensitive nipples... and he moaned with pleasure and thought about the rest of his body, and with one hand still squeezing a breast he reached down and slipped a hand between his legs, and he let his fingers slip gently down until he touched his

vagina, and he gasped in a soft voice, pulling his hand away, shocked and scared of the feeling he'd experienced.... He knew he shouldn't touch his vagina... good girls didn't do that! And so he took a deep breath and let the suds sluice off his arms, his chest, and ignoring the throbbing need he now felt between his legs, ignoring the insistent demand he felt to once touch his firm young breasts, to squeeze and lift them, he got out of the tub, flush with pleasure and shame.... And he toweled off and hurried back to his room chanting.... "You're a man.... You're a man.... You're man, Ryann, and don't you forget it!"

He rushed to the bedroom window and stared out at the swirling snow, the silvered world beyond. A gust of wind rattled the frame, and he could feel the frigid air against his body, causing his nipples to tighten. He put his palms against the glass, and in a soft pretty voice he whispered, "Can't someone save me from this prison?"

His clothes had been laid out for him while he'd been in the tub—cloths, once again, from an earlier era. The camel pants hugged his hips and butt before flaring out baggily around his legs. He pulled on dark brown, knee length boots with a faux distressed look—suspiciously looking at the heels—which looked like the heels for a man's boot, but he really couldn't be sure. He felt the shape of the boot was a little—just a little—more reminiscent of a shapely woman's leg than a man's. He wore a cotton shirt with a drawstring collar and sleeves that flared out at the wrists, a tan leather vest. Looking in the mirror he felt.... Blurry. Androgynous. Like he was dressed for another costume party, and his costume was Indiana Jones in transition.

He no longer felt like he had a woman's body, and he sat down on the edge of his bed, crossed his legs at the knee and frowned. What is happening to me? The images of the past day began to merge and rotate in his mind... the ghost girl in the library.... His life as a girl and a

slave in ancient Rome... the dance... and getting sick on the cigar while the women snickered....
The feeling of touching himself, his vagina.... The feeling that it was good, that it was right, that
he was...

Chris. Chris is doing this to me.

But that makes no sense. How could she make me... feel like this? See these things?

Drugs in the bath? In the air?

Confront her, he decided. That's what I need to do. Just go right up to her and tell
her....

A new voice, a woman's voice interrupted. You're being ridiculous. You are freaking
out. Getting hysterical. Men don't get hysterical.

"I'm not..." Ryann said. "I'm going to talk to her, tell her I know..."

"That she's making you think you have a vagina? Breasts?"

"Tell her how I'm feeling..."

"Feeling? Men don't talk about their feelings! Maybe you are a girl."

"I'm not a girl," Ryann said, getting up, staring out the window. "I'm a boy. I'm a
boy."

Downstairs, Ryann found Chris, Georgia and Georgia's two little waiting for him. They
were all dressed in outfits identical to his, and immediately he felt more self-conscious about his
clothes. "Good morning," Chris said. "Tummy all better?"

“I’m fine,” Ryann answered. “Good morning, Georgia. Um.... Girls...” Ryann couldn’t remember their names. Had he ever learned them? It seemed rude to ask at this point.

“Come sit with us!” One of the girls said, patting the chair between the two children--- the only open seat at the table.

Ryann smiled and said, “Sure.” He remembered the humiliating experience from the night before, having his food cut for him, and was glad to have some distance between himself and Chris. The girls cheered as he sat, and then one of them shouted, “You look so pretty today!”

“Handsome,” Ryann said. “Boys are handsome.”

The girls just giggled.

“I picked out a special breakfast for you,” one of the girls said. “Please try it?”

“What is it?” Ryann said.

“Just promise you’ll try it? Pretty please?”

“Please.... Please... please...” the other started, and then they chanted together, “please.... Please.... Please....”

“Better to just give in when they get like this,” Georgia said.

“Okay,” Ryann said. “Okay!”

The serving girl came, placing plates loaded with eggs and meat in front of Chris and Georgia, likewise the girls. When she came to Ryann she placed a bowl in front of him and a silver spoon. Ryann stared down at the milky mush and said, “What is it?”

“Curds and whey,” the serving girl answered.

“Try it! Try it!” The girls chanted.

Ryann smiled. Lifted his spoon. Scooped up a mass of the yellowy lumps in the milky white substance, put them in his mouth—tasted what seemed like vinegary cottage cheese with some apricot—swallowed and smiled. “It’s... great...” he said, grinning. “Delightful.”

The women and girls laughed.

“I knew you would like it,” the little girl said, patting Ryann on the arm.

Breakfast went on. Ryann had two more bowls of curds and whey and found himself helpless to do much more than smile and nod as his two little companions chattered on amiably about their dolls and favorite books, their favorite games and ideas they had for plays they wanted to put on ...”soon.” They were the most energetic and excited children, so full of energy and light, and Ryann couldn’t help but find himself charmed by their enthusiastic zest for life.

“Bowling,” Chris said loudly, breaking the reverie.

Georgia rapped her knuckles on the table. “Here. Here. Let’s go, girls!”

“Bowling!” The girls cheered. They grabbed Ryann’s hands and dragged him to his feet. Ryann’s thoughts went back to his room, his diary... Ryann’s diary. He wanted to get back there, read it. See if he could figure out what happened, was happening.

“I think I’ll just go back to my room...”

“No!!!!!” The little girls shouted. “You must come with us!”

“Come on, Ryann. Be a sport,” Chris said.

“I’m just still feeling a little sick…”

“Come with us! Come with us!!”

“I’m afraid it won’t be much fun without you,” Georgia said.

The girls had Ryann’s hands and were tugging at him, trying to drag him down the hall with all the might in their tiny little bodies. Finally, he sighed and said, “O-KAY!” To the smiles and cheers of all.

They all watched as Ryann stood, facing the pins, his back to them. He stood with the ball clutched in one hand, his other hand on his hip as he stared down the lane. As soon as he started to stride toward the pins, his free hand went out to the side, his hand bent pensively at the wrist, his hips swaying side to side, and then he dropped the ball with an awkward clunk, bending at the knees, putting his hands to his cheeks as the ball careened across the alley and slammed into the gutter. The women watched, amused that he had no idea how absurdly feminine his body language had become.

“Oh!” Chris said. “Good try!”

Ryann turned, blushing, his hands now knotted together at his chest. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me!”

“Hey, you look cute as hell, so don’t worry about it,” Chris said, getting up for her turn, patting Ryann on the ass as he passed her.

“Yeah!” The little girls shouted as Ryann walked back. “You threw the ball so hard!”

“Maybe you should try using two hands like we do!”

“Maybe,” Chris said.

Georgia laughed and patted Ryann on the knee as Chris sent her ball gliding down the lane to smash into the pins, sending them scattering in every direction with a mighty crash. “It’s all just for fun.”

“Strike!” Chris shouted, pumping his fist. She turned and said, “Who’s the man?”

“You are!” The little girls shouted.

Ryann focused, concentrated as hard as he could. He managed to get the ball to at least roll down the lane and knock over some pins, but he couldn’t pick up a spare to save his life. The girls cheered him on and showered him with hugs, which just made him feel worse. As bowling mercifully ended, Chris came over and gave him a hug and a kiss. “I kicked your ass!” She said, grinning.

Ryann grinned back, determined to hide how wounded and humiliated he felt. “Enjoy it while you can, little girl. One of these days when I feel more myself I’ll show you some real bowling skills.”

“Okay, cutie,” she said, then put a hand on his cheek. “You don’t mind watching the girls for awhile, right? Georgia and I need to do some things.”

“Watch the girls?”

“Yeah. They’ll be fine. Just keep an eye on them while we take care of some business.”

“I don’t know...” Ryann said, only to feel their little hands grabbing him as the girls once again shrouded him in a chorus of “please... please... please...”

“Thanks,” Georgia said, patting him on the shoulder. “You’re a doll.”

And with that, Chris and Georgia walked away leaving Ryann holding hands with the little girls who immediately began tugging on him, dragging a frustrated Ryann off even as a dozen objections remained trapped in his throat.

Ryann found himself in the East Wing of the manor where Georgia lived with the girls. He hadn't realized how huge the manor house was, and felt amazed as they led him through yet another maze of hallways and rooms he hadn't sending, ending in a large, high ceilinged space with a bank of windows and two huge, fireplaces that had been converted into a massive playroom, complete with a tree house, a life sized doll house, a section crowded with easels and long tables smothered with arts and crafts supplies, another area jammed full of musical instruments.

"This is... amazing?" Ryann said, staring around the room even as his mind was flooded with strange memories... he was in Chris' arms, his breasts pressed against her flat, strong chest, he tilted his head back and parted his wet, red lips, inviting her in for a kiss...

"Isn't it?" One of the girls said, skipping into the room.

"Time for tea!" The other said.

The girls sat grabbed a toy tea pot and cups, quickly setting the table. Ryann took a seat slightly off, sitting down with his knees together, hands in his lap, smiling as he prepared to "keep an eye on the girls" but they weren't having it.

"You have to have tea with us."

"It simply won't be a party without you."

Ryann sat down on one of the tiny chairs, resigned to his fate, and they pretended to drink tea. He finally asked their names and found that that they were named Thomasina and Paula. The girls started referring to him as ChiChi at some point, and Ryann didn't want to ruin the fun by making an issue of it, so he just let them. The tea party led to cards--- Old Mai—and then crazy eights.... The girls chattered away, Ryann nodding and smiling, and then Paula, having just won another hand, said, “Did you know we have a rock band?”

“Impossible!” Ryann said. “Little girls can't be in a rock band.”

Soon Thomasina was pounding out a driving, steady beat on a drum kit while Paula tore through runs on an electric guitar—sounding like the reincarnation of Jimmy Hendrix. Ryann found himself shaking a tambourine and slapping it against his hip while they girls played and sang an old David Bowie song:

Ch-ch-ch-changes....

Turn and face the strange

Ch-Ch-Changes

Gonna have to be a different man

The song ended, the three of them bursting into laughter and giggles, and suddenly the hall was filled with whooping and clapping. Ryann turned and saw Georgia and Chris standing there, cheering. Ryann stood there, clutching his tambourine, knees together.

“Say goodbye, girls,” Georgia said.

“No! We want Chichi to stay.”

“Chi Chi and Chris want some time together,” Georgia said.

Ryann exchanged hugs and goodbyes, following Chris out of the room and back into the confusing maze of rooms and hallways. “You’re so good with kids,” Chris said as she led him through a dark room filled with furniture that stood hidden beneath dusty white sheets.

“I don’t know...” Ryann said.

“It’s a total turn on,” Chris said, grabbing him and kissing him. She pushed Ryann back against a table, kissing him, her hands in his hair. Ryann felt himself getting hard, kissed her back, slipping his hands down to her hips, holding her close, the smell of her musky scent filling his nose. She kissed, fondled, but when Ryann reached down to undo Chris’ belt, she pulled away. “Not here,” she said in a gruff voice.

“I’m so horny,” Ryann squealed.

“Come on,” Chris said, pulling him to his feet. She turned him, put her hands on his hips and standing behind him, guided him to a spiral metal staircase. “Go,” she said, patting him on the ass. “Up!”

Ryann, his whole body hot with desire, eagerly started climbing the stairs. He needed for Chris to fuck him so bad he would do anything she said.

At the top of the stairs a trapdoor led to a glass domed observatory, a huge brass telescope. The storm had ended, and above them, through the glass, a huge, misty winter moon hovered in a star smitten sky. Ryann looked up and stared at the moon in wonder, the cold white light sparkling in his eyes, and as soon as Chris made her way through the trap door she

came up behind him, putting her arms around his waist, and he felt her stiff and hard, pressing against his ass, and he arched his back, tilting his hips back, sighing with pleasure.

Chris tuned him, and he stared lovingly up into her eyes, the bright moon shining through the glass above her, and she cupped his chin in her hands, tilted his head back and kissed him. Ryann clung to her strong shoulder, lifted a leg, and as the kiss broke he said, “fuck me.”

Chris smiled and kissed him again. “Be patient,” she said, unbuttoning his shirt, pulling it open to reveal his soft, heavy breasts, nestled in his pink and white lace bra. She cupped one breast while reaching down and starting to undue the button on his pants, but when Ryann tried to help her she slapped his hand away and said, “Slower is better” in her deep, baritone voice, a voice as smooth as molasses that gave Ryann shivers of delight.

“I want you so bad,” Ryann answered in his own tiny, pretty little bell of a voice.

Chris patiently undid Ryann’s pants, slide them down his lithe legs, then slipped her arms around his back and deftly undid the clasp of his bra, slipping it off and stepping back to take a look at Ryann, who stood there in his panties, one hand on his wide, round hip, his knees together. “You are so beautiful...” Chris whispered, letting her eyes caress Ryann’s smooth, hairless body.

Ryann giggled, lifted his arms and put them on his head, thrust his full, firm breasts out even as he thrust his hips back, and he did a slow turn as he pulled the pins from his hair and let it tumble down over his slender shoulders in masses of shimmering curls.

Chris’ eyes got hot and hard, and she walked slowly toward Ryann, who fixed in the sights of her masculine hunger felt himself trembling, his heard racing... he resisted the urge to back away, to run, and instead he licked his lips, and smiled, eager to make himself this powerful

man's woman. Chris grabbed him—one arm hooked under his thigh and another around his back, and she picked him up off his feet like he were nothing but light and air... she carried him to the center of the observatory, lay him down right in the center of the cold winter moonlight and took one of his nipples in her mouth, sucking as she squeezed his breast, and Ryann threw his head back, his arms on her powerful, muscular shoulders, and he moaned softly – thrilled to know and feel again what it meant to be a woman, a woman being made love to by a man... and his whole body sang with pleasure as Chris sucked on his firm, young breasts, her erection pressing against his soft, inner thigh, and he wanted to beg her, to plead with her to do it right now, to hammer into him and drive him mad with pleasure, but she had ordered him to be patient, and he would and he had to and he knew it would be better than anything he could imagine if he just let Chris take charge and so he just softly whispered, “oh... god... oh god....” As Chris kept squeezing and sucking on his breast, pressing her hard member against his body.... She began to sweat, and her wet, salty sweat dripped onto Ryann, and their bodies grew slick and the tension in Ryann rose and rose, and he just kept whispering “oh... god... oh... god....”... as the space between his legs got hotter and wetter, and he wanted so badly to feel her inside him...

Chris finally took her mouth off his hard, throbbing nipple, a trail of her hot spit slashing across Ryann's neck and shoulders. She kissed him again while she gently ran her fingertips along his arms, his shoulders, down his ribs and over his taut, soft belly... every touch sent a greater surge of pleasure through Ryann's body, every kiss curled his toes, and he gasped and moaned and stared up at the moon stunned as he arched his back, grabbed Chris' hands and put them back on his breasts.... She shook his little hands off, grabbed her wrists and pinned them above his head as she leaned down, his hard, muscular chest pressing against his breasts while she stared into his hot wet eyes, felt him struggling helpless to free his hands to move, some

anger in that pretty face of his, strands of his golden halo of hair across his eyes... and then a soft, fuzzy surrender as he gave up his struggle, accepted her dominance, and instead begged, “please hurry..... “

Chris placed Ryann’s soft little hands on his breasts now and growled, “play with yourself, honey.”

Ryann smiled, lifting and squeezing his breasts, and Chris slid down, pushing his legs apart. Ryann made a mewling sound, and Chris positioned herself between his legs, but she didn’t make a move to penetrate him, instead leaning down and kissing him on the belly... it felt good, Ryann sighed, but it wasn’t what he wanted, needed... and he repeated... “please...” but louder, more urgent.... “Oh please....” He kept squeezing his breasts like his man had told him to, and Chris kissed her way down his belly, right down to the space between his legs, and she slipped her tongue inside him, and he screamed “please... oh god... please....!” Chris teased him with her tongue, Ryann lifting his hips, playing with his full, soft breasts, begging softly, and then she found his clit and Ryann screamed as pleasure rocked his slender little body like rolling thunder, and he arched his back, burying his hands in Chris hair, pushing her head deeper into his vagina as time and space seemed to collapse and his eyes rolled back into his head as his stunned male mind melted under the infinite heat of a woman’s orgasm....

As it came to an end Ryann stared deliriously up at the moon, the stars, a thin wisp of cloud ... he didn’t know where he was or who he was; he knew only pleasure... and even as he lay there on the floor, naked and euphoric, he heard Chris grunt and slip her rough, strong hands under his ass, giving it a squeeze, lifting it as she slipped her rock hard member between the lips of his vagina, and he felt a hunger and a need, relief and desperation fill him all at once, and he moaned, his pretty little sounds in counter-point to Chris’ deep, guttural grunting, and she began

to work, slowly, at first, and then faster, faster... harder and deeper, and Ryann rocked his hips, then raised his legs and wrapped them around her, desperate to pull her as deep into him as he could, and again he sang out “Oh... God... oh... god... oh... god...” In his pretty little voice, and she kept going, kept going until Ryann was woozy, faint whit desire.... And then finally she exploded into him and Ryann sang out in relief as a second and a third orgasm shook his soft, rounded body... and he stared up at Chris, with her square jaw, her stubbly chin, and he was overwhelmed with love.

Chris, exhausted, pulled out, her face slick with sweat. She kissed Ryann and brushed the back of her hands across his soft cheek. “You okay?” She asked.

Ryann nodded, his mouth dry, unable to think in words. He stared up at the moon, the moon that shone down on his soft skin, his breasts, his slender round legs... He stared up at the moon, still panting, his breasts rising and falling on his chest... Chris’ musky sweat smeared all over his body, he stared up at the moon, radiant, satiated, his whole body tingling in the afterglow, fragments of their love making replaying his mind... touches... sounds... he put his little hands in his hair and then once again put them on his breasts, an echo of the pleasure he’d just been lost in... he stared at the moon as his breathing slowed, as the dimpled sweat on his body began to cool, he stared at the moon, and he thought... *what did I let her do to me?*

I let her fuck me, he thought. I let her take me in this body, this woman’s body... I let her ride me like a man... He remembered how he’d begged for it in his soft little voice, how he’d screamed in pleasure as she’d shot her load into him...

A little wispy sliver of silver cloud drifted across the starlit sky like a piece of lace against the blackness... Ryann shivered, naked on the floor... his hands on his soft, round

breasts... the moon on his soft, flat tummy... his slender legs... his vagina..... *She'll never respect me again.... She'll never be able to look at me without disgust... She'll tell Georgia... the serving girls... everyone will be laughing at me now....*

Ryann sat up, his breasts swaying on his chest. He pulled his tangled hair from his face, threw it back over his shoulders. Chris lay on her back, her eyes closed. She seemed to be sleeping, and Ryann felt a stabbing fit of jealousy looking at her there, sleeping peacefully in her strong, man's body, smugly satisfied with herself while he sat there in new, soft little shape worried and scared and ashamed.

I'm supposed to be the man, he thought, clenching his fist. I'm supposed to be her.

He got to his feet, the feeling of his jiggling, swaying breasts annoying him as they swayed against his arms, rocked back and forth, tugging on his clavicle. He saw his bra in the corner, pink and white, lacey and pretty, and he swallowed, disgusted with himself as he weighed the thought of slipping back into his bra, decided against it. I have to get out of here, he thought, again. I have to escape. Somehow. He walked over to the cool glass of the observatory, got up on a narrow ledge that ran around the rim, a groove that allowed the great telescope to rotate 360 degrees and sweep the sky, and looking down at the manor grounds his heart sank, he bit his lip, put his hands to his cheeks. He couldn't even see the wall. The snow had buried it completely. The trees seemed like dwarves now... the snow fall must have been four or five feet, and with the wind drifts had piled much higher in places. *I'm trapped*, he realized. It would take days to clear the snow. Maybe more. Way out here, did anyone even try, or would they just wait for it to clear on its own?

He turned, his boobs swaying and bouncing. He looked, again, at the bra, his bra. He would go back to his room. Climb under his covers. Read and sleep. Ask the girl to bring him his meals. Just stay there, and hide from the world. He didn't want anyone to see him like this, to face them knowing they would know he'd let Chris fuck him. Begged for it.

I'm supposed to be the man, he thought again, frustrated. It was my turn.

Chris did this to me somehow. She made me this way.

Ryann smiled. He slipped on his pants, his shirt and vest and boots, letting his soft breasts sway freely on his chest, his sensitive nipples rubbing against fabric. Then he grabbed all of Chris' clothes, leaving behind only the bra and panties, and smiling, he climbed down the stairs and began to creep through the dark, cold, silent house, wandering through the halls and rooms, knowing he would find his way back to his room, or some other place. After a few twists and turns, he shoved Chris' clothes under a couch in the corner of a den, then stood up and reached to brush his long hair back...

But it wasn't there. Looking down, pulling open the front of his shirt, he saw a flat, white, hairless chest, and hands that now manifested somewhere between the man he'd been and the woman he'd become. Ryann started walking again, moving through the dark rooms, and with each twist and turn, each step away from Chris he found himself becoming more of a man, less of a woman, and when he finally found himself back in the main hall, looking up at the grand staircase his body had returned to its previous form, and he clutched his hands under his chin and excitedly ran up the stairs and back to his room and grabbing his diary, he crawled under the covers and started to read once more, fascinated with every word before coming to the day of Ryann's debutant ball:

Am I just another silly, giggling girl after all? Am I just as powerless over my heart as any limpid heroine in some tawdry nickel romance novel?

His name is Chris, and blush to admit that merely to whisper his name makes me tremble with an ineffable joy, and I find myself composing the silliest rhymes, and imagining the two of us together on all manner of exciting adventures. I cannot deny it; I am in love with the most handsome, darling boy I have ever seen, and I am ashamed of myself. I am sure everyone at the ball saw how I blushed and giggled, just like any silly girl, and they must now all be having quite a laugh at how quickly the tomboy, who had vowed she would never fall in love with any silly boy, has found herself smitten like any other girl! Oh, were it so easy as that!

I spent the morning in hell, being primped and prettied by my mother and her serving girl, forced into a suffocating corset and then draped in a shimmering pink silk gown. I had agreed to it all, of course, in return from a promise from my mother that I should be allowed to study mathematics and science at Vassar, rather than something absurd as deemed appropriate for my sex. My face was painted, and I was perched on the most impractical and uncomfortable shoes with heels that made me fear with every step I would topple over and fall on my face! I begged mother to let me wear something less insane, but she had warned me that I should practice walking in these monstrosities, and now she smugly insisted that I should learn “on the job” as she believed that hobbling myself in such a ridiculous manner was part of my future life as a “proper lady.” I was to make a grand entrance, appearing at the top of the stairs and then gliding gracefully down to the main lobby, where all the guests would be waiting, and I nearly died with shame as I made my way out there and then stood at the top of the stairs, the orchestra striking up SONHGHHERE. I felt like a slutty clown, my face painted, wearing a ridiculous

dressed that showed off my shoulders and breasts, and looking down at all the boys in their smart suits I felt sick and disgusted that I would be forced to degrade myself in this manner, presenting myself to the whole room as just a Girl!

As the music began, the crowd looked up and I heard murmurs. “She’s so pretty!”
Someone said.

Appalled, I clutched the bannister and began to make my way down the stairs, teetering in those stupid shoes! I minced and clung, making my way painfully down the stairs, and when I finally reached the bottom I sighed and smiled, my breasts rising shamefully as my father approached and took me by the arm, leading me out into the center of the room like I was one of his prize horses, being displayed at paddock before the race. The other boys were gawking at me, seeing me in a dress for the first time, seeing the breasts and the womanly curved I had worked so hard to hide from the world, as their eyes grew hungry with desire I had a horrible realization; they would always see me as a girl now, a woman. Even when I did put back on a pair of pants, a jacket, they would remember this night, this shape, and I would never again be one of the boys.

It was a horrible thought, a thought that made me sick with grief, literally sick, my stomach turning as I realized what my mother had done to me, my father, that they had not just forced me into dresses for a single night but had stripped me forever of my boyhood. And just then, struggling to breath as the corset seemed to grow tighter, crushing my body, choking the life out of me.... I saw her. Chris.

I mean, he was a boy. Chris. But he could have been a girl with that lean, slender body and that pretty face—big, blue eyes ringed with long, dark lashes, full lips, a head of unkempt

sloppy black curls. Our eyes met. He smiled. The breath caught in my throat, and my cheeks grew red as he smiled, wider, his own cheeks blushing the sweetest prettiest pink, and I pictured him, right then and there, I pictured him wearing my pink dress, him perched on my heels, him with a tiara sparking in his thick, curly black hair, and he was pretty, so pretty!

As I looked into his eyes, I felt a need I had never felt before; I had to have this boy, to possess him, make him mine. I stared at him, at that pretty girl-boy, and he dropped his eyes, looking away, his hands clasped behind his back, but just then I felt my father give my arm a squeeze, and he leaned down and whispered, "Don't stare!"

All night I played the coy young colt, carefully parceling my glances, feigning disinterest, but when the grand dance began, in which all of the young bachelors would have a chance to dance with me, my heart raced with excitement, and I counted eagerly as one after another boy took me in his arms and danced with me-- I felt embarrassed by them, by myself, to find myself in a dress, smiling with my painted lips as boys I'd wrestled with, hunted and fished with, slipped their arms around my waist and smiled stupidly down at me like I was just another girl, which to them I was. Now. But finally Chris came, and as he gathered me in his arms I felt him trembling, and I smiled reassuringly and said, "You're very pretty."

He smiled, laughed. The room spun round us. "I supposed to say that to you, right?" He said.

"No," I answered, gripping his hand, showing him my strength even as I began to take control of our dancing. He struggled against me for a moment, but then surrendered, both of us moving more confidently, assuredly, as he led to my follow, and I saw him smile with relief as he let me take control, and I fell even more madly in love with my girl-boy.

And so, of course, I am no silly girl. Not at all. I think I may feel as other girls feel now, but it is all that is sweet and feminine in lovely Chris that brings it out in me, that makes me feel so alive! So full of passion! Can it be I have found my soul mate? Someone no more bound by his shape than I am? A girl-boy to match the boy-girl in me? I almost daren't think it!

Ryann closed the diary and held it over his heart as he played the scenes described back through his mind. He could see it all happening, see Chris there when she'd been a boy, so young and pretty, and he in his dress, and all the excitement of being young and in love for the first time!

I was Ryann, he finally admitted to himself. I lived this life. I was this girl!

He'd never believed in reincarnation. Never even entertained the possibility that it was possible, but now as he lay in his bed--- the bed that had been his in his past life, the room where he'd grown up when he'd been a girl, in the house where he'd lived.

Chris wants to turn me back into her, Ryann thought, remembering the feeling of her inside him, making love to him. It had felt... divine. Perfect. Sublime. It had seemed so right. Maybe he should...

But no. No. He was a man. He had to stop this from happening. Somehow.

And he was sure the answer had to be in the diary. The spell book. The ghost had led him to them. The ghost had urged him to read. The ghost was helping him, but why? Who was she??

Biting his lip, he opened the diary, eager to learn more of Ryann, to seek out the next piece of the puzzle, but just then someone rapped loudly on his door. "Yes?" He called out, his voice having shifted into a softer, more feminine register.

"The butler," a young but male voice answered. "Your bath is ready."

Ryann could feel his body shifting, small breasts blossoming on his chest. "No," he whispered. "No." He looked down, frustrated as the soft little cones. "I'm not feeling well," Ryann said. "Can you bring me my breakfast here in my room? Please?"

"No, he will not," Chris answered from outside the door, her deep baritone voice startling Ryann, who flinched.

"Go away," Ryann said, now in the same soft, pretty voice he'd spoken with last night. "Leave me alone!"

"Get up, clean yourself up and get downstairs. Now," Chris said. "Or I will come in there and drag you downstairs myself."

Ryann heard her heavy footsteps clunking away down the hall. He slit his eyes at the door, clenching his little fists. *Who does she think she is, talking to me like that?*

And yet he ruefully threw off the covers, hid the diary under the mattress and made his way to the tub, his breasts swaying with each step. He paused to put his long, golden hair up, then slipped into the steaming, soapy, perfumed waters of the tub, today smelling of honey and vanilla. It would be good to clean the stink of sex off, to clean HER smell off his pretty body, and he lay back and relaxed in the warm water, letting it drain the tension from his slender body,

his heavy breasts. He thought back on the diary, the night of his debutante ball, the visions Ryann had had of dressing Chris in her gown, putting his hair up...

And now she was doing it to him in this life. That and more. She'd stolen his sex, made him into the girl, and now she had him totally under her thumb, helpless, trapped, totally at her mercy. He had no doubt she would drag him down stairs if he refused, and he was too small and too weak to resist her. The anger rose in him, rage and resentment. How he hated what she'd made of him! He got out of the tub, toweled off, padded prettily back to his room, and there on the bed were his clothes for the day:

A pleated, checkered wool skirt with a bow at the hip, a sleeveless blouse, and a sleeveless sweater vest. High-heeled, knee high boots. A bra. Panties. This time he'd been left some jewelry as well-- bracelets, necklaces. Pretty clothes. Feminine clothes. His stomach turned, and he flushed with shame, though he'd been expecting this, expecting all of it, and he hated the thought of putting on these clothes, dressing pretty, just as he always had, but as he stood there, nude, staring down at his shame and humiliation, he knew he had no choice. He could throw a fit, make a fuss, but these were the clothes he would be wearing, and any tantrums he threw would just make him seem all the more the girl Chris wanted him to be...

The girl Chris wants me to be..... Ryann smiled, a thought creeping into his mind. Maybe even a memory. He picked up the lacy little bra. Today it was white lace, with a little ribbon between the cups, ribbons on the shoulder straps. Very pretty. Sexy. And he smiled, because he'd just realized that was a very good thing. He slipped into his bra, adjusted the straps, tugged on the bell to summon the servant. He slipped on his panties, his skirt and the blouse, which of course seemed too small, too tight, designed to hug his breasts, show off his curves to

the world. Ryann only buttoned it halfway, leaving the top open, showing off his breasts and just a hint of his bra; he knew how even the slightest glimpse of a bra drove a man crazy.

"Miss?" The servant called through the door.

"Bring me some make-up," Ryann said. "I want to do my face."

"Of course," the butler said. "At once."

Ryann's heels clicked as he walked across the marble floor, his skirt swishing around his legs. He strutted into the dining room, head held high, breasts thrust forward, and as he entered Chris, Georgia and the boys looked up. They all smiled at the sight of him, a kind of superior, demeaning smirk. Chris and Georgia let their eyes drift over his body, and he felt his skin tingle as they mentally undressed him.

"Isn't she stunning?" Chris said to Georgia.

"Lovely. Much better today than yesterday."

Ryann smiled and lifted one of his slender hands, lifting his hair back. "Oh, stop!" He said in a feminine sing-song. "And how are my favorite nephews today?" He asked, turning to Thomas and Peter, who sat, grinning in their little flannel shirts, their rough, baggy corduroy pants. They'd all become male now, and they all wore rugged, outdoorsy clothes. Chris got up and pulled Ryann's chair out for him, and Ryann sat, smoothing his skirt beneath his legs, smiling back over his shoulder at Chris. "Thanks!"

"George and I plan on doing some hunting after breakfast. You'll watch the boys, right?"

"I'd love to!" Ryann said, gushing girlishly, gracing the two boys with a bright, affirming smile.

"Cool," Thomas said.

"Awesome," Per mumbled.

Ryann shifted his chair, making sure to give George a good view, and then he began to unbutton his sweater, slipping it off his shoulders, giving his shoulders a little wiggle and making his breasts sway, just a bit. The boys were talking, telling him about the snow fort they planned to build, and Ryann turned his focus on them, pretending not to notice the heat coming from the two men as they got a look at his full, white breasts, his bra.

The food came. They boys all ate eggs and steak. Ryann ate his curds and whey, his knees primly together, his back straight. But there was nothing prim about the way he ate, as he lifted each spoon of steaming, white, milky whey to his pink painted lips, slipped the spoon between them, sucked on it and then slipped it out, licking it with his tongue, making eye contact with George and making pretty little sounds, "Ummmm.... so good!"

"I love a girl with a good appetite," George murmured.

"I bet you do," Ryann said with a little shrug of his slender, round shoulders.

Chris tried to ignore him, but Ryann could see the rage building in her eyes.

Ryann let a little lump of curd fall from the spoon onto his breasts and squealed, "Oh my!" Then, he looked right at George and said, "would you mind, terribly?"

"It would be my pleasure," George said, reaching over and using his index finger to lift the lump from Ryann's breast, then slipping it into his mouth with a smile. Then he plucked the handkerchief from his lap and dabbed at the spot.

Ryann giggled and squirmed.

"You're acting weird," Thomas said.

"Even for a girl," Peter added.

"Very weird," Chris said, slamming her knife down on the table.

Ryann put a hand to his cheek, letting his eyes go wide with alarm. George turned to Chris. "You have a problem with something?" She said in a flat, deep voice full of threat.

Chris locked eyes with George, and the two big, husky women stared at each other for a minute. Chris hand twitched. She reached for her knife, then said, "No problem at all," as she went back to eating.

George glanced at Ryann, and Ryann smiled his prettiest smile.

Breakfast ended, and George stood up and pulled Ryann's chair out for him. When he stood up, she draped his sweater over his shoulders, letting her hands linger there for a moment, and then she said, "You go on and hunt without me today. I think I'll spend some time with the boys."

Chris, who'd been checking her zipper, looked up, glancing between George and Ryann. "But we planned this."

"Plans change. Go and have a blast. We..." and now he mussed Thomas' hair, "are going to build the most GINORMOUS SNOW FORT EVER!"

"Yes!" Ryann said, clapping his hands while the two boys pumped their fists and cheered.

As they walked away, George slipped his arm over Ryann's shoulder, and Ryann put a little extra sway in his hips, letting his skirt swish prettily back and forth as he clicked along in his heels. He glanced back over his shoulder and saw Chris standing there by the table, the great window behind her bright with the snow-silvered world beyond. She had the knife in her hand, and it caught the sunlight and flashed, and Ryann smiled, his bright white teeth flashing right back.

They bundled the boys up and headed out into the snow. Ryann's heel boots had very little functionality, so he had to cling to George as the group made their way out onto the patio and found place along the buried field stone wall to build the snow fort. The boys flung themselves wildly into the snow, digging and rolling up big, heavy snowballs which their mother, George, lifted into place, constructing a wall of snow boulders. Ryann, heels and all, helped for awhile; he knew men liked a girl who would leap in to fun, but he made sure to be as girly as possible, struggling to lift a not so heavy snow boulder, helping to dig a trench, but doing it with silly, kittenish little clawing motions that sent all the boys into fits of laughter. As usual, the adults tired and found a place to sit while the two boys kept digging and building, seemingly impervious to the cold.

Ryann and George sat, shoulder to shoulder, their cheeks flush, breath silvered. Ryann leaned against George. "I'm cold," he said, softly.

George put her arm around Ryann, pulled him in close. "You'll always feel colder as a woman," she said. "You'll get used to it, though. It's not so bad."

"I guess," Ryann said. "You're kids are great."

"Yeah. Great pains in the behind."

"Oh..." Ryann said, playfully slapping at George's arm with a mittened little hand.

"I'm glad they're boys now, before they start dating."

"Are you glad you're a man?"

"Yes," George said.

They sat together for a time, watching the boys play in the snow, and then Ryann let them come: the tears. He buried his head in the crook of George's shoulder and sobbed, clinging to her. George pulled the little man in closer, held him tight, murmured, "there, there. There, there. It's going to be all right. You'll see."

"I'm scared," Ryann whispered. "Lonely. I ... don't know... I'm so lost and confused, and I'm.... I need someone...."

George put her hand under Ryann's chin, lifted his face, then she put her hands on his cheeks and looked him in the eyes and whispered, "You have me." Ryann's tilted his head further back, let his soft lips part, closed his eyes...

George leaned in and kissed him, gently, sweetly lovingly. When the kiss ended he leaned back and said, "You have me."

Ryann nodded, the tears rolling down his cheeks, and then he buried his head in George's chest again, mostly to hide the smile that was threatening to break out and ruin his performance. *I have you all right*, he thought. *Wrapped around my little finger.*

The crack of gunfire in the distance. A handful of snow dropped from the branches of a nearby pine tree.

They sat together, holding each other, watching the boys, waiting for them to tire themselves out, to become aware of the cold, but they just kept running and yelling, frolicking in the snow, so finally George called out, "Who wants hot chocolate?"

They left the boys with the butler. George took Ryann's hand and led him to her room; a great, ancient room, the walls crowded with paintings and weapons, art works and craft works from 1000 years of history. A blazing fire roared in the great fire place, and George said, "You should get you out of those wet clothes before you catch a chill." She sat down on the bed and smiled.

Ryann bit his lip and slipped out his sweater, then slowly undid his blouse, letting it fall from his narrow shoulders and fall to the floor. Turning, his back to George, he squirmed out of his skirt, letting it fall to the ground, wiggling his ass and giving her a good look at his firm, round ass, his long legs. He lifted his arms, tilting his hips back and glanced over his shoulder, meeting her hard, hungry eyes, and then, legs straight, he stuck his ass back and hinged over and unzipped his high heeled boots, stepping out of them and then turning and reaching up to pluck the pins from his long blonde hair, letting it tumbled down over his shoulders as he turned to face George, putting one hand on an outthrust hip, running the other through his hair. The fire light flickered across Ryann slender body, across his full, heavy breasts-- accentuating the mysterious shadowy space between his legs, deepening the mystery of the soft deep valley between his breasts.

George shook her head. "You are so beautiful," she murmured. "So fucking beautiful."

Ryann didn't answer. He reached back and unhooked his bra, slipping it off his shoulders, letting his breasts sway free. George put her hand between her legs. "I haven't been with a woman in this... life... I mean, I haven't been a man... with a...."

Ryann didn't answer. He hooked his thumbs under the waist band of his powder blue panties, pulled it out, hesitated, and then slipped them down his legs, letting them pool on the floor around his tiny feet. Knees together, he cupped his breasts and finally spoke, calling out in a soft, clear voice, "Take me."

George lurched to her feet, her pants tented, and Ryann's eyes went wide at the sight of the huge bulge. George tore her shirt off, throwing it aside as she gathered Ryann's soft little body into her arms, kissed him and then lowered him onto the bearskin carpet in front of the fire place. She kissed him, squeezing his ass with one hand while with she took his hard little nipple between her finger and thumb and pinched it, hard.

Ryann yelped and giggled, reaching down to undue her pants, eagerly pushing them down, down, feeling her hard and stiff against his belly, and George, desperate, started to position herself, wanted to just get right to it and take the pretty little man beneath her...

Ryann put his hands on her chest and pushed. "Wait!" He said. "No!"

George didn't hear him. She was mad with lust, and it wasn't until Ryann slapped her across the face and screamed "Stop!" that she realized something was wrong. Her face clouded with anger, confusion, even a little fear as she thought she might not get inside him, get the release she needed. She forgotten how fickle women could be.

"What is it?" She said. "Did I hurt you or..."

"No," Ryann said, letting his voice rise to an even higher, softer register. He took her rugged, stubbled face in his soft little hands and said, "it's something else... something I need you to do for me?"

"Anything," George said, her balls aching as she fought against the need and the dread of popping off prematurely.

"This will make it easier for me," Ryann said as he hooked George into his bra.

"I understand," George said, her hard on raging once again, her body tense and desperate for release.

Ryann took George's hand and led him to the bear rug, and then George got down and lay on his back, smiling up at Ryann. She looked cute in his bra and panties, her hard flat chest and bulging, powerful shoulders encased in the delicate girly little garment. As asked, she kept her knees together for now, hiding her erection. "Better?"

Ryann smiled and nodded, lowering himself onto George, wrapping his soft thighs around her ribcage. He leaned down and kissed George, once again putting a hand to his cheek, smiling down at him. Ryann's long blonde hair framed his pretty face, the strands brushed against George's shoulders and cheeks, tickling her, and she smiled and said, "Fuck me now. Please."

Ryann slipped back as George spread her legs. He reached down and found her stiff member, squeezed it inside her panties and then pulled it free of the thin cloth, and then he lowered himself onto it, throwing his head back and moaning as she entered him and filled him

like he'd never known; she was huge. Bigger than Chris, and he buried his hands in his long, blonde hair and started to ride up and down on George, who clawed at the floor, staring up at the sight of Ryann's big, soft, firm breasts bouncing up and down on his chest while he fucked her, pretending to be a man.

Dinner. Ryann sat next to George, the two of them exchanging glances, smiles. Chris had a cold, dead look in her eyes. Spoke in monosyllables. Flat, low tones. The two boys were squirmy and jumpy; they got louder and louder, talking about their day in the snow, and Tom yanked Peter's knife out of his hand, sending it clattering across the marble floor. Chris slammed her palm on the table, rattling the dishes, and shouted, "Mother your damn children!"

Ryann stood at the dark, frosted window of his room, staring out at the frozen world beyond. The wind had picked up again, and the house moaned and creaked, the glass rattled. Ryann adjusted the slender straps of his nightgown, pulled back the covers and climbed into bed, where his diary already awaited him, and he curled up with it under a pool of warm, golden lamplight, eager to remember himself, reading about he and Chris, and the unfolding of their courtship in public—and in private, until finally he came to the entry he needed to find:

Bruises. On my legs. My ribs. Big, blue and black bruises. They hurt, still, with the echoes of Chris' fists, but when I remember the pain, when I remember him striking me, I smile. With each blow I drew from him, I grew stronger, and he grew less a man. I had planned it all. Every bit of it. I wore a flouncy, over-sized summer dress in a pretty, flowery pattern of pink and powder blue. A silk, polka dot bow in my hair. I knew he would come past the old mill on Misty Creek after tennis, and I made sure to be in Georgie Edgeworth's arms when he passed. Poor

George! A sweet, skinny boy, he'd been so happy just to hold me and talk of his dreams, and as soon as Chris saw he shouted, "Get the hell away from my girl!"

"Run!" I shouted, but Chris caught him and punched him on the side, pushed him down. I tried to hide my smile, but as George ran, Chris turned on me. I felt scared. I never saw him like that. Like a bull, or a lion. His whole body tensed, he took a step toward me, and then he started to paused, the think.

"You aren't going to do anything," I said. "I can kiss anyone I want."

His jaw moved. He couldn't think of words.

I stood up and stepped toward him, ran my hands over my breasts and said, "He kisses way better than you. He's a man, and you're just a ..."

He punched me in the side. Hard. I laughed, and he seemed like he'd been driven mad as he punched me again, and I fell down, still laughing, and then he smashed his fists into my legs. He didn't speak, grunted, punching me, and I curled up into a ball letting him rain blows down on me until he finally collapsed, exhausted, and I let the tears flow, uncurling, standing, and I said, "Just wait until my mother hears about this!"

Chris looked up. Horrified. "No," he said, finally finding the words. He stood, reached toward me—I flinched away. It wasn't an act, I did it instinctively, and I could see the pain in Chris' eyes. "Please."

Tears and tears, and an hour later as the sun dropped behind the Old Mill, golden rays lighting the underside of the cottony clouds, Chris knelt in my dress of pink and blue as I fixed the polka dot bow in his hair.

The memories mixed and merged with others, so many others; he, the slave girl, using his beautiful body and lips and wiles, his master sitting while Ryann painted his face and put his hair up just like a girls'... Ryann, wife of a wealthy merchant, living in Florence at the height of the Renaissance, forcing a painter who'd wooed her to paint his own face onto the body of a nymph, and then showing him the pleasures of a nymph with his own brush. The painting now hung in The Metropolitan Museum in New York, where it had been donated by Ryann in a later life, then a British Aristocrat, who'd wanted the whole world to see her husband Chris' face on the nubile body of a water nymph.

We've been doing this forever, Ryann realized. Struggling. Fighting. Warring against one another. But this time, this life, he'd been the man. It had been his turn. He remembered.... Something. But no. The answer had to be there in his diary, and he began to skim ahead, looking for the answer, certain he would find some way to get back to being a man, a hunter, and in this life Chris could learn to be his wife – in body as well as in mind:

He raced ahead through the diary, memories merging with the words as he relived his previous life, his life as a woman: the strife ridden courtship as they each headed off to their separate colleges. Chris railed and ranted, infuriated at Ryann's constant pressure for him to privately take on the woman's role. Chris fought but always gave in, part of him wanted to, Ryann was sure of it, but he took it out on her as well; cruelly mocking her dreams and ambitions, taking every opportunity to remind Ryann that in the end he was the one who had a woman's body, who bled, who would have no choice but to become a wife, a mother. "I can't wait to put a baby in you," Chris would say, patting Ryann on the belly. "You'll know you are the woman, then."

Ryann clawed at him, tore his skin. Chris twisted his arm, forced him on his knees. They both hated it. They both loved it. And yet to the world they presented the smiling face of the perfect, loving couple, the ease and comfort, the lovingly attentive nature of their relationship envied and admired by all. Like so many perfect couples, their public face was perfectly Dorian, hiding the grotesque reality of inner portraits.

Fittings. Fetes. A bridal party with cackling hens, seething with jealousy as he imagined Chris and all the men smoking, drinking, laughing. The wedding itself a nightmare as he was squeezed into a ridiculous gown of white, a veil, flowers in his hands. As he marched down the aisle, a perfect and perfectly practiced smile on his face, he locked eyes with Chris. They exchanged a look. Ryann's eyes got harder, colder, as she thought, "I am going to fuck you till you bleed."

Chris just smiled, telegraphing back.. "We'll see who ends up getting fucked tonight."

The tension and anger grew all night as they danced, listened to the speeches, smeared cake in each other's faces. As soon as they had each smeared a chunk of the cake into the other's face, their features dripping with white frosting, spackled with lumps of yellow cake, Chris took Ryann into his arms and kissed him, then whispered in his ear, "That's not the only frosting I'm gonna put on your face tonight."

"Oh, honey," Ryann said, tapping him on the chin. "You say the sweetest things."

Finally, at the hotel room, Chris picked Ryann up and threw him onto the bed. "You're my wife now," he said, smiling, looking hungrily up and down Ryann's body. "I can take you any time I want."

"Take me, then," Ryann said, looking up at him through his bangs. "If you can."

They struggled. Ryann slapped and clawed. Chris pinned him, held him down, ripped his clothes off bit by bit until he found himself naked, his breasts pressed against Chris chest, Chris on top of him, pinning his weak, slender little arms, his knee wedged between Ryann's legs, keeping him from closing his legs, locking them together. Ryann could feel Chris' hard, throbbing member against his leg, and it thrilled and disgusted him at the same time.

"You're so weak," Chris said, staring down into Ryann's eyes, seeing anger and fear mixed with desire. "So helpless."

"Just do it," Ryann said, straining with all his strength against the big man on top of him. "Just shut up and do it."

Chris chuckled, kissed Ryann's breast, shifted his hips, grinding himself against Ryann's leg. "You want it so bad."

"No," Ryann said, straining.

"You're just like any other girl."

"No."

"You love this, and you want it, and you need a man to pin you down and show you what you are."

"No."

"Admit it. Tell me you want it."

Ryann turned away. Closed his eyes. "Stop."

"Beg me for it."

"No," he said. "I don't."

Chris started to kiss Ryann on the neck, then to suck and kiss some more, moving his hips, grinding against Ryann's soft leg. "Beg me."

"Please," Ryann finally whispered. "Please.... Fuck me."

The lamp dimmed. The air grew colder. Ryan shivered, looked up from the diary the memories falling from his visions like cobwebs, and the ghost stood there at the foot of the bed, staring at him, smiling, eyes dead.

Ryan fought the fear, the urge to pull the covers over his head. He looked back at the ghost, trying to remember the face... who was she? She looked like him, like him as a girl, but she couldn't be Ryan, he was Ryan, so.... "Who are you?" He whispered.

The ghost opened her mouth, straining, straining as before, the face becoming warped and distorted, and then, a sound emerged, a word.... "I.... I..."

Ryan leaned forward, fingertips at his lips, pretty eyes wide. "Yes?" He said softly.
"Yes?"

"I... I am...." The phantom struggled, strained, veins bulging in her forehead. "My name is...."

Bang!

A first hammered against Ryan's door causing him to jump, letting out a small scream. The ghost turned, spun, began to run toward the shadows in the corner of the room. "No!" Ryan said, reaching a slender white hand after it. "No!"

"I'm coming in," Chris barked, pounding on the door.

"Fuck!" Ryan hissed as the ghost vanished, as he heard a key jangling in the lock of his bedroom door. Rolling out of bed, he shoved his diary under the mattress, yanked down the covers, ran across the room just as the door started to open and threw himself against it. "Go A-WAY!"

Chris shouldered the door open, sending Ryan falling backwards onto his butt. "You asshole!" Ryan said, his anger rising, but also his excitement.

Chris looked down at Ryan, sitting on the floor in his nightie, his slender white arms at his sides, his blonde hair in his face. He raised his hand and Ryan braced himself, but Chris extended his open hand in an offer of held and, swallowing hard, said, "I'm sorry."

"What? Fuck you." Ryan slapped Chris' hand away, struggled to his feet, turned his back and walked away. He let his hips sway, stood at the window, arching his back, raising his hips as ass slightly. "Leave me alone."

Chris stood right by the door. "We need to talk."

Ryan didn't answer, but just stared out the window at the cold, moonlit world of snow.

Chris waited, finally said, "Fine. I need to talk."

Ryan shrugged.

"I don't want to do this anymore. I'm not going to do it. This constant struggle, this war between us. I'm going to leave tomorrow. You'll never see me again."

Ryan twirled, his knees together, hair swirling around his pretty face like a golden halo.

"What?"

"That's all. I just came to tell you that. I hope you have a great life and wish you the best." Chris turned and started toward the door.

Ryan ran after her, grabbed her arm. "You can't do this to me. Leave me like... this!"

Chris easily yanked her arm free of Ryan's small, soft hand. "Goodbye," she said gruffly, walking away.

Ryan stood there as she started to walk through the door, seething. Would she do this to him? Just walk away and leave him trapped in this body? "The best?" He said, shaking his head. "Stop! You stop right now!"

Chris kept walking, didn't look back. A deep, animal scream tore free from Ryan and he felt a stabbing pain in his hands, realized he'd dug his long fingernails into his palms, drawn blood. In a blind rage he raced after Chris, leapt onto her back, wrapping his legs around her waist, burying his fingernails in her neck, as the momentum from his leap sent them both crashing to the ground. Ryan sat on Chris' back, slamming his little fists into Chris' head. Chris got on all fours, rolled over and Ryan suddenly found himself on his back, pinned between Chris' legs. Chris had blood coming from her forehead, his neck, black and sticky looking in the dim light of the hall. Ryan flailed at her, trying to slash his nails across her eyes, but she grabbed one of his wrists and batted the other slender little arm away repeatedly with her own meaty arm.

"Asshole!" Ryan said. "Go ahead and fucking hit me, you pussy!"

"No," Chris said, finally catching Ryan's other wrist, holding both of his little arms, keeping his weight on him so Ryan's attempts to use his strong legs to buck him off did no good. Ryan was too small, too weak, and as the familiar feeling of being helpless and overpowered came over him burning tears of shame began to pour from his eyes.

"Hit me," Ryan mewled, like a kitten. "Slap me, you bitch."

"No," Chris said again, and then he picked Ryan up and slung the pretty little man over her shoulders, like a hunting trophy, and carried him sobbing back to his room, tossing him onto his bed. Ryan, defeated, curled into a sobbing ball, his nightie riding up his leg, revealing the full length of his soft, round thigh, his plump ass.

Chris looked down at Ryan's leg, his soft, inviting ass. Her blood was hot, and she clenched her jaw, fighting against the urge to take him right then and there, ride him like a pretty little doe, put him in his place.

But instead, she turned and walked towards the door, pausing only to say, "I hate you too much to keep doing this for you" before she pulled the door closed and Ryan heard the key turning in the lock, the brass bolt slamming home.

As soon as her footsteps stopped echoing down the hall, Ryan sat up, staring back at the door through his tear blurred eyes, a new feeling gripping him: emptiness. Is she really doing this? Leaving me?

The idea terrified him, not just because it meant he was trapped as this woman, trapped in this woman's life, but because...

"I don't know who I am without her," he whispered, pulling his hair back over his shoulder. "I'm not a man or... a woman. I'm... nothing."

Nothing.

If I am to be nothing, my whole life and purpose stolen from me, then she will be nothing, too, he decided, thinking of the armory downstairs, the gun collection. His rifle was

down there, and wouldn't that be a pretty end to them both? Yes. Yes. He would kill her, and then himself. Maybe in there next life together, things would be better.

Ryan sat up, wiping away his tears, wondering what he should wear to the murder suicide, and then he saw the ghost. She was lingering in the shadows. All he could see were her eyes. "I am going to kill us," Ryan said to the ghost, wanting to talk to someone, anyone, even someone who was dead, if she was even real. "We'll do better next time. I'll be the man, and Chris will learn to love his girl's life!"

The ghost stepped forward, shaking her head, pointing, urgently pointing, to something, something... under Ryan.

"What?" Ryan said.

The ghost pointed, pointed, shook her head up and down.

"The diary?" Ryan said.

The ghost shook her head, NO! Pointed. Pointed.

Ryan's eyes suddenly went wide with recognition. "The spell book?"

The ghost nodded and sighed, fading away, melting back into the darkness, sighing, "yeeeeeees...." in a dry, earthy voice that sounded like sand on a shovel.

"Wait? What should?" But the ghost was gone. Ryan thought about the gun, about the look on Chris' face when she saw him raise the barrel toward her stupid face... and yet, the spell book? Maybe Ryan could win after all. All he needed was the right spell and he could have Chris eating out of the palm of his hand! Maybe there would even be a sex-change spell in the book, and wouldn't that be delightful to turn Chris back into a silly, giggling girl?

Ryan pulled the forgotten spell book out from under the covers, and adjusting the straps of his nightie, he sat cross-legged on his canopy bed, the spell book open in his lap. Walk away from me? He thought, smiling. We'll just see about that Mister M'am.

By the time the sun rose, Ryan had made his plan. He crouched at the top of the stairs, still in his nightie, watching as Chris arrived, sat down and started perusing a map, the serving boys bringing him a cup of steaming coffee. It took all his willpower to resist the urge to cast his spells. He wanted the others there to see Chris' defeat and humiliation.

George and the boys walked into the dining room to find Chris at the table, perusing a map, his plate covered with the smeared remains of his breakfast. "Good morning, George. Boys!

"Yeah, whatever," Thomas said.

George was wary, eyeing the jovial, smiling face of the other man nervously. "Good morning to you, Chris. You seem unusually bright today."

"I am. I have made a major decision, and one that I think you will like, George." He tapped the map on the table with his finger. "I am leaving!"

"Leaving?"

"I am leaving. Going to strike out into the wilderness, make a mad hike through the frozen wastes to Repulse Bay. I think I can make it in a few days as long as I keep moving."

"You'll freeze to death. Don't be crazy."

"I'll be fine. Or I won't. But I can't stay here. You know why."

"About that..." George said, glancing at the kids. "Well..."

"She's yours. You won her. I am glad for you. This time, I am going to do what I should have done for the past 2000 years and leave you both to live your lives."

George sat back. "That's very... noble. I don't even know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything. I've decided that the time has finally come to be a man about it...." Chris felt like something stabbed into his right eye, sat back, blinked, covered it as the pain jabbed into his brain.

"What is it?" George said.

"I don't know I feel like..." Then he felt another stabbing pain, a pain in his groin, also like a hot needle, and at the same time he twitched and gasped. "Her....." He felt the ball of pressure building in him, the pleasure rising, squeezed his legs together and he was still a man, but he knew he was having a... female orgasm, and he gasped, slipping from his chair, falling to the floor, putting his hands on his chest, spreading his legs as the orgasm exploded in him and he cried out like a woman.

"Boys...." George said to his sons. "Go to your rooms."

"What's wrong with Uncle Chris?"

Ryan walked into the room, smiling in his nightie, letting his hips sway arrogantly as he tossed his long blonde hair. He held a polka dot ribbon in his hands. "*Aunt* Chris is just remembering who she is, aren't you?"

Chris, shaken, looked up at Ryan. Chris could feel the animus draining from her, flowing into Ryan, who to Chris' eyes radiated with a blue halo of masculine energy that surrounded his soft, curvaceous shape like a suit of armor.. "No."

"That voice doesn't suit you, sweetie. Say it higher."

Chris felt compelled to speak, and raised his man's voice to a higher register. "No," he said, unable to resist Ryan's commands.

"Again. Higher... more nasal," Ryan said.

"No," Chris repeated, placing his voice higher, speaking through his nose in a falsetto that embarrassed and horrified him.

"Say, I want to be a pretty girl."

"I want to be a pretty girl," Chris said in his now pretty girl voice.

The boys laughed. George shook his head, started to stand. "Ryan..."

"You just sit there, and you and your boys get to stay male," Ryan said. "Okay, dear?"

Chris glanced at George, pleading with his eyes. "Please help me!" Chris squeaked. Ryan looked at George, raised an eyebrow. George thought about, shook his head and sat back down with a shrug. Ryan smiled. "Good decision."

"Get on your knees," he said, and Chris did as he was commanded.

Ryan stood behind Chris and affixed the polka dotted bow to his hair. Chris found himself crying. "I was leaving," he said. "I was going to walk away and put a stop to all this."

"No one walks away from me," Ryan said, giving Chris a kiss and a pat on the cheek.

"Now stand up, and I want you to walk around the room on your tiptoes, and let's see the most girly, feminine walk you can manage, Chrissie."

"Please."

"Do it!"

Chris stood and rose onto his toes, then put one hand on a hip, let the other dangle off to his side and started to mince around the room in tiny little steps, his hips waving side to side. The boys started laughing. Ryan laughed. George looked away. Didn't want to watch it.

"Come along, Chrissie," Ryan said after he had made a complete circle around the room. "Let's leave the men to eat their breakfast."

"I'll make you pay for this," Chris said in his falsetto, following behind Ryan, a hand still on his hip as he minced along. "I'll make your life a living hell."

Ryan glanced back over his slender white shoulder and said, "I'm counting on it."

Epilogue

George sat in his leather chair, puffing on a Cuban cigar, sipping from a rocks glass half-filled with dark rum. His head was surrounded by a cloud of sweet, powdery white smoke, and he sighed with pleasure as the sweet, thick rum mixed with the earthy smoke. Beside him, on a card table, a Ouija Board waited. Eventually, the lights flickered, and the room grew chill. The ghost of a young girl appeared, and she stood, smiling. George smiled back and blew smoke in her direction. "I think we finally made this work, my dear friend. I think the cycle ends here."

The ghost nodded. Her eyes twinkled with joy.

"Ryan agreed to marry me today. She will be a lovely bride, and a perfect mother."

George took a sip of his rum. "And she has Chrissie as her little toy on the side, so she can satisfy her... special needs with him. She has him scheduled for breast implants when we get back to New York," George chuckled. "I understand why you kept that all from me, of course. I wouldn't have understood, but now I see the wisdom of... everything."

The planchette began to slide across the board, spelling out a message: Your Promise.

"Yes. Of course. I have the ingredients. Everything. I will cast the spell, ensure that your soul is incarnate in the body of Ryan's first child. I have already used the other spell you showed me to awake and enhance her maternal instincts."

The ghost smiled. Nodded. The planchette moved across the board: Do you love her?

"Of course," George said. "And I promise you this; I will use every tool at my disposal to make her the happiest woman in the world. Oh, you don't need to worry. I will take *exquisite* care of your daughter."

Goodbye