

TRAPPED IN A TEEN GIRL



Fantasy Novel!

Trapped in a Teen-Girl Fantasy by Cooper

“The answer is ‘no,’ and that’s final.”

“But, Father...”

“No,” Robert Carter repeated in his firm, calm, dad voice.

“Why not?”

“But you always let Robbie.”

“It’s different for girls, Kate.”

Kate crossed her arms and frowned, a little crease forming between her black eyebrows. It was the same look her mother had gotten whenever she was angry. “Um, maybe that’s the way it was way back in the 80s, Father, but this is the 21st Century and girls can do anything boys can do.”

“Well, not in my house.”

“Ugh! It’s totally unfair.”

“One day you’ll understand.”

“I can take care of myself! I’ll call you every hour, and—“

“No, and that’s final.” He picked up the remote and flipped on TBS.

“Oh, Modern Family reruns!”

“I wish mom was still alive and you were dead,” Kate said coldly.

It stung, deep, but Robert just stared at the television and after cycling through several childish comebacks or bitter, guilt trips, hit simply said, “I love you, and it’s my job to protect you.”

Kate stomped up the stairs, slammed her door. Robert rubbed his temples and muted the television. Am I being too hard? Maybe she is old enough for more freedom. She’s very together, mature, much more so than her brother had been when he was 16, but she was still so, so young. He thought of her mother, her smile, her laugh.

Her face as the tractor trailer came swerving across the center line. She’d... smiled, and her face had been calm and at peace, as if she knew what was about to happen. And she’d said, “I love you.”

The accident had left him with a bruised rib. It had killed her instantly. Their son, Paul, had become distant, and once he went off to college almost never called or visited, and it had been just he and Kate, and raising a teen-age daughter was not easy.

I just wish I could understand Kate, he thought, and help her understand me.

Upstairs, Kate threw herself onto her bed and punched her teddy bear. She fished her phone out of the pocket of her jeans and texted, “Can’t Come. Have Fun.” Then, she clicked her Facebook APP and before it even finished opening a text came back from Kurt. “Why?” She answered, “The Dad!!!!”

“Dick!”

Why do I have to have the lamest dad in all of Graceville? Kate wondered, picking up the book she’d been reading. “Wolf Moon Summer.” It was stupid trash, and she only allowed herself to read one trashy teen romance novel a month in between the serious reading for high-school AP English, and as much as she liked to make fun of the books and the stupid girls with her friends, she actually kind of liked them, too, sort of. I wish my dad could understand me, Kate thought as she started to read. I wish I could understand him.

Lights flickered, the earth may have shaken just a tad, but so slightly no one could really be sure, and downstairs, Robert drifted off into a strange sleep, some new kind of sleep he’d never experienced full of gauze and the smell of ginger, and had he not been alone, had anyone else been in the room with him, they may have heard him mumble, “I don’t want to be a princess.”

Robert found himself spinning, spinning, spinning, handed from the arms of one boy to another. Each boy put one hand on Robert’s hip and grabbed Robert’s right hand with the other, and then they spun him and handed him off,

the world around him a blur of spinning colors and half-glimpsed faces, the whole room thrumming with the sound of an orchestra – strings and brass and woodwinds brightly playing away. Robert couldn't get out, couldn't get his bearings, but just felt himself being helplessly swept away by the boys and the music and the dancing until finally the music slowed, then stopped, and the boy who was holding his hand when the music stopped bowed low, then took Robert's hand and—kissed it? He smiled at Robert and said, "My thanks, Princess, and may I be so bold as to say, you look radiant."

Robert took his hand back, shocked, and stood, stupefied, as the room broke up into chattering voices, boys and girls talking brightly. He looked at his small, white hand, his delicate wrist, glanced down to see soft white breasts pushed up in a glittering powder blue ball gown, and he flushed in shame and confusion as he realized he was wearing a dress, and he had breasts and—am I girl?

Daddy! He heard Kate whisper.

He turned, awkwardly in his full-skirted gown, and saw.. no one.

Daddy! I'm in your mind.

"What?" He said, surprised at his soft, feminine soprano.

"Pardon?" A young woman said as she walked by, thinking Robert was talking to her.

"What?" Robert said to her, feeling nervous and confused, a little

scared.

“Princess, are you okay?” The girl asked.

“Princess?” Robert said.

Daddy, tell her you’re fine. Quick! You have to get to the balcony.

Fast!

“I’m, um, fine,” he said. “Just fine. Thanks.”

The girl smiled. “You look lovely.”

“Okay,” Robert said, drawing an odd look from the two as they walked away. “What was that?”

They don’t know what okay means, Father. Now, hurry! Hurry! Get to the balcony.

What is going on? Robert thought at his daughter, glancing around the room. An elegant ballroom, it reminded him of something out of the court of the Sun King-- polished marble floors, flaring chandeliers, gold everywhere... and yet, there was something too bright, and a little alien about the place—his eyes were drawn to a large mural that dominated one wall, a mural depicting a bearded, elderly knight with his foot planted on the chest of what looked like a werewolf.

Father, stop gawking and skat!

“I’m dreaming,” Robert thought, looking down at his dress that hung

down almost to the floor, with a flaring skirt of shimmering silk, like something from a storybook. It bothered him that in his dream he was a woman, wearing a dress, dancing with boys, and he frowned, feeling the slick, soft fabric of his dress. “I wonder what my therapist will think of this?”

“Father!”

“And why is my daughter here?” He found himself drawn to the mural, slowly walking toward it, his eyes locked on the image of the werewolf-- his hard, hairy chest and big, powerful shoulders, and those thick, muscular thighs. Robert couldn't look away, but just kept wandering closer and closer, ignoring his dream daughter's urgent pleas. There was something about that beast, that wild animal, and he couldn't take his eyes off it, but felt his own skin tingling and a tremor ran through his whole body. He put one hand to his cheek, his mouth went dry, and as his eyes played over the powerful shape of the wolf man, a thought popped into his head out of nowhere, “I wonder what it would be like to kiss him?”

Oh! My! God! Daddy!

“Oh my god,” he heard himself say out loud, shocked as he realized what he'd been feeling, thinking, and his cheeks flushed as he spun and hurried away from the mural, terrified at the strange new feelings that had been awoken in him.

Lift your skirts! Life your skirts or you'll fall!

“What...?” But just then his foot caught on the hem of his skirt and he stumbled but righted himself. “This is ridiculous.”

Lift your skirts.

“It’s just a dream.”

No. It isn’t.

“It has to be!”

Does it seem like a dream?

Robert looked around. He could feel the warm, summer air against his bare shoulders, feel the weight of his dress, feel the tightness of it crushing his waist, the way it lifted and supported his breasts. He could hear the happy sound of people talking and laughing, the sound of the musicians tuning their instruments. It seemed real, more than real.

It is more than real, and if you don’t get to that balcony, Father, you are going to be stuck as a girl forever!

How? Why?

“Trust me! I’ll explain later, but right now lift your skirts and hurry!

Princess? Princess!” Someone yelled.

Oh, no!” Kate said. “Just go. Go!

Where?

I told you. To the balcony!

I don't know where the balcony is!

Oh! Up the grand stair case.

Robert lifted his skirts and hurried up the stairs as fast as he could manage. With his waist so constricted, he could barely breath, and by the time he reached the top of the stairs he found himself panting, his breasts heaving prettily. Now through the arch to the left.

I have to catch my breath, he said, leaning weakly on the banister. I think I'm going to faint.

There's no time. Go! Go!

I can't!

Stop being such a little girl and GO!!!!

Hearing his daughter call him a little girl burned, especially as he found himself dreaming or whatever this was that he was a girl, and so he summoned all his strength, pushed himself from the railing and stumbled through the archway, out onto the balcony and into the arms of a tall, dark, handsome man.

The man caught Robert and pulled him to his body. Robert was so weak, surprised and so short of breath he instinctively clung to him, whispering, "Thanks" in a breathless voice. He felt so weak that he was afraid if he pushed away he would collapse, and so he allowed the man to half carry him to a little

bench opposite the door.

This is Duke Garreth Blaise. He's in love with you, Daddy.

Garreth chuckled as he helped Robert sit. "You're all out of breath, darling. My goodness!"

"I... I hurried up here."

"Couldn't wait to get alone with me, eh?"

"Um, well..." Robert started to push away, but Garreth held him tight, so Robert pushed a little harder. "Let go."

"What is it?" What's wrong?"

Father. No. Just let him hold you.

I can't...

Do you want to be stuck as a girl?

I won't be.

You will!

"You okay?" Garreth asked, taking his arms from around him.

"Yes, yes," Robert said sitting up and scooting a little away from Garreth, fanning himself. "It's warm out!"

"Very warm," Garreth said. And then smiling, trying to establish some sense of normality, he said, "You look lovely tonight, Kitterina."

“Um, Okay,” Robert said, looking down and away.

“Okay?”

He doesn’t understand—

I know!

“It means thank you.”

“Oh? I hadn’t heard it before.”

“It’s a new thing among the—girls.”

“Girls!” Garreth said with fake exasperation. “Ugh!”

“Yes,” Robert said, “Ugh! So, could you maybe get me some water?
I’m so thirsty.”

You’re not supposed to—

“Of course,” Garreth said. “I’ll return momentarily.”

Ugh! You changed the story.

Garreth stopped at the archway and waved. “Don’t get lonely and
throw yourself at some other boy while I’m gone, now.”

Robert waved, forcing a smile and a laugh. “Haha!”

He’s kind of a dork, Robert thought arranging his skirts.

Yes. He is, but you weren’t supposed to send him for water. You
changed the story.

What do you mean I changed the story? What's happening?

Father, you're in my book.

Kate, what does that even mean?

One of my romance novels, You're in it!

So I am dreaming.

No. You are in the book. You're the Princess. Princess Kitterina.

Princess? Me? What's this about me being trapped as a girl forever?

Robert asked, turning his attention to the more ominous bit of news he'd received.

When you entered the story, you changed the story. I can read ahead, see what happens, and the blurb changed. The blurb on the book.

What does it say?

It says--Robert was an ordinary single father, doing his best to raise his daughter Kate, but when they each wished to understand each other better, he found himself living in a teen-romance novel. If he doesn't... blah... blah... blah... he'll be trapped as a girl forever!

Doesn't? What's the blah... blah?

Oh, just some nonsense. You don't want—

Kate? What does it say?

It says if he doesn't marry Duke Garreth—and—no. That's all. Marry the Duke.

Marry the Duke? Wait. How long is this story?

I don't know. I didn't finish it yet. But, anyway, just get Garreth to marry you, and you'll be free. That's all.

That's all? I CAN'T DO THAT!

Why not?

Because I'm a man!

Well, not right now you aren't.

This has to be a dream. A nightmare!

Just then, the clouds parted and the soft light of the full moon washed over the balcony. A ferocious, bestial roar...

Robert lifted his skirts and rushed to the edge of the balcony, looking out over the silvery, moonlit palace grounds. He felt a thrill—fear and excitement, terror and fascination like he'd never felt before at the sound of the wild animal call. "What was that?" He said out loud.

A werewolf, Kate answered quietly. Um, Daddy?

Were wolves aren't real, Robert said. Again, he heard a bestial roar, and he jumped slightly, gasped but fought against his fear, clinging to the balcony and leaning out, searching the night with wide, wet eyes.

Omigod. Daddy!

And then he did see it—climbing on top of the palace wall, maybe 100 yards away, a huge, hairy beast. Robert’s little heart raced and found himself breathing heavily, straining against his corset. The creature ran along the walls on all fours, loping just like a wolf, but then it stopped, sniffing the air, and slowly rose on its hind legs. Raising its powerful arms in the air, its claws flashing in the moonlight, the creature seemed to look right at Robert and then it howled once more, a long, lonely howl full of sorrow and desire.

Robert felt his knees go weak and answered, letting out a soft cry that rose up into a feminine shriek, and then he started to climb up onto the rail of the banister, his whole body burning with the need to be with the werewolf, but even as he struggled against his gown he felt someone grab his shoulders and pull him back, “No!” He cried. “No!”

The creature dropped out of sight and Robert burst into tears even as Duke Garreth spun his around and held him by the shoulders, looking down at the pretty little princess with fear and confusion, “Kitten!” He said.

“Let me go,” Robert hissed, struggling helplessly against the large, strong man’s grip.

Garreth, confused, held tight to the crying, distraught female and said, “I heard you scream.”

DADDY! Kate finally managed. GET IT TOGETHER!

Robert snapped out of the spell of the wolf, stunned and confused and ashamed, and he felt so vulnerable and helpless and afraid, and the tears came harder and he sobbed uncontrollably. “What’s happening to me?”

Garreth pulled Robert to him and put Robert’s small head against his big, firm chest, wrapped the frightened little female in his big, strong arms. “It’s okay,” he whispered. “It’ll be okay.” He felt awkward and uncomfortable. It was bad enough that he’d agreed to a private meeting with the unescorted princess, but if someone saw him holding her like this it would be quite the scandal, and he didn’t want to do anything that would hurt the princess.

“You should go,” Garreth said. “I’m sure the whole palace heard that scream.”

He’s right, Father. You need to get out of there before you’re found alone with a boy.

“Yes,” Robert said, completely and totally lost in his frothy new world of feminine feelings and needs. “Of course.” And yet they lingered in each other’s arms.

In the book, father, you kiss him now.

What?

You kiss him, and then you run off before you’re discovered together. But, I don’t think you should. It’s too gross.

But what about stuck as a girl forever? Robert said, lingering, feeling safe in Garreth's arms, staring up into the boy's soft green eyes.

Oh. That. Maybe. I don't even know what – just do it! Do it! I don't want my father to be a princess.

Okay. Okay. Robert raised an eyebrow, letting his eyes widen, smiled. Kiss me dummy, he thought. Kiss me! Garreth just smiled back, raised his own eyebrows.

He's such an oaf! Do I have to marry such a dork?

You do it, father. Kiss him. Quick!

Robert reached up and grabbed the lapels of the Duke's coat, pulled him down and kissed him right on the lips.

And just then, King Kragh Wolf Slayer rushed out onto the balcony, saw the two kissing and bellowed, "Arrest that man!"

The two looked over in shock and surprise. "No," Robert said. "It's not what it looks like."

"And escort the princess to her room," The King said.

"But, wait?"

"Young lady," the King said. "You are grounded."

Grounded? "You can't ground me."

"Would you like to make it worse, Princess?"

Father. Just go. You don't want to challenge him in front of everyone. He won't stand for it.

But I'm not even really his kid. And since when did people get grounded in the middle-ages?

It's not a great book, okay? Just play along. Believe me. If you argue, you are in for it, but if you just do what he says, he'll forgive in the morning. I know what daddies are like.

I had a father, too.

Yes, but it's different for girls, father.

Different for...Ugh! Robert thought, allowing the guards to lead him off into the castle. He glanced back to see Garreth being led in the opposite direction, and their eyes met, Garreth's eyes were—happy? Full of doofy puppy love.

Oh crap. Robert thought. I think he's in love with me.

You better hope so. That's your future husband, daddy.

Grrrrreat. Robert thought. Just. Great. This is too weird. What next?

I don't know. Everything is changing now. You and Garreth weren't caught in the original story.

The guards had formed a square around Robert—two in front and two behind—and they marched him down a wide hall with a blood red carpet

running down the center, bright white marble underneath. Mirrored wall sconces reflected soft, flickering candlelight along way, and Robert couldn't help but glance out of the corner of his eye to see what he looked like-- The glimpses he caught disturbed him—he saw a young woman with curly raven black hair piled on her head in an elaborate manner, with strands playfully gangling at his cheeks. He had milky white skin and big, bright, smoldering emerald eyes. Chandelier earrings flashed from his tiny little seashell ears. She's stunning, he thought.

She is you, Father, Kate said.

No, it's not, or I mean, I know it's me in this book or whatever, but that's not me at all, he said, you know? The sight scared him and thrilled him and he was appalled at how pretty he looked, how young and vulnerable and passionate and yet he found himself eagerly glancing in the next mirror, fascinated at the gorgeous creature who looked back at him. He had a long, slender neck, caught a glimpse of small, bare white shoulder.

The next mirror he eagerly glanced again, taking in his plush, red lips, tiny little upturned nose.

Stop looking at yourself! Kate said with a giggle.

What?

Don't be so vain!

Okay. Okay, Robert said, annoyed to have his daughter throwing his

own words back at him again. It's totally different, and you know it.

Really? How?

I've never seen myself—or her, I mean—before, so I'm naturally curious or ... I don't know. You know what I mean.

Of course. Sure. Completely different.

Could you figure out what happens next, please?

Oh. I forgot. I got distracted watching you check yourself out like an old pervert.

Just read!

Okay. Okay. Let's see...

Just then, one of the guards in front of Robert pulled a dagger from his belt and grabbing the other by the hair, drew the blade across his neck sending a fountain of thick, crimson blood arcing against the wall. Robert tried to scream, but someone had thrown a hand over his mouth and wrapped an arm around his waist like an iron vise. Kate! Robert yelled in his mind, struggling to free himself.

What? What?

Robert felt himself being lifted off his feet. The guard who'd just slit the other man's throat turned one of the wall sconces and section of the wall slid open, and Robert kicked and thrashed pathetically as he was carried into the

darkness. What's happening? What's happening?

It's The Lord of Wolves! He sent those men to kidnap you!

Shit!

The group rushed down the hall, then a narrow winding stair. Robert stopped struggling. He'd started to see stars, and it took all his strength just to manage to breath. When they reached the landing, the man holding him plopped him on his feet and then threw him roughly against the stone wall. "Keep your mouth shut and cooperate, and you won't be harmed! Got it?"

Robert nodded, his eyes wide with fear.

The hand slid away, and Robert put a hand to his side, which was aching, and he made involuntarily made a soft little mewling sound.

"Shut it!" The man hissed. He dwarfed Robert and his deep voice and ugly face scared the little thing he'd become, so he nodded, covering his mouth with one hand while still clutching his side.

"That's a good little girl," the man said. "Take her clothes off."

Robert's eyes went wide and he started to whimper again.

"Don't you worry, Princess. No one is going touch you. The master wants you unspoiled.

Thank God, Robert and Kate thought at the same time.

The men cut away Robert's ball gown and then cut lose his corset. He

almost collapsed with relief to feel the pressure removed his midsection and gasped for air, free to breath for the first time. He was standing there in just a slip, and the man tossed his some clothes and said, dress yourself and make it quick.

Robert fumbled with the garments, stepping into a long brown skirt, pulling on the tan blouse. Kicking off his slippers, he pulled on the clunky brown boots.

“The hair thing, too,” the man said.

“What?”

Take your hair down and cover it with a kerchief.

What?

Just do what I say.

Okay. Okay.

Kate guided Robert as he reached up and pulled out the pins and needles from his hair, letting it drop around his shoulders, and then he tied to kerchief over his hair. In the meantime, the men had switched into servant’s clothes as well.

“Now look at this, girl,” the man said, holding up the flashing blade he’d used to slit the guard’s throat. “Make so much as a sound, and I will cut your throat before anyone has a chance to help you. Got it?”

Robert nodded.

“It’s my orders. Nothing personal. But you either leave this palace with us, or you die here. Understand?”

Robert nodded again, too scared to speak.

“Good. Good. Lead the way.”

The other two men walked ahead. Robert was in the middle with the third man close behind him, so close he could almost feel them touching. It made Robert uncomfortable to have the big man walking so close behind him, and as they emerged from the secret passage and into the kitchen, he thought about calling for help or making a run for it.

Don’t! Kate said.

I don’t think he’ll kill me, Robert said. And I can move much more freely in this skirt than I could in my dress.

He will kill you, father. I just read the passage where the Wolf Lord gave him his orders—he is to bring you to the lord unspoiled or the Wolf Lord will kill him!

So I’m just supposed to go along with them?

It’s for the best.

Maybe if I die, I’ll be free of this god awful book of yours.

Hmmmnn. I guess? Maybe? But... what if you die for real, then? I

don't want to lose you, father.

It's not worth the risk, Robert said, sorry he'd scared Kate. Not yet.

Thank you, father. I'm worried.

Me, too.

Robert found himself led through the kitchen. He fought back the impulse to call out for help or run, instead meekly following his captors. He could have sworn one or two of the servants, sweating in the sweltering heat of the kitchen as they cleaned up after the great feast, glared at him maliciously, but he looked down, not wanting to gain any attention.

As they approached the open archway leading to the courtyard he could hear trumpets blaring and shouts coming from the walls.

They know you're missing! Kate said.

Good, Robert said. Good. Maybe someone will recognize me and-- save me.

Let's hope so.

But the group made their way to the narrow servant's entrance and as they approached the sentry saw them and said, "Gents."

"Evening," the leader said with a sly grin.

"Safe travels, fellas."

Robert stole a glance at the sentry, who caught Robert's glance and

barred his teeth, leering hungrily.

Robert felt a chill pass through him. He's one of them?

Yes. Kate said. It seems the Wolf Lord has agents everywhere.

They walked casually along the dirt path that wound from the palace down to the river and the small cottages where the servants lived, but halfway down the path they slipped off into the woods and carefully made their way into the forest. Robert's skirt caught on the twigs and brambles, and at one point a branch scraped his face.

Finally, they reached a clearing in which stood three large, flat-topped boulders before the dark entrance to a cave. On two of the boulders stood immense white wolves, each of whom rose and growled as Robert was led into the clearing. Their eyes glittered red in the darkness and they paced if caged, always keeping their eyes on Robert.

On the third boulder stood a man—tall, broad shouldered, he had long, jet black hair and stubble on his dark face, but like the wolves his eyes glittered red and feral; he grinned, showing off his fangs.

Robert felt his heart flutter at the sight of the man, his cheeks flush.

“I am the Wolf Lord,” the man growled in a raspy voice. “Kneel.”

Robert knelt, keeping his eyes fixed on the Wolf Lord. He's so beautiful, Robert thought.

Father. Stop staring at him. You're falling under his spell!

I... I can't... Robert answered.

"Remove your clothes." The Wolf Lord said.

"Yes, master," Robert whispered, pulling his blouse over his head and throwing it aside. He stood and slipped his skirt down his hips, stepped out of it and kicked it away, and then, trembling with excitement, he reached back and started to undo the lace ties at the back of his slip.

Snap out of it, Daddy! Stop!

"I... I can't..." Robert whispered out loud.

"Of course you can," The Wolf Lord answered keeping his eyes locked on Robert.

The clearing was filling up with the Wolf Lord's followers—some were in human form, others in the shapes of wolves, and still others were half-wolf and half-human. They seemed to swarm in from all sides, and the clearing filled with their musky, animal scent and the heat of their bodies. They started to growl and scrape at the earth, all of them with their eyes locked on Robert's slender body.

Robert finally got the last of the ties free. He pulled his slip open and let it slide off his shoulders, and he stood naked and white in the moonlight, his eyes locked on the Wolf's Kings, and Robert found blushing.

The Wolf King let his eyes drift down from Robert's pretty face, down to his soft, firm breasts, to his soft belly, wide hips and finally to the triangle of black hair between his legs. Then, just as slowly, just as hungrily, his eyes rose back up to meet Robert's, and Robert seeing the hunger in the Wolf Lord's eyes, felt a thrill of power and smiled triumphantly, showing his own white teeth.

The Wolf Lord howled, and once again the savage animal voice of the Wolf Lord shook Robert to his core. The rest of the pack howled in response, and Robert felt his nipples getting hard even as he raised his hands, buried them in his hair and shook it out, letting it fall loose over his shoulders and down to tickle the tops of his breasts.

Oh my God. Father! Father! Stop!

Oh, shut up, Robert thought. I want him! He threw his shoulders back, thrusting his breasts out and then threw his hip to the side, his eyes glassy with desire.

Jesus, Kate said. Oh, God, I don't want to see this.

The Wolf Lord leapt off the boulder, hair sprouting over his body and his face taking on a more feral, wolf-like appearance as he bounded across the clearing and wrapped his arms around Robert, leaning him back and smothering him in a savage kiss even as his claws dug into Robert's soft back.

Robert dug his hands into the Wolf Lord's furry back and let one thigh rise up along his ribs.

The pack howled and began to circle the two, barking and growling and yelping.

The kiss ended, Robert gasped and begged, “Take me! Take me now!”

The Wolf Lord laughed and instead lifted Robert off his feet and held him up like a prize. Robert felt a thrill to be lifted like that—to feel so small and weightless in the rough, powerful hands of the Wolf Lord, and he squealed as the Wolf Lord tossed him in the air, and then caught him.

Robert threw his arms over the Wolf King’s shoulders and pulled him close, their noses almost touching. “Please,” he whispered. “I want you inside me.”

“Patience little Kitten,” The Wolf Lord said.

“I claim this one as my mate,” The Wolf King howled. “Let us feast!”

“Feast!” The Wolves answered. “Feast.”

“Take her and dress her for the feast!” The Wolf King called out to the two white wolves, who immediately reshaped into the forms of women.

“Please,” Robert said, clinging to the Wolf King. “I want to stay with you.”

“We’ll share a bed tonight, Kitten,” The Wolf King said, and then he gave Robert a slap on his cute little ass. “Now go and make yourself pretty for your King.”

Robert let himself be led away, glancing back right before he entered the mouth of the cave, looking longingly at that gorgeous, perfect man. Is this what it feels like for a girl to be in love?

Not love, Father, dearest. Lust.

Leave me alone, Kate.

I wish I could. I really don't want to see my father acting like a little slut.

Robert barely heard her. His head swam with new feelings and sensations, the sultry shock of his first kiss as a girl, the feeling of being cradled in the Wolf King's arms—his skin still tingled where the Wolf King had touched him.

And as he walked with the other two females, Robert felt something else—a new kind of power and pride. He'd been chosen by the strongest male, kissed in front of everyone-- he walked arrogantly down into the cavern with his shoulders back and breasts proudly swaying, consciously of the looks he was getting, of the feeling of his long, curly hair hanging over his shoulders and down his back, swaying in counter-point to the swaying of his wide, round hips. He was a beautiful, young woman, and his boyfriend was the hottest wolf in the pack, and he felt so pretty and so strong and every inch the princess as he walked into the cave knowing that HE was the most beautiful girl.

You shouldn't base your self-esteem on what some boy thinks of you,

Daddy, Kate said.

Shut it, Robert answered. You're just jealous.

The two females led Robert to a warm, damp cavern with a steaming pool fed by a volcanic spring. "Do you want to bath yourself or have one of his help you?" The girl gave Robert the glad eye, but he had no interest in women right now-- his body belonged to the wolf king.

"I'll do myself," he said.

The girls giggled, and Robert, realizing how it sounded, giggled, too.

"Let me put your hair up," one of the women said. "You won't have time to let it dry."

"Thanks," Robert said, turning while the girls went to work on his hair.

"What are your names?" Robert asked.

"I'm Mischa," the red-head said.

"And I'm Greta."

"I'm... Kitterina," Robert said.

"We know. "

"You're both so pretty," Robert said as they finished with his hair.

"You, too, and so lucky! To be the mate of Growl Fang!"

"I feel like I'm in a dream!"

Taking a lump of soap from a small and slipping into the warm, soothing water. It was the first time he'd had a moment to himself since he'd found himself in the body of a woman, but as he washed himself, he could think only of the Wolf Lord, playing their first kiss over and over in his mind.

God, you're making me sick.

Shut up! Robert said.

You have to fight these feelings, Daddy.

I can't, Robert said. I don't even want to!

You'll be stuck as a girl forever, then, Daddy.

Robert smiled. I don't care. I love him, Kate. I want to be with him forever.

It will be forever, father! Don't you realize? You will spend all eternity as the Wolf King's wife.

I hope so, Robert laughed. It's all I want, Kate. All I ever wanted! He's so... perfect!

Those feelings won't last. It's puppy love.

No! It's real love. You wouldn't understand. You never loved anyone the way I love him!

Oh, really? Do you remember Brett Blutarski? The guy with the motorcycle and the tattoos? I wanted to drop out of school and ride across

country with him?

I was so wrong to stop you, Kate. I see that now. A girl has to follow her heart.

Listen to me! You'll be giving up everything! Everything!

I will give up everything for him. I must.

Even me? As Kate asked the last question her voice broke, and Robert could feel that his daughter had started crying. Finally, it broke through the haze of teen-age passion that had clouded his mind and consumed his thoughts, and he felt tears rise in his own eyes.

Oh, Kate. Kate. No. Of course not.

Well, you can't have it both ways! If you don't find some way to fight it, to get away from there with your virginity intact, you will lose me, and I'll be alone in the world, the real world! The one where you are the only person I have!

My virginity?

Garreth will never marry you if you've been fucked by the Wolf King, Father.

You don't have to be so crude.

Well, that's what this is. Okay? Let's just be honest about it because I just watched my father throw himself-- throw himself! At a man! Not even a

man but a wolf man, and beg to be fucked by him and it's freaking me out, okay? It's freaking me out!

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I don't, I didn't mean? I couldn't help myself.

Are you turning gay?

Robert searched his feelings. He was wildly attracted to the Wolf King, and yet he knew that he wasn't turning. No, he answered. Maybe. It's more like, and you know? It's just that, right now...

You're a girl?

Yes, he said, relieved. Yes. I'm a girl. And he found himself crying, and he covered his face with his hands and said, I'm so sorry, Kate. I'm sorry this happened, and that I kissed two boys tonight, and that I want the Wolf King, and what kind of father am I? What kind of man? And why am I crying all of a sudden?

Welcome to the life of a teen-age girl, Father. You're hormonal, and you are obsessed with boys. Your emotions are all over the place. You're not even a real girl, but a girl in a romance novel, which is like any girl at her worst. That's what's happening.

It sucks!

I know.

"Princess?" Greta called from the hall. "The Wolf King will be

expecting you to be dressing for the feast soon."

"Thank you," Robert called. He stood up and stepped daintily from the pool, his skin tingling.

You are really pretty, Kate said.

You can see me? Robert gasped and put one arm across his breasts and another over his vagina.

I can see everything. It's like I have a 360 degree view, plus I feel everything you feel and hear your thoughts. It's really weird and cool.

Robert felt creepy realizing Kate could see and feel everything. He took a towel and started to dry himself. I don't like the idea of you seeing me naked. Why aren't you grossed out? I'm your dad!

If you were still you, I would probably claw my eyes out right now, but since I am seeing you as Princess Kitterina, it's kind of different. Wow. You have a great ass, Daddy.

Stop it! He said, turning his back to the cave wall.

I can't help it.

Well, can't you focus on reading ahead and seeing if you can figure out some way for me to get out of here? It's one big advantage for us that you can see the future.

I'll still be able to see you, but that is a good idea, I have to say.

I still get a good idea once and awhile even if I am your father.

And boy crazy.

Har. Har.

The girls dressed Robert in a thin, silk sari that came down to just above mid-thigh and clung to his breasts. The feeling of the cool silk against his soft skin gave him tingles, and he said, “Can I look at myself?”

“Of course,” Greta said, and she led Robert by the hand over to a full length mirror.

It was the first time Robert had seen his full body. I look like a supermodel, he thought.

Yeah, Kate said. I’m actually jealous of how pretty my father is right now.

He had long, tone legs—really long, and lithe arms, wide hips and breasts that were medium sized buy very perky—even without a bra. Tone, round shoulders and of course--- that face. That perfectly feminine face with those smoldering green eyes. Again, he felt surge or pride and confidence—he was the prettiest girl!

“Do you like it?” Greta asked.

“I love it,” he said honestly, speaking both of his dress and his body, and plucking at the short hem of the sari, turning and looking at his profile, loving

his classic S- shape, with his firm breasts and tight, lifted round ass. Oh, he thought. I do have a great ass.

Okay. Getting gross again.

The girls led him away from the mirror, and they began to work on his hair and paint his face. My first time wearing make-up, he thought, with girlish excitement!

Like you need it.

Where am I, anyway? He wondered

The Wolf King's cave.

I mean—the real me? In our world?

I guess you're in bed?

Check and see? I'm just curious. I mean, if I am stuck in here for a long time, won't my body need to eat?

I don't know, Kate answered. Okay. I'm going to go and see. If we lose contact, just stay calm. I'll be back as soon as I can.

Okay, Robert said, realizing as Kate said it that the thought of being without Kate to help him did scare him. What would it be like if she did vanish, and he was just stuck in this world in this body forever? No, he thought. No. That's not going to happen! We'll find a way out. I know we will. But, what if I give in to the Wolf King? Or what if he... just takes me?

Daddy. Stay calm! Breathe!

Oh. Okay. Wow, he said, breathing. I'm just worried about—
everything.

Teen-age girl, Daddy. It's in your blood now.

Right. Right.

Okay. And so keep breathing and stay calm, but you are not in your bed
right now.

Then where—oh my God! What if I am stuck here, what if—oh, wait.
Wait.

What?

I fell asleep on the couch. Downstairs.

You're such a scatter-brain!

I'm sorry!

“Now for some jewelry,” Greta said.

“Oh, I don't care about that,” Robert answered casually, remembering
how carelessly he'd tossed away his chandelier earrings, but when Greta opened
a carved, mahogany jewelry box and he saw the flashing diamonds and
emeralds, Robert's mouth fell open and his eyes went wide. “They're so...
pretty!”

“Yes,” Greta said. “What girl doesn't like pretty jewelry?”

“I get to wear these?” Robert whispered.

“Yes,” Greta said. “You are the Wolf King’s bride, darling. He has these for you—and more!”

Robert’s heart began beating and he felt a kind of giddy excitement as the girls draped him in jewels—bracelets and necklaces, earrings and anklets.

“Stunning!” Greta said.

“Gorgeous!” Merta responded.

They took Robert’s little hands in their own and again led him to the mirror.

“Oh my God,” Robert said. He’d been pretty—very pretty—before, but now? He couldn’t think of a word to describe it. With the mascara or whatever these girls used around his eyes, they now seemed bigger and more electric than ever, and they’d woven silver wire into his hair, which was piled on his head like a crown while curly strands dangled at his cheeks—a wilder, sexier version of his hair. His full, pillowy lips had been stained a deep, blood red that contrasted with his pale skin, and they’d put just the tiniest amount of blush on his high cheeks.

And the jewelry. How it sparkled! Oh my God, I’m a goddess!

And you are sleeping on the couch, by the way, Daddy Goddess.

Kate! I don’t know how to stop it. I just, I mean...

Did you hear me mention that you are on the couch? A kind of flabby, middle-aged man?

Yes, he said, smoothing his skirt over his wide hips. Yes. I know. But, are you seeing this?

Yes, Kate said.

And?

And you are super pretty, Daddy.

Thanks! He said, thrilled to have his daughter affirm him, assure him he was as pretty as he thought he was.

Now stop looking at yourself.

Robert pulled his eyes away from himself, reluctantly, and smiled at Great and Merta. "Thank you," he said. "You did such a wonderful job!"

"Of course," Merta said.

"It is our pleasure. You are lovely."

"Like a white rose!"

Robert giggled. "I just hope the Wolf King is pleased."

Daddy!

Sorry!

"Oh, he will be," Great said, leading her pretty charge toward the

Feasting Hall. "He'd be pleased if you were wearing nothing but a burlap sack. Now, we will be back in a moment, so just rest and don't get anything on your dress!"

"I'll be careful," Robert said, glancing at himself in the mirror again, plucking at the hem of his dress.

Robert heard the door to the outer room open, and walked back to it, saying "Back so soon?" as he entered. But there, standing in the center of the room, was a man who took Robert's breath away. Tall, with long, curly black hair that tumbled wildly down over his thick, powerful shoulders, he had a square jaw, and a thick, muscled neck. His blousy black silk shirt hung open, revealing a big, rock hard chest and coiled abs all covered in black hair, and he'd rolled up his sleeves to reveal arms writhing with veins and muscles. Robert's eyes slid down to the man's tight leather pants, and the bulge made him swallow and look back up at his dark, black eyes.

Uh, oh. Be careful, Daddy.

The man smiled. "You like what you see." It wasn't a question.

"Yes," Robert said in a hoarse whisper, again totally unprepared for his reaction to a gorgeous young man. "Who are you?"

"You are the most beautiful creature I have ever seen," the man responded, letting his eyes caress Robert's curves. "It's all I can do to resist the urge to take you right here, right now."

"What's stopping you?" Robert whispered.

Get away from him. Call for help.

I can handle him, Robert said.

"What's stopping me? Nothing." The man stared into Robert's eyes and walked slowly toward him.

Scream, Kate said. Tell him to leave.

Robert couldn't look away. He had butterflies in his stomach, but found himself backing slowly away. Robert giggled and said, "I'm the Wolf King's girl."

The man didn't answer, he just kept walking forward, staring into Robert's eyes. Robert bumped into a wall and put his palms against the cold stone, raising one leg defensively. "You shouldn't be here," Robert whispered. "If he Wolf King finds out..."

The man was now standing very close to Robert, so close Robert could feel the heat from his body, smell the masculine musk of him, and Robert looked away, blushing. "The Wolf King..." he said weakly.

"I don't care," the man said. "When I see something I want, I take it."

"Oh," Robert said. "Wow."

The man took Robert's chin in his hand and tilted his head back. Robert looked in his eyes again, those deep, dark, eyes, and the man moved in as if for a

kiss, pausing just before their lips touched. "Do I scare you?" He said.

"Yes," Robert admitted.

And then the man kissed him, hard, and long, and Robert felt the man shove his tongue into Robert's mouth, and Robert his tongue with his own even as he felt the man put a hand on his breasts and squeeze, and Robert saw stars and reached down and grabbed the man's pants, desperately trying to yank them down.

Stop! Kate screamed. Stop!

The man also grabbed Robert's soft little hand and pulled it away from his pants, ending the kiss. "Not yet, little Kitten. Be patient."

Robert nodded. "Okay." He would do whatever the man said. He had to.

"Okay?"

"It means, yes. Whatever you want."

Taking Robert by the hand, the man dragged him to the dressing table and sat him down. Robert felt a thrill having the man take control of him like that, tell him what to do. He knew he should fight it, should stand up for himself, but he was so pretty and strong, young and-- everything!-- that Robert just wanted to please him. Then, the man picked up a small brush and, tilting Robert's head back, he fixed his lipstick for him, sending another strange thrill

through Robert's slender little body.

The man stood for a moment gazing lovingly down at Robert's pretty face, and Robert sat there smiling, basking in the attention, and in turn staring in fascination at this beautiful man. Then, the sound of the outer door opening again could be heard, and the man disappeared like the wind.

Greta and Merta walked in, looking around curiously. "Was someone here?"

They can smell him, Kate warned.

I bet they can, Robert answered.

Gross.

"A messenger from the king," Robert said. "Checking to see if I was ready."

"Odd," Greta said. Then, looking curiously at Robert who was fanning himself, she said, "You look feverish."

"Oh! Haha! No! Just excited!" Robert looked at himself in the mirror and found himself a little turned on at the sight of himself-- the tip of his nose was flush, as were his ears, and he recognized from his experience as a man the face of a woman who was ready to take a roll in the hay. Worse, his nipples were rock hard and poking out of the thin, silk material of his dress in a all too obvious manner.

Greta and Merta exchanged a glance, and then shrugged. "Are you ready to make your debut, Princess?"

"Yes," Robert said, standing and smoothing down his dress. "But maybe we can just wait a moment, until, um..." He gestured at his nipples.

"Yes," Greta said. "Very unladylike."

"Haha," Robert said, as Merta handed him a bouquet of flowers. "They just have a mind of their own, these things. Hahaha!"

Let it go, Daddy. Just let it go.

Who was that handsome boy? Robert asked.

Try not to think about him, Father. Or your nipples will never go down.

I will, but who was he?

That was the Wolf King's son, Father.

Oh. Well, he certainly is, um, confident.

Yes.

"Let's go," Greta said. "Let's go. They are waiting for you!" They led Robert through the caves and to the feast hall, and as the footmen opened the big, iron bound oaken doors, Robert clutched his flowers, took a deep breath and prepared for the next step in his strange adventure.

Robert walked into the Feast Hall. An immense cavern with huge, jagged stalactites descending from the ceiling, it featured tiered rows of wooden

tables behind which had gathered what seemed like thousands of men and women, some in half-wolf shape. On either side immense fires blazed in huge fire pits, each tended by teams of wolf men in leather masks.

On one end, the Wolf King lounged in a great, obsidian throne inlaid with blood red rubies, three naked women crouching at his feet. He met Robert's eyes as Robert walked in, appraised his body, and then grinned. Robert once again felt himself flush with pride and threw back his shoulders.

The crowd grew suddenly grew quieter, the shouts and revelry replaced by soft murmurs, and Robert realized they were all looking at him, appraising him, and he caught appreciative murmurs from crowd as they all stared in wonder at his beauty. He put one hand on his hip and smiled confidently at the Wolf King, though it was really for the whole crowd.

“Ravishing,” the Wolf King growled.

“Thank you, your majesty,” Robert said in a high, pretty voice.

Greta led Robert to a smaller, white marble throne on the other side of the room, and he sat down prettily, his knees together. “Who are those girls?” He whispered to Greta as he sat.

“Oh, don't worry, miss. They are servants, but the Wolf King mates with only one girl. You don't need to be jealous.”

“Good,” Robert said, but he still felt a little angry toward the women and the Wolf King. Can't he at least make them wear some clothes?

Fight it, father! You're letting him get in your head again.

But, he's so pretty!

"Stop!"

I'm trying, but—

That wasn't me.

"Stop!" A young man called again, striding to the center of the floor and raising his arms. He was tall and dark, slender but sheathed with hard, lean muscle. He made fists with his hands and the tendons in his fore arms coiled, sending a thrill through Robert's slender frame. It was the boy who'd kissed him in his room!

"I challenge you for this female," the young man said, pointing at Robert, who gasped.

"I respect your courage, but urge you to reconsider," The Wolf King said. "The time has not yet come for you, my son."

They're fighting? Over me?

Oh no, Kate said.

It's so, I mean-- it's really exciting, right? Robert found himself playing with his hair.

This is hopeless, Kate said.

They're both so cute.

The younger man spoke again. “The challenge stands, father.”

“Again, I urge you to reconsider.”

“The challenge stands.”

“Then we fight. To death.”

To the death? “Oh, no!” Robert called out prettily, standing, but Greta grabbed his arm and held him back.

“It’s the way of the pack,” Greta said.

The Wolf King howled, rapidly transforming into his half-wolf form, growing taller and thicker, black hair covering his body. His son, Dark Moon, did the same, and they began to warily circle one another while Robert stood, his hands clasped over his heart, waiting anxiously to see who would claim him.

Now, Kate said. Everyone is watching them fight. Slowly back out of the room.

Okay, Robert said, but he stood there watching as they lunged at each other.

Daddy!

Robert bit his lip. I want to see who wins me!

Back out of the room!

You’re no fun, Robert said, backing slowly away.

Hurry! The bloodlust will overcome the winner, and he'll take you right on the floor in front of everyone.

Really? Robert answered, slightly excited by the idea.

Father, he will rape you.

I don't think he would, Robert started, through the word struck fear into his heart and he found himself backing away more rapidly.

Just do what I tell you!

Okay! Jeez! Robert hurried, all the while keeping his eyes longingly locked on the raging wolf men who were fighting over him.

Good girl. Now, you are far enough back, so turn and hurry yourself down the hall, and then take the first right.

How do you know?

There's a map of the Wolf King's lair in the book.

Oh. Duh.

Good. Good. Hurry! Hurry! When the fight ends, they will follow your scent.

Okay, Robert said, hurrying as fast as he could, his breasts bouncing with each stride.

Kate led him through a series of twisty tunnels, so many turns that Robert couldn't have found his way back if he wanted to. He was sweating, his dress

sticking to his body, when he finally reached a wooden ladder, scampered up and throwing open a hatch, climbed up into the cool night air.

Now, run! Run! They are coming for you.

Even as she said those words, Robert heard a distant howl, answered by another, and his heart raced. The voices of the wolves were full of anger, and they sent a bolt of pure terror right to his girlish heart. He started running one direction, then another, turned in a circle, put his fingers to his lips. Which way? Which way!

East!

Which way is East? He said

Toward the moon.

Yes! Robert thought. Yes! The moon was huge, radiant, and Robert began to hurry toward it as fast as he could amongst all the dense forest. He had lost the path and had to clamber over mushroom encrusted fallen trees, fight through thickets and plunge through gross spider webs. He could hear the rush of the river, but he also heard the howls of the behind him.

They're getting closer!

Just keep moving. If you can get to the river they'll lose your scent!

Robert pushed his way through some leafy branches and made a small yelp as he looked down a steep drop to a patch of sand near the running water.

He was at the edge of a ridge, maybe a 10 foot drop from the river bank and safety.

Go! Go! Slide down the bank.

It's really steep, Robert said, putting his hands to his cheeks.

You have to!

Maybe I could find another way down, he said looking down and along the ridge, but seeing nothing. He jumped as he heard a crashing in the woods, followed by a series of excited howls.

Daddy.

It'll ruin my dress!

Father!

More howls. Closer still.

He sat down on the edge of soft earth, then closed his eyes and pushed himself forward, sliding down the steep incline on his butt and then landing in the soft sand with a thunk-- and unharmed!

He scurried to his feet, yanking down the hem of his skirt, which had ridden up his legs during the slide down, and hurried to the water, wading in, trying not to make too much noise even as the cold caused his skin to instantly get goose bumps, and then he waded into the river, which came up to his breasts, before climbing out on the opposite shore, water dripping down his smooth,

white legs.

Hide! Hide! Behind that rock!

Robert hurried over, cowering behind the rock, his breasts rising and falling as he gasped for breath.

Just in time!

What's happening?

They just reached the ridge, and they are looking around, trying to smell you. When I say go, run to the left, and you will find a path that leads up away from the river.

I don't know if I can run anymore, Robert said, clutching his side.

Of course you can.

Kate, I'm just ... I feel dizzy.

You can do it, Daddy. I know you can.

I don't know if I can keep going. I'm just... I'm just a girl now.

Don't ever let me hear you say that!

But it's true.

You are stronger than you know, and don't you use the fact that you're a girl as an excuse to give up! Now, RUN!

Robert got to his feet and scurried from behind the boulder, saw the path

and raced up it, his arms swaying, then as Kate urged him on ran along the path, and ran and ran until he thought he would vomit, then found the strength within himself to run some more, just putting one little foot in front of another and moving, moving until finally he reached a small, moss covered knoll, and Kate said, Rest!

Robert dropped onto his back on the soft, moist moss and sighed with relief as the pressure finally left his aching legs. Oh my God, he said.

You did it, Daddy! I am so proud of you!

All I did was run away, he murmured, barely aware of anything but his own desperate need for breath.

Don't sell yourself short!

Okay, he said. Okay. Thirsty.

We'll get you some water, but just rest for now.

Yes, Robert said. Yes. He stared up at the moon, which seemed to have risen to a point right above him, bathing him in it's cool, white rays. It was a familiar and yet strange sight-- a moon very much like the real moon, his moon, and yet no man on the moon, no seeming face. Instead, it was smooth and without a single marking of any kind, like in a cartoon. And yet, it was beautiful, and he felt his heart swell as he lay there and looked up at it, the heaving of his breasts slowing as he gradually caught his breath and started to realize his situation: he was a girl, all alone in the wilderness, so small and

insignificant looking up at that huge glowing moon, and a thought popped into his mind as he found himself feeling small and lonely and helpless: being pretty won't help me here.

No, it won't. But you are actually a very strong, athletic girl, as you just proved to yourself, and you are going to survive.

How?

Girl Power.

Har. Har.

Use what you got, Kitten.

Wake me up in, like, two days, Robert said.

Afraid you don't have that much time, sweetie, but rest yourself for a minute. I'm going to read ahead and see what you should do next. The letters have stopped moving.

What?

Every time you change the story, the letters start swirling around and the book rewrites itself.

Oh, Robert murmured, drifting off to sleep. Kewl.

Not really, Kate said, thought Robert couldn't hear her. She started to read, struggling to keep her own eyes open as the night dragged on.

Robert opened his eyes. His arm, which he'd slid under his head for

support, ached, and pushing himself into a sitting position he looked around confused as he regained consciousness. He felt something brush against his cheek, and reaching up to find a curl of hair, he reached up and touched what seemed like a mass of hair on his head, looking down at the same time at the full, white breasts straining against the top of his dress. He remembered then—the ball, getting kidnapped escaping from the Wolf Lord’s lair, the fact he was a girl now.

Kate? Kate?

Rubbing sleep from his eyes with his little white fists, Robert looked around, seeing nothing but twisted, moss covered trees and one small, dark path leading out of the clearing. What should I do now?

Nothing. No response.

Kate?

She didn’t answer. Robert immediately felt himself getting scared. Where was Kate? Was he stuck in the book now forever? Had Kate abandoned him?

Kate! Kate! Where are you?

Nothing.

Now what?

Robert felt scared and alone, and he looked at the path, his knees

together hands on his cheeks. Should he go out—there? Alone?

To do what? To go where?

I should just—stay here! He thought, sitting back down. Yes. Kate will come back, and she'll tell me what to do. She probably just went to the bathroom! Stop being such a silly, girl, Robert, he thought, scolding himself. Stay calm!

He breathed, looking down at his dirty feet and sandals. It was gross, and he wished he could go and wash them off somewhere. Such a shame to ruin such pretty shoes! And, anyway—

What's that?

Robert caught something out of the corner of his eye, and standing up he walked over and looked, seeing a tiny chair and table, like a child might use, though on the table was a pipe, and a wooden box. Beneath the table, he found a conical red hat and a wicker basket.

How cute! He picked up the hat and looked it over. Biting his lip, he put it on top of his own head, fitting it on top of his crown-like head of hair, and as soon as he placed it there he felt his skin start to tingle and then he rapidly shrunk down to child size!

“Ahhhhh!” Robert shrieked, quickly pulling the hat off and tossing it aside. Nothing. He stayed tiny, the chair now the perfect size for him, standing maybe 2 feet tall. “Darn it!”

And then he heard it—a growl in the forest! And then a crashing sound. A werewolf? Something worse? Oh my God, Robert thought, looking around in a panic for a place to hide.

“Missy! Missy!”

Robert looked to see a garden gnome looking out at him curiously from a hatch that he’d opened in the side of the mossy gnoll. “In here! Quick!”

Robert hesitated. The gnome looked- creepy—with thin, graying, unkempt hair, flaccid skin, and wide, glassy eyes that he a look of—perviness about them.

“I... I don’t know you!” Robert said.

“Grabblestack!” The gnome growled. “The name’s Greasily. Yours?”

“Kitterina!”

“Glad to meet you. Now get in here! You’ll be dinner for a wolf soon little miss,” the man said. “Get in here! I can’t keep the door open much longer, or I’ll die, too!”

The growl grew louder, closer, and so Robert, panicking, rushed into the hole the gnome had opened.

Greasily slammed the door shut, grabbed Robert by the hand and dragged him a narrow, twisting flight of stairs and into a cozy den, which he pushed Robert into before slamming the door that led out, quickly bolting it and

placing the key in his pocket.

Robert was looking nervously at the bolted door and the pocket where Greasily had put the key, feeling very trapped and very uncomfortable, pulling at the shirt hem of his dress. Greasily was a little shorter than Robert—maybe standing one foot and 9 inches tall, but he was squat and had thick, strong looking legs and arms.

“Lady Kitterina, “Greasily said. “Tsk. Tsk. I merely bolted the door for our safety. So that Wolfman can’t come down here and eat us.”

“He’s too big,” Robert answered, finding himself talking in a softer, higher voice.

“He could use the hat just like you did, Lady.”

“Oh!” Robert said. “I ... didn’t think of that. Sorry?”

“Think nothing of it,” Greasily said, smiling, revealing a jagged mouth missing as many teeth as it still held. “You’re trembling!” He said, hurrying over and grabbing a quilt from his big, leather easy chair and placing it over Robert’s slender shoulders before practically pushing him down onto a low, soft couch that sat in front of Greasily’s small, sputtering fire.

“Rest. Compose yourself, Milady. I’ll make us some nice tea! You would like some tea, I am sure.”

“Yes,” Robert agreed, hugging the quilt around himself. “Thank you.”

Greasily busied himself in his small kitchen area, pouring water from a white, stone pitcher into a rusty and dented iron tea kettle.

Robert looked around the gnome's little den. He'd decorated it with hunting trophies, the mounted heads of humming birds, weasels, ferrets, spiders and tadpoles. Again, Robert's intuition buzzed, and he pulled the quilt more tightly around his shoulders as his creeping feeling of unease grew stronger.

Greasily hurried over with the tea kettle, hanging it on a piece of steel wire above the fire, which he then busily stocked with some fresh lumps of wood, glancing frequently back at Robert as he did so, each time offering Robert a wide, leering smile.

Robert smiled back politely.

"Food!" Greasily shouted, leaping in the air and giving Robert a start.

"Oh, goodness," Robert said prettily. "You've been too kind already!" He didn't feel comfortable taking anything else from the creature, and was already trying to figure out how to politely back out of the tea, though he was ever-so-thirsty.

"Neversuch!" Greasily said. "The gnome code. Always offer food," he said, and again offered his leering grin, "to a young lady who comes to visit."

Robert shifted uneasily, looking longingly at the door. "Am I, um, stuck this size?"

“And what’s wrong with this size?” Greasily said, dropping a plate clattering to the floor. “What is wrong with THIS SIZE!?”

“N-nothing,” Robert said, smiling and squirming away from the gnome. “I was just, I mean, I didn’t mean—“

“Hahahahahaha!” Greasily screamed. “Hahahahahahaaha! You should see your face! Hahahahahaha! I had you going, didn’t I?”

“Yes,” Robert said, trying to hide his growing terror at the crazy, filthy little creature. “Haha! You’re so... funny.”

“Hahahahahaha,” Greasily continued, putting his hands over his belly and falling to the ground, rolling around laughing. “I can turn you back, of course,” Greasily said, wiping his nose with the back of his hand and then running it against his shirt. “Hahahahahahaah!”

Robert started looking around for something he could use as a weapon, grabbed a candlestick from the table next to the couch and, clutching it tightly in his little hand, hid it under the quilt.

Greasily abruptly stopped laughing and popped up to his feet, his face deadly serious. “I don’t get visitors often. You’ll forgive me if I am a little bit of a silly goose.”

“You’re a delight,” Robert lied, holding the fake smile on his face.

Greasily stared at Robert, tapping his foot, and then he said, “You are a

lady! A true to life lady. Right in here in my humble little den. I am so honored to have someone who is so much better than me here in my home.”

“The honor is all mine,” Robert said, warily, completely unable to read the strange creature’s wildly shifting moods and attitudes.

Greasily opened a drawer and pulled out a knife, holding it over his head and letting it catch the firelight.

Robert gasped.

Greasily pulled out a large, thick sausage and slamming it on the counter brought the knife slashing down into it, cutting off a chunk of hard, fatty meat which he popped into his mouth and then, chunks flying out as he spoke he said, “Food coming soon, Princess! Hope you are HUNGRY!!!!” And then he began wildly hacking at the sausage, leaping in the air and bringing his whole body down as chunks of meat went flying in every direction. “Choppy Choppy Choppy CHOP!!!” He sang.

Robert suddenly found himself growing furious with the little creature. It was obvious the little twerp was intentionally scaring Robert, and Robert had enough, so he screamed, “ENOUGH!”

Robert felt himself growing angry with the creature, and he gripped the candlestick tightly, wanting to spring across the room and smash it over the little freak’s head. But instead, he just sat there, paralyzed with fear. Where’s Kate? He wondered. What’s going to happen to me.

Greasily slapped the knife down on the counter and gathered the hunks of meat with his greasy dirty hands, piling them on the small, stone plate. Then, he wiped his hands on his shirt, picked up the plate and trotted over to Robert, bowing deeply and presenting the tray to him. “Milady.”

Robert stared at the ragged chunks of disgusting meat, the same meat he’d seen Greasily touch with the same hands he’d used to wipe his nose, and he shook his head. “No, thanks,” Robert said. “I’d really just like to get on with my journey?”

The tea kettle began to whistle, a high-pitched whistle, like a child’s scream. Greasily looked up at Robert with cold, dead eyes. “Eat,” he said.

“I don’t...”

“Eat!” He said again in a tense, quiet voice full of the threat of violence.

Robert reached out with one slender, white hand, keeping the other wrapped around the candlestick, and he took a small, greasy chunk of the sausage in his fingers. “What is it?” He asked in a trembling voice.

“Sausage.”

“I mean,” he glanced around at the trophies, “what kind of ... meat?”

“My special blend, Sweetie Delicious. It’s a combination of rat, dog and river worm.”

“Oh,” Robert said, his hand shaking. “I shall save it for later.”

“Eat it!” Greasily said. “Eat it! It’s so good for you! Put hair on your chest!”

“No, no...”

“Eat it, you stupid bitch, or I’ll cut you open and dance on your guts.”

The kettle shook and whistled, steam blasting out of the lid in a billowing jet.

The words stung, and Robert felt himself recoil. No one had ever called him a bitch before, and he felt his anger growing, and his frustration, but more powerful was his fear, and he just felt like if he did this one gross, little thing for the creature, maybe Greasily would let him go. So, Robert brought the slimy meat to his lips, scrunched up his face, and put the brown lump of slimy meat into his mouth.

It tasted rotten, and had the consistency of greasy dirt, and Robert felt himself begin to wretch just from the horrible taste of it on his tongue.

“Chew, Sweetie Delicious. Chew and swallow!”

Instead, Robert spit the lump of meat right into Greasily’s ugly face.

Greasily screamed and threw his plate against the wall, causing it to explode into fragments. Then, he leapt at Robert’s throat, his mouth a huge, hungry maw. Robert screamed and, yanking the candlestick from beneath the

covers, swung it with all of his strength, bringing it down in a great, flashing arc to slam against the crown of Greasily's head. Greasily instantly collapsed against Robert and lay on top of him, unmoving.

Robert crinkled his nose and saw blood pouring from a gash in Greasily's head, shoved the creature off of him and watched his body slump to the floor, like a bag of rice. Robert pulled his knees to his chest and looked at the creature. "Greasily?" He whispered. "Greasily?"

No response. Hoping off the couch, staying clear of Greasily, Robert grabbed a cloth and took the tea pot of the fire, plunking it on the floor. A steady stream of blood was leaking from Greasily's head, forming a small pool on the stone floor, reflecting the fire light, the blood seemed to flicker with demonic energy.

Robert smoothed his dress and looked around the room. Now what? The door? Run away? The door was still locked. He would need to key from Greasily's pocket. Darn it! Robert said, stomping his little foot angrily. He didn't want to get near the gross little creep, let alone have to shove his hands in the dirty little thing's pockets. But, what else could he do? Maybe there was another key? Of course, there had to be another key! But where?

Kate? He called. Kate?

Alone. Still. "Greasily?" Robert called. "Greasily?" Nothing. He looks dead, Robert thought. Did I kill him? It made him feel—confused—to

think of it. Part of him was glad that he'd killed the nasty little freak, but part of him also pitied the creature, and even more so any loved ones he might have who cared about him. Did he have a mother? A father? How would they feel when they found him dead? He felt himself tearing up slightly, though he wasn't sure if it was empathy for the creature's loved ones or just a reaction to the stress he'd been under.

Robert gingerly approached the creature. Reached out and poked him with one finger. He's not real, Robert reminded himself. His family isn't real. You're not a girl. He reached out and found the edge of Greasily's pocket, pushed his hand in and yanked it out with a yelp, his fingertip bleeding.

A little brown mouse stuck its head out of the pocket, sniffed the air and then skittered away off into the darkness.

Gross, Robert thought. Totally gross, and then taking a deep breath, he pushed his little hand back into Greasily's pocket, felt the cold, round, steel key, and grabbing it, he pulled it slowly from the pocket, relieved that finally—

Just as Robert pulled the glittering key out, Greasily grabbed Robert's wrist and twisted his head around, smiling and screaming, "Feel anything else while you were in there, Princess?"

Robert screamed and tried to yank his wrist free, but Greasily held on tight, and Robert ended up dragging the freak across the floor as Greasily began to scream, and the two of them screamed together until Robert finally delivered a

vicious kick to Greasily's chin and the creature let go of his wrist, once again lying immobile on the floor.

“I hate this place!” Robert said, breathing hard, his breasts heaving. “I hate IT!!!!!” Great. Great. Now in addition to being a girl, I am two feet tall, and I have no idea how to get back to normal size so I can get a boy to marry me! Awesome!

He didn't have a clue where to go, what to do, but he did know he wanted to get away from this dirty little hole and the nasty gnome, so he decided to just get back up top and go somewhere, do anything. It didn't matter, because he was not going to stay here.

He went over to the kitchen area and used some water from the pitcher to wash his hands. He wanted to drink—he felt very thirsty now—but the water had an oily quality and smelled vaguely of rotten fish, and he couldn't bring himself to even taste it.

With a sigh, he threw his shoulders back and walked over to the door, glancing one last time at the inert form of the nasty creature, and then he reached the key toward the lock... only to hear a clanking noise from the other side as someone else inserted a key from the outside. Robert stifled a scream and hurried back into Greasily's chambers, finding himself in Greasily's bedroom, he looked around and then in desperation crawled under the creature's bed.

He heard the door swing open. A pause. A gasp and a rush of footsteps. Then, a low, soft, moaning, like a dying animal. It was a voice filled with sorrow and despair, shock and most of all loss.

Robert thought of Kate, and tears sprang to his eyes, and he struggled with the impulse to climb out from under the bed, rush out and throw his arms around whoever was out there. Oh. Kate, he thought, missing her more than ever. Kate! What if I never see you again?

The moaning grew louder and louder, growing into a scream. Then, stomping and smashing sounds. More screaming, all in some strange, unintelligible language, and Robert covered his mouth as the tears flowed from his big, green eyes, terrified and lonely.

Run! He thought. Run! I have to get away from here!

He saw feet rush into the room, large, thick feet shod in heavy black boots. The feet rushed here and there, throwing things, smashing things to the ground that burst into shards or bounced and rolled across the floor, and Robert held his breath, trembling.

Suddenly, the creature stopped. Stood stock still. Began to make a sniffing sound. "I smell her," it croaked. "Yes. A human girl. Oh, she smells wicked and naughty. She is a bad, bad girl."

The feet started to walk away. Stopped, turned and rushed back toward the bed, only to stop once more. "What's this?" The creature squatted, and

plucked a single long black hair from the floor. Robert caught a glimpse of a gnarled and grotesque face, like a prunnier version of Greasily, and he struggled against his urge to scream and scamper away, instead sitting still, still, not breathing, his lungs burning.

“Naughty girl WAS here! Maybe she still is, hiding. Nasty, dirty little girl. She’s gonna get cut, she is. I’m gonna cut her up and make her into a pie! Where could she be? Where does a nasty little girl hide? Maybe, in the closet?”

The creature stomped over to the closet. “She doesn’t hide here. No. Nasty isn’t here.”

“Could she be... in the wardrobe?”

Robert’s lungs burnt. He closed his eyes and concentrated, concentrated as hard as he could on just STAYING STILL. Don’t move! Don’t breath!

“Oh, I think nasty little girl is hiding under the bed,” the creature said, laughing. “Yes, I do. Let’s find out?”

Then, silence. Robert waited. Waited. Expecting to hear the creature howl with glee when it found him, or grab his hair, or something... Finally, he opened his eyes, and stared right into the glassy, hate-crazed eyes of Greasily’s mother.

“Ah!” Robert skittered backward on his belly, his skirt riding up his legs onto his hips as the creature swiped at him with a twisted claw hand.

The hand missed, and Greasily's mother hissed and started crawling under the bed toward him, but she was very fat and only made it a little way before she got stuck.

"I'm sorry!" Robert said prettily. "I'm so sorry!"

"Sorry isn't good enough!"

Robert slipped out from under the bed and got to his feet, pulling down his dress, and bolting toward the door, but before Robert even got from behind the bed, Mom had wiggled her way free and jumped to her feet, blocking the door.

"Please! Let me go!"

"You do look tasty," Mom said, licking her lips, letting her eyes run over Robert's slender body. "Young and tender!" She stepped forward, reaching toward Robert.

Robert backed up against the wall, knees together, arms folded across his body, gasping for breath, and he did the only thing he could think to do—he screamed!

Mom grimaced and rushed forward. "I'll shut you up but good!"

But, just as she was about to grab him, Robert saw a miniaturized werewolf scamper into the room, and Robert threw himself onto the bed, away from Mom, who suddenly found a werewolf on her back, his claws locked

around her jowly neck.

Robert rolled away and headed toward the door, but as soon as he reached the door he saw two more werewolves squatting there, waiting for him. In a panic, Robert spun. There werewolf had pushed Mom down on the bed and was choking the life out of her. Robert screamed again and ran into the only open door her saw—the closet! It was dark and musty, and packed full of all manner of clothes... coats and furs and pants and jackets.. and Robert just kept pushing his way through, further and further back until he suddenly stumbled free of the clothes and plopped on his butt, finding himself in large room with big, lead glass windows through which poured cool moonlight!

He looked back and saw only a mirror, looked around stunned and saw a pink, canopy bed, little tables and chairs, dolls... a little girl's room. And then, the tousled little head of the girl herself popped up on the bed, and she looked at Robert with her big, wide eyes and said, "Are you a fairy?"

"Me?"

"Who else?"

"Oh. Um, no."

"Then what are you?"

What am I? Robert thought. Good question. "I'm... well, I'm a princess."

“What?” The girl crawled to the edge of her bed to a closer look. “A real life princess?”

“Yes,” Robert said, getting unsteadily to his feet, straightening his dress.

The little girl bounded from the bed, and Robert found himself staring up at her. He’d forgotten how he’d been shrunk, and so the little three foot tall girl now towered over him. “How did you get here?” She said, poking him.

“Ow!” Robert said, stumbling backward. “Please don’t poke me!”

“But how did you get here?”

“Well, some werewolves were chasing me, and then a gnome captured me, and his mom wanted to eat me, so then I think when I ran away I fell through your mirror.”

“A werewolf?”

“Yeah. He wants to marry me.”

“Why are you so tiny?”

“I put on this magic hat, and I don’t even know, really.”

Impulsively, the little girl grabbed Robert and picked him up off his feet. “Ah! Put me down!”

“You’re stinky! You need a bath!”

“Ow,” Robert squeaked, squirming helplessly. “I can walk!”

“You’re my new dolly.”

“I’m not a doll.”

“My name’s Meme. What’s your name?”

“Um, Princess Kitterina.”

“Kitterina! Just like a Kitten! I love you more and more!” And then, without warning she plopped Robert into a wooden bucket filled with water, and it was COLD!

“Ahhhhhh! It’s freezing!” Robert said.

“Shhhhh. My parents will hear you, Princess.”

The water came up to Robert’s shoulders, and he stood there looking at angrily at the girl. “Maybe I want your parents to wake up! You’re being a bad girl!”

“Haha. You’re so funny. Here!”

She plopped a lump of soap into the water, a rag. “Get clean! I’ll get you some new clothes.” And with that she skipped from the room in a cloud of giggles.

Robert stood there in the cold water, frustrated. He had to get away from this psycho child, plus what about the werewolves? They could come bounding through the mirror at any moment. So, he carefully pulled himself up onto the lip of the bucket, and then hauled himself up, getting one leg over the

edge and looking down at the steep drop to the floor. He would probably do best to hang from the outside edge and then...

“PRINCESS!”

“Oh no.”

Meme stood there glowering at Robert, her arms crossed over her chest.

“Bad Dolly! Bad Dolly!”

Robert nervously dropped back into the bucket, raising his arms in supplication. “I’m sorry, I just...”

But Meme charged forward and putting her hand on Robert’s head shoved him down under the water. Robert struggled, flailing around, pushing up with his legs, but Meme held him there, and held him there, and just when he thought he couldn’t hold his breath anymore she let him up, and he burst through the surface of the water gasping for breath, gulping it in desperately, but then Meme shoved him back down, and again he found himself in a panic, struggling under water, terrified the vicious little girl would drown him, before again she finally let him back up, and again he gasped for breath, desperate to get as much air into him as he could before she shoved him back under the water.

Meme reached down and put her hand on his head once more, and Robert squealed, “Please! Please stop!”

Meme stopped. She smiled, and patted Robert on the head. “I think someone has learned her lesson.”

“Yes,” Robert said, nodding. “Yes! I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry.”

“You mustn’t disobey your mommy.”

Robert nodded, and he saw Meme raise an eyebrow. He knew what she wanted to say, and his fear of the little girl overrode the lingering scraps of his manly pride. “Yes, Mommy,” he said.

“Now get yourself cleaned up, Princess! Then, we’ll put you in a pretty dress!”

Robert resigned himself to playing along for now. The little girl was much bigger and stronger than him, and she had shown herself to be a merciless little wretch. He decided he might as well get clean. What else could he do? Besides, he did stink, and his dress was ruined, though he dreaded to think what his latest captor would find for him to wear. He stripped off all his now miniaturized jewelry and terribly worried it would be ruined by the water, he let it sink ruefully to the bottom of the bucket, though he made a determined fist and promised himself he would leave with all his pretty bracelets and earrings and all the rest.

Maybe the werewolves will come through the mirror, he thought, getting his hands soapy and beginning to rub the soap on his body. And eat that little witch for breakfast!

Once he finished cleaning himself, he waited patiently in the bucket, not wanting to get out and bring the wrath of Meme down on himself again. Meme

reappeared shortly, but all she had was what looked like a washcloth. She picked Robert up and wrapped him in the cloth, then carried him out to her room and sat him on her dressing table. “Now time for fun!”

Robert told her the story of his adventures while she dried his hair and then brushed it out with tiny, doll-sized brushes. Then, somehow and much to Robert’s amazement, she managed to brain his long hair into pigtails, which she tied off with little pink bows. “There!” She said. “Just like my Princess Swan doll!”

“Thank you,” Robert said, smiling prettily as he touched his pigtails.

She then had him step into a slip and then put on a blouse with puffy sleeves and layers of ever larger white petticoats, over which she then pulled a frilly silken gown in pink and white that came down to his knees. White stockings and leather shoes with a shiny buckle. When he looked in the mirror, Robert saw what looked like an illustration from a 19th Century children’s book—he was dressed just like a little girl, or a little doll, though his full, curvy body filled out the dress in a provocative way that also called to mind an old school stripper.

“You are pretty, pretty, pretty!”

“Yes,” Robert said, making a small bow. “Thank you, Mommy.”

Meme then grabbed Robert and carried him carefully over to her little play area, plopping him down on a little chair at the table, where he was joined

by a couple teddy bears, a few glass-eyed dolls, and of course Meme, who immediately poured Robert a cup of tea.

“Tea Party!” Meme said, clapping, and then lay out a tray full of pastries.

“Are they real?” Robert asked, remembering how hungry and thirsty he was.

“Of course! Help yourself.”

Robert watched as Meme picked her teacup up with a dainty finger extended, and he did the same. Meme then began to regale him with her own wild tales of witches and vampires, while he smiled and ate the sweet, delicious pastries, nodding and giggling when it seemed appropriate.

Maybe this is it, Robert thought. Maybe I am going to be just stuck here for the rest of my life, having tea parties and eating crumpets or whatever these things are. He had no idea what to do, where to go. How would he ever get back to normal size? Get, goodness, the Duke, to marry him? Did he even want to?

But then he thought of Kate, and of course he had to find a way, some way, to get back to her, to get back to himself, to be her father.

Oh, Daddy, Kate said.

Kate!

I'm in tears on my side.

Where have you been?

I fell asleep. I'm sorry. I see a missed out on some action. Cute outfit.

Oh, God, he said. She made me wear it.

So, am I right in deducing that you have gone from being a werewolf's fiancé to a little girl's toy?

Something like that. The thing is...

Hold on. I'll just flip back a few pages and read it. It'll be easier.

Okay. Okay. Well, the thing is this, it may seem...

Just be a good girl and sit there quietly for a minute, okay?

Okay, Robert said, smiling and putting his hands in his lap, nodding as Meme rattled on and on.

Hmmmn. Okay. Oh. Wow. Greasily.... Greasily... and then, yeah. Now let me ready ahead a little and see how to get you out of this.

Okay.

Let's see... Oh no! Oh my God. No. No.

What is it?

I can't... it's too terrible.

What?

The book has locked, Kitten.

Locked?

It can't be changed. It says, poor Robert made one mistake too many, and he lived out the last of his days trapped in a teen-girl fantasy.

Trapped? But it can't be? I can still get back to regular size, get married...

No. No. Oh my God, I am so sorry... you're Kitterina now. Forever.

Oh my God, Robert said, feeling a growing sense of deadness fill him. I can't believe... Kate, I am so sorry... what's that?

He'd heard her snort. Then, she burst out laughing.

Not funny!

You should have seen your face!

That's not cool, Robert said. Not cool at all!

One day you'll laugh about it!

Go away!

Okay.

No! Don't! Tell me how to get away from this crazy little girl!

Okay. So, in about one second...

Meme yawned and stretched. "I'm tired," she said. She picked Robert up

and tossed him onto her bed, then climbed up and got under the covers. “Time to sleep, Dolly.”

Just play along.

“Yes, Mommy,” Robert said, laying down next to Meme.

Mommy?

It’s just something I have to do.

Yeah. Okay. Well, now just wait a couple of minutes, and once she is asleep, we’ll get you out of there and on your way from being a little dolly to a big dolly.

Ugh!

Meme fell asleep. Robert carefully crept away from her, made his way to the foot of the bed and then lowered himself down to the floor.

Okay. Now, go over and grab the teaspoon that fell on the floor under the table. Robert walked over and found the teaspoon. It was about half as tall as him, but when he tried to lift it, he strained prettily and then dropped it. Too heavy!

Your arms are weak, but your legs strong, Daddy.

What?

Cradle it with our arms and lift with your legs.

He did as she said and managed to lift the spoon, then at Kate’s direction

carried it over to the bedroom, fitting it into the small space between the door and the frame. Now, use it as a lever to pry open the door.

Okay! Robert said, tossing his pigtails back and grabbing the spoon.

Use your legs, Daddy. Girls have strong legs.

Okay. Robert wrapped his slender arms around the cold metal spoon, squatted low and then pushed with all the strength in his long legs. The door spread slightly open, and Robert smiled. I did it!

Yes. Good girl! Now, some more.

He once again braced himself and pushed, and the door spread open more, wide enough that the spoon slipped free and Robert plopped backwards on his butt, his legs spread out before him. Yes! I can fit through now.

And so can the cat.

Cat?

Robert heard a soft purr, looked up and saw a black cat with big, yellow eyes stick its head into the room, look right at him and hiss, barring its fangs. Robert screamed and jumped back, and the cat slipped into the room, arching its back, the hair standing up.

Run, Daddy! Run.

Robert spun around and ran, his arms waving girlishly.

Toward the mirror!

Why?

Do it!

So Robert scampered toward the mirror as fast as he could, the buckles on his little shoes flashing as Meme woke and rubbed her eyes, and the cat pursued Robert.

Robert ran up to the mirror, spun, his pig tails flying, and then with his back to the mirror he reached back and put his little palms against the cold glass, his knees together. The cat grinned down at him, and Robert stood there, paralyzed with fear. The cat reached toward Robert with one white, fuzzy paw, and its claws shot out. Robert screamed again, but before he could even think to run or move, he found himself shoved from behind and he tumbled to the ground, landing on his hip and looking in surprise as three tiny werewolves burst from the mirror and immediately attacked the cat, one leaping on his paw and biting, while another grabbed his second foreleg and a third leapt onto his head.

"Mr. Fuzzles!" Meme screamed as the cat whined and the werewolves howled in tiny little, puppy voices.

Now. Daddy! Run back through the mirror!

Robert got to his feet and tossing back his pigtails, he bolted for the mirror.

"Oh, no you don't!" Meme yelled, but just before she could grab Robert he plunged through the mirror and tumbled forward, falling onto his butt and

finding himself once again in the gnome's bedroom.

Robert sat there for a moment catching his breath. Goodness, he said. That was quite an... such a... I'm speechless!

Haha. You should see yourself, Kate said. You look ridiculous in that dress.

Imagine how I feel.

Yeah. Well, you can catch your breath for a moment, missy, but then it's time to get a move on. We need to get you back to regular size and back to the palace.

Yes. Can I just use the hat again?

Won't work.

The book says so?

Yes. But, now let me read ahead a little bit.

Robert had gotten to his feet and saw the bloody corpse of Mom on the bed, and he gasped his clasped his hands in front of his chest. How awful! Carefully making sure not to get any blood on his pretty shoes, he ran from the room.

You really are becoming quite a girly girl, Kate said.

It's just so gross, Robert said, catching a glimpse of Greasily, averting his eyes and quickly running from the room and up the stairs, making it to the top

and then pensively peeking out the door before daintily making his way back into the clearing where it had all started. He carefully lifted the edge of the hat and ducked under, letting it fall and standing there in the dark for a moment.

Told you.

I had to try at least.

I know. But if you would just listen to me we could get things moving along a lot faster.

I am listening to you!

Okay, well... oh my God!

What!

Oh, nothing. It's just the werewolves...

Robert, who'd been about to climb out from under the hat, stopped.
They're back?

No. No. Meme caught them, and she's putting bows in their hair like little poodles, and then making them wear little girl party dresses from her dolls. They look so cute!

Poor guys, Robert said, climbing out from under the hat, looking down at his own little girl party dress. Meme is wicked!

Kate didn't say anything.

So what now? Robert said, feeling anxious standing out in the clearing

again. The moon had continued its journey, and he judge only a few hours remained until dawn.

There's a magic pool. Go back up this path. Watch very closely. A small trail on your left will appear in a little bit.

I didn't see any trail before.

It probably wasn't there. Remember, the book keeps re-writing itself.

Okay, Robert said, making his way down the trail, carefully avoiding any brambles that might mar his shiny silk skirt. Oh no! He said, stopping and turning back.

What?

My jewelry! I left it all in Meme's bucket!

Leave it!

I can't! Robert said, walking back the way he'd come. It's so pretty!

No. You can't. You'll spend the rest of your life a little girl's doll if you go back there!

But I want it! Can't we find a way!

Young lady, listen to me. You turn yourself around and march right back to the little path like I told you.

You can't make me!

No, but I think we can both agree that when you listen to me things go better, right?

No.

Are you or are you not now the size of a doll, and are you or are you not wearing a party dress and thinking about risking everything to go and get some jewelry that doesn't even really exist?

Fine! Robert said, turning and marching back the way Kate had told him to go.

You're such a silly girl!

Don't talk to me! Robert said.

Okay. Have it your way. But you do realize you're acting like a child.

I can't help the way I feel!

Robert walked for a time, found the little path and made his way up, up, up until he reached the top of the hill and found a silvery pool, glimmering in the moonlight. It's so pretty! Robert said, approaching the pool.

As he approached, the water shimmered, and a slender female emerged. Nude, she had silvery grey eyes and alabaster skin, a delicate, winsome frame, and small white breasts with little pink nipples, plus pointy little elfin ears that were to die for.

"I'm Naomi," the girl said. "Who are you?"

"I'm... Princess Kitterina," Robert answered.

Naomi looked Robert up and down, just the same way he'd gotten used to men looking him over, and he could tell Naomi was mentally undressing him. When she finished, Naomi met his eyes and licked her lips. "You're very beautiful."

Robert crossed his arms over his breasts, blushing and stammered, "Thank you. You're, um, super-pretty, too."

She wants to have sex with you, Kate said.

Kate!

Shake your boobs!

What?

Shake your boobs! Let her know you're interested.

I'm not!

Naomi beckoned with one of her slender white arms. "Come here," she said. "I want get a closer look at you."

You need her to make you tall again.

No.

Yes!

Robert stepped nervously forward, fanning himself. "It's so hot," he

said.

"Maybe you should take a swim?" Naomi said, putting a hand to Robert's soft cheek. Robert covered her hand with his own and smiled.

"That might be... fun?" Do I really have to do this.

Yes, Kate said, her voice hoarse.

Robert found himself getting lost in Naomi's gorgeous eyes, and he was barely even aware when she slipped around behind him and began to undo the buttons on his dress. As she slid it off his shoulders, she kissed him on the neck, and then on his bare shoulder, and then while continue to unbutton his dress, she started nibbling at Robert's earlobe, teasing it with her tongue. Robert giggled, closing his eyes, giving himself over to Naomi, who now pushed his dress down past his hips and let it fall to pool on the ground at Robert's feet.

"You're wearing so many layers," she said, turning Robert to face her, kissing him on the lips while she slid the delicate silk straps of his slip from his slender shoulders. Robert felt his slip drop, his breasts naked and exposed to the air, and Naomi quickly cupped one and lifted it, showering it with gentle kisses.

I can't believe I'm watching my Daddy have lezzy sex, Kate whispered.

Close your eyes, Robert said, while making soft humming noises in the world of the book. Don't look.

I can't, Kate said. I'm loving this.

Naomi had managed to get Robert completely naked, all the while caressing and sweetly tending to his body, giving him waves of sweet, feminine pleasure unlike anything he'd ever experienced. It was so much different than with the men he'd kissed, the men he'd wanted. Naomi was just as in control, but he felt connected to her in a way he'd never felt connected to anyone, a sweet, beautiful connection, like a gossamer web that surrounded them both, and he mirrored her actions, cupping and kissing her breast, her belly, gently cupping her behind and squeezing, even as she did the same for him, their soft breasts pressing together as they waded into the pool, kissing and giggling, sighing with passion and love.

"You've been put under a spell!" Naomi said.

"Yes."

"Let me help you with that." She used her fingers and her tongue, and Robert gasped in ecstasy as multiple orgasms popped and shot through his body like electric current, and he felt himself growing, growing, growing back into a full-sized girl, and Naomi growing with him, cradling him gently as he wept in the afterglow, carrying him to the edge of the pond and staring down into his eyes, gently caressing his cheek.

"I love you so much," Robert whispered.

"I love you, too," Naomi said, tracing her finger between Robert's breasts.

"I want to do for you... what you did for me," Robert said. "I want to please you."

Naomi nodded and kissed him. "I know," she said. "You're a sweet girl."

And then she lay back, and Robert kissed her and brought her to paradise, and as Naomi climaxed, she cried out and said, "I'll always remember you," and then she seemed to burst into a thousand droplets of water and vanish back into the spring.

No, Robert said, his slender white arms now clutching only the empty air. What happened?

She's gone, Daddy.

But why? Why? He sank to his knees, naked and unashamed, covering his face with his soft little hands.

Kate sounded like she was weeping as well, and then she said, here's what the book says: the water sprite Naomi would be the first and only girl Princess Kitterina ever loved, and thought people will say that sort of thing is just a phase some girls go through, and though the princess would become a dutiful wife and loving mother, she would always cherish your night with Naomi, who truly taught her how to love and be loved as a woman.

Get me out of here, Robert said, wiping away his tears. This place is too painful.

Okay, Kate said. But you might want to get dressed first.

Robert stood, his breasts swaying. He no longer felt as self-conscious about his body, his nudity, in fact he felt proud now to be a beautiful young woman. And without thinking much of why that had changed or what it might mean, he slipped back into his dress, buckled on his pretty shoes and said, "What next?"

"They show up again," Kate said.

"Who?" Robert asked, tugging at the lace sleeves of his pretty white gloves.

"We have you now!" He heard a piping little voice shout, and three werewolves leapt from the brush. They were still tiny, dressed in little girl's party dresses, and with bows on top of their heads. The werewolves made little growling sounds, sounds like puppies might make trying to sound fierce, and they advanced menacingly on Robert, their tiny little paws raking the air.

Robert put his hands to his cheeks and cried, "They're so cute!" And then he giggled.

The werewolves paused, looked at each other uncertainly, and then one of them howled at the moon, or tried to. All that came out was a squeak.

Robert laughed some more and grabbed two of the little werewolves, picking them up and laughing, while the third scampered clear. "You're silly," Robert said, plucking at the werewolf's skirt. "Do you know how ridiculous you

look right now?”

“Put me down!” The werewolf squeaked. “Put me down!”

Instead, Robert tossed the hapless little creature in the air, making him scream, and then caught him, tossing him again.

The werewolf in his other hand bit him, but again the creature was so small and weak now it felt more like a baby sucking on his skin than anything remotely painful, so Robert tossed the second werewolf in the air and then began to juggle the two of them, laughing as they squealed in terror.

Daddy, Kate said. Don't be mean.

I'm not, Robert said. They're just so cute.

Just because you have the power to humiliate them doesn't mean you should.

I'm not.

Yes, you are.

Robert stopped. Put the little creatures down, watched as they crawled quickly away in terror, and he realized Kate was right. “I'm sorry,” he said prettily.

“Run!” One of them screamed, pointing up at Kate. “Run!”

“No,” Robert said. “I really am sorry!”

But then Robert heard a high-pitched, piercing wail like a bird of prey

that caused him to jump. Looking up he saw a huge, eagle-like creature fly across the moon, glimpsed an armored figure riding on its back brandishing a flaming sword, and then he saw another, and another, a whole flock of immense birds swirling across the sky, and diving right. Toward. Him.

Robert screamed and started to run, but felt the whoosh of wind, heard the howl of the bird and then felt the creature's talon circle his waist and lift him screaming from the ground. "Help!" Robert screamed. "Help!"

The bird flapped its mighty wings and rapidly rose into the sky, higher and higher, until the whole world looked small and toy-like, and Robert's brief struggles to be free changed to terror that the creature would drop him, and he found himself clinging to its smooth, hard talons in terror.

What now? Robert screamed to Kate.

Just relax and enjoy the ride. He's taking you to see the Withered Witch.

And what am I supposed to do now? How do I get out of this? I'm TIRED of being a PRINCESS!!!! It's not FUN!

Calm down, Daddy.

"Calm? Down?!! I'm one million miles in the air and I'm going to die!!!!"

You're having a hissy.

A HISSY!!!! A HISSYYYYYYYYY!!!!

Stop it, or I'll just leave you to figure this out on your own right now, young lady!

Robert started to respond, bit his lower lip and huffed. UGH!!!!

The eagle took a big turn, and Robert found himself being carried along the shore line of an immense, churning ocean, its crashing waves silver in the moonlight. The air was cool and smelled of the ocean, and it tossed his long braids and caused his dress to whip around his knees. It was beautiful, and strangely calming, and Robert saw a jagged black tower in the distance, and it was gorgeous and alluring in the moonlight.

That's her tower, Kate said.

What does the witch want?

To make you ugly.

What?!

She hates you because you're young and pretty, and so she wants to put a spell on you that will make you look all old and ugly and smell gross!

Robert felt a deep, visceral fear at the thought, picturing his face, his new face in the mirror, with his perfect white skin, full lips and bright, green eyes. No, he whispered. No.

Yes.

Nothing could be so terrible, he thought. I'd rather die.

Spoken like a true princess.

It's just, well, how will ever get the duke to marry me if I'm not pretty?
I won't have any friends. No one will want me at their parties.

Daddy...

I have to be pretty, Robert said. I have to be pretty! It's the most important thing!

Just then, the bird swooped down to the tower roof and set Robert gently down. He lay on his side, his hip in the air, as the armored figure leapt from the eagle's back and with a whistle sent it flying off into the night.

Robert lay there, one white-gloved hand raised defensively, the other on his cheek, and the armored figure stood, looking down at him, his flaming sword raised above his head, casting the whole tower roof in flickering crimson light.

Be as sweet as you can be, father. Get him to like you—he already has a crush on you.

Really!

Yes.

“Don't hurt me,” Robert said in a soft, breathy, high-pitched voice.

“Milady!” The figure said, sheathing his sword. He then pulled off his helmet, revealing the furry whiskered face of a tabby cat. “I would never

willingly harm you, Princess Kitterina.” He bowed deeply, then offered his steel gauntleted hand to Robert.

Robert reached out pensively, putting his soft little hand into the Cat Knight’s, and allowed the knight to help him to his feet. Pretending to stumble, Robert let himself fall against the Cat Knight’s body and felt the other put a protective arm around his slender waist, holding him up. “What’s your name?” Robert asked, using the same soft, high-pitched little voice.

“I am Sir Constant Purrpuse.”

“My pleasure to meet you, Sir Purrpuse,” Robert said, giving his whiskers a playful flick. “You’re so handsome!”

“To hear it from a girl of such perfect beauty is a moment I will cherish, I mean, your sweet words are a... well, I am not a poet, milady.”

Robert giggled and let his hand slip around Purrpuse’ head, scratching his furry neck. “Why did you bring me here?”

“I am commanded to do so,” Purrpuse said, his face growing dark.

“By who?” Robert said.

“The Withered Witch,” Purrpuse said, looking away.

“The Withered Witch!” Robert gasped and let his mouth drop open, his eyes go wide. “Oh no! Please, don’t take me to her!”

“I must,” Purrpuse said, the arm around Robert’s waist tightening.

“No! Please!” Robert said.

“I’m sorry,” Purrpurr whispered, dragging Robert towards the tower door. “I have no choice.”

Struggle, Kate said, but not too much.

Why?

Just do it if you want to keep your pretty face.

Okay!

Good girl!

Robert squirmed and struggled a little, making soft little noises of protestation as Purrpurr took him through the door and down, down, down into the tower. “Let me go!”

“I’m so sorry, Princess.”

Finally, Robert found himself dragged into a large, gloomy throne room. A black throne rose from the dais, like a jagged shard of glass, and behind it five narrow windows of green, stained glass stretched from floor to ceiling. Cauldrons stood around the periphery of the throne, great emerald fires dancing wickedly, and Withered Witch herself sat hunched over on her throne, wearing a conical hat, her face hidden behind a black veil, but the hand that held her twisted, black staff was hard and covered in ugly liver spots.

"On your knees," the witch hissed, her voice coarse and cold.

Robert threw his shoulders back and lifted his little nose into the air. "I am Princess Kitterina," he said. "And I kneel before no one."

"Purrpose?" The Withered Witch said.

"I'm sorry, Milady," he said, shoving Robert causing him to stumble forward and fall to his knees.

"Ow!" Kate? This doesn't seem to be working.

Trust me, Kitten.

"Bring in the Gown of Gloom," The Withered Witch said.

A gong sounded somewhere in the tower, and a grinding noise as a large, stone door slid open and a group of women entered, dressed in long, drab robes, their heads covered, faces hidden behind veils that revealed only their eyes. They carried a black gown that seemed almost like a hole in space, absorbing all the light around it. The Gown of Gloom.

Robert felt terror fill him at the sight of the Gown, so cold and dark and ugly, and he made a small yelping sound and started to scurry away, but Purrpose grabbed him by the arms and held him down.

"Help me!" Robert said. "Free me!"

"I can't," Purrpose said.

The Withered Witch chuckled as she rose stiffly from the throne and advanced toward Robert. "The Gown of Gloom will drain from you all your

girlish vigor and vinegar," she said. "Your beauty. It will make you old and tired and sad, ugly and unloved."

"Why?" Robert said, looking up at the witch, his eyes filling with tears.

"Because I loved your father once, little girl, and he spurned me, and he took from me everything I ever loved, and now I will take the same from him."

"No," Robert whispered. "Please. I don't want to be old and.... ugly."

"We all get old and ugly, my dear. You will just do it alone."

"No...."

"Put the Gown on Her," The Withered Witch said, then hitting Purrrpose with her staff, she said, "Step Away."

"Please," Robert said, looking back at Purrrpose. "Don't let her do this."

"I have to," he said, crying now, too. "She has my wife and son."

"Oh no," Robert said, and then he covered his face and said, "Okay, then. At least I know I'll be helping you save your family."

"How touching!" The Withered Witch said.

Robert felt the Gown being laid over his shoulders. Instantly, he felt a chill pass through his body, a deep, deep cold, like the coldest night of winter, and looking down he saw his hand start to turn bony, liver spots appearing on his smooth, white skin.

"Elaka! Elaka! Nozer! Elaka! Elaka Cree!" The Witch cried, and the

cold began to seep deeper into Robert, and he felt all the joy and happiness he would ever had fading, fading, his vision began to get blurry, and dim.

"With these words, I do bind you forever in..."

"No!" Sir Purrrpose yelled, throwing himself at the Witch, bringing his flaming sword crashing against her hunched back.

"Fool!" The Witch answered, tumbling backward, but somehow shielded from the blow. She raised her hands and hurled balls of flickering fire at Sir Purrrpose, sending him flying through the air and crashing into the far wall.

At that moment, Robert called on his last bit of strength and threw off the gown, diving at the Withered Witch's feet, knocking her backward and causing her staff to fly out of her hand.

The Witch crouched, animal like, hissing at Robert, her teeth yellow and black, and she screamed, "I'll gouge your eyes out you little slut!"

Robert tried to stand, but he was still too weak, and he found himself sitting there, helpless, as the old witch crept toward him.

"Die, Witch Woman!" Duke Garreth Blaise cried from a upper-balcony, grabbing a rope he swing down, plunging a lance right into the Withered Witch's side, and killing her instantly. Without a moment's hesitation, he picked Robert up, cradling him in his arms, and Robert, the warmth and youth returning to his soft, white body, threw his arms around Garreth's neck and said, "You saved me!"

And then he felt chills pass through his body as Garreth kissed him, and he felt safe and protected and knew Garreth would be a good husband and a wonderful father to their children. Garreth immediately set Robert on his feet and dropped to one knee.

Oh my God, Robert thought, blushing. Is he about to?

Yes.

"Princess Kitterina," Garreth said, gazing up into Robert's eyes. "You are the most beautiful and perfect girl in all the kingdom, and I have loved you since the first time I heard your laugh, saw your smile. I will fight for you, protect you, cherish you and care for you always. I would willingly die for you, because without you life would not be worth living. Will you be my bride?"

"Yes," Robert said, crying. "Yes! Yes!"

"Hooray!" Sir Purrpose shouted, his fur slightly singed but otherwise no worse for the wear. Just then, Sir Purrpose's wife and son came running into the throne room, throwing their arms around their father. Robert and Garreth cheered and laughed, and then they kissed again, and Robert realized that he did love Garreth, and he would always love him and be his wife and the mother to his children. Robert sighed, there in Garreth's arms, and he wished the moment could last forever. I'm in love, he thought with a sigh. In love!

And then Robert, back in the real world, opened his eyes, and found

himself on the couch, his neck stiff, and he sat up, and Kate was there, looking at him.

"Kate!" He said. "Oh my God."

"Daddy," she answered. "I'm so glad you're safe."

They hugged and wept, apologized for everything they'd ever said or done that hurt the other, cried and hugged some more, and finally, exhausted, they each headed off to bed. "Sleep tight, Daddy," Kate said.

"Call me Kitten?" Robert answered.

Kate laughed.

Robert walked into the bathroom and looked in the mirror, and he immediately felt shocked and terrified. "This isn't my face."

He had curly black hair, big, green eyes, and perfect white skin.

But this thing in the mirror was a man. An old man. With wrinkles.

No, he thought. No. The Gown of Gloom worked. But then, no. That's not right. I am a man. Kate's father.

I'm tired, he thought. Confused. Let me sleep, and I'll make sense of it all when I've had a good night's rest. And so he went into his bedroom, slipped into one of his wife's nighties, and slept, and in his dreams he was at his wedding to Duke Garreth, and they were dancing, and Robert was a happy princess.

One Month Later

Robert, one arm full of a burlap bag full of groceries, unlocked the front door, pushed it open with his foot and hopped into the living room, setting the bag down on the living room table.

“Hey, Kitten,” Kate said, pausing the television and looking up.

“Hey, girl” Robert said, kicking off his shoes and wandering over to join his daughter on the couch. He collapsed into it with a sigh.

“Long day?”

“Busy,” he said, blowing his bangs out of his eyes. “On my feet non-stop.” Then, he tucked his legs under himself and turned sideways on the couch, taking Kate’s hand. “How was your day?”

“Fine,” Kate said. “Nothing happened really. It was just boring school.”

“But what about Jill and Sarah? Are they still mad at you?”

“Oh,” Kate said. “Let me tell you about that!”

The two chatted for a time, as had become their regular ritual, Robert nodding and smiling, looking right into his daughter’s eyes, gently touching her on the shoulder or giving her hand a squeeze. Then, when she’d finished telling him about her day, he glanced at the clock and said, “Oh no!”

“What is it?”

“I have to get ready for my date!”

He bounded off the couch. “Can you put the groceries away? She’ll be here in like, one second!”

Kate shook her head as she watched her father scurry off to get ready. It was good to see him so excited, so in love. He’d been sad for such a long time after Mom had died, and now he was finally starting a whole new life, and with Kate herself ready to head off to college, she had been worried about him all alone.

“Can I borrow your jeans?” Robert called from the back of the house.

“Which ones?”

“The cute ones?”

“Okay.”

Kate started putting the groceries away while Robert gave her a running commentary on his preparations. “My hair! This humidity is making me into a frizz monster! “ Or, “I can’t find a single top she hasn’t seen me wear before! Can I borrow one of yours?”

Kate shot back supportive comments or advice. “Your hair looks amazing! What about your green silk shirt? Where are you going, anyway?”

“Sera Bella.”

“Sera Bella? On a Thursday? Isn’t that more a weekend romance kind of place?”

“Yeah! Frankie wanted to do something special because we’ve been so busy at work lately.”

“Well, I guess that’s one perk of working for your boss.”

“She’s not my boss! We’re partners!”

Kate rolled her eyes, but bit her tongue. Robert still clung to a few scraps of his old, masculine self, including a refusal to admit that he now worked as his girlfriend’s secretary. She’d talked him into quitting his old job and joining her firm as a partner, but Robert spent his time sitting at a little desk outside Frankie’s office, answering the phone, meeting clients, managing the database and basically just scurrying around the office doing whatever needed to be done. It might have bothered Kate, but he’d become such a sweetheart since his time in the book that he was well suited to the job, and Frankie treated him really well.

As Kate grabbed some things and got ready to cook up some dinner, Robert walked into the room, put a hand on his hip and said, “Well?”

Kate looked him over, still marveling at how much he’d changed. He’d grown his hair out to almost shoulder length and dyed it black, and constantly slept in curlers, so he now had a full head of glossy curls and teased bangs that came down to his slender eyebrows. He’d begun to wear bright, green emerald contact lenses, and encouraged by Frankie, he’d even had nose done, turning it into a tiny little upturned button nose. The total effect was that he now looked

like a young woman. His crash diet and an exercise routine heavy on cardio and yoga with no weight training at all had left him dangerously skinny, with a slender, girlish frame, and when he squeezed himself into Kate's jeans, which were designed to help shape a young woman's body, they created a slightly curvy profile for his hips and lifted and rounded his posterior in a girlish manner.

He'd brought Katarina's obsession with jewelry back with him as well, and he had slender, sparkly bracelets on one wrist and a slender, very feminine watch with a narrow leather strap on the other, as well as a few silver and gold necklaces and sparkling diamond earrings. The jeans left his ankles exposed, and Kate glanced down to see he also had an anklet on one leg, and a pair of deck shoes to complete the outfit.

"Oh my God," Kate said, rushing over to give her Daddy a hug. "You look amazing!"

"Really?"

"Frankie is going to freak when she sees you!"

"I'm a little worried about this belt," Robert said, gingerly putting his hands on his little leather belt. "Is it too girly?"

"It's perfect," Kate said, still surprised sometimes at her father's lingering gender confusion. That he could stand there with that hair in that outfit and be worried that his belt was too girly? But, she knew from experience that what he needed most was assurance, so she just smiled and nodded and said,

“You’re the most handsome father in the world!”

“Thanks!” Robert said. Then, he turned and headed back. “I’m going to try a different pair of shoes!”

“Daddy!”

The doorbell rang. Kate went and answered, looking up at Frankie.

“Hey, squirt,” Frankie said.

“What’s up, Frank?”

The two fist bumped, and Kate led Frankie into the house, where Frankie plopped down on the couch and threw her arms over the back, her legs spread wide. She was wearing grey slacks, a blue button down shirt and a grey blazer. “How’s kicks?” She grimaced and sat forward, rubbing her knee.

“Same old same old. Did you hurt your knee?”

“Old volleyball injury,” Frankie said. “I hurt it in the National Championship game, but...”

“... didn’t tell the coach because you were afraid he’d put you on the bench?”

Frankie laughed. “Guess I told you that story before?”

“A couple times,” Kate said with a giggle.

Frankie stood over six feet tall, with the long, lanky tone body of a one-time all-American volleyball star for UCLA. She was an Amazon, and when she

was around, Kate felt herself get all girly and giggly. It had been something of a miracle that Robert had met her shortly after his experience in the book. He'd been busily turning himself into Princess Kitterina, which had created a lot of tension at his old job, and Frankie had been struggling to deal with her own issues, namely that she liked men, but also pretty much needed to be the man in any relationship.

Robert was just the kind of man she's been looking for, and she'd been his prince, bringing him in to work at her consulting business, encouraging him along his path to femininity, and even becoming fast friends with his daughter, Kate.

"Your Daddy is something special," Frankie said.

"Yes."

"And he loves you more than anything."

"Oh..." Kate said, touched. "I know."

"You about ready?" Frankie called.

"Just a minute?" Robert sing-songed back.

Frankie stood up and approached Kate conspiratorially. "Kate, I have something very important to ask you."

"What?"

"How would you feel about me asking your dad to marry me?"

“Marry? Are you asking for my permission to take my father as your bride?” Kate said with a wink.

“Yes, I am, Mr. Kate.”

“Of course,” Kate said, giving Frankie a hug. “I would love it.”

And then they both laughed with relief.

“What are you two laughing about?” Robert said.

“Frankie was just telling me about your first date,” Kate said, falling back on an old story they shared all the time.

“Oh!” Robert said. “When I got lost on my way to the bathroom and had to call her to come and help me?”

“Yes!”

And they all laughed together.

“I’m surprised you ever went out with me again! I must have seemed like such an airhead.”

“It’s what made start falling in love with you.”

“Oh,” Robert said softly, reaching up and throwing his arms around Frankie’s shoulders., tilting his head back and accepting a kiss. “I love you, too.”

So sweet, Kate thought, watching, and then Frankie put her arm around Kitten’ waist and led him out the door.

Kate missed her old dad sometimes. But having a new sister was fun, too. They had prayed to understand each other better, and though neither one had expected the prayer to be answered quite the way it had come to pass, they were both extremely happy with the result.

Kate looked at their last family picture, the last one they'd taken when her mother still lived. She, her brother, her father and her mom. She reached out and touched the image of her mother, a single tear falling from her eye and rolling down her cheek. I miss you, Mom, she said. I miss you every day, but I know you're up there watching out for me and Kitten, Robbie Jr, and we'll all be together again one day.

But in the meantime, Daddy was a princess, she'd be off to college soon, and life went on, much as it always had, in the town of Graceville.