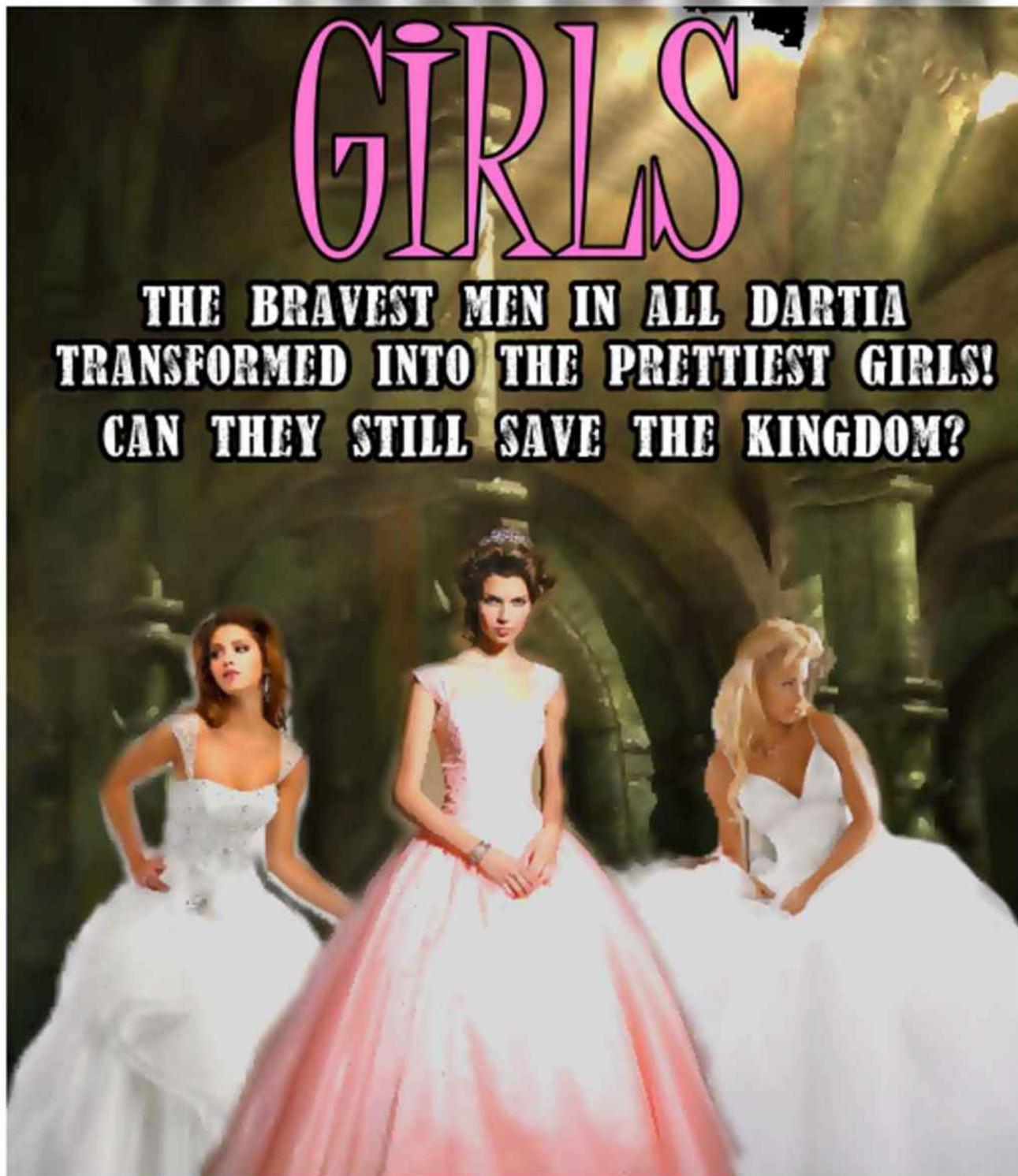


WARRIOR

GIRLS

**THE BRAVEST MEN IN ALL DARTIA
TRANSFORMED INTO THE PRETTIEST GIRLS!
CAN THEY STILL SAVE THE KINGDOM?**



Surrender

Media

The Warrior Girls

their story as recorded by the court poet of ancient Dartia

Cooper

It was sudden, the spell. Merlynn and Stasha saw the flash and felt their own magic defenses deflect its magic, and by the time they turned to see what had happened to the Warrior Gentleman it has already worked its magic: the three of them stood there, mouths open, their armor and weapons gone, replaced by the thin, silken gowns and flashing jewelry of women.

“Madness,” Hector uttered through crimson lips, pushing back the golden locks that now flowed over his shoulders.

“My weapons,” Aggam said, plucking at the thin material of his gown. “My armor.”

“This can’t be,” Fulldur whispered, his own attention drawn to the delicate bracelets that now shimmered at his wrists, his masses of red hair.

“Back down the hall” Merlynn said ushering the shaken away, “Back.” She glanced at Stasha, and the other mage remained behind, murmuring spells of her own. The men moved slowly and awkwardly in their dresses and dainty slippers.

Back down the hall, the three men huddled close together, looking down at themselves and at each other, shocked and embarrassed, as much to find themselves bereft of their fearsome weapons and armor as to the changed nature of their clothing. Their bodies were largely unchanged. They were still tall and broad of shoulder, their chests and arms still thick with sinewed muscle as hard as steel, but their complexions had all turned maidenly fair, and their bodies were now hairless. Each had a full head of flowing hair—one golden, one red and one brown, and they were thin silk gowns, slender belts of silver circling their waists and flashing jewels at their wrists, dainty

little jewels in their ears. Their faces were painted in the soft colors of maidens. Thin little straps hung over their bare shoulders.

“A trap,” Merlynn said. “Lain by the enemy.”

“We’ve lost everything,” Aggam said, his eyes forlorn.

Stasha came quietly into the room, eyeing both the men and Merlynn with concern. “The spell is gone now, once triggered. There is no more magic there.”

“Can you undue this magic?” Hector asked.

Merlynn shook her head, and Stasha said, “It is beyond my knowledge as well.”

“Then we must continue,” Merlynn said. “We have very little time.”

“Continue?” Hector said. “Like this? We must return to the city, rearm ourselves.”

“There is no time,” Stasha said. “You know that. We must get to the Great Altar and summon The One Hero.”

“We can’t go into battle like this,” Aggam said. “Weaponless.”

“You won’t go into battle like—that,” Merlynn answered. “Stasha and I will continue the quest alone.”

“And leave us here? Defenseless?” Aggam said, his voice rising in pitch. The other two men glanced at Aggam.

“Let us follow behind,” Fulldur said. “We are still warriors. Maybe we will find some weapons along the way.”

“Yes,” Hector agreed. “We are not yet useless.”

“Of course,” Merlynn said.

The three men slipped out of their high-heeled slippers, preparing to follow the two female mages, but after only a few steps each stopped. “My feet have been made soft,” Fulldur objected. “I can’t walk.”

“Mine as well,” Hector said, irritated.

“You will slow us down,” Stasha said.

“You can’t leave us behind,” Aggam hissed, slipping back into his heels. “Not like this.” He pushed his long hair back from his face.

“We will get used to walking in these shoes,” Hector said, leaning on a wall as he slipped back into his own. “In time.”

Stasha gasped with irritation. “Fine. Fine. But do your best to hurry.”

Stasha and Merlynn set off, doing their best to slow their pace, as the three men teetered along behind, their arms out awkwardly from their sides as they hurried in their heels. There was no time to think about the strange spell and what it might mean, no time to think further about their condition. Before long, the party came upon an ancient stair that led crookedly down into the darkness. “This stair is mentioned on the map,” Stasha said. “It leads to the guardian’s crypt.”

“You three stay here,” Merlynn said. “We will go and face the undead.”

“Lend me your short sword,” Hector said without thinking. “And I will fight.” He took a quick step forward and almost lost his balance, reaching over to grasp Stash’s shoulder for support.

“You can barely walk,” Stasha answered, brushing his hand away. “Stay here.”

“Fine,” Hector said, stomping his foot in feminine frustration.

"Take this knife. Maybe it will help," Merlynn said, drawing a small knife from her belt and handing it to Folder.

The knife immediately transformed into a small silken purse.

"The spell seems to turn any weapon you touch into something... girly," Merlynn said.

Fulldur held the little purse out toward Merlynn, but she just smiled. "Keep it, sweetie," she said. "It matches your dress."

Fulldur slung the purse awkwardly over his shoulder and said, regretting the womanly words as soon as they left his pink painted lips, "Be Safe!"

The three men stared angrily as the women descended the stairs, furious and ashamed to be left behind. Finally, with a sigh, Hector said, "might as well rest."

"I am worried about them," Aggam said, lowering himself gently to the ground and slipping out of his heels with a sigh of relief.

"Me, too," Hector answered, massaging his soft foot with a sigh of relief.

"What sort of madness was in the enemy's mind when she lay this spell?" Aggam asked, tugging at one his earrings. "Why not just kill us?"

Neither of the others had an answer, but all felt an uneasy sense of feminine helplessness and vulnerability creep over him as the memory of the knife turning into a purse played in their confused little minds. They were warriors, and had always fought their way out of every problem.

And now they could not hold a weapon. Or run. Or even walk in their dresses and slippers.

Helpless!

Not one of them thought to wipe his face free of make-up, nor to remove his

dress. Nor did they wonder why the thought did not occur to them. Fulldur sat, twirling one of his bracelets nervously.

A deep, corrupted voice howled from the darkness, and the ground shook. There was a flash from somewhere below and the chill wind wafted up the stairs, sending dust swirling before it. Nervously, the men huddled together, grasping each other's hands as the twin voices of Merlynn and Stasha rose up against the voice of the undead, and they trembled as the ground shook beneath them. They could feel the forces below them, crashing back and forth, sending shockwaves through the ruins, and minutes passed into hours as they huddled in fear, their heads of long, pretty hair pressed together.

Suddenly, it was quiet. Steps could be heard upon the stair. The three men looked at one another in the darkness, not one daring to speak or move as they waited to see who—or what—came up the stair, and they sighed as one when Merlynn and then Stasha emerged, each one bloodied and battered, but still alive.

Hector's heart swelled with joy to see the women return safely from battle and he climbed to his feet. Ignoring the hurt in his soft feet, he rushed to Merlynn, threw his arms around her and kissed her on the cheek. "Thank the Fates," he said. "You're alive."

Aggam and Fulldur were right behind. Bewildered, the women suffered the men's hugs and tears, and then sank wearily to the ground as the men scurried about and tended to their wounds. The warriors knelt after and listened eagerly as the women told the story of their great battle, and not one of the three seemed at all aware of the changed nature of his behavior, but Stasha and Merlynn merely pretended not to notice, more certain than they had been as to the full nature of the enemy's spell.

Finally, the three men slept, laying in each other's arms. Merlynn and Stasha kept watch, each still wincing from the wounds they had suffered battling the Voice of the Dead. "Already," Stasha said, "they act more as common women than men."

Merlynn nodded. "It is a powerful spell, and swift. Yet I cannot guess the

enemy's mind in laying it."

Stasha shook her head. "I can't see it, either. But what does it matter now? They are useless to us now, more than useless. They are a burden."

"They are our friends and allies. We can't abandon them."

"I know. It pains me, though, to see them reduced to-- this. I once made love with Hector, and he was a man among men."

"Turn that pain against the enemy who has unmanned them. Don't take it out on them."

Stasha didn't answer, but only stared grimly at the sleeping figures. "In the morning we will have to continue on the quest. You should sleep to regain your strength."

"You sleep," Merlynn said. "I have a spell that allows my body to rest while I am awake."

Stasha did not fully believe Merlynn in this, but she was weary and slept while Merlynn kept watch through the remainder of the night. As she sat, she looked upon the men and wondered what strange plan had been in the mind of the enemy, and how the men would react when they realized the full intent of the enemy's spell.

She didn't have to wait long. In the morning the men woke to find their bodies changed. They were smaller, more slender, which might have escaped their notice the change was so minute, but each now had the budding breasts of a young girl. As they woke and found their blossoming breasts, they wept.

"What is this?" Fulldur said, crossing his bare arms across the pretty little breasts now nestled within his gown. His eyes filled with bitter tears of humiliation.

"We are becoming women," Hector said, also shyly covering his own small breasts

Aggam could not speak, but wept most bitterly of the three, as he was a farther of three strong sons, and it shamed him most to think of facing them in this changed form. The three men, still huddled together, looking up at the women in shock and embarrassment, clinging to each other.

"We must go back and find some way to undue this curse," Hector said. "We must."

"We must get to the altar," Merlynn said. "Then, we will find some magic to cure you."

"But..."

"My decision is final. Get to your feet. We move on."

"She is right," Fulldur said. And, as the other two started to object, he raised a slender white hand. "It is the way of the Warrior Gentleman. Remember? Always forward. Never back."

"Always find a way to use your limitations," Hector added, hands on his hips.

"But," Aggam said, "but, I mean... look!" He gestured down at his dress.

"Lift your skirts, gentleman," Fulldur said, "and let's proceed."

The three warriors lifted their skirts, nodded to one another and in unison, said, "Always forward. Never back."

And with their heads held high, they followed the women down the stairs and into the deeper and more dangerous depths of the dungeon.

Passing through the ruined form of the Voice of the Dead, smote upon the crypt it once slept in, the three men cringed in fear, and as they moved on and came to the next gate, they once again found themselves left behind and huddling together while the women waged war against a demon of smoke and fire.

"I would not have my sons see me reduced to this," Aggam said.

Hector took Aggam's hand in his own and squeezed it gently. "My own heart quails at the thought of my wife, The Lady Blue, looking upon me as I am now become." He glanced down at his small, soft breasts. "It shames me even to face Stasha. I was once her lover. Now, I am not even a man."

Aggam began to weep, softly, and Hector hugged him, weeping now himself. Fulldur sat nearby upon the edge of a stone table, his knees together, nervously twisting a lock of his long hair, and listening to the sounds of the battle. The fate of the world stood in the balance, and the three strongest men on the side of Unity now found themselves turning into girls.

Yet, Fulldur thought, we will fight on. Somehow. Good must win in the end. Perhaps it would be their fate to simply watch as the women saved the day, but he prided himself on always preparing and always finding a way to contribute to the fight even when wounded.

The men woke from troubled sleep to find their bodies further changed. Their hips had taken on the round shape of a young maiden's. Their breasts had continued to blossom, fuller and heavier, white and soft, swelling out prettily in their gowns. Arms, once thick and mighty as the limbs of an oak, were now soft and round as a girl's.

The women had not returned, and the Temple of the One Hero stood silent.

"What if they have fallen?" Aggam asked, dispirited but not surprised to find his voice had grown softer in the night.

"We mustn't think it," Hector said, his own voice now closer to a woman's than a man's. "We daren't."

"If they have fallen," Fulldur said in his own slightly hoarse but feminine voice, "We will fight on."

"How?" Aggam asked.

"We will find a way, or we will die trying."

They waited out the day, idling away the time braiding each other's hair, pulling it out and braiding it again, speaking rarely in their soft new voices, and now and then weeping over what they had lost, what had become of them. And then they slept, in spite of themselves, dreaming strange dreams, and whispering softly in their sleep of dragons and knights and damsels in distress.

Merlynn and Stasha woke them sometime later, and the three men leapt to their feet, crying out for joy in high pretty voices, showering the two with maidenly kisses, which the women tolerated in bemusement, not grown used themselves to the feminine natures now instilled in the once great warriors. Each looked down in surprise into the now pretty, female faces, and marveled silently at their rounded, womanly figures.

Finally, Merlynn ordered them to follow behind as they continued their journey. The men nodded, walking close together as the women led the way, and before long they came to a great door of stone, carved with ancient glyphs of magic. Merlynn and Stasha cast their spells, the ones they had been given before the quest, and the door swung open, dust wafting from the dark chamber beyond, which had not been opened in many years.

Inside was a simple stone altar, but one that resonated with ancient magic. The men sat in the corner and watched, their hearts beating excitedly, as Merlynn lay the helmet of the One Warrior upon the altar and the two women began to weave their magic. Slowly, a figure began to form upon the altar, a large man, with wide shoulders and a chest like an oaken barrel. Hector, Aggam and Fulldur rose to their feet, their maidenly hearts flutter at the sight of the great man taking form, and they felt the desire for him growing in their slender forms, though they were not yet truly women.

Slowly, slowly, the One Hero took shape, his thick golden beard hanging down to his chest, his arms and legs as the limbs of a mighty oak, and finally, he sighed, opened his eyes and said, "is it time?"

“Yes,” Merlynn said. “It is time.”

“The world is once again in peril,” Stasha said. “A great division fractures all. Only the One Hero can once again bring unity to the people.”

The One Hero stood, and lifting his helm, placed it upon his head. “I am ready,” he said. “Where is my captain? Where is the great man who would command me? I answer only to a man of great strength and courage.”

Merlynn and Stasha looked at each other at The Hero, and the purpose of the enemy began to take form in their minds. They glanced over at Aggam, Hector and Fulldur, once all great warrior and leaders of men, now standing in the corner in their long gowns, their pretty faces flush with feminine excitement, their white breasts and round hips not all the shape for great men.

“Where is my captain?” The One Hero repeated, his voice now hard with anger.

“He awaits you in at The Great Hall of the King,” Merlynn said, her own heart now sewn with doubt. “Come with us. We will take you to him.”

“Where is my captain?” The One Hero now bellowed, his great voice shaking the hall.

Hector stepped forward nervously, his hands clutched before him, and summoning all the courage that was left in him said, “I am Hector. I... I will command you.”

“You?” The One Hero answered. “You are a woman.”

Though the words shamed him, Hector swallowed and stepped closer still, looking up at The One Hero with wonder and fear, trying his best to look the great man in the eye. “A curse was lain upon me, true, which has trapped me in this womanly shape and replaced my fearsome arms and weapons with this dainty trappings of a woman. But, I have the heart still of a warrior, and I ...” he was about to say “command you” but the stern eyes of the great hero fell from Hector’s bright eyes, slowly down along his slender neck and

smooth shoulders, to the fullness of his womanly breasts and hips, and he felt himself grow hot, his courage failed him, and he looked away in girlish modesty and manly shame, his long hair falling in his face. Then, struggling to find what he had lost, he managed only to whisper, "I would have your aid, please. I pray. Please..." All at once, he was overcome with his own weakness and humiliation; the room filled with his soft sobbing as he hid his face in slender white hands.

"The King..." Stasha began, but The One Hero was finished listening. He began to fade, his eyes burning with anger. "Wake me again without a captain worthy of me, and I will destroy you all. It is not given to soft women to command The One Hero." His helmet sat empty on the cold stone of the altar.

"We have failed," Fulldur said, now shedding his own womanly tears, as Aggam went to Hector's side and sought to comfort him with sisterly kisses.

Merlynn and Stasha, exhausted from their long battling, dispirited and feeling defeated, sank to the ground, each also sobbing weakly, though not in feminine weakness, but they cried the bitter tears of rage. Outside, they knew, The Enemy was advancing, her armies swarming across the countryside while her broken creatures waged war against the King and his remaining knights and wizards. To come so far and yet to fail? To fail their king and all the people? All to be undone by such a simple spell, a spell which had turned their warriors into weeping women? Faith splintered, and they grew weary.

The five eventually sat in silence for some hours, still as the rest of the vacant dungeons and ancient tomb. Stasha, at last, stood, and her eyes were angry. She strode over to where the three men sat huddled together, grabbed Hector by a slender arm, yanked him to his feet and tossed him to the ground. "You stupid, useless dolls," she said. "You eunuchs."

Hector's eyes burned with anger, but he cowered, one small arm raised up weakly to ward off Stasha's blows. He whimpered. "Stop," he cried in his soft voice. "Please."

Fulldur and Aggam grabbed at Stasha crying, “leave him alone!” But Stasha threw them to the ground and raised up her hand strike Hector again when Merlynn froze her with a spell.

The three men scurried over to Merlynn, gathering around her and clinging to her legs for protection. “Calm,” she said. “Calm. You are safe now.” She stroked Hector’s smooth cheek, ran a calming hand through Fulldur’s hair. Hector, his breasts heaving with fear, kissed Merlynn’s hand.

“It’s not our fault,” Aggam said softly.

“I know,” Merlynn said. “And Stasha does, as well. She will remember it now that the passion has left her. Merlynn led the three little men to a corner and asked them to sit. Her back grew straight and they could all see the resolve grow in her eyes.

“What is your plan?” Hector said.

Merlynn began to draw a rune upon the floor of the altar room. “We have been stopped but not beaten. All we need is a... man. A warrior. A captain to command The One Hero. We will go and find one, and with this rune I will be able to return here in a flash. Then, the tide will turn.”

The men nodded, new hope filling their gentle hearts, Merlynn’s womanly confidence inspired them and they felt reassured. They watched nervously as Merlynn released Stasha from her spell, and though the other still seemed angered, she too had heard Merlynn’s plan and knew hope. Stasha took the Hero’s Helm from the altar.

“Come,” Merlynn said. “Time is still against us. We must hurry our way back to The Kingdom, where we will find a captain to lead The One Hero.”

With no enemies to fear, they made their way quickly back to the surface, where they found their horses still tethered, protected by a ring of magic. Merlynn helped each of the men into a his horse, though they now sat side saddle in their delicate gowns, they had each been a rider of renown and the party set off, making good speed and passing many miles before the setting

of the sun.

They made no fire, for the enemy would know that they had failed, and she would seek the helm. "Tend to the horses," Merlynn said to the men. Then, she signaled for Stasha to join her as she scouted the area around the camp.

Hector, Aggam and Fulldur fed the horses and brushed them down. Hector found himself smiling to himself, amazed as if for the first time at the beauty of the great steeds, their strong, muscled bodies. He felt good to tend them, to be useful, and it filled his heart with joy to pet the muzzle of his brave horse and grace it with tender kisses. The other men were moved as well, their girlish hearts delighted in the beautiful animals, as maiden's hearts are meant to, and the three sat, once their work was done, exhausted, and as the night drew in they were not afraid because they knew the women were there to protect them.

As they lay on their backs, Aggam whispered, "you were very brave, Hector, to speak to The One Hero as you did."

Hector sighed. "You are kind, Aggam, but I am ashamed of it. I thought to speak bravely and as a man, but the way the hero looked at me, it unmanned me, and I stood before him only as a woman."

"But you did your best," Fulldur said. "And, what's more, it was more than I could do. If any here has cause for shame it is I, for as I looked upon the great hero, I looked upon him only with the eyes of a woman, and my heart went out to him."

"I did as well," Fulldur admitted, closing his eyes and thinking back on the form of the One Hero. "Even now, I cannot rid myself of the image of him."

"I thought I would die in battle," Hector said. "I prayed for it. And now I die not as a man at all, but drown in the soft fleshy body and longings of a woman."

"We must be strong," Fulldur said. "My heart tells me we have a role to play still, and all is not lost! As long as we keep faith, as long as we stay true to

each other, we have hope!"

The two other men smiled, and they joined their small, soft hands to form a circle. "The Gentleman Warriors! Together Forever!"

With morning, the men were further changed. Smaller in stature, fuller of figure, and with the small, chirping voices of girls, they awoke. And now, though none spoke of it, each was fully a woman. They cast rueful glances at one another, knowing that now they were all as girls in every way, and they hoped that Merlynn and Stasha would not guess at this final change. Before the party broke camp, Merlynn took Fulldur aside.

"I have placed the helm of The One Hero in your saddle bags," she said. "You must keep it and protect it. If the enemy attacks, flee as fast as you can. We will catch up with you if we can. Get the helm to the king. We must not lose it."

Fulldur nodded and gave Merlynn's hand a squeeze. "As you wish."

He turned to go, but Merlynn put a hand on his shoulder and stopped him. "You must not feel ashamed of what has happened to you. You must never lose faith. You yet have an important role to play in this great striving, and only if you surrender to despair does the enemy win."

Fulldur smiled gratefully, brushing his long hair back from his face. "I will do my best, Merlynn."

"Good. Tell the boys it's time to go."

No attack came that day, and the group settled into camp just before nightfall, now just half a day from The Great City. Hector, Aggam and Fulldur relaxed, being in the confines of their own kingdom and so close to safety, though each also fretted over what it would be like to return to the kingdom in their new shapes. They dealt with their nervousness by trading jewelry and fixing each other's hair. They didn't want to speak of facing wives and former lovers, of facing men they had once led, though it was constantly on each of their minds.

As the sun set and an icy breeze fluttered through their long hair, Fulldur frowned. "There will be no moon tonight," he said.

And so in the chill of a moonless night a great howling tore through the camp and goblins on tattered creatures of the sky descended in a rain of fire. Fulldur heard Merlynn shouting "run!" from somewhere in the midst of the raging battle, and he scurried to his feet, slipped into his heels and grabbing Aggam and Hector by their small, soft hands, led them quickly to the horses.

"We can't just leave them," Aggam said, his face a study in feminine concern.

Fulldur was helping Hector onto his horse. "We must," he said. "On Merlynn's command."

"What if they're killed?" Aggam said, tears now on his smooth cheeks.

"Don't cry," Hector whispered, though he was also now in tears.

Fulldur tried to control himself, but the tears were infectious and his own eyes stung with tears as he struggled his way onto his horse. "Ride!" He cried prettily. "Ride!"

None liked fleeing the battle, even in their diminished states, but if that was what Merlynn commanded, then that was what must be done. It was not in their feminine hearts to make decisions, and less so to defy orders of one such as Merlynn. The three men rode off into the night, their long hair and gowns trailing behind as they dashed off, away, away, away into the dark.

They did not rest until sunrise, when they found a spot in a small copse of trees, tethered their horses and at last sank wearily to the ground. They huddled together, scared and defenseless, small and weak, and their hearts knew the fear of gentle girls left alone in the wild.

"What now?" Aggam said, a slender hand to his cheek, peering fearfully about. "What now?"

“We must get to the city,” Fulldur said, smoothing his dress. “That is what Merlynn told me to do if we were attacked. It is only a few hours.”

“What if we’re attacked?” Aggam said. “It’s too dangerous.”

“So what should we do?” Hector said. “Wait here for someone to come and rescue us?”

"Yes," Aggam said. "Yes! Someone will come and save us!"

"No," Fulldur said. "We will make it to the city, and we will do our part to save this world from The Division and her misshapen army of fragments."

"How?"

"I don't know. Stay here." Lifting his skirt, Fulldur made his way to the top of a small hill near where the men hid while Aggam and Hector watched nervously. He came back, a small smile on his pretty face.

"What?"

"I know this land," he said. "There is a hermit who lives not far from here, a friend I have known for many years, a friend of Unity, and one who will help us. We take only what we can carry, and send the horses south."

Aggam clapped his little hands and laughed. "At last some good fortune!"

"Yes," Fulldur said.

"Is it wise to go on without the horses?" Hector said, feeling tears well up in his eyes at the thought of sending his great stallion Steel Heart off into the wild.

"They are easy to track, alas," Fulldur said, once again feeling his own pretty eyes fill with tears. "Though it pains my heart as well to see them gone."

Slinging a water skin over his shoulder, Aggam looked down in surprise as the tough old leather strap and bag suddenly transformed into a pretty, lacy white covered water skin that matched his dress and featured a big, pink bow. "Oh," he said in surprise.

The others found the same thing happen as they added the few items they would carry, each transforming into a pretty, feminine accessory.

"It seems this spell ensures we are always dressed as prettily as can be," Fulldur said.

Hector ran his hands over the soft little silk purse that now rested against his round hip. "I guess that's good?" He shook his head. "Our faces always look perfectly painted, and our hair is always as if it had just been carefully brushed."

Aggam smiled. "It seems strange the enemy would do something so... pointless?"

Fulldur smiled. "There was a point to making us into girls," he said. "Though we did not see it until we attempted to raise the One Hero. And there is a point, I suspect, to this pretty power as well."

"But what?" Hector said, running his hands through his hair.

"I don't know yet." Then, with a sigh he looked into the wide, bright eyes of his two companions. "Lift your skirts, gentleman. It is time for adventure."

The horses sent off into the wild, the three little warriors waited until nightfall to leave the seeming safety of their little grove and head out over the open terrain. Each felt his heart fluttering, and their soft breasts heaved as they clung nervously to one another, unaccustomed to feeling-- and being-- so vulnerable. A tiny sliver of moon now glowed behind the boney fingers of ragged clouds, and with little light to see by they crept slowly in their confining dresses and slippers not made for outdoors.

Soon, the grim tedium of the march settled over them, their heart rates

slowed, and though each kept aware of any sound or movement of threat, they merely minced along, one step after another, moving ever closer to safety.

As the night crept along, they came through a small copse of trees and found the broken remains of a small watch tower jaggedly jutting from the earth atop a small hill. "Do you know this place?" Hector whispered.

"It is a dark place, full of Division and unclean spirits. We must go around it."

Hector and Fulldur started to back away into the woods, but Aggam remained rooted to his spot, clutching his hands to his breasts, his white gown fluttering in the breeze.

"Come," Fulldur said.

"I'm scared," Aggam whispered.

"Then come," Hector said.

"I can't!"

Hector lifted his skirts with a sigh and started toward Aggam, but Fulldur put a soft hand on the man's slender arm. Just then, they both saw it-- a thick, black, slithering serpent had encircled Aggam, and was now going around and around and around, getting closer with each time.

"I'm going to scream," Aggam hissed.

Looking about, Fulldur saw a fallen branch, and carefully leaning over, grabbed it in his tiny hands, intending to attack the snake with it, but the branch was too heavy, and he strained to even lift one end off the ground.

Hector, meanwhile, dropped to his knees and felt around, trying to find a rock, anything, and finally feeling his fingers wrap around a cold stone, he lifted it over his head and watched in shock as it transformed into a rose.

"Fiddlesticks!"

Meanwhile, the serpent poked its head under the hem of Aggam's skirt. He felt his body flush with panic, and suddenly the need to pee seized his girl's body. He strained against the need to scream, glancing in terror at the tower, and then squeezed his eyes shut in terror as tears leaked out the corners of his eyes. The snake licked at his leg with its cold tongue, and he felt himself pee in terror, the urine pouring down his leg.

Fullldur hurried forward, finally, and Aggam struggled to get to his feet, and then both grabbed at the serpent's tail, while the serpent itself finally spoke in a soft, silky voice.

"I smell something sweet," the serpent said. "Something sweet... something sweet."

Aggam felt the cold, scaly skin of the serpent against his calf as it coiled about his leg and began to slide up the inside of his soft thigh. A new, alien, female terror flashed into his mind. "Oh... oh... oh no... oh no..."

Fullldur finally managed to wrap his hands around the serpent's tail, but it freed itself effortlessly with a flick, and Hector kicked prettily at it without effect, each forgetting about the threat from the tower as their friend squirmed.

"Something sweet! In a cave! So in a cave of sweets that's where I shall, I shall eat!" And with that the serpent lunged up Aggam's leg and at space between his legs.

Aggam screamed, and screamed like no girl had ever screamed as he felt the serpent thrust up against his slit. Freed of the paralysis of fear, he spun away, falling on his backside and pushing himself away, away from the invading presence of the serpent while Fullldur and Hector continued their attack.

Chaos. A trumpet sounded in the air, splitting the air like thunder, and an orange light filled the sky as a host of ravens launched from the tower in a mad flutter of wings and cries and the three pretty men covered their little ears with their little hands and screamed in soft voices as they sank to their

knees, their hearts filled with fear, and then one after another, they fainted prettily and sweetly into the safety of oblivion.

Fulldur woke last. He came from a dreamless sleep, first becoming aware of the crackle of fire, then the sound of hushed voices whispering urgently, and opening his eyes he looked up at a vaulted ceiling of black stone and felt the rush of panic that comes with waking in a strange room. Sitting up, feeling the weight of his breasts as his long hair fell into his face, he saw the women Aggam and Hector had become sitting close together near a fire, and the events of the night before rushed together in a jumble.

Seeing their captain awake and the panic in his wide, pretty eyes, the warriors got to their feet and rushed to Fulldur's bed, taking his small hands and brushing the hair back from his face. "Where are we? What happened?"

"You are in the tower of the Raven King," a deep voice answered, and turning, Fulldur saw a large, slender man covered in black feathers sitting in the corner, his mighty wings wrapped around him like a shawl.

"Oh," Fulldur said, his mouth dropping open in a pretty O of surprise.

The Raven King stood and stretched his great wings, revealing arms that were hard and sinewy, and the sight of which instantly made Fulldur's throat a little dry. Unsure of the situation, Fulldur plucked at his dress and did his best to sink into a proper curtsy. "Your highness."

The Raven King laughed. "Well, how delightful. The great warrior Fulldur curtsying before me like a common girl."

"You know?"

"He knows," Hector said.

Fulldur stood and straightened his back, looking The Raven King in the eye. "I am not a common girl."

"No," The Raven King said, stepping forward and putting a finger beneath

Fulldur's chin. "You are a beautiful girl, indeed. Exquisite." He let his eyes drop to Fulldur's ample breasts, proudly displayed in his dress.

Fulldur's eyes grew hot with anger, but he felt the helplessness of his small, soft body, bound in the hobbling gown, and fought hard to resist the urge to strike at the man.

"Oh, have you grown so soft in your pretty dress, Fulldur?" The Raven King let his hand slide down to Fulldur's soft shoulder, and then to cup his breast. It was the first time the warrior had felt another man's hand on the soft swell of his breast, and he finally slapped The Raven King's hand away as strange new emotions swirled in his pretty head.

Aggam and Hector rushed to their captain's side and the three looked up angrily at their captor. "Stop it!" Hector said.

The Raven King laughed. "I will have you little dove," he said.

The three little men raised their tiny fists.

"But I will have you of your own free will. You will spread your legs for me little one, and you will welcome me as your lover."

"Never!"

"Not even for the helmet of The One Hero?"

"What?"

"I would have you wear the clothes in the wardrobe, girl. Make yourself pretty. Or, I will give The Helmet to The Division."

"Raven King," Fulldur said, "you mustn't..."

The Raven King turned to leave. "I'll be back to carry you off later, little virgin!"

"No! Wait!"

But The Raven King strode from the room, slamming the great iron door and locking it securely, leaving Fulldur flustered and blushing.

Fulldur sat, stunned. "He has the helmet?"

"Yes," Hector said. "And everything else but our dresses."

"You'll have to sleep with him," Aggam said.

"No," Hector said. "Never!"

"What else can he do?"

"We'll find another way... escape... get help... just because we're women doesn't mean we have to spread our legs for every stupid man who comes along."

"Well, we always said we would use whatever weapons we had, and right now Fulldur's best weapon is between his legs!"

While the two argued, Fulldur arranged his skirts and played idly with his bracelets. He put his fingertips to his lips. "What was that you said?"

"Me?" Aggam said.

"Yes."

"Your best weapon is between your legs?"

Fulldur laughed prettily and clasped his hands in his lap. "Men?"

"What?"

"Help me out of this dress."

"No," Hector said. "Don't even think it."

Aggam walked over and smiled. "I'm glad he at least has some sense."

Fulldur turned and lifted his hair so Aggam could start unbuttoning the back of his dress, and he met Hector's eyes. "I'm going to use my sex," he said, giving his breasts a little shake, "but hear my vow: Fulldur, Gentleman Warrior, will leave this tower with his maidenhead unbroken!"

"Oh," Hector said, his hands on his cheeks. "Goodness. Okay. Fine? Then? But, what?"

"I'm going to use a weapon, but it will be between someone else's legs than mine," Fulldur said, giving Aggam a wink.

Aggam smiled. "What scheme is running in that pretty little head of yours, Fulldur, dear?"

"I'm not sure yet," Fulldur said. "I need to learn some things about this spell and how it changes our... possessions."

Aggam gave Hector a look and they both giggled. When Fulldur got plotting, it was always a dangerous thing for their enemies, and the fact that he was now a pretty young girl hadn't changed that, at least. "You have something very wicked in mind, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," he said, as they slid the dress from his slender shoulders. "Very wicked!"

Once Fulldur slipped out of his dress and felt the cool air swirling around his woman's body, he stepped in front of the mirror and looked at himself for the first time, scarcely able to believe the stunning, full-breasted girl who stood before him WAS him. He turned and looked at his profile-- the soft little belly, the high, firm womanly behind, his long, round legs, and then whispered "Goodness. I am pretty."

Aggam and Hector watched as their pretty little captain examined his

curvaceous body, each one suffering a strange mix of thwarted masculine hunger for the sweet thing he had become as well as a little girlish jealousy, though each of the men was just as pretty. Aggam pulled Fulldur's hair back and pressed his own soft breasts against the other man's smooth back, and their eyes met in the mirror. "I want to kiss you so badly right now," Aggam said.

"Not now," Fulldur said hoarsely, his own mind a swirling mass of boygirl confusion. "I need to dress."

In the wardrobe they found a short little gown of frost spider silk, festooned with ribbons and lace, and the three men cooed over how pretty it was before helping Fulldur wiggle and squirm his way into the garment that clung to his breasts and hips as if it had been painted onto him. They went to work on the pretty hair, then, braiding and pinning and arranging before placing a sparkling diamond tiara on his head and arranging the pretty ribbons that trailed from it down his back. Finally, a delicate waist chain, necklaces, bracelets and anklets followed, until Fulldur stood perched before them a sight of flashing feminine perfection, poised prettily on high heels.

He looked in the mirror and giggled, and Hector and Aggam soon giggled as well. Fulldur held out his little hands, and the three joined in a circle. "The Warrior Gentleman," Fulldur squealed, and then they all repeated it in their little, sing-song voices.

On cue, they heard the lock in the big iron door turning, and Fulldur put a hand on his hip, threw his shoulders back and waited for his man to open the door and see him in all his beauty. The door swung open, and The Raven King stood there and gazed with admiration upon the woman Fulldur had become, dressed to please and succeeding.

Their eyes met, and Fulldur felt his maiden's heart flutter at the hard, fierce look of masculine hunger in the Raven King's eyes.

"You are stunning," The Raven King said.

"Thank you," Fulldur answered hoarsely.

The Raven King strode forward, grabbed Fulldur around his slender waist and pulled him close. Fulldur looked up into the man's eyes, feeling his own soft breasts crushed against the Raven King's rock hard chest, and his lips parted as the Raven King leaned in for a long, lingering kiss that left Fulldur seeing stars, clinging weakly to the powerful man even as he felt a stirring against his thigh that sent all sorts of female thrills surging through his body.

And then the Raven King swept Fulldur from his feet, and Fulldur felt a thrill as he found himself throwing his slender arms around the man's neck, his body so small and light in those powerful arms, and he laughed in girlish delight, thinking, so this is why they love us!

"Are you ready, little bird?"

"Yes," he said, lost in those dark eyes. "Take me."

The Raven King lay Fulldur gently on his bed, and immediately climbed on top of his soft little body and began showering him with kisses. Fulldur felt himself afire with female needs, and kissed and stroked and grabbed and forgot all about his plan and the helmet and the fact he'd once been a man, all of that over-ridden by one all-consuming need to have the Raven King inside him.

But then The Raven King stood and looked down at Fulldur, his nipples hard and throbbing, his cheeks flush, eyes flashing with hunger, and said, "Pleasure me with your mouth, girl."

Fulldur got to his knees and reached for The Raven King's belt, but the man impatiently pulled it free and drew down his pants, revealing his manhood. Fulldur felt a heat like a fever sweep through his little body as he looked for the first time upon the sight of an aroused male -- from the eyes of a woman, and his whole body screamed with the need to be filled and filled and oh, no, no, some small part of him thought, but yes, yes the girl he now was said, and the Raven King laughed as pretty little Fulldur got onto his knees and smiled up at him as prettily as could be and said, "I just want you inside me!"

"All the kingdom will know that The Raven King made a woman of Fulldur, the once great warrior. You will be laughed at throughout the kingdom, and I will tell everyone how you begged for it like a common whore."

The words were like a slap in the face, and suddenly Fulldur was himself, shocked and ashamed at what he'd been wanting and needing just a moment before, but most importantly he remembered his mission and what he needed to do. "I'm going to love this," Fulldur said reaching for The Raven King's member, and The Raven King laughed for the last time as man.

Fulldur seized the turgid member, digging his nails into the flesh with every intention to use the man's member as a weapon against him. The spell worked. Fulldur had a weapon in his hands, and he felt it instantly shrink and dwindle until he found himself pressing his hands against the flat, smooth surface of The Raven King's vagina.

The Raven King squawked, pulling away from Fulldur in shock, reaching down and placing his own hands over his slit, shock and disbelief filling his eyes. "You!" He hissed in a girlish voice. "Bitch!"

Fulldur rolled away as The Raven King lashed out with a clawed hand. "No... no... no," he screamed, and then stepping forward, one hand still covering the shameful gash between his legs, and he raised his taloned hand high above Fulldur and screamed, "I'm going to kill you!"

Then he squawked, and twirled like a ballerina. His wings now shone white, the black feathers that covered his body vanished and he stood there with smooth skin as white as snow, his dark eyes now a bright pale blue. He squawked and spun again, and he now stood a little over five feet tall, his whole body having grown lithe and slender like a girl's, and he stared at his small, pretty hands before squawking once more, spinning and finding himself with full, firm breasts, and the soft curves of a female. He covered his face and sank to his knees, sobbing.

Fulldur looked down at the pretty little creature The Raven King had become, with her white gold hair over her slender shoulders and the delicate, angelic wings, and his heart was filled with tender, girlish empathy as he

remembered his own shock and humiliation when he'd woken with breasts and realized his life as a man was over, and so he crawled down and cradled the new girl and whispered, "I'm so sorry."

The Raven King looked up, his face a picture of perfect girlish innocence, his pretty blue eyes wide with wonder. "Sorry?"

"Yes," Fulldur said, wiping the girl's tears. "Sorry."

And then the girl The Raven King had become threw her slender arms around Fulldur and hugged the man, kissing him on the cheek and saying, "I feel so happy and free, and I never knew I could feel like this and it's a gift you have given me! A Gift!"

And Fulldur saw it now. All traces of The Division had been lifted from The Raven King, and all the anger and hate that had poisoned his soul, and now sitting there a slender, pretty female, he was glowing with the light of Unity, and he was happy.

And then Fulldur wept, and the two hugged some more, and exchanged maidenly kisses, and cried together until finally The Raven King stood and the two looked in amazement as the dark, broken tower had suddenly transformed into a glittering tower of white marble and pink curtains, flooded with light and joy, and the Swan King, for he no longer commanded creatures of the dark but sang with those of beauty, laughed in a pretty voice like crystal and said, "we have to move and quickly! The Division will come for the helmet of The One Warrior, and we must get it to safety!"

"Yes," Fulldur said, and the two turned and started toward the door. The Swan King giggled prettily and stopped.

"What?"

"My body," he said, "it's... bouncy!"

Fulldur looked down at his own breasts and said, "I don't know if I will ever get used to it."

“Well, let’s take a moment to get dressed, shall we?”

Soon, the Warrior Gentleman had gathered with The Swan King before his chariot—once a fearsome machine of steel and death, it now glittered in the shape of a swan, with diamonds flashing in its eyes. “Oh,” The Swan King said stroking the sculpted swan’s long, slender neck. “Everything has become so pretty!”

The three warriors gushed and cooed over the chariot, and climbed aboard as the Swan King summoned a flock of giant swans who allowed themselves to be harnessed to the chariot, and then with a great flapping of wings, carried it into the sky, the wind tossing the four men’s long, beautiful hair. “To Dartia City,” The Swan King sang out. “And with haste!”

Below, crouching on the edge of the forest, a small, wiry figure leaning weakly on a gnarled staff watched as the glittering white chariot rose from the white tower, now festooned with pink and purple flags, and took off into the pale blue sky, four beautiful girls on board in perfect dresses and made up as if for a ball.

“Hmmm,” he mumbled. “Hmmmmmm.” He’d watched as the tower had grown from a broken ruin into something new and glorious, how long dead trees had suddenly burst forth with young, bright green leaves, how the garden had blushed with tulips and roses and sunflowers and daisies and a once dark and desolate land burst with fertility. And then he heard it, faint at first, as if a memory of a song, and then stronger and stronger, voices deep as stone and high as wisp clouds, certain as a storm and gentle as a brook, male and female and otherwise, and these voices were the voices of unity, and they sang the song of nature in praise to life.

A tear escaped from the small man’s eye, and then another, and he wiped them away in wonder as feeling crept into his heart he had not felt in many and many a passing year, and it was the feeling of hope.

He let the staff slip through his fingers, stood straight, and stepping into the sunlight and the air buzzing with bees and birds and all that was, and he

began to dance, a sight unseen in the world since the first days of The Division.

The Swan King's chariot descended into the Great Square, of how the curious crowds gathered around, marveling at the beauty of the four girls who stepped daintily out, bashfully facing the city for the first time in their new shapes. As beautiful as the three mortal girls were, none shone with the pure light and divinity of the slender girl with the white wings, the one who flapped those wings three times to bring the massing crowd to silence, and then said, "I am the Swan King, and these are my friends. We have come to save the world."

A detachment of the royal guard blew their horns and made their way through the crowd, their steel helmets flashing in the sun. The lead, Captain Amore, instinctively drop to his knees at the feet of the Swan King and said, "Milady."

The Swan King reached out with a slender hand, and said, "You may stand, Captain."

The Captain stood, removed his helmet and said, "Forgive me, for I can see the light of unity and divinity within you, but I must know your name that I may introduce you to the Queen."

The Swan King smiled at the soldier's good manners. It was a perfectly polite way for him to seek the information he needed. "I am the Swan King. We did battle some years ago, Captain, but you knew me then as The Raven King."

The truth of the words was plain to the Captain, and yet looking at the slender girl before him, winged as she was, it did not seem possible, and yet his heart sounded the words, and he knew that this girl had been The Raven King, and that she now was a creature of unity, and so he spoke the only word that he could manage, "how?"

“I was defeated by this mighty warrior,” The Swan King said, drawing Captain Amore’s attention to Fulldur, who stood meekly to the side in his silky pink dress, hands folded.

Their eyes met. Captain Amore felt his heart flutter as the girl smiled shyly and he could have sworn he saw her blush even beneath her painted cheeks. Captain Amore stepped forward and reached out for Fulldur’s hand. Fulldur held out his little white hand, and the Captain took it gently in his own and kissed the back, sending butterflies fluttering through Fulldur’s belly.

“May I ask your name?”

“I’m... um...” Fulldur bit his lip nervously. He had known the Captain for many years and felt shy both as a man who now stood before a peer in a dress that showed off his full, womanly breasts, but as a man who had just blushed and gotten dizzy and felt... so, well, girly, and “I... my name...”

“These,” The Swan King sang out loudly, his voice echoing throughout the great square, “were the Warrior Gentleman, and they have returned to you now as the Warrior Girls.”

The three men felt themselves shrinking with shame, standing there surrounded by thousands now, their identities known. Each felt fully aware of the weight of his breasts, the tight dresses that hugged his round, soft hips, the hair and pretty paints, the flashing earrings and bracelets and all manner of feminine finery that now adorned his sweet, soft shape.

Fulldur started to pull his hand away from the Captain, suddenly sick with shame, but Captain Amore held it firm and gave it a squeeze, raising it up in the air and shouting “three cheers for the Warrior Girls! They bring hope in our darkest hour!”

“Here!” The crowd roared. “Here! Here!”

As the roaring subsided, the Swan King gave each of his companions a hug and a maidenly kiss on the cheek. “I am called for help by the Sky Lord, and I must go, dear friends,” he said, “but the sweet singing birds and winged

creatures of the wild are ever with me, and I will ask them to watch over you. If you are in peril, call for me, and I will come if I can.”

“Thank you,” the men said prettily, and then watched as the pretty little Swan King climbed onto his chariot and was swept off into the sky as the crowd cheered once more.

And the three pretty little men looked at one another, their pretty eyes wide with pride and wonder and laughed with girlish delight.

“To the palace,” Captain Amore said.

Fulldur looked at the other two men and smiled. “Gentlemen, lift your skirts!”

“Fulldur? Aggam? Hector?” The King, a tall elderly man of over six feet, looked down at the pretty little women standing before him and shook his head. “You are all just... beautiful!”

“Thank you, your highness.”

“But, I don’t see how you can help with the war in your current... condition.”

“I don’t, either,” Fulldur said. “But we will, nonetheless.”

“Fulldur,” The King said putting a hand to his smooth cheek and adopting a fatherly tone. “You have done enough. That the three of you managed to get the helmet of The One Hero here, to defeat The Raven King, as a girl, that’s the...”

“I am NOT a girl,” Fulldur said.

“Well, in the shape of a girl, then. You are remarkable, and what you did was remarkable. I have already asked the Court Composer to write a ballad telling the tale of your triumph! But you can’t go back into danger in that

body. I won't allow it."

"But someone has to get the helmet back to the temple of The One Hero!"

"Yes, and by your own accounting, that person needs to be a man."

"Your highness," Hector offered, "I know it seems like madness, or impulsiveness, or false courage, and even to me as I stand here before you in this gown and with my hair pinned up, and speaking in this soft voice, I myself question the words, but I tell you I now in my heart that despite it all, we, the three of us, must bring the helmet back to the temple. It is our destiny!"

The King shook his head. "You would be captured, the helmet taken, and the world would end."

"Please, your highness," Fulldur said, gently touching the king on the arm. "Trust us."

"And you, Aggam?" The King said, looking to the little blonde who had not spoken. "What do you think of this notion?"

Aggam ran a slender hand through his long blonde hair and took a deep breath, sending his full breasts heaving, and then, one hand on his hip, he studied his long, pink finger nails. "I am helps," he said, "in this body? Like this?" He gestured down at his curvy figure, plucked as the thin material of his dress. "Not only am I small and soft and weak, but any object I seize as a weapon turns into a bracelet or a purse or some other female absurdity. I am forced to dress in gowns that make it impossible to run and difficult even to walk... I am not even a girl or a woman, but a ... what? PRINCESS.... Ensorcelled to not only live in the shape of a girl, but to dress and act like one. No, until this spell is broken, I must say, no, I am no warrior of any kind and I doubt I could manage to get the helmet past a small group of children in my current... state... of this!"

"Aggam, Fulldur said, "but we just..."

“Aggam speaks the truth,” The King said, putting a firm hand on Fulldur’s soft shoulder. “I will have quarters prepared for you suitable to your current shape, and tomorrow, well, Princess Fanelle can talk to you about ways you can help the war effort.”

“What? Knit stockings for the men? Is that what you would have me do?”

“Yes,” the King answered. “Or something else suitable for a GIRL.”

“Your majesty, I know when you look at me, at this small body and this pretty face, you see a girl, but inside still beats the heart of a warrior.”

“I don’t doubt it, and perhaps it would surprise you to know that many a girl throughout the kingdom has a warrior’s heart. However, neither they nor you can swing a sword or an ax or a club with a girl’s slender arms, and you can serve your king better now in ways other than running off into battle in a ball gown armed with a bouquet of poseys.”

“Your majesty...”

“Enough! Young miss, you are dismissed.”

Fulldur smiled back his feminine rage and bowed. “Yes, my king.” The other three followed suit.

Fulldur, Aggam and Hector were given sumptuous rooms in the women’s wing, each room with a lace draped canopy bed, mirrors, dressing tables, perfumes and flowers. Fulldur slipped off his shoes and rubbed his little feet with a sigh, but before he even had a moment to think about his plight, there was a knock at the servant’s entrance, and a girl of maybe 12 years entered. “Baths have been prepared, milady.”

“Don’t call me that,” Fulldur said, annoyed.

“Pardon?”

“Don’t call me milady! I am a man.”

The girl looked over the beautiful girl in the pink gown that sat before her, not just a girl but a perfectly beautiful one, like a statue, and she smiled. “So, it is true? You were a warrior?”

“I am a warrior, still.”

The girl smiled, but then quickly looked away to hide her amusement and save the pretty man further embarrassment. “Well, would you like a bath, Milord?”

“Yes,” Fulldur said, standing. “I can’t remember the last time I had one. Lifting his hair, he turned. “Help me out of my dress.”

“Of course, Milord.”

Once free of his dress, Fulldur slipped into a small, thin silken robe the girl had brought with her, and he soon entered the royal ladies’ bath, a large, steaming pool room that smelled of jasmine and vanilla. Hector was there, nude, his arms wrapped around his breasts as he dipped a toe gingerly into the steaming water, and seeing the man nude for the first time, Fulldur felt a shock of surprise. “Your waist is so tiny!”

Hector tossed his long blonde hair and laughed. “And so is the rest of me.”

“Not your breasts!”

“I needn’t be reminded.”

“You’re beautiful.”

Taking a deep breath, Fulldur slipped his own robe from his shoulders and felt his breasts swaying free, the steamy, perfumed air swirling around his smooth body. He wrapped his own slender arms around his chest and quickly lowered himself into the warm water, eager to hide his girlish shape from view. Hector slid down next to him, and the two sighed in unison as the warm, salted water instantly eased tense, tired bodies. “That feels good,” Hector said.

“Oh, god, yes.”

Aggam entered, shyly. He stood lingered near the door, and they all felt the tension lingering from the scene in the King's chambers. Fulldur smiled and said, “Get in here, Aggam!”

Aggam grinned, clearly relieved, and came over to the pool's edge, lowering himself in and letting the water lap at the hem of his robe, he stood there, clearly nervous to get naked before the other men.

“You don't have anything we don't have,” Hector said, standing and taking hold of Aggam's robe, pulling it gently away from the other man's soft, round shoulders. Aggam's white breasts bounced slightly as he shrugged out of the robe. He had large, full, pink nipples, and his breasts were firm and high. He quickly lowered himself into the water, letting himself slide down until the water came right up to his neck. He saw Fulldur staring at him with soft, unfocused eyes. “What?” Aggam said with a giggle.

“You're the prettiest of all of us,” Fuldder said.

“Oh.. no.. you and Hector... I mean...”

“He's right,” Hector said. “You are stunning.”

Aggam rolled his pretty eyes and said, “It's so awfully odd! The three warriors talking about which of us is prettier! How silly we've all gotten.”

"It's the spell, dear," Fulldur said. "And the fact that you are gorgeous."

Aggam slide down into the water up to his chin. "Well, I don't mean to be! I just am!"

"I feel the same way."

"I'm sorry," Aggam said then, almost in a whisper. "For... what I said... for being so weak..."

"You spoke from your heart," Fulldur answered, thinking of Aggam and the snake, of how it must have shaken him. "And perhaps your words were true."

Hector moved behind Aggam and began to massage the other man's slender shoulders. "You're so tense."

"That feel good," Aggam said, closing his eyes. He could feel Hector's breasts rubbed against his smooth back as the other kneading his shoulders, a familiar sensation made alien by the tingling in his own soft chest.

Fulldur watched the other two through the steamy air, fascinated and confused at the sight of the two beautiful women, feeling both phantom urges within his own strange body as well as new, confusing feelings and needs. Closing his eyes, trying to clear his head, he thought of The Raven King's hard chest and rigid abdomen, his manhood... and that strange new need to be filled once again flooded through Fulldur's body and mind.

Opening his eyes into slights, he watched as Hector pulled Aggam's hair away from his pretty face, and with a nudge turned the other's chin towards him, swooping in for a kiss while one small hand cupped the other man's full white breast. Aggam kissed back, then ran a slender finger along Hector's chin, and the two exchanged a knowing smile.

The sluts! Fulldur thought. They've been making out behind my back. He ducked his head under the water and came up with a splash, wanting to break up their little girl kissy session and free himself of his own erotic musings.

"So," Hector said. "Is it a girl's life for us from here on out? Dresses and needlepoint?"

Fulldur shrugged. "Maybe."

"Fulldur? Pardon? You mean... you aren't planning on just accepting this?"

"He is still our king, and we remain bound to obey his orders. I am vexed by it, but what would it mean of our honor were we now to disregard the orders

of our liege simply because we don't like them?"

"He has ordered us to knitting!"

"I will try and convince the king again," Fulldur said.

"And if that fails?"

"I suggest we get used to the idea of knitting!"

And then he swam over to Aggam, put his hands on the other man's shoulders and kissed him, a long, slow, longing kiss. Aggam stiffened and pushed against him, but then settled in and accepted the kiss with a soft moan. The feeling of their full lips and soft breasts pressing together new and foreign to him, and it had its pleasure, but when he pulled away, he put his hands to his cheeks and met Aggam's eyes.

"You, too?" Aggam whispered.

"Yes," Fulldur whispered back. "Oh, goodness!"

"What?" Hector said.

Fulldur shook his head and stuck his tongue out in imitation of puking. "I think I like boys now!"

The next morning, the three men found themselves sitting prettily in the antechamber to one of Princess Fanelle, knitting needles in hand, as one of her lady's in waiting, Kina, watched them practice the knitting technique she had been teaching them. "Wonderful," Kina said. "You are all experts with your needles! It's like you've been knitting your whole lives!"

"I feel like I have been knitting for a lifetime," Hector said. "How long have we been here?"

"Only an hour," Kina said. She was a chirpy, peppy, happy girl of maybe twelve, and had already remarked a dozen times on how pretty she found the

men.

"Oh, dear me," Hector said.

Kina laughed. "I still can hardly believe you were once men! You're certainly girls now!"

"Good morning, Warrior Girls," Princess Fanelle said, entering in a gust of cool air. She wore riding britches, tall black boots and held a riding crop in her leather gloved hands. The three warriors stood, their knitting needles in hand, and awkwardly bowed and curtsied, not sure how to properly respond.

Fanelle laughed, looking down at the three. Tall and slender as a goddess, at six feet tall she stood well above the little warriors. "Kina, you may go. And you may all sit."

The three men sat carefully in their shimmering dresses of pink and white, and Fanelle threw herself onto the couch, looking with wonder at the pretty, busty young women who sat before her, each with knitting in his lap. "I have known you all since I was a little girl," she said. "I am so sorry this has happened."

"Thank you," Fulldur said.

"Who is who?"

Each of the three introduced himself in his soft, pretty voice, first Fulldur, then Hector, then Aggam.

"You are the prettiest of all," Fanelle said, looking with wonder at the blonde, porcelain-skinned beauty.

"That's what I have been telling him," Fulldur said.

"Well, it seems father dear has decided you shall knit for the war, my dear sisters in arms. Mother in planning a parade, as well as ball to welcome you as ladies of the court. And, I believe my aunt, the Duchess of Carole, plans a

tea."

"Pardon?"

"Parades? Tea? A welcome ball? Isn't there a war right now?"

"Welcome to girlhood, my sweets. I am sorry to say there is already talk of who you each might marry!"

"But surely..." Fulldur put down his knitting. "Surely, you are joking?"

"Not at all."

"We must fight," Fulldur said, making a small fist and pounding his palm. "It is our destiny to fight this war, to deliver the helmet to the One True Hero."

"Good luck explaining that to my father."

"What of your mother?" Hector said. "Might she help us? Persuade the king on our behalf?"

"I doubt that she would."

"Certainly she has some influence with the king?"

"Certainly. But you will find, I suspect, she and others like her feel that a female's proper place is at the side of a man."

"We are not females!"

"Well, you sure aren't men."

"What of the marriage talk?" Aggam asked, knitting needles clicking away.

"There have been a few inquiries, and of course the women of the court already propose proper matches for each of you. It started practically the

moment you rode into town on a giant swan."

"We are men, or were men," Hector said, "who would want to marry a man, even one changed into a girl's shape?"

"You have land and vaginas. Two possessions just about every man in the kingdom finds irresistible."

Just then, servants arrived with tea and pastries. "Put your knitting away, and refresh yourselves. I'll be back before they arrive."

"Who?" Fulldur said, imagining himself swarmed with suitors.

"A bunch of young ladies of the court want to meet the smart little warrior girls and hear all about your adventures! They are arriving now, and they will make their entrance at the striking of the bell! Get ready to chat yourselves mad, girls!"

Hector and Aggam rolled their eyes, but Aggam smiled. "I guess we had better learn to enjoy this," he said prettily to the other men. "Because it's life."

Princess Fanelle grabbed a tart and popped it into her mouth. "I am sorry this has happened. You were all men amongst men. But don't expect a great deal of sympathy from any of the women of the court just because you now have to live the way the girls have always lived. More than a few think it's about time a group of men found themselves in skirts."

Fulldur spread his slender white arms and curtsied. "Your highness."

Princess Fanelle left. Fulldur went to the mirror and checked his dress and hair. Of course, both were perfect, and he wondered that the women of the court wouldn't be a little jealous if they knew of the spell that made he and the other warriors always perfect in their dress and make-up.

Hector came over and checked himself as well, pushing his breasts up to enhance his cleavage in the low cut white dress. "You still ready to just

accept this if we can't persuade the king?"

"Knitting is one thing," Fulldur said, "but marriage?" He pictures himself at the altar, on his honeymoon, pregnant, "no." He shook his head, though part of his felt bubbly with excitement at the thought. "And tea parties while our friends fight and die on the battlefield? No, again."

"What, then?"

"I don't know yet. For now, let's all smile and laugh and be pretty, and we'll see if we can't make some friends of these women, because we will need allies, and I am thinking for this battle our best allies will be wearing dresses."

"Yes."

"Aggam?" Fulldur said, stepping away from the mirror satisfied he was the image of feminine perfection. "Do you want to check yourself?"

"No," Aggam said, sipping tea from a delicate china cup. "I know I'm going to be the prettiest one in the room."

Fulldur stuck his tongue out.

Aggam giggled.

The bell struck and the three heard the foyer fill with the chattering of excited female voices. Fulldur smiled and said, "Gentleman, lift your skirts!"

Over the next few days, Fulldur wrote letters to the king in his delicate, girlish handwriting, but they went unanswered. He attempted to speak with the queen, but she laughed and said, "Most maidens dread the thought of their wedding beds, the burdens of wifhood and bearing children. You will do as females have done since the gods made us man and woman. You will simply put up with it all, my darling."

"But, your majesty..."

"I won't hear of it, Fuldda, dear," she said patting him on the cheek. "You are simply too pretty for anything other than marriage! You will birth the most beautiful children, sweet girl, and forget all about your silly life as a man!"

She renamed them all. Fuldda, Hecata, and Aggami, who was her favorite because he of all of them was the most feminine and the most obedient to the demands of his new sex, eagerly agreeing to do all that she asked of them in their new roles as the most famous girls in the land.

Days passed... weeks... and they found themselves knitting and weaving, doing needlepoint, gracing teas and dances, surrounded almost always by girls and women, and never alone, but always in groups, and certainly were they never to be in private with a male, but only to interact with males in carefully orchestrated social events with constant supervision. Their masculinity eroded further, their resolve. They were kept so busy they had little time to think or plan, and Fuldda found himself increasingly indecisive, unable to commit to any plan of action, and so he sat with his needlepoint and worried.

Fuldda begged for information on the war, on his friends Stasha and Merlynn, but the only answers he received, again and again, were that he shouldn't worry his pretty head about such things, but instead simply pray to the gods and be a good girl. So he sat and knitted and worried some more.

Four days on end they posed for court painters and sculptors, the images of the Warrior Girls captured for posterity, and they heard the song of their transformation sung in the Great Square, a song that would spread through every corner of the kingdom of how the three greatest warriors in the land found themselves transformed into girls, and how they rode into the great city in a chariot shaped like a swan and began new lives as women.

The night of the ball approached, and the warriors were kept busy learning a girl's life worth of lessons in dance and etiquette, proper behavior for young ladies, and it became increasingly clear the queen meant for the ball to serve as their joint debutante ball.

The queen spoke frequently of the need for the three to marry, to set a good example for the young ladies of the kingdom, and she took a special interest in Fuldda, spending many hours with the confused little man, constantly talking of his new life and correcting any word or gesture she found unladylike. “Shouldn’t we do something more than knit and dance? To help the men with the war?” Fuldda asked, pulling out a bit of knitting that had gone awry.

“Our work begins when the men come home,” the queen said. “We have lost many of our best men, and with war has come plague and famine. It will be the duty of every fertile girl to bear many children and rebuild our population.” She met Fuldda’s eye and smiled. “It will be your duty, my dear, to mother.”

Fuldda knew. It had always been the way—for the females. But he wasn’t! He couldn’t!

“You will learn to love motherhood,” she said, “when you suckle your first baby at your breast, and feel your mother’s milk flow... oh, such a lucky girl!”

Marriage. The thought scared Fuldda. He felt almost as if he could, if he had to, learn to live as a girl, spend his life in dresses, but a wife and a mother? “I don’t want this,” he said softly.

“Neither did me,” the queen answered, “but it is the duty of our sex.”

And yet the city stood nearly empty of young men, with the war having drawn them all off, and the only single men being largely old, largely widowed, and largely... well, LARGE.

That thought as much as any weighed heavily on Fuldda’s mind as he pictured himself on his bridal bed being smooshed beneath the bouncing fat of a 70 year old bald man with gross spots on his jowly face.

Sewing, knitting, needlepoint, teas and dances, he thought more and more of the queen’s plans, of being forced to marry some gross old man, and it consumed his pretty thoughts and dreams.

Finally as he worked on walking more gracefully, his anger burst forth. "I don't want to marry an old fat man!" He shrieked at the queen as she watched him walk gracefully with a book perched on his head.

"Well, at least you are thinking like a proper girl now," the queen answered, looking at the pretty little warrior with a glint of satisfaction in her eye.

"Well, can't I at least wait until a more suitable match returns from the war?"

The queen smiled. "Perhaps, but a girl must marry young or not at all. The war could go on for years."

"Oh, please," he said, coming to kneel before the queen and taking her hand in his. "Please. If I must marry, and accept this girl's life, please at least let my husband be handsome, and young and strong. Let him be someone who can.... please me." Tears then began to pour from his eyes. "I don't want to marry some wrinkly, old man."

The queen squeezed Fuldda's hand. "It breaks my heart to see a once great man reduced so," she said. "And yet, your tears move me, girl. And to hear your reason... to hear that soft voice, to see those girlish tears, to know the pretty little thing kneeling before me once faced giants without fear, but now cries because she wants a handsome young man between her legs, one who can please her the way a girl wants to be pleased?"

She tilted Fuldda's head back and smiled down on his pretty face. "I will find a strong young man for you, sweet girl. One who can please a warrior girl! Will that make you happy, my brave little warrior girl?"

"Yes," Fuldda said, a pretty smile spreading across his face. "Very much."

The queen hugged him. "We're going to find you a man!"

"Thank you, my queen," he said. "Thank you!"

The queen watched him walk gracefully away, turn and curtsy, then leave,

clearly thrilled at the news, and as soon as he left she laughed out loud, and the air seemed to grow cold and dark. "He is broken," the wounded voice of the division whispered.

"Yes," the queen said. "As you commanded."

"And now I will send him the man of his dreams! And he will bear many children, and they will serve me."

"Your wish," the queen said, "is my command."

As the presence of The Division withdrew from the room, the queen blinked and started a sudden noise. She turned, startled, certain she had seen something or someone move out of the corner of her eye. The curtain fluttered, and she saw a small pot on the floor turned over on its side. "Just the breeze," she thought, memory of the voice of the Division already fading from her memory. "Now, what was I doing?"

"Duty," Fuldda said sitting at his loom, working the thread with his small, nimble hands. "I have always sworn to do my duty. And, the queen's words held truth. A girl has her duty, and the kingdom relies on the females to mother children. "

"But we are not girls," Hecata said. "These shapes are the results of dark magic. It is the will of The Division that made maidens of us. We have a duty to fight! To complete the quest each of us vowed to undertake, or to die in the effort."

"I can't decide what is my true duty!" Fuldda said.

"I feel as the queen feels," Aggami said. "Whether by dark or light magic, I am now a female, and I must do my duty as it is given me."

"So, you will accept marriage and motherhood?"

"Yes."

“Aggami,” Fuldda said, “but what of your own wife, and your children? Don’t you have a duty to them?”

Aggami sighed. “I try not to think of my wife and children. It pains me, but I would rather they believed me dead than saw me like this. Would I share my bed with my wife now? I am ashamed to even think it.”

“The minstrels travel the land singing of The Warrior Girls and the Swan King,” Hecata said. “Your family will know you are not dead if they don’t know already.”

“And how will you feel when they sing of your marriage?” Fuldda said. “The birth of your first child? How do you think your sons will feel when they hear songs of their father in his bridal gown?”

“I hate it,” Aggami said. “I think of it every day. Of my sons, and the shame they will feel, when news of this reaches them, when they hear their father is heavy with child, but what can we do? What can I do? He raised his small hands to his head, the bracelets at his tiny wrists flashing. “I am cursed and doomed, fated to live out my life in dresses, and I would kill myself but I lack the heart.”

“Aggami!” Fuldda said.

Aggami wept now, his hands still to his head. “I hate this! I hate this! Hate it! Hate it! I was a man! A warrior! A father! This is worse than death!”

The other two rushed to their friend’s side, the other two weeping openly as well. They hugged and hushed and held each other, their mutual grief and shame at all they had lost, at the price to be paid by their wives and children, and all the fear and rage they had been holding back poured out of them until finally the sobbing began to subside, and they wiped their tears and Aggami laughed and said, “Even when we rage against our prisons of female flesh, we do it as women.”

“Yes,” Fuldda said. “Yes, but, oh my goodness, Aggami, your tears have washed the cataracts from my eyes.” Fuldda stood and arranged his skirts. “I

now my duty. Our duty!”

“”What?” Hecata said.

“Both!”

“Both!”

“We must complete our quest to raise The One Hero. We did vow as much, and that vow was not conditional upon our sex! And then?”

“We marry and bear children?”

“Yes. For that, too, now falls to us.”

“And our wives and children?” Aggami said, thinking again of his strong young boys.

“For my part, I will face them and explain the path I must now walk. I will want them to understand why I submit to marriage and motherhood! And my daughters as well.”

“So, what first?”

“We must reclaim the Helmet of the One Hero,” Fuldda said. “After that, I know not.”

“So, first, we must find out where the helm is kept.”

“Yes.”

“How?” Aggami asked.

“I can help with that,” Princess Fanelle said, stepping out of the shadows.

The three men jumped in shock, making little cries of surprise. “Princess!” Fuldda said. “You were listening the whole time?”

“Yes,” she said. “And I will help you.”

“Why?” Hecata said suspiciously.

“Because my mother has fallen under the power of The Division,” she answered. “And I, too, long for the life of a hero.”

“Then I offer to make you a member of the Warrior Girls, my princess,” Fuldda said. “If you are willing to pledge your loyalty to us, and to accept our pledge in return.”

Princess Fanelle joined hands with the three, and looked them each in the eyes. “I am ready,” she said.

“Repeat after me,” Fuldda said. “I swear on my heart and on my name, and with whatever gods I hold true as my witness, that I will stand loyal with my brothers even unto the brink of death, and that I will never abandon them whether in the field, at court or in the pub.”

Princess Fanelle repeated the pledge, and then they all said the words together.

“Welcome, brother,” they each said, shaking her hand.

Princess Fanelle grinned. “I feel like a boy!”

“Me, too,” Fuldda said. “For the first time in a long time!”

“Where is the Helmet?” Hecata asked.

“I will take you to it,” but when they three started toward the door, she said, “no! I will take you through secret passages. We will be able to reach the chamber unseen. We must not let Daddy catch us!” Then, she winked.

“When you grow up a princess,” she said, “you learn to sneak!”

The three men followed behind as Fanelle pressed on a stone and a narrow door appeared in the wall. It was dark, and as they entered and the door slid

shut behind them, so dark they could barely see each other let alone where they were going.

“Hold hands,” Fanelle said. “I know the way. Just be as quiet as you can.”

Fuldda took Fen Ella’s hand, and then joined with Hecata, with Aggami in the rear, but Aggami whispered, “I am scared,” and the two men switched places in a rustle of skirts. Fanelle then began to lead them forward up narrow, twisting stairs, down steep, slippery slopes, through galleries and closets and mysterious dusty rooms. More than once she paused and squeezed Fuldda’s hand, who passed the squeeze back, and all the men froze, holding their breath, as a set of footsteps echoed in the distance, or voice could be heard murmuring in the dark. On and on they went, and Fuldda felt himself grow ever more anxious as he lost all sense of where they were and doubted if he could ever find his way back in the secret hallways.

Finally, they came to a narrow balcony that stretched across a large library with bookcases that reached to the ceiling and busts of all the kings of the Western Dynasty, dating back all the way to the founding of _____ as an independent kingdom when it broke away from Universalis. Dying embers glowed in the great fireplace, and a single red candle burnt down near the bottom of the taper rested on a marble table near one of the bookshelves.

Fanelle squeezed Fuldda’s hand and signal they should back out the way they had come. Once a safe distance, she whispered, “I have never seen a fire in the library. Nor a candle left unattended.”

“Is someone in there?”

“I don’t know. I am going to sneak around a bit and make sure it is safe for us to cross.”

“Is there another way?”

“No,” Fanelle said.

“Be careful,” Fuldda said taking her hand and kissing it sweetly.

“Of course.”

The three men huddled in the dark and waited. And waited. Silence. Painful silence, and dark. Dark. The men huddled in the dark, holding hands, and Hector found himself quietly offering a prayer to Unity that Fanelle was okay, that they would find their path in the darkness and regain The Helmet of the One Hero. Fuldda and Aggami joined, their three soft, pretty voices melding in the dark and seeming to bring them all light and warmth and courage. Hector nuzzled his face in Aggami's thick blonde hair that smelled of vanilla, and thought of the other soft lips and kisses stolen in the dark, while Fuldda stared ahead into the blackness, looking, watching for any sign of Fanelle.

Then, a sound. Like stone moving. Where? Fuldda turned his head this way and that, trying to figure out which direction it came from, pulling his long, thick hair back from his ears—and then the same sound. From behind them! It was the sound of a secret door opening and closing.

He found Hecata's hand in the dark, grabbed it tightly and pulled the other forward. He felt Hecata pull back in confusion and then relent, and the three surged forward down the hall toward the dim, flickering light from the library. Their skirts rustled as they hurried, and Fuldda silently cursed their dresses, but kept moving forward.

The three reached the end of the passage and crept out onto the balcony, eager to make it to the other side, to get out of sight, away from whatever pursued them and to the safety of the next tunnel. Halfway across the balcony, he heard a thud, and the three froze. The queen was below, her back to them, looking intently among the large, heavy tomes that crowded the shelves. Fuldda's breath caught in his throat, and he felt Hecata squeeze his hand. The three men crouched there in their dresses, as silent as little mice could be, and they watched as the queen moved about, clearly frustrated and anxious as she searched. “Somewhere,” the queen said. “Somewhere in here.”

Aggami felt his heart racing, and his full, soft breasts heaved as the rising tide of a panic attack started to build somewhere down in his belly. Hecata,

sensing the panic, turned and saw Aggami's pretty eyes wide, his white gloved hands clasped over his mouth as he fought the rising need to scream. Hecata put his hands on the other man's smooth, round shoulders and smiled, "calm," he tried to mouth. "Breath."

Aggami looked at Hecata's pretty face, the other man's eyes soft and pretty in the dim light, his glossy red lips and full, wet eyelashes. Breath, he could sense the other man mouthing, breath. Aggami nodded. Nodded. Nodded, and he started to breath, soft but deep breaths, just as he had once done to calm himself before a battle.

Then, a soft noise behind them. Aggami tried to turn and look, the panic rising in him again, and he glanced down at the queen, who was turning in their direction, and then felt Hecata's strong hands plunge into his thick blonde hair, and he met the other man's eyes and Hecata mouthed "Fanelle. Fanelle." And then nodded in the direction they had come from.

Oh! Aggami thought, once again with a surge of relief, and tears now poured down his face as he felt the panic and tension ebb, resisting the urge to throw his slender arms around Hecata's long, graceful white neck and give the other man a kiss.

Fuldda watched the queen, only offering the smallest awareness to the drama playing out behind him. She had turned toward them, her hands on her hips, but her line of sight was far below in the cavernous room. Don't look up," he thought. "Why would you? Nothing to see up here in the darkness."

The queen turned again and once again examined the shelves, and her next words sent chills through all of the slender little men's bodies. "I know you're hiding here somewhere," the queen said. "And I will find you."

How? Fuldda thought. He felt Hecata shift as if to push forward, but something told him to stay still. Not to move. He shook his head, thick curls of pretty hair tossing around his angry eyes. No! No!

The queen sighed. "Just a matter of time before I find that damn book," and with that she grabbed her candle and left the room.

Fuldda immediately led the Warrior Girls forward, across the balcony and down into the next hallway. “Goodness,” Aggami whispered, wiping away his tears, happy and proud he had not given in to his girlish need to scream.

The queen poked her head back into the library. Had she heard something? She looked around, squinting into the darkness, and thought of the feeling she had earlier, a feeling that she’d been watched, that someone had been watching her in secret. But no. The room seemed empty.

Still. Perhaps it was time for her to be more cautious. And to check on her little Warrior Girls.

“When I heard her coming,” Fanelle whispered later, when they felt safely clear of the room, “I snuck back around and used another passage to come behind you! I didn’t think you would be frightened and move forward.”

“I almost screamed,” Aggami said, reveling both in the fact he didn’t as well as the girly fact that he almost did.”

“Thank goodness you didn’t!” Fuldda said.

“Thank Hecata! He saved me.”

“That was close, brothers,” Fanelle said. “If mother caught us sneaking about, we would be in ever so much trouble.”

“She’d probably have us married and consummated before dawn.”

“Or worse. She is under the spell of The Division. I saw and heard it myself,” Fanelle said, shivering at even the memory of that broken voice and that dark look of hate and madness it had brought to her mother’s eyes.

“We daren’t fall back in her hands,” Hecata said.

“What of your father? Does he remain free of The Division’s spells?”

“I think so,” Fanelle said, “but...”

“But?”

“He is a man, and he thinks little of the abilities of... girls.”

Fuldda nodded. “So, spell or no spell, he will be no ally.”

“No.”

“How much farther?”

“Not much.”

Soon, they came to what seemed like a dead end. Fanelle turned. “This leads to the Grand Chamber. It is where all the rarest treasures are kept.”

Fanelle then turned and found the stone to open the way. She pushed it, and the secret door slid open. The room behind was dark, but Fanelle soon found a lantern and the means to light it. The lantern sputtered to life, the light stretching out into the darkness, and the room began to sparkle and glitter as gold and silver, diamonds and rubies picked up the light and flashed to life. The three men felt their girlish hearts leap at the sight of the jewels, and all the pretty bracelets and necklaces and statues and gorgeous things from every corner of the world shone and called to them.

“Come,” Fanelle said. They made their way into the chamber, wending their way along narrow paths in the heaping mountains of treasure, until at last they came to a stone door carved with glyphs and sigils. The door stood open, and inside the room they saw the King. He was clearly asleep, gently snoring. On his head he wore The Helmet.

“Wait here,” Fanelle said, creeping forward. The three men waited, again agonized with worry, as Fanelle snuck silently to the side of her father, reached out and placed her hands on the helm. The King snored on, and Fanelle carefully, carefully began to lift the helm from his head. The King snorted and shifted positions, waving his hand as if to chase away a fly, and

Fullda covered his mouth to stifle a shriek. Fanelle took a deep breath and lifted the helm the remainder of the way from her Father's head, and the three Warrior Girls raised their little fists in triumph.

Carefully, carefully, Fanelle brought the crown out of the chamber, the smile on her face growing wider as she approached the three, and then, just as she was about to clear the door, she stumbled and fell forward, the Helm slipping from her fingers and right toward a large gilded mirror of glass.

She watched in horror, the whole thing playing out in slow motion, the help moving gracefully through the air, and then the mirror exploding into a shower of flashing fragments.

"What?" The King yelled, jarred awake and lurching to conscious, his hand instinctively reaching for the dagger at his side as he had practiced many times for fear of assassins. In the dim, flickering light, he saw four girls.

The Warrior Girls froze as the king jumped to his feet and drew his cold steel dagger. All four looked at him, their eyes wide with fear and surprise, but thinking quickly, Hecata stepped forward, covering the helm with his long dress.

"Fanelle? What are you... what are all of you doing here?" The king could feel something was wrong, he was missing something, but what?

"Um..." Fanelle said, "We were just looking for you!" And she rushed forward and threw her arms around The King. "I love you, daddy."

"Oh," he said, taking his daughter in his arms. "Why, that's... The Helm!" He turned and looked behind him. "The Helm of The One Hero!" He glanced back at where he'd been sitting, started to turn as if to walk back and search, but then spun around, eyeing the Warrior Girls suspiciously. "You came looking for me, eh?"

"Father," Fanelle said, but he ignored her, looking intently into the faces of the three girls, all of whom looked away blushing. "Where is it?" He moved toward Aggami, whose lower lip began to tremble. "You!" He bellowed, and Aggami jumped back with a shriek.

“I’m sorry,” Fuldda cried, throwing himself at The King’s feet. “I was too scared to tell you the truth!” And girlish tears poured down his cheeks as he lifted his small hands imploringly.

“Where is The Helm?”

“A man,” Fuldda said, pointing away back toward the secret door they’d entered. “He forced us to bring him here, threatened that if we told anyone he would... do THINGS to us! I was scared!”

“We all were,” Fanelle said, crying now as well, and the other two men began to weep in sympathy, begging for forgiveness, the air filled with their soft cries.

Fuldda threw his arms around the king and sobbed against the man’s hard chest. “He’s going to come back and... and... I daren’t even think it!”

“No,” the King said. “Now, now.” He patted the little female on the head, looking back where Fuldda had indicated the thief had run. “I will keep you safe.”

“Fanelle, and need you and the girls to be brave now.”

“Yes,” father.

“Go, fast, and find the guard. Send them after me. I am going after our thief.”

“No! Father! He’s too dangerous!”

“Go,” he said, turning and rushing off into the chamber. “Be good girls now and go!”

Fanelle smiled and winked at Fuldda. “A girl learns to fib,” she whispered. Hecata stepped back and grabbed the helm, which they quickly wrapped in light afghan they found draped over a sculpture of a mermaid, and lifting

their skirts, the Warrior Girls rushed off, flush with feminine pride over their triumphant outsmarting of a man.

“What now?” Aggami asked, and Fanelle said, “follow me!”

The little group of four soon found themselves rushing up... up...up ... one stairway after another until at last a steep, winding circular step. “The great tower!” Fanelle said.

“My legs hurt,” Hecata said, his breasts heaving prettily as he gasped for breath, one tiny hand holding up his skirts, the other The Helm.

“We’re almost there!”

Nearly blind with exhaustion, sweat pouring down their faces, the four men rushed on, trotting along as fast as they could in their tight dresses, eager to escape the palace. “Surely the kind has guessed at our trickery by now,” Aggami hissed. “The guard is probably right behind us!”

“No,” Fanelle said. “He would never even consider for a moment the possibility that he could be tricked by a mere girl.”

Just then they turned the last corner and reached a landing that led to a stout wooden door. The four immediately collapsed, gasping with relief. Fanelle pushed her sweat drenched hair from her forehead and laughed. “It is so unfair!”

“What?” Fullda said, breathing deeply.

“You’re all still perfect!”

And, indeed, each of the warrior girls sat and gasped with his long, glossy hair perfect, his dress spotless, and every pretty bow and piece of lace perfectly in place, his face a picture of feminine painted perfection powdered and blushed, lips glossy and wet, eye shadow as pretty as pretty could be.

“One of the more useless bits of magic ever,” Hecata said. “I wish I could take this make-up off.”

“Ready?” Fanella said.

“Ready.”

“If I hadn’t been wearing a dress,” Hecata said, wistfully. “I wouldn’t have been able to hide the Helm.”

“Yes. And had Fuddle not been or appeared to my father’s eyes as a helpless and oh so innocent little female, those pretty little lies would not have been so convincing.”

“It seems our curse has strangely become a blessing,” Fullda said. “Could it be this was all ordained by Unity?”

They walked out onto the roof of the tower. “Maybe being female never was a curse,” Aggami offered, and Fanelle laughed and said, “now, you are getting the lesson.”

“Well, the old and ugly men of the land will be so disappointed,” Hecata said, sticking his breasts out. “This is one girl who is staying single! I’d love to see The Queen’s face when she finds out we have The Helm.”

“Then why don’t you turn around?” An icy voice called from the door to the stair, and the four turned and shrieked as The Queen stepped from the shadows. “Give me the helm, and go to your rooms, girls.”

The four stood there, looking at her, frozen. Her words had a strange power, and they each felt a powerful need to obey, but each resisted.

“Girls, you are trying my patience! I am going to count to three, and if you are not marching your pretty little fannies down those stairs by the time I am done, you will each get the spanking of your lives!”

Each of the three men felt a bolt of pure terror run through his little body at the Queen’s words, and Aggami straightened, lifted his skirts in a curtsy and said, “yes, ma’am.”

Seeing Aggami break, Hecata followed suit, and then her eyes met Fuldda's, who reached toward his skirt, then swallowed hard and shook his head.

"No!" He said prettily. "You're not my mommy! You can't tell me what to do!"

"Hecata and Aggami, come stand behind me." The two men obeyed, standing behind the queen, eyes downcast. "You have been good girls."

"Thank you, my queen," they each said.

She turned her eyes back to Fuldda. "I know you are a good girl, too, Fuldda. Aren't you?"

Fuldda felt a sense of relief sweep over him. He was a good girl! "Yes," he said. "I am a good girl."

"Curtsey like a good girl, then, and come stand behind me."

Fuldda lifted his skirt and started his curtsey. He was a good girl!"

"Brother!" Fanelle said. "Remember our oath!"

Fuldda stopped his curtsey and looked uncertainly toward Fanelle.

"BE A GOOD GIRL!" The Queen screamed.

"Brothers stand together until the end!!!"

"Oh, goodness," Fuldda whispered. "Goodness me."

"One!" The queen said.

"Brothers!"

"Two!"

What shall I do? Fuldda felt himself crying, looked from the queen to

Fanelle, to Hecata and Aggami.

“Brothers to the end,” he thought, then winked at Fanelle.

He finished his curtsey and said, “I am a good girl,” before walking toward the queen, just as smartly and feminine as she had taught him.

The Queen smiled, a crooked, broken smile of triumph, and her eyes filled with the black hatred of the division as she pulled a pair of long, sharp needles from her hair. “Now, you little bitch,” she said to Fanelle, “you will be punished because one thing you have never been is a good girl.”

The Queen stepped forward, and Fullda threw himself against the back of her legs, sending her tumbling backwards. Hecata and Aggami immediately fell upon her, each grabbing one of her arms and clinging for dear life, as Fullda draped himself across her legs, and Fanelle put a foot on her chest.

“You bitches!” The Queen shrieked in the broken voice of The Division. “I’ll kill you all!”

“Get out of my mother!” Fanelle screamed. “Get out of her, I command you in the name of Unity!”

“You can’t command me,” The Queen screamed, and with a mighty lurch she tossed the three little warrior girls aside and leaping to her feet in a flash she plunge one of the needles into Fanelle’s heart.

Fanella’s eyes grew wide, and she looked down in shock at the needle sticking from her chest. “No,” she said, coughing, and blood came up with the cough and dripped from her mouth. “It wasn’t supposed to end like this.”

She fell to one knee, and looking up, she met her mother’s eyes. “I loved you,” she said as if realizing it for the first time, a single year rolling down her cheek, and then she closed her eyes and sank to the floor, where she lay unmoving, her face to the ground.

Fullda rushed to Fanella’s side. “Oh no,” he whispered. “No... no... no...”

and he turned her over, and her eyes were open but they were the glassy, unseeing eyes of the dead. “Fanelle,” he said. “Not you.”

Hecata and Aggami rushed to the side of their fallen friend, weeping openly, they all seemed to have forgotten about the Queen, who stood, transfixed, watching the scene, one needle still clutched in her trembling hand.

“Stop playing,” she said. “Fanelle, this is not a fun game. Now stop playing and come to dinner.”

“She’s not playing,” Fullda said. “You... killed... her.”

“No, this is just a game. My only child? Dead? No, but it can’t, I wouldn’t...” the Queen’s eyes seemed fixed on something in the far distance, and her mouth hung open as she started to slowly spin in a tight circle, the needle in her hand flashing. “Get out of ME,” she screamed. “Get out!”

And then she raised the needle high in the air as if preparing to plunge it into her own heart, her other hand rising up and grabbing her wrist, and she twisted and turned and howled and spun toward the parapets the lined the top of the tower, and Fullda, realizing the queen would soon stumble over the side of the tower and plunge to her death leapt to his feet and tried to run to grab her but immediately tripped over his dress and fell, and the Queen threw herself violently against the parapet and tumbled backwards, falling backwards and then... she was gone... without even a scream or any noise at all.

Fullda pulled his hair back from his face and stared at the empty space where the queen had been, and then he crawled back to Hecata and Aggami, and the three of them held hands and prayed quietly over the still body of their young friend.

And then there was a great cry, and the sound of flapping, and looking up they saw the Swan King in his chariot rise from below them, and he held the unconscious body of the Queen in his arms. Next to him stood Merlynn and Stasha, wearing gilded armor that flashed proudly in the sunlight, and the three little men felt their hearts leap with joy and hope at the sight of their

friends.

“I thought I might catch up with the queen,” The Swan King said with a silvery laugh, but then he saw the fallen body of Fanelle and gently laying the Queen down he leapt from the chariot with a cry and, kneeling beside Fanelle he wept and sighed. “The Division has broken so many, but this one grieves me more than any other.”

“Why?” Stasha said.

“She was unified within herself, and she was a great hope for the healing of the world and the rejoining of the Kingdom Sundered.”

He covered his eyes with his small, soft hands for a moment and remained still, and when he looked up it was clear he had been silently weeping. “It is time to end this Division,” he said softly then, in a voice of small fury.

“We cannot just leave her here,” Fullda said, gesturing to the fallen princess.

“I will tend to my daughter,” the Queen said, having wakened. Her face was hard and drawn, her eyes sad but alive once more. “I am free of the Division.”

Helm in hand, the Warrior Girls leapt upon the Swan Chariot and they felt their spirits rise as the chariot lifted into the sky. “We need yet a mighty warrior to command The One Hero,” Aggami said.

“And we will have him soon enough!” The Swan King sang, and so trusting their friend, the Warrior Girls giggly hugged Merlynn and Stasha, and listened with wide eyes as the two spoke of their harrowing adventures and narrow escapes from many foes and traps.

“And what of you three?” Stasha asked.

“We learned to knit,” Hecata answered.

“And sow.” Fullda answered.

“And we managed to avoid being saddled with husbands!” Aggami added, and they all laughed at the strange new lives and adventures the warriors had faced in their small, female shapes.

The Swan Chariot descended to the tomb’s entrance, and Stasha and Merlynn quickly dispatched a small unit of the broken souls who’d been left to stand guard. “Too easy,” Fullda said.

“Yes,” the Swan King said. “She waits within. The Division.”

All felt a chill then. The UltraGod herself had come to prevent them from reaching The One Hero and ending her reign. “Can sneak past her?” Fullda said, clutching his little hands to his breasts.

“No.”

“Can we contend with her?” Stasha said. “With these weapons?”

“No.”

“Can you?”

“No.”

“And so what should we... um... do?” Aggami said.

“Lift our skirts,” Fullda said.

“Come.” The Swan King strode forward into the tomb, and the others followed.

They passed the same chambers as before, saw the place where the spell trap had begun their transformation into girls, passed the ruined remains of the creatures they had slain, and then finally arrived at the door that led to the Tomb of The One Hero. The Division stood there waiting—a mismatched and ragtag woman with the arms and legs and eyes and ears of many different races and sizes, and clothes assembled in a mad combination of styles from

through the history of the world, a creature that was at once everything and nothing, completely broken and brokenly complete.

In her right hand she held a hilt with a shattered blade, and in her right she clutched the end of a mace like a great stone. On her head she wore a broken crown, and her eyes were empty.

Merlynn and Stasha stepped forward while the Warrior Girls gathered nervously around the Swan King. “Stand aside. Your day is over,” Stasha said.

“Very well,” The Division said, and stepping aside in a flowing of ragged capes, she revealed five tall, beautiful men.

All five of the women gasped as they looked upon the men and their broad shoulders, their hard chins, their arms roped with tendons like steel cables, and their flashing, lively eyes. Each of them stood blushing as one of the men met their eyes and stared, and stared until one by one they each looked away in blushing maidenly confusion.

The men stepped forward and took each of the women by the hand, each offering a sweet, gentle kiss on the back of the hand that sent shivers through their bodies and left them weak in the knees. The Warrior Girls each curtsied prettily, and music filled the chamber, and soon they were in the arms of these handsome men, small and safe as the big, powerful boys spun them around the room, and each looked up into the handsome face of his prince, and the prince laughed and said, “you are the prettiest girl in the world!”

And the Warrior Girls giggled and blushed, and felt like the luckiest girl alive, and all thoughts of her mission passed from her mind, and she thought only of dancing and laughing and being held in the strong arms of a handsome man who thought she was pretty!

A strong arm went around the waist and pulled her close. She looked up into those beautiful eyes, and her soft lips parted, and she closed her eyes and accepted the first kiss! And her fingers tingled! Her toes curled! It was ever so much fun to be a silly, pretty girl and kiss a boy!

And then The Division screamed! The faces of the princes melted into the grotesque, shattered faces of the broken, and they spun and rushed to the aid of their queen, but with barely a flick of the wrist what appeared to be a small, little rustic man broke them into pieces and sent them to their end.

“Now!” The Swan King said as The Hermit kept the The Divison at bay, and the group rushed with the helm into The Chamber of the One Hero, and summoned him forth, and he looked once more upon a group of women, and his face grew dark with anger, but then the Swan King shouted “Ever Been!”

“Oh!” Ever Been shouted, fending off blows from The Division. And with a wave of his hand he broke the spell, and the Warrior Gentlemen stood as men once more, and The One Hero looked upon Fullda and said, “I will serve you.”

“No!” The Division shrieked. “NO! It’s still my turn!”

But The One Hero merely laughed, and with a breath he blew The Division into pieces, and the world erupted with joy and the song of nature.

Epilogue

“Aggami!” Fullda shrieked with joy and rushed over to greet his friend. “You’re getting so big” He said, patting the man’s belly.

“Eight months,” he said proudly. “I think I am with twins!”

Fullda laughed. “Twins!”

“Yes. Well, when a Warrior Girl sets her mind to something, she does it all the way.”

Fuddala took Aggami by the hand and led the other man to the nursery, where his own newborn son slept sweetly. “He’s beautiful!” Aggami whispered.

“Let’s talk while he yet sleeps!”

The two men soon found a spot on the veranda of Fullda’s estate that looked down over the whole misty valley. Aggami sat with a groan, grateful to be free of his woman’s burden for a moment.

“So,” he said. “Mothers!”

“Yes. Our next great adventure.”

“Do you miss the life of a warrior at all? Do you ever regret asking Even Been to return you to your girl’s shape?”

“I don’t. I had enough of killing and death, enough battles. I want to create life now, nurture it! It will be adventure enough for me to be a good mother, and wife. And when I am old I will tend my gardens and bring life forth from the earth! You?”

“No,” Aggami said. “I also long to bring life into this world after having taken so much of it. And besides, I found I feel more comfortable as a woman. I’d much rather wear a pretty dress than a smelly suit of armor!”

“Have you seen Hecata?”

“He and The One Hero adventure together, doing battle against the remaining servants of The Division. He seems happy to be a man again, though I think he still does needlepoint in the evening.”

“And he kept his girl’s name. We are unified now,” Fullda said. “No long are we divided against ourselves, but we are male and female, pretty and strong, sweet and mighty as we choose or need to be.”

“It is a great time, and a true triumph.”

“Yes. I am happy my son will be free to wear a dress if he chooses, or to swing a sword.”

“Stasha and Merlynn seem happy living in their little cabin in the woods together.”

“Yes, they have become quite the hunters and woodsmen.”

It was quiet for a time, only the distant sound of an axman chopping wood in the air, and the two sat and enjoyed the breeze and the sunlight, until a cloud passed over the sun, and they each felt a chill.

“I miss Fanelle,” Fullda said, tears coming from his eyes.

“Me, too,” Aggami said, and the two hugged prettily, and then they both looked up as the air was torn with a baby’s cry.