

## Nerd Girl

“So, you’re taking care of it?” Richard said into his cell as he ran his electric shaver across his chin.

“Of course, but, really—“ Michael Kline started to say.

“BUT? Don’t you but me! Do your job!” Richard said, ending the call.

Micheal looked at his phone, his blood boiling. Richard had been accused of sexual harassment— again— for repeatedly coming onto one of his professors no less. Micheal had been tasked with making it go away. Again. He was really getting tired of it. “ I went to Harvard Law school for this?” He wondered. Of course, he worked for Richard’s father and was very well paid, but still. He really didn’t like being talked down to by a child.

Luke, Richard’s roomie, was sitting on the couch, Calculus textbook in his hands.

“That prick giving you shit?”

“Asshole started to lecture me. Like I give a fuck what he thinks.”

“He take care of that bitch?”

“Yeah. Just had to find her price. For all her feminist bullshit, we paid her off just like any prostitute.”

“And you would know,” Luke said.

Richard chuckled. “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.”

Richard looked himself over, smiled. He was a good looking man, for sure, and he knew it. Add in the fact that his father was worth half a billion dollars, and he’d gotten away with everything his whole life. Not that his Dad was any kind of positive role model. He was on his fourth wife— this one a 19 year old model. He’d only agreed to marry her after she’d gotten a boob job. Richard thought it was awesome. He wanted to be just like dear old dad as he got older, trading in one hot young wife for another.

“Heading out,” he said.

“Keep it real,” Luke said.

“Always.”

Richard walked down the hall to the elevator. When the doors opened, he saw a girl there— another student. Looking her over he saw cheap jewelry, a shitty blonde dye

job, plastic sandals. In other words, common, though slightly attractive in the way a peasant can be. She smiled. "Hey," she said.

"Yeah," Richard said, getting on the elevator, making it as clear as he could through his tone and demeanor that he didn't want to talk to her. He even pulled out his phone, pretending to check his texts, praying to God the elevator would get to the first floor in a hurry. The girl was wearing some kind of cheap, drug store perfume that smelled like chemicals he suspected were supposed to approximate some form of flower, but actually just smelled like pollution to him.

"We have a class together," the girl said. "Economics? In that auditorium with, like, 300 people?" There was something needy, almost desperate in her voice. It made Richard sick.

"You are a mud person," Richard said. "A common creature. I wouldn't hire you to clean my toilets, so please just shut up."

The girl looked stunned, stepped back. They rode the rest of the way down in silence. When they reached the first floor and the doors opened, the girl shoved her way past Richard, mumbling, "jerk!"

Richard recoiled, disgusted she had touched him. "I am only being honest," he called after her. "I thought women liked honesty."

The girl didn't respond.

"Morning, sir," Ahmir, the doorman, said from behind his desk.

"The quality of the residents has declined," Richard said. "Have you noticed?"

"Oh, yes," Ahmir said, thinking, *with you*.

Richard left. Thank God this was his senior year, and he would soon be free of the requirement to associate with lesser people. The worst thing about colleges these days, he felt, after the absurd sexual harassment policies, was the insistence on providing opportunities to middle class and even — ugh— poor people. They just degraded everything with their backward and uncouth opinions. Not to mention the smell.

He made the short walk to campus, thinking about the corner office that awaited him at dear old dad's brokerage. The secretary. The penthouse apartment he would secure, in a building with the better sort. It was all going to be so glorious, and it would make these days listening to the idiotic droning of these pitiful low paid academics

worthwhile. How could people who only made 70,000 dollars a year and lived in hovels expect to be taken seriously?

Just as he was contemplating the pitiful existences common to his so-called professors, he came to the quad and stopped short. There were people there—students, alleged adults, dressed in robes, rubber armor, swinging plastic swords. He stopped. A waifish girl with pale skin and pink hair, wearing a robe with stars and moons on it, holding a staff over her head, was backing toward him. “I cast my spell of turn undead!” She shouted, her voice trembling with passion.

“The spell worked!” Richard shouted. “You look like a skeleton!”

“What?” The girl spun around.

“What is this? Dimwits and dullards? A support group for terminal losers?”

The Larpers all looked away, embarrassed and not sure how to react to the bully who’d intruded into their fun. All, but the waif. “For your information,” she said, “Larping is one of the fastest growing pastimes amongst educated men and women between the ages of 18-25. So **you** are the one who isn’t cool.”

Richard chuckled. “Cool? What adult cares about cool?” He stepped forward, assessing the young woman. “You,” he said, “have never had a boyfriend. You were on every planning committee for every dance in high-school, but no one ever invited you. You went anyway. Alone. You pretended you didn’t mind, but it hurt. So bad. You had a crush on the quarterback and used to fantasize about him asking you out, but you knew you could never be worthy of a boy like him, so you threw yourself at a series of sad nerds and losers, none of whom ever returned your sad affections largely because they were all gay. Your father abandoned you. You never got along with your mother. And now, you try and escape your sad little life, to feel some sense of power and worth, by pretending to be some kind of wizard, which is the saddest thing about your pointless and loveless life.”

The girl’s mouth dropped open. Her eyes started to mist over as she shook her head. “No...” But Richard could see he’d nailed her.

“Um, for your information, she’s not a wizard, she’s a cleric,” an acne scared bean pole wearing what looked like a corset and a monocle said.

“Shut up, crater face,” Richard said. “You’re all pathetic,” he shouted, waving toward the crowd of Larpers. “You proclaim to the world that you are losers, and you wonder why no one respects you! Go! Go! Run to Mordor and give Gollum a kiss for me.”

Laughing, Richard turned and walked away. He was a truth teller. He couldn’t help himself. Perhaps his radical honesty would lead them to change their lives. As he was replaying his performance in his mind, he was so distracted he didn’t even see the woman who stepped in front of him. He collided into her, shocked, stumbling backward. “Hey!”

The woman was tall, dressed in a cable knit sweater, a flamboyant scarf draped over her shoulders. She looked down at Richard through big, turtle shell glasses. “Excuse you,” she said.

“You’re the one who got in my way,” Richard snapped.

“Richard,” the woman said, shaking her head. “You are everything that’s wrong with men. You are the kind of person who watches Star Wars and roots for the First Order.”

“So?”

“So, it’s time for you to learn to identify with the underdog, my little friend. It’s time for you to broaden your horizons.”

“I’m outta here,” Richard said, but when he tried to walk past the strange woman, he found he couldn’t move. “What?”

“My name is Eris,” the woman said. “I’ll be seeing you around, nerd girl.”

With that, she began to laugh, the air around her shimmered, there was a blinding flash and when Richard could see again— she was gone.

Richard shook his head. Took a step to find out if he could move, which he could. “I need to get more sleep,” he decided. “Losing it.” He went on to class, putting the incident out of his mind. Finding a seat toward the back, he slouched down in his seat. As he waited for class to start, a girl walked in, stopping in the aisle to talk to someone. She was wearing a t-shirt that read, “Gryffindor.” Richard smiled, his heart even fluttering a little. “She must be into Harry Potter,” he murmured. “That is so cool. I’m so Slytherin.”

The girl found a seat. Richard found himself thinking about Hermione. He really admired her and kind of wanted to be like her, she was so brave and loyal. Really, he was already pretty much her —

What am I thinking? Richard sat up, shocked at the fact he'd been admiring a— woman? And not even a real one, but a character in a stupid... But no. He realized. Harry Potter wasn't stupid. It was one of his favorite all-time things. Richard's head hurt as he struggled to process what he was thinking. He had always thought Harry Potter was moronic, something for losers, hadn't he? He was sure he had, and yet now he had memories of reading every book, even hugging them to his chest before he went to bed at night... he ... he..

The professor walked in. Richard shook his head. It was all nonsense. He would just forget about it. None of that mattered. As the professor lectured, though, Richard found himself sketching a picture of Harry, and decorating it with hearts. When he realized what he'd been doing, he crumpled up the picture, looking around, worried someone had seen him. There was a girl sitting in the row behind him, and she kind of smirked. Richard looked away, humiliated and enraged.

## Chapter 2

After class, Richard walked back to his apartment. He saw a girl with green hair wearing a shirt with minions on it, and he couldn't help himself. "That shirt is so cool!" He gushed. The girl smiled, a kind of dorky smile. "Thanks."

Richard groaned inwardly. What is wrong with me? He needed sleep. That was it. A night off from drinking. As he approached The Estate, where he lived, he noticed the sign was gone from out front. And there was no one there to open the door, which seemed kind of stiff and made a screechy noise as he pulled it open. "What the hell?" He bellowed as he walked into the lobby, noticing the lighting seemed dim, dull, and the marble floor was dingy. "I am going to call the super and rip him a new asshole!" Richard hissed, making his way to the elevator.

He walked into his apartment seething. The whole day had been annoying and weird— and what about that weird woman? “What’s up?” He absently called to look, then froze.

“Dude?” He said, staring at his roommate, who was sitting at the kitchen table, laptop open. “What the fuck?”

Luke glanced back at him. “What?” He now had curly red hair. It was messy and came down to his jawline—and there was a ring glittering in his nose. “Oh, shit.” Luke turned his attention back to the computer. “Hold on. I gotta finish this battle.” The sounds of explosions were coming from the computer.

Luke had never had red hair, and certainly was not the nose ring type. On top of all the other weird experiences, it was too much. Richard walked over and looked at the computer screen. What looked like some sort of cat girl was in a dark cave battling spiders with a staff. It was obvious Luke was playing the cat girl. “Since when are you into this bullshit?”

“Um, since forever?” Luke said. Luke pressed some buttons, lightning shot from his staff and killed the spiders. His character started to do some dorky dance, which Luke mimicked.

“Don’t embarrass yourself,” Richard said, walking off to his room. He didn’t see Luke stick out his tongue at him as he walked away.

Richard threw himself on his bed and pulled his pillow over his face. Sleep, he commanded himself. Sleep. What a crazy day. He drifted off, tossing and turning, his sleep filled with vague, shapeless dreams. The sun set as he slept. When he woke his throat was dry, and he was hungry. He stared up at the green, glow in the dark stars he’d put on the ceiling above his bed, smiling at the sight, and—

Richard sat up. He’d never put glow in the dark stars on his ceiling. That was so lame. What the hell was going on? Was Luke playing some prank? “Lights on,” he said, waiting a moment for his voice command system to light the room. Nothing happened. “Lights on!” He shouted. Nothing.

His frustration building, he rolled out of bed and marched across the room, flipping the lights switch on the wall, looking around his room, blinking, wondering if Luke had done anything else to annoy him. At first, he thought everything was the same as

always, but then he noticed the picture on the wall above his bed. Instead of the hot woman in lingerie he'd hung, there was a framed poster of some chick with white hair-wait. That was Daenerys, he realized, only the most awesome female on Game of Thrones. He didn't know how he knew that, but he didn't have time to care, either. "Luke! Damn it!" He shouted, barreling out into the living room area. Luke was on the couch watching some Japanese cartoon.

"What now?" Luke said, pausing his show with a huff.

"What the fuck did you do to my room?"

Luke shook his head. "I don't have any idea what you're talking about."

"The Daenerys poster?"

"I didn't touch your poster."

"You put it there. Come on. Stop fucking with me."

"You're the one obsessed with Kaleesi," Luke said, snickering. .

"Me? I—" and yet, just as earlier he'd suddenly found himself in love with Harry Potter, he suddenly found his mind flooding with memories of obsessively watching Game of Thrones, belonging to a Mother of Dragons Facebook page, even writing a paper about her cultural significance. "I don't even know who Daenerys is," he mumbled, his head aching again, even as he struggled with the fact that he knew everything about Daenerys.

"Something's wrong with me," he mumbled, sitting down on the couch. Covering his face with his hands. "I don't know what's happening."

"Relax," Luke said, patting him on the knee. "Watch this. It's really sweet."

Richard just sighed and nodded. He was feeling so— off. The cartoon started. It was about a guy and girl who kept switching bodies, and there was a meteor that was going to hit the town.... Richard found himself fascinated with the story. He really liked the girl, Mitsuha, and when she and the guy found love he was shocked to find himself crying. Luke was crying, too.

"Fuck," Richard said, getting up, storming back to his room. "That movie sucked!"

Luke frowned, dabbing at his own tears with a tissue. He felt bad for Richard. He was so out of touch with his feelings! Oh, well. Luke was used to it. He just hoped that one day Richard would learn that it was okay to feel the feels!

Richard took the Daenerys poster down, shoving it into his closet. Then, he got on a chair and pulled down all the glowing stars. Part of him felt kind of sad to be doing it, but mostly it was too embarrassing to him to have these dorky decorations in his room, and after his crying spell he was worried that they were somehow making him weak. One thing he would never be was weak. He climbed into bed, determined to get a good night's sleep and get back to normal tomorrow. I have an iron will, he reminded himself. I am in control.

Once more, his sleep was troubled with mysterious dreams. He woke to the sound of his musical alarm— “I like— I like— I like—“

Richard smiled and hummed along. “Night dawn when the stars shine....”

It was only his favorite anime theme song of all time and—

“No,” Richard sighed. “No.” He reached up to rub his eyes, and found his hands covered with soft, furry cloth. “What?” He pushed down the covers and looked down to see he was wearing what looked like a fuzzy bear costume, but which he realized even as he looked at it was a teddy bear onesie. “Fuck,” he said, throwing his legs over the side of his mattress, getting up and going to his full length mirror. The hood was up, making it look like he had round ears. The whole thing looked like something Ariana Grande might wear, and Richard was humiliated to find himself wearing something so childish and girly. He pushed the hood back to see his high and tight haircut was gone. He now had messy black hair that came down to his chin line, and it was thick. “This isn't possible,” he said, pushing his new bangs out of his eyes.

He grabbed the zipper and yanked it down, stepping out of the onesies, yelping to see that underneath he was wearing a pink tank top with a sparkly unicorn in it that read “I don't sweat. I sparkle.” And, worse, panties! Little white panties with a pink bow?

“I'm losing it!” Richard said, horrified, and he quickly stripped off the girly clothes. “Omigod. What's happening to me?” Stalking to the bathroom, he took a quick shower, going to his closet. His clothes were still there, but now mixed in among his shirts and sportcoats were t-shirts with anime characters on them, plus Wonder Woman, Batwoman, Phoenix. He pulled those shirts off the hangers and threw them angrily across the room, dressed in a thermal shirt, jeans, boots and, grabbing his satchel, headed off to class. He didn't want to be late. It was one of his favorite classes.



Luke was in the kitchen wearing a pair of thermal pants and a Power Puff girls t-shirt. His messy red hair came down to his shoulder now, and he looked shorter. “Cute shirt,” Richard said, unable to stop himself. But then, focusing his will— “for a girl.”

“I know,” Luke said, with a giggle.

Richard opened the fridge, grabbed a container of strawberry low fat yogurt, started eating. “Does anything seem weird to you?” He asked, pushing his bangs out of his eyes in what was rapidly becoming a habit.

Luke looked at Richard. Shrugged. “No.”

“Nothing. Like, my hair?”

“I mean, it’s a little messy, but no. It looks the same.” Luke nibbled on a rice cake. “You wanna hit Tamriel tonight?”

“Um, no?” Richard said.

“You’re no fun.”

“I gotta scoot,” Richard said, thinking, *scoot?*

He grabbed his satchel, heading out, his head still spinning with all the weird changes. It was obvious now Luke was not playing some prank. Luke was changing, and there was no way he could make Richard’s hair grow. The only thing that made sense was that— what was her name? Eris?

As he walked to the elevator, Richard saw a girl come out of an apartment. She had pink hair and looked kinda familiar, but before he could even think about who she was his eyes were drawn to her Vampire Doll t-shirt.

“Oh. Wow,” Richard said. “Vampire Doll is soooo good.”

“Oh. I know, right?” The girl said, but then she recognized Richard from the quad the day before. “You?” She said, the humiliation from his put downs washing back over her. “Creep.”

“What?” Richard recognized her then. He felt his heart sink. He had been super mean to her, but if he had known how cool she was? “Oh, wow, I am sorry, I—“

But the girl just made an ugly face and stormed off.

It really bothered Richard. He kind of wanted her to like him. I mean, she was obviously into really awesome stuff, and he wanted to make friends with some kids who shared his love of anime and Harry Potter and— Game of Thrones?

I do not love Game of Thrones... I do not love Harry Potter.... Richard chanted as he walked to class. I do not love Daenrysl! He walked into class, found an open drafting table. He got his art materials from his locker and set up his latest composition. It was an original character he'd created: Force Tiny. She was cute and petite, but super strong and fearless! He admired his work— the big eyes, little mouth, flowing hair...

The teacher walked over and looked over his shoulder. Richard sat straight, brushing his bangs back as he waited to hear Teacher's comments, his heart racing. "Good lines, excellent composition. But, it's derivative. I keep telling you. If you want to do this, you have to find your own style."

Richard's shoulders sagged. He sighed. It hurt so bad. He wanted to be a cartoonist, to create his own comics! It was the most important thing in the world!

"Just keep working," Teacher said. "And you have to look at more art."

"I will," Richard said, his voice trembling. "I will do anything to reach my dream of becoming a..."

Richard shook his head. Gulped. Where was he? What the hell was going on? He wanted to study... art... no... finance. He was going to be a broker like his father and make loads of money. But, did he? Really? Hadn't he always wanted to make comic books? Like Ranma 1/2?

"You okay?" Teacher said.

"Yeah," Richard said, looking at the drawing in front of him. It was— cute. Insufferable. And he loved it. He did. "I have to go," Richard said. "I don't feel well."

"Okay. Just— take care of yourself," Teacher said.

Richard got up, grabbed his satchel and fled the room, leaving his drawing and art supplies on the drafting table. He needed air. He needed to think. Running out onto campus, he struggled to remember which him was the real him. Did he want to study business? Hadn't he been studying business? He pulled up his schedule on his phone. Drawing. Japanese. Computer animation. Senior Study.

What the hell? Not one business class. Not one of the classes he knew he'd been taking the whole time. Eris, he thought. It had to be Eris.

He found a spot under a tree away from everyone else. "Eris?" He whispered. "Eris?" Then, louder. "Eris!" Nothing. Shoot. He stomped a foot. He would have to

find her somehow, he decided. Apologize. Beg her to stop doing whatever she was doing. What had she called him? Nerd girl?

He decided to get some coffee. Stop and think. He walked over to the campus Starbucks, though he really preferred Area 44, the quirky off-campus coffee house with all the alien-themed decorations. But, for now, he'd settle for Starbucks. He was pretty much in the mood for a triple cinnamon latte. He was so lost in thought, he was totally caught off guard when he heard a familiar voice call, "Hey, nerd girl."

Richard snapped to attention. "Eris!" She had dreadlocks now and cat eye glasses, but it was her. Her name tag even read Eris.

"I love your hair," Eris said. "Though, I think we'll make it a little longer, shall we?"

Richard had meant to beg and plead, but his natural disposition kicked in, further fueled by Eris' mocking tone. "You have no right to do this to me!" He snapped. "Do you know who I am?"

"I know exactly who you are," Eris said. "You're a nerd girl."

"I am not a nerd girl," Richard said.

"Oh, come on. You love anime and Kpop. You're obsessed with Herminone and Daenerys. Be serious."

"I don't—" Richard said, struggling with the fact that he so totally did.

"Then why are you wearing a Mother of Dragons designer t-shirt?"

"I'm not—" But even as he started to answer, Richard felt his thermal shirt shifting, changing, and looking down he saw he was now wearing a t-shirt with the stern face of Daenerys across his chest with dragons and the words, "Girl Power."

"Ahhh!" He wrapped his arms over his chest, looking around, embarrassed.

"Maybe I should put you in a skirt?" Eris said, smirking.

"No! Please!" Richard said. "Please. Stop this."

"Oh, maybe. We'll see. But, right now? You're holding up the line. You can pick up your drink at the end of the counter, sweetie."

"Eris?!"

"End of the line or skirt. Your choice."

"Fine," Richard said, stomping one foot. "But I want to talk to you!"

"In due time. In due time."

Richard would have just left, but he really needed that latte. The whole cafe smelled of freshly brewed coffee, and he was now craving caffeine and sugar like crazy. So, he stood facing the wall, trying not to let any of the other kids see his shirt. The barista brought his drink, calling out “nerd girl.”

Furious, Richard grabbed the drink, seeing “nerd girl” on the sticker on the side. A couple sorority girls saw his shirt and started laughing. He grabbed his drink and rushed out of the Starbucks, stumbling and almost falling over as he awkwardly made a dorky exit.

### Chapter Three

Sipping his latte, Richard found a picnic table off away from the walkways and sat down with a huff, blowing his bangs out of his eyes. One thing he had learned in business was that to make a deal you needed either leverage or incentive, preferably both. He had nothing when it came to this Eris character. Who was she, anyway? He needed information. Taking his sketchpad out of his satchel, he wrote Eris? In big letters across the top of the page and grabbed his phone, doing a Google search. The very first entry read, Eris: Greek goddess of chaos, strife and discord.

*Greek goddess? It can't be....* Richard thought. He started to write it down on his sketch pad anyway, when he was interrupted by some familiar voices.

“Richie! What’s the word?”

Richard looked up to see some of the other guys from his finance class walking towards him. He gasped, closing his sketch pad, holding it against his chest to hide his t-shirt. “Nothing,” he said, voice cracking. “Just hanging out.”

Jesse looked at Richie, turning his head sideways. “You look different.”

“What?” Richard said, his voice cracking again.

“You need a haircut,” Kyle said. “You look like my little sister.”

“And what’s with your voice?” Jesse said.

“I gotta go,” Richard said. His voice didn’t crack this time, but he was horrified to hear it come out high-pitched, like when he’d been a child. Keeping his sketchpad

pressed to his chest, he grabbed his satchel and got up. Even as he stood, he felt like his butt was swelling, stretching out his pants. His arm bumped against his now round hip.

“Dude, what the hell?” Jesse said, laughing.

“You’ve got an ass like a stripper!” Kyle chimed in.

“You’re so full of it,” Richard piped, his cheeks blushing with shame as he hurried away, unable to stop his hips from wiggling side to side.

Now, it should be noted that very few people liked Richard. His arrogant, superior attitude annoyed people, and the fact that most believed he was largely a pampered child of privilege who’d been born on third base only added to their irritation. Many people, however, had been friendly with Richard due to the fact he always had good drugs, and they thought maybe he would-be able to maybe help them someday after the college careers ended.

These pragmatic motives to fake friend him could not withstand the amusement they felt seeing Richard with a messy bob, and then, impossibly, with the most perfect, feminine looking ass they had ever seen. None even paused to wonder how this could be possible, or why he sounded like a girl. The mere fact that all of this had clearly taken him down a peg or three was enough.

Richard, on the other hand, had never felt more humiliated in his life. As soon as he got away from the crew, he stopped to examine himself. His hips now flared out from his waist, almost like a shelf, and glancing back he could see to some extent what he already felt— his booty had gotten much bigger, and now swelled out behind him like— well, he hated to think it, but stripper’s ass was not inaccurate.

“Eris!” He squeaked, unable to stop from putting his hand to his throat at the emasculated sound of his voice. He needed to get out of sight. He couldn’t risk having anymore people see him with his new hips and ass, so he hurried back to his apartment, struggling with all his willpower to stop his butt from wiggling.

The building, as he approached, looked even shabbier. The exterior was dull and stained, the glass of the doors was dirty. There was still no doorman, and the marble had been replaced by low-grade formica in an ugly green color that looked to Richard like Baby pooh.

“Eris!” Richard squeaked again. “She’s ruining my life!”

Entering his apartment, he slammed the door behind him, sighing. Luke was sitting cross-legged on the couch, his long red hair now came down past his shoulders, curling above his breasts...

“Breasts?” Richard said, pointing.

“What?” Luke said, looking up from his smart pad.

“You have boobs! Boobies?”

Luke glanced down at his chest. He had firm little A-cups pushing out the front of a t-shirt with the picture of a flying toaster on it. “Um, yeah? So?”

Richard shook his head, confused and freaked. He turned so Luke wouldn’t be able to see his plump new booty and walked sideways toward his bedroom. “I am just walking over here,” Richard said. “Heading over to my room.”

Luke giggled. “You are such a nerd!”

Richard tried to laugh, but it came out as a feminine giggle, echoing Luke’s.

He slammed the door to his room, threw his satchel on his bed and ran over to the mirror, turning to the side to look at- “Oh, no, no, no...” he said, seeing the sway of the small of his back, the perfect, lifted shape of his ass. It was the kind of ass that looked like an invitation, and turning his back to the mirror and looking back over his shoulder, he saw it was heart-shaped perfection.

Richard felt like someone punched him in the gut, and he sank to his knees, covering his face. How was he supposed to ever leave his room again with this booty? He couldn’t! He knew what boys would be thinking!

“Leverage,” he reminded himself. He grabbed his laptop. Did a new search. Eris, he read, was the daughter of an entity called Nyx, sister of Ares. The impossibility that Eris was a Greek goddess was quickly being outweighed by the radical changes Richard was experiencing, and though he could hardly believe something so crazy, he was desperate enough to try just about anything. He searched for How to Summon Ares, and he found a spell.

His heart was racing. Could he do something so insane? He wiggled, feeling all the extra flesh now cushioning him as he sat. “Do I have a choice?” He wondered, and the thin, feminine sound of his voice was the answer.

## Chapter Four

That night before bed, Richard took the teddy bear onesie and used a pair of scissors to cut it into shreds, then threw it in the garbage. There was no way he was going to let himself wake up in that girly nerd garb again. He also took all the panties out of his dresser, likewise cutting them into pieces and throwing them away. He was a man, damnit, and he would go commando before he put on another pair of panties! Or, woke up in them, for that matter. “You hear me Eris?” He said, shaking a fist at the sky. “Enough with this-- these-- you know!”

When Richard woke in the morning, he once more found himself staring up at the glowing stars on his ceiling. He sighed, rolling out of bed and looking down at his paws, immediately noticing they were now pink and white instead of brown and white. He saw a note pinned to the back of his paw and looked:

“No teddy bears for my big girl!” It read. “Hugs. Eris.”

“Ugh!” Richard got up and wandered to the mirror, unable to resist the urge to see what he was-- “a bunny?” His new onesie looked exactly like the one Harley Quinn had worn in *Birds of Prey*-- pink with hearts on it, and cute little ears on the hoodie. Richard touched the ears. They were pretty cute and-

“No. I hate cute!” Richard squeaked, throwing back the hoodie and squeaking again. Not only was he wearing Harley’s clothes, but he now had Harley hair! A messy nest of white-blond hair with red tips on one side and blue tips on the other framed his smooth face. He dug his hands into his thick hair, pushing the bangs out of his eyes. “How am I supposed to manage all this hair?” He said, stomping one foot, even as he found himself resolved to watching some videos and learning how to style his hair, maybe even putting it into side braids?

He slipped out of the onesie to find he was once more wearing panties, this time checkered panties with roses and a picture of Harey. He slipped out of them and threw them across the room, mumbling curses toward Eris.

Heading to the bathroom, he glanced in the mirror to confirm he no longer needed to shave, and as he did his face seemed to melt and reshape itself. He screamed, putting his hands to his cheeks, staring at himself. The first thing he’d noticed was that he had

a dusting of freckles across his nose. Freckles? They looked-- dorky. And there were other changes. He looked younger, and he could not deny-- feminine. His eyes looked bigger, his chin pointed, his nose smaller.

“How am I supposed to face the world looking like-- this?” He could hear his friends laughing, everyone laughing. But, he couldn’t hide in his room. He had to go to class! Groaning, he took a quick shower, then went to get dressed, his heart sinking as he realized that all of his old clothes were gone, replaced by an entirely nerdy and girly bunch of clothes none of which he had any desire to ever be seen wearing.

Sifting through the clothes, constantly fighting with his hair, he finally just settled for a pair of jeans with a big sunflower embroidered on one hip-- trust me when i tell you they were the least nerdy pair he owned-- and a Lord of the Rings t-shirt featuring Arwen, of course, who was so powerful and brave and just the kind of girl he wanted to be like...

No. No. No, Richard tried to tell himself, but his attempts to remember who he’d been and what he once liked or hated were becoming less and less real and seemed more and more like a nervous tic. He tied on a pair of battered red and white Chuck Taylors and wandered out to the kitchen.

The room smelled good-- eggs and fresh brewed coffee-- and Richard wandered over to where Luke was cooking. “Egg white and spinach omelet?” Luke asked, flipping the omelet.

“Yeah,” Richard said. “What about you?”

“I have one in the oven waiting!” Luke said. “I love it when we can share breakfast and chat.”

“Yeah,” Richard said, mildly annoyed, but he was trying to figure something else out. There was something that didn’t seem right about Luke-- besides the fact that he had breasts, slender, rounded hips and long red hair. Finally, Richard realized what it was. He was looking Luke in the eyes, whereas the day before Luke had gotten shorter. “You got taller,” Richard said.

Luke shook his head. “I’m pretty sure I’m still 5’ 4”,” he said. “Just like always.”

“No. I’m -- wait.” Richard looked down. He rushed back to the mirror in his room. He saw it now. Whereas his head used to come to the top of the mirror, it now only came to the middle. “I’m-- short!” He gasped. For Richard, being tall had been part of



his status, part of what made him dominant, powerful. The thought that he was now short horrified and terrified him. He was so small! Anyone could beat him up now!

“This can’t be happening!” he said, feeling himself starting to hyperventilate as he stumbled back out to the kitchen. “It isn’t real. Omigod!”

Luke, who’d put the plates on the dining room table along with steaming mugs of coffee, took Richard’s hand and led him to the table. He was used to Richard’s panic attacks. He was so sensitive. “Deep breaths. Deep breaths,” he said, sitting Richard down. “Close your eyes and take deep breaths.”

Richard did. He just-- he felt he should listen to Luke, who’d always been such a good friend. Richard felt himself calming. He sighed. “Talk to me,” Luke said, as he began to eat his omelet. “What’s going on?”

Talk? It seemed so-- girly. And yet, Richard felt he really needed to talk. “I just-- I feel like everything is wrong,” he said. He realized that Luke seemed to have no awareness of the changes that were happening. “I feel like I am losing control of-- like-- everything? Does that make sense?”

Luke nodded. “I know. I know, girl.”

Girl? The word offended and scared Richard. “Why did you just call me girl?”

“Um, you know. Just a figure of speech.”

Richard groaned. “Nevermind.” He started eating, sipped his coffee. “Want to help me try and summon Ares tonight?”

“That sounds so cool!” Luke said, his eyes sparkling. “Omigod, I can’t wait!”

After eating, Richard grabbed his satchel and headed off to his sculpting class. He knew he was now really good at sculpture and modeling, and even though he wondered if he should just not go to these classes Eris had put him in, for some reason he found he could not NOT go. It was a windy day, and the breeze kept blowing Richard’ hair into his face and mouth. He fought it relentlessly as he made his way to class, half blind the whole way. Finally, he got through the door and sighed with relief, pushing his hair back, brushing it out of his eyes and realizing he was going to have no choice but to learn about managing long hair.

As he made his way into the studio, he saw the only open seat was next to the green haired girl from the quad, the one who hated him. Swallowing, he went and took

a seat next to her, bracing for her to say something mean. Instead, her face lit up and she said, “Hey, Richie Rich.”

“Um, hey?” He said, surprised by her warm greeting.

“What do you think?” She asked, drawing his attention to a wet, clay sculpture she was working on.

Richard’s mouth dropped open. “Omigod!” He said, losing control. “It’s like a Lovecraftian Balrog!” In fact, the creature did look like the merging of the Balrog and Cthulhu. “It’s so... awesome and amazing!”

The green haired girl, who Richard suddenly “remembered” was named Agnes, giggled. “Thanks,” she said. “I’m really into primordial entities.”

“The balrog is so all about the collective unconscious!” Richard said. The two started chatting, finishing each other’s sentences, and Richard felt a warmth and comfort come over him, a sense of contentment that they were friends. Of course, the old part of him was screaming, but his new self was getting more powerful and she insisted they be friends with Agnes. Besides, they were into all the same things, so, duh, right?

They worked through class. Richard was sculpting a dragon, working hard to get the scales just right. When class ended, on impulse he said, “Want to help me summon Ares tonight?”

“Sounds good,” Agnes said. When they both stood, Richard was mildly shocked to realize she was now taller than him, and he had to look up at her. Remembering how he’d towered over her just a few days ago, it brought home to him how much he’d lost, how tiny and vulnerable he’d become. *I have to get back to being a guy*, he thought, burying his hands in his thick hair and pulling it back over his shoulders.

With class done-- Richard really needed to do more work on those scales!-- he headed toward the dollar store to get supplies for the spell he’d found to summon Ares. As he was walking down the sidewalk, he passed a couple guys, who swiveled their heads as they passed. “Nice ass,” one of them said.

“Her legs go all the way from her ass to the ground,” the other one said.

Richard froze, turning to glare at them, his mouth dropping open. They just walked on like it was all no big deal but Richard felt-- insulted? "I'm a guy!" He squeaked, his voice full of feminine fury.

"You sure about that, honey buns?" He heard Eris say, as she slapped him on the ass.

Richard yelped and jumped, his face turning red as he turned to face her, furious. Eris was dressed in a man's suit now, her hair short, and she had a pipe clenched in her teeth, a strange purple smoke curling from the bowl. "Y-you! Jerk! Change me back!" Richard squealed.

"Ta ta," Eris said. "I'm off for a steam." She turned and faded into a cloud of smoke.

"Ahhhhhh!!!!" Richard screamed in frustration. He jumped up and down three times, his hair all plopping down over his eyes, and he was totally unnerved to feel his booty jiggling with every jump. Furious, he stormed off in search of his supplies. Ares. Ares was the answer. He had to be!

## Chapter 5

Later, Richard found himself huffing as he climbed the hill that led to his apartment. His arms were aching as he strained to carry the bags of supplies he'd bought up the hill. He knew they weren't that heavy; he was just that weak! Still, he gritted his teeth and struggled along, determined not to let his minimized form stop him from getting his payback. As his formerly luxurious and exclusive apartment building came into view, he was depressed to see it was now a bland, cinder block dorm. The sign out front read Eris Hall. Richard sneered, getting to the rusty old doors, struggling to get it open with his shopping in his hands. He managed to get it open a crack, tried to shove his foot into the open space to keep it from closing again, but a sudden gust of wind blew it closed.

Richard felt his eyes burning, tears starting to pool. No, no no! He told himself. I am not going to cry like some-- girl!

Just then, the door opened, and a short, portly boy with coke-bottle glasses smiled, revealing crooked, yellow teeth. "Milady," he said, bowing and waving his hand with a flourish.

"Haha," Richard giggled, nervously. He forced a quick smile and stepped into the lobby, trying to keep his body from touching the dorky guy. "Thanks," he managed to remember to say.

The boy actually blushed. "My name is Mortimer," he said. "And what would your name be, fair maiden?"

Richard groaned. He was so not in the mood for this. Just as he was about to just turn and walk away, however, he suddenly said, "Astrid, First of her Name, Queen of Godqueens, Khaleesi of the Great Pyramid, Lady Regent of the Eris Hall, Protector of Geeks, Breaker of Xbox remotes, and Mother of Cats." As soon as he finished his eyes went wide and he made a little squeak of fright.

The boy's grin grew wider, and he bowed even lower. "It would be my honor to help you, Astrid, Mother of Cats, with your burdens!"

Richard giggled and tossed his hip out to the side, holding his bags out toward the boy. "Forsooth," he said. "Thou art my hero!"

The boy giggled and took the bags. Richard started twisting his hair around his fingers. "You remind me of Samwell Tarly."

"I get that all the time," Mortimer said, taking the bags and walking Richard to the elevator. The whole way up, Richard found himself giggling, laughing at all Mortimer's Morrowind jokes-- he even reached out at one point and brushed some lint from Mortimer's shoulder. The whole time, he was screaming inside. He knew he was not only flirting, but in his mind flirting poorly, but he couldn't stop.

When they got to the room, Richard opened the door, eager to get rid of this geek, but as soon as he pulled the door open he froze in shock as he found himself looking at a one room dorm with bunk beds. "Whaaa?"

Mortimer walked right in with the bags.

Luke was on a chair, just finishing the hanging of a string of Christmas lights, and there were balloons floating all along the ceiling. Luke now had a clearly feminine figure, with rounded hips. "Hi!" Luke sang out, hopping down from the chair. "Ta da!"

“This is sooooo cool,” Mortimer said.

Richard had gotten sort of used to the fact that his life was going to keep changing for the worse, so the change in and of itself was not that paralyzing. But-- a shared room? Bunk beds? And, “Christmas lights?”

“Yeah. For the party,” Luke said. “Who are you?” She said to Mortimer as he set the bags down.

“I am Mortimer,” he answered, once more performing a dramatic bow. “I rescued this fair damsel.”

“I’m not--” Richard said, getting annoyed. “Okay. You know. Thanks. Bye!”

“Surely I have earned a hug?” Mortimer said.

“Um...” Richard answered, crinkling his nose.

“Astrid!” Luke said. “Don’t be rude!” She put a hand on Richard’s back and shoved him toward Mortimer, who wrapped Richard in his arms and pulled him to his fleshy body.

“Okay! Okay!” Richard said, pulling away. “Bye!” This time, he put his hands on Mortimer’s back and started pushing him out the door.

“You should come to the party tonight!” Luke called.

“I’d love to,” Mortimer said as Richard slammed the door in his face.

Richard spun. “How could you make me hug a boy!”

“He was cute!”

“Not!” Richard said.

“Cuter than your last boyfriend,” Luke said as he turned his attention to arranging some Solo cups on the counter.

“My-- what?!!” Richard said, horrified at the thought that anyone thought he’d ever had a boyfriend. “Anyway, it’s not a party. It’s a summoning.”

“A summoning party,” Luke said, smiling. “I know.”

“It’s-- okay. Fine. A summoning party,” Richard sighed. “Whatever. I have to get ready.”

Richard cleared a space in the middle of the tiny room and used the red chalk he’d bought to draw a magic circle, carefully copying the Greek letters from the spell around the circle. Then, he set up the candles at the compass points: north, south, east

and west. He set up the incense burners around the room, and placed the bottle of wine he intended as his sacrifice inside the circle. Putting his hands on his hips, he looked it over, nodding. Everything was in place.

“It looks soooo cute!” Luke said, clapping.

“It’s not supposed to be cute,” Richard said.

“Okay, gumpy panties!” Luke said.

The spell had to be cast after the moon rose, so Richard had some time to kill. He decided he needed to do something about his hair, which was driving him insane, always getting in his eyes, his mouth. He got his phone out and called up a video on how to do a ponytail, then sat down on his bed, took a rubber band and started to work on his hair. Luke watched. “I feel like you should wear a robe,” Luke said. “Something more magicky.”

“The spell doesn’t say anything about a robe,” Richard said, twisting his hair, which he gathered, sliding a rubber band over it.

“Have you ever seen anyone do a summoning wearing jeans?” Luke said. “I don’t think it will work.”

“Why not?” Richard said, using his phone’s mirror function to check out his hair. It was okay, he decided, though there were a lot of flyaway hairs.

“Because. It isn’t magic or something?”

“Well, I don’t have a robe,” Richard said. “So, like, whatever?”

“I have a robe,” Luke said. “I think.”

“Well, I’m not wearing it,” Richard said. “That would just be so-- nerdy.”

## Chapter 6

The sun set. The moon rose. Somehow, word of the “Summoning Party” had spread among a bunch of the nerds who lived in Eris Hall. Agnes was there, of course, along with Mortimer and some other kids. They were all super excited, gathered together in the dark, their faces lit by flickering yellow candle light and the flickering of Luke’s Christmas lights. The heavy scent of sandalwood hung in the air, wisps of smoke curling from the incense burners.

Luke had won, and Richard now stood outside the magic circle in a black robe covered with stars and moons. He read the incantation, the rest of the kids repeating each phrase in low voices:

Mighty Ares  
Bless us with your presence  
We, your humble supplicants  
Would call your aid

There was a sudden, cool draft in the room, the candles flickering...

Mighty Ares  
Come to Us  
Mighty Ares  
Come to Us

As they finished the last refrain, the windows burst open, a blast of wind filling the room. The candles blew out, the Christmas Lights went dead, and a deep voice called out, "Who Dares Summon Mighty Ares?"

The Christmas lights flickered back on, the candles flickered back to life. The kids all cowered away as they now saw a shadow standing in the circle. Richard backed away as well, stunned the spell had actually worked.

"I--- do?" He said.

"And why do you call me?"

"I-- um-- Eris has been messing with me?" Richard said, summoning all his courage to keep from turning and running from the room.

"I gotta go," Mortimer said, getting up.

"Yeah, this is scary," Luke said.

"Wait! No! Stay!" Richard said, terrified at the thought of being alone with-- Ares?  
Was it really a God?

Ares raised his hand and everyone but Richard froze. “You wish me to stop Eris from messing with you?”

“Um, please?” Richard said.

“Very well,” Ares said. “I will do this for you.”

“Really?” Richard said, heart rising. “You will?”

“Yes,” Ares said. “The thing is, Eris is always giving flat-chested girls a hard time. So, the solution is simple. You just need boobs.”

“Boobs? No!” Richard said, but even as he spoke, he felt his chest swelling, pushing out the top of his robe, big, soft breasts forming on his chest. “Ahhhhh!”

“Oh, you look so cute!” Ares said, as his body morphed into the form of Eris. “But, should they be bigger?”

“No! Please!” Richard said, cupping his new boobs in horror. They were soft and heavy, and his brain reeled at the strange new weight, the impossible reality. “Take them away! Please!”

“Nah!” Eris snapped her fingers and as she vanished, the other kids started to move again, talking just as if nothing at all had happened.

“I’m sorry it didn’t work,” Mortimer said. “But it’s still a fun party.”

Richard noticed that Mortimer was looking down at his chest. “Um, I’m up here,” Richard said, annoyed.

“I know,” Mortimer said. “But-- boobs!”

Richard crossed his arms over his chest and turned away, sighing and blushing with shame. The “party” went on for a couple more hours. It was super nerdy, with some of the kids sitting around on their laptops playing MORPs, others playing fantasy card games, and Luke and a few other kids in a circle just drawing and talking. Richard was horrified to find every guy at the party coming onto him, staring at his boobs, his butt... in their tiny dorm room there was no escape, and he was humiliated to find himself the target of not just male attention but nerd male attention.

Having spent his whole life as a guy, he actually had no idea how to deal with infatuated boys, and some new part of his personality made him all giggly and flirty, laughing at all their lame jokes and feeling completely unable to get out of the conversations as he now found himself incapable of “being rude.”



When the party finally ended, he collapsed onto his bed, immediately aware of the weight of his new breasts on his chest, the feeling of them rising and falling, he covered his face and struggled to hold back the tears of exhaustion and despair he was feeling. Luke climbed up onto the upper bunk. "Such fun!" He said. "We have to do another summoning party!"

"Yes," Richard said with a sigh. "That's a great idea."

"The boys were all over you tonight!" Luke said with a giggle. "I'm so jealous!"

"I would love it if they would just ignore me," Richard said.

"Yeah, right," Luke said. "Night, Astrid."

"Night," Richard said, for the first time fully realizing that his name, at least as far as everyone else seemed to be concerned, was now Astrid. He thought about it. Shrugged. There were worse names, he decided. Then he hugged his pillow to his chest and curled up into a ball, wishing he could just disappear.

## Chapter 7

Richard found himself chained to a stone pillar. He looked down to realize he wore a metal bikini just like the one Princess Leia wore in Star Wars. "What the heck?"

He tugged on the chain, but he was so weak he could barely even move the thick, metal links, let alone break them. "Come on!" He called out, his voice echoing around the torch lit cave. "This is so regressive!"

"Inconceivable!" He heard a whiny voice proclaim, and he turned to see the chubby, bald character Vizzini from A Princess Bride.

"You have to be kidding me," Richard sighed as he once more tugged on the chain, making cute little grunting noises as he did.

"It's time for us to consummate our marriage," Vizzini said, leering at Richard's nearly naked breasts.

"Stop staring at my boobs!" Richard squealed. "And that is so not happening!"

"Oh, we'll see!" Vizzini said, reaching toward Richard.

Richard screamed, trying to get away from the greasy, grasping hands, and just then he heard a voice shout, "Villain!"

Richard looked to see John Snow striding shirtless into the room, a sword flashing in his hand. "This female belongs to me!"

"Again, regressive.." Richard said, though at the sight of a shirtless John Snow his mouth had suddenly gone very dry.

Snow punched Vizzini in the gut and then threw him aside, snapped the chain holding Richard to the pillar and then lifted him up in his arms. Richard felt a thrill pass through his whole body, and he parted his lips...

"Wake up! Wake up!"

Richard felt himself shaking, then opened his eyes to see Luke, and their tiny little dorm room behind him. "You were having your John Snow dream again," Luke said.

"Ahhhh!" Richard pulled his covers over his head not sure if he was more frustrated that he'd been fantasizing about John Snow or that they'd been interrupted before the KISS!

In the morning, a forlorn Richard found himself wearing-- a black onesie. Black. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. The pink one was more fun. He went to the mirror, and saw that this was a Dagon onesie, like from Game of Thrones, and he nodded. It made him feel kinda powerful to be wearing a dragon onesie, which was good now that he was so small. When he threw back the hood, he was pleased and surprised to see his white-blond hair was now braided just like Denearys, and he was excited to realize he knew how to braid hair now-- like, seriously braid hair like a total hair-braiding maniac!

He went to the bathroom, slipped his panties down to his knees and sat down on the toilet to pee. Only after he realized what he'd done did he process the fact that, well, he now had no choice. He was all Astrid now, and it was humiliating to him beyond belief. After his shower, he put his hair in a messy top bun, and gloomily looked through his bras, knowing he would need one now unless he wanted every guy in the college to have his eyes pop out of his head whenever Richard walked by. After much debate, he just grabbed a daffodil bra that was almost like a super tight t-shirt, pulled it on, feeling like he was surrendering any last claims he could make to manhood.

And then he found himself staring at a drawer full of leggings. The leggings had appeared in his drawer over the last few days as he had changed, and he'd sneered at them with contempt because there was no way he would ever wear them-- or so he'd told himself. But now-- they were so cute! He had leggings with kittens on them. Hearts. He had leggings that said, "Clone Club." He had Star Wars leggings with BB8! And they were all so cool and soft. He ran his fingers over them, held them to his smooth cheek. He also remembered how much he loved to see girls in leggings, though, how hot they looked, how it really showed off their curves.

He knew he had a nice ass now, and sexy, feminine legs. Guys were even making comments! Gross! But then, a thought occurred to him as he clutched the leggings in his hands, struggling with the desire to wear them and the fear of the male gaze. Actually, he told himself, the fun patterns on these leggings would distract people from looking at my body! Yeah! They'll be all looking at BB8 and not my ass!

With that, his heart fluttered and it was settled. He slipped one dainty foot into the leggings, and then pulled them up his calf and leg, then the other, and then he stood and pulled the stretchy waistband over his rounded hips, wiggling as he adjusted the fit, feeling them snug against his hips and the new space between his legs. Oh! He loved the way the leggings hugged and almost seemed to massage his legs; they were so soft and cool!

Feeling really fun and cute, he piled his hair up on his head in a sloppy top bun, then slipped on his Millennium Falcon earrings. Glancing in the mirror, he was pleased and dismayed to see how well he now filled out his Nirvana t-shirt. You know. The one with the frowny face with Xs for eyes all the dorky young women are wearing these days?

His roommate was sitting by the window, eating Lucky Charms while reading something on her Smartpad.

"Can I have some of those, Luke?" Richard asked, realizing he was actually pretty hungry.

"Um, who's Luke?" The red-haired girl in the Vampire Doll t-shirt asked.

"You---" but then he remembered her name was Lucinda. Now. "Nevermind," Richard said. He saw that they had a little dorm fridge and had set up something of a

pantry along the shelf below the window. There were several brands of hip, retro cereals he now realized they both loved and ate “ironically.” Sugar Smacks. Cookie Crisps. Corn Pops.

Richard couldn't help himself and poured a little of each into his “Firefly” bowl, thinking it would be so much fun.

There was a knock on the door. “It's open,” Lucinda said

The door swung open and a tall, rail thin boy with big hair and super pale skin walked into the room. He wore a knee length black jacket.

“You on your way to audition for a Cure cover band?” Richard said, thinking this kid was the biggest dork he'd ever seen.

“Good morning to you, too,” the boy said in a slightly British, affected accent. He walked right up to Richard and kissed him on the head.

Richard's initial response was horror and a feeling of his personal space being violated, but then the world seemed to tilt for a second, and he suddenly remembered that Renard-- not his real name-- was actually--

“I have a boyfriend?” Richard asked, even as his feeling of horror was replaced by a warm feeling and a kind of crushy haze as he looked up at Renard's dark eyes and cleft chin.

“I-- think so,” Renard said. “Did I miss an episode of Astrid's Wacky Adventures in Cartoon Land?”

“She's such an airhead,” Lucinda chimed in.

“What are you doing here?” Richard said, struggling with a whole range of feminine romantic feelings.

“Just wanted to say ‘Hi’ and get my daily dose of snark before heading off to Latin class,” Renard said. “And you didn't disappoint, hufflepuff.”

Richard giggled and shrugged, rolling his eyes and waving his hands around awkwardly. “Haha. I love it when you call me hufflepuff!”

“Meet me at lunch,” Renard said as he grabbed a few marshmallows from Richard's cereal bowl and popped them into his mouth. “I'll hufflepuff you until you turn into anime girl and can't stop giggling.”

At that, Richard put his hands under his chin and giggled uncontrollably.

Renard smirked and walked out.

“You two are so cute together!” Lucinda said.

Richard, struggling to remember who he really was, who'd he'd been, tried to regain his composure, taking a deep breath, calming himself, but then it just burst out of him. “He looks just like Jon Snow!”

Lucinda smiled. Maybe, she thought, but a vampire Jon Snow who had starved himself until he was almost a skeleton. Still, she was happy her friend had found a boy, and she did think they made the cutest little couple. “Oh, so much,” she said.

Richard had his Japanese III class, which he was so excited for as he liked to read his manga in the original language. Some of the translations were so bad! As he walked to class, he found himself constantly stumbling, somehow tripping on his own feet. He couldn't get used to the feeling of having breasts. Even secured in his tight little bra, he could feel them jiggling on his chest with every step. And-- yes-- guys kept looking at them, at his legs-- just brazenly checking him out, making him feel like-- an object!

## Chapter 8

When he got into class, he struggled to get his satchel off. The strap got tangled in his hair, and he found himself turning in circles, struggling, making little annoyed, girly sounds, feeling like the most uncoordinated dork in the world. Then, when he'd finally gotten it off, he pulled out his textbook and a bunch of comic books slipped out and tumbled to the floor. Richard felt his cheeks blushing as he frantically tried to pick everything up, just sure everyone in the room was watching, thinking he was the biggest nerd ever.

“I'm fine!” He shouted, waving his hands “Just a little spill!” When he bent over to grab his comics, his butt bumped into the kid next to him. “Oh, no!” He turned to apologize, his butt now bumping into the kid on the other side of his desk. “Okay! It's okay! Sorry! Sorry!”

“No problem,” the kids laughed, good naturedly. They were all used to Astrid and her awkward displays.

Richard, however, was not used to Astrid and her awkward displays. He'd always been sophisticated, together. Superior. As he finally took his seat and tried not to knock anything else off his desk, he covered his face, thinking, *I can't live like this!*

When class ended, Richard carefully managed to get all his stuff back in his satchel without incident. Then, he made his way out of the classroom, only managing to stumble once on his way to the cafeteria. *Ugh*, he thought as he entered the room where the common people ate. It was not the old school cafeteria of past years, but had been reconfigured to resemble the food court at a mall, with different meal stations around the perimeter, each serving a different theme-- subs here, pizza there, stir fry, salad. Richard, now an obsessive Japanophile, found himself drawn immediately to the sushi station, getting himself a plate of California rolls. Renard was there already, sitting in a corner reading *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*.

Richard felt super nervous as he sat, all the fluttery, crushy, girly feelings making his cheeks blush. Renard looked up from his book as Richard sat down and said, "You're looking unusually rosy cheeked today."

Richard giggled. He super wanted to kiss Renard, to hug him... it was making him crazy... and he found himself rubbing his legs together, enjoying the feeling of his leggings. Renard noticed and tilted his head to the side. "Maybe I should start calling your Cricket?"

"You're so funny!" Richard said, all silly and giggly.

Renard put his book down and shook his head. "No."

Richard sat back. The word stabbed at him like a dagger. "Did I do something wrong?"

"I don't know what's gotten into you, but no. This giggling airhead thing you're doing is not you. I do not like it. You know I am minoring in Women's Studies."

"I- I'm---" Richard felt a deep need to please Renard, to be exactly the kind of girl Renard wanted him to be. This need repulsed him, made him feel like a cypher, but it was an all-powerful need he could not deny. "What-- how do you want me to be?"

"You are a powerful woman who stands up for the oppressed," Renard said. "A feminist firebrand."

"I am?"

“Sit up straight!” Renard demanded.

Richard immediately straightened his back.

“Shoulders back! Chin up! You are an Amazon warrior!”

“Like Wonder Woman?” Richard said as he followed each and every command.

“You are Wonder Woman!”

“I am Wonder Woman!” Richard shouted.

“Very good,” Renard said, suddenly slipping back into his air of cool detachment. He picked up his book. “Now, eat. I am at a really good part.”

Richard ate, feeling himself surging with confidence and passion. If that’s what Renard wanted, then he was Wonder Woman, and Captain Marvel, Hermione and Denaerys. He was a woman! And it made him feel so good to be pleasing to his boyfriend.

When they finished eating, they walked out together. Richard’s whole body was aching. He needed a kiss so badly. He almost thought Renard was going to just drift off to class, but then he turned and cupped Richard’s chin, tilting his head back. “See you later my little warrior!” Renard said, leaning down and kissing Richard right on the lips.

The kiss lingered, Richard’s mind screaming you’re a guy! A straight guy! You should not be doin this! But the feeble remnants of who he’d been had nothing to combat the full body thrill of the kiss, which curled his toes.

Renard walked off, the breeze sending leaves swirling around his feet as he vanished into the crowd. Richard wandered dreamily back toward his dorm. Part of him was struggling to fight all this, to reclaim his life, but-- that kiss! He didn’t know if he even had the strength to leave this life. Renard was such a good kisser! And they’d been dating for a little while, surely they would have sex soon, and Richard couldn’t even imagine the world’s of pleasure he would experience now.

Just then, he heard shouting. “Nerds!” Some stocky jock was saying, he and his friends laughing. Richard looked to see Agnes and her friends on the quad, once again in their role-playing garb. They all looked humiliated, and Richard remembered how he, himself, had once made them feel that way. He marched right up to the bully and poked him in the chest.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” He bellowed.

The guy looked shocked at the aggression and rage coming from this dorky looking dweeb. "I'm just kidding---"

"No. You are engaging in harassment. If I report you, the school will come down hard! Back off!"

The guy took a step back. "I'm on the football team," he said. "I could lose my scholarship..."

"Then apologize and be on your way!" Richard said.

The dude put his hands up in surrender. "I'm sorry," he called out to the group. Then, he turned and walked away.

"Oh, my God!" Agnes said, rushing up to Richard. "You're my new favorite superhero."

Richard started twisting his hair around his fingers and made a snorting sound. "Oh, gosh."

"Seriously," one of the other kids said. "What a badass!"

*I'm just being who my boyfriends wants me to be*, Richard thought, but then a new idea occurred to him. "Hey, can I join you guys next time?"

"You can join us now," Agnes said.

"Yeah, yeah," everyone said.

"I don't have a costume."

"You can get one for the next session." Agnes said. She took Richard's hand, dragging him toward the group. "Let's have fun!"

Richard followed, looking at all the dorky nerds, realizing that these were his people, this was his world. Images of his dream life of penthouse apartments and dating supermodels passed through his mind, feeling superior as he tooted around in a Ferrari... Now, he was surrounded by a bunch of impoverished people with regrettable skin and tragic hair. This was his now, this was his future. "So, what do I do?" He asked, standing among the group, feeling lost.

"You pretend," Agnes said.

Richard smiled. "Pretend? Yes. I think I can do that."

## Epilogue



The banner hanging above the entrance to the Hyatt Regency read: Welcome, Warrior, Warlocks, Witches and what have yous. Princeton-Con 2019.

Eris smiled as she wandered into the hotel and made her way to the grand ballroom. She'd decided to come dressed as Xena, Warrior Princess and had used her magic to make herself look exactly like the young Lucy Lawless. As she wandered among the mortals she was showered with praise and wonder for her "costume." It reminded her of the old days back in Greece a bit, and she loved the attention. As she entered the grand ballroom, she smiled as her eyes fell on a couple of dorky little cos-players. They were dressed as Elsa and Anna, the sisters from Frozen, but dressed in Mandalorian armor, as a kind of cross-over super nerd cosplay. Richard had his pale blonde hair in the classic long braid Elsa was famous for, his helmet cradled under his arm as he talked to a guy dressed as a sad, chubby Captain America. "You're so hot," the guy was saying, "the movie should have been called Flaming. You know. Instead of Frozen."

Richard snorted and tossed his braid. "You're sweet," he said. "But I have a boyfriend, and if he sees you hitting on me?"

"Oh. Sorry!" The guy said, turning and running away. "Sorry!"

Astrid and Lucinda giggled. "Would you do him if you weren't seeing someone?" Lucinda asked.

Astrid scrunched up her nose. "Nah. But, Renard did dress up like Captain America once, and I was Black Widow!"

"You guys are always so adventurous!"

"It's soooo fun. Wonder Woman and Superman. Daenerys and Jon Snow! Once, I was the Joker and he was Harley...." Richard's eyes sparkled as he ran through his memories. "Omigod! I want to get him to dress up like Baby Yoda right now."

"Astrid!"

Eris finally stepped forward from where she'd been watching, laughing. "I did not make you THIS big of a nerd."

Astrid looked up at her, eyes now flashing with anger. “Don’t be so judgy, all annoying goddessy hag!”

“Hag? Maybe I should turn you back into a boy.”

Astrid’s face filled with horror at the thought. “No. Please!”

Eris smiled. “Don’t worry. I like you much better like this.” She turned and walked away.

“I love your costume,” Astrid called after her.

“Thanks,” Eris called back.

“What was that about turning you BACK into a boy?” Lucinda asked.

“Oh, you know. Role playing,” Astrid said.

“But, Xena doesn’t have magic powers?”

“I know right? What a NERD!”

They both laughed as they wandered toward the merch tables. It was strange for Astrid. She did remember being a boy once, and being rich. It seemed she had everything. Why would she be so happy now as a dorky nerd with no money and probably futile dreams of becoming a cartoonist? It wasn’t hard to answer.

She pictures herself in her Princess Leia costume, Renard dressed as Han Solo, and she knew that she knew why she’d always want to be the girl Eris had made her: the sex was amazing!

