



# Coming Of Age

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**PRYNNIE**

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COMING OF AGE

By

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The train slowed down as it entered the yards outside the depot. The change in tempo of the clacking wheels brought Eric out of his reverie. He was about to meet the woman who had been his mother's friend for most of her life. She had been part of their life, his and mother's, during his toddler period and for a very few years beyond, but that was so long that he wasn't sure how much of a presence she had really been. He scarcely recalled what Diana Zeiring looked like.

Eric did recall all the humiliations he had suffered and his mother's adamancy in refusing to let him fight back. "Sooner or later they'll get tired of teasing you and then they'll stop pushing you around..." By doing so his mother unwittingly or by design had trained him to be the passive victim of events and the persons who made things happen. The bullies never did tire of tormenting the small, passive boy. It had continued right on through high school. True that not all of the guys in school and around the neighborhood bothered him but there were enough who boosted their own miserable little egos by pushing him around. It was hardest on Eric when they did it to show off in front of their girlfriends. The nicer girls made them stop but there were so few girls who did. Eric still wondered how he would be able to pay them back for his humiliation. He especially wanted to get back at the ringleaders, those who instigated others to tease and shove Eric. In some circles it had become a rite of passage to create and preside over an incident in which Eric would be reduced to tears either by physical or emotional harassment, preferably both together. You weren't part of the group until you teased Eric to tears or knocked him down in front of a group of girls. Some of the girls would stand over him and laugh as they postured in ways designed to make sure he could see up their skirts. Although this added to his humiliation, Eric was enthralled at the thought of more intimate exploration of what these or any other girls might have to offer. Eric knew that these girls would never pet with him the way they did with other boys so rather than hope for intimacy with these tormentors he began to long for intimates over intimacy, the marvelous things which girls wore under their street clothing. That led to furtive glances in the windows of ladies specialty shops as he longed to experience for himself the thrill that came with wearing these lovely things. He never stopped to window shop. He didn't dare to because actually standing gazing at the bits of silk and

nylon would only confirm what his tormentors accused of being. Not that they needed confirmation.

Life had become very different the week he finished high school; not better, just very different. The symptoms his mother had tried so hard to hide became overwhelming. Nothing could be done other than make her comfortable while she deteriorated. He postponed college to see to things, things that left them with little more than the less than modest house in which they lived. She made him promise to contact Diana Zeiring, but not before it happened. “Di will know what to do; she always does...You need to find different people; people you could ever meet around here. You’ll see from them what you can be. Maybe Di can show you but if she doesn’t, then you do it for yourself. You must if you’re ever going to become...come of age...”

What could that mean? He was already eighteen. Back then it was the age at which you could do everything but vote.

Eric looked through the train window at the seemingly random web of tracks, at the signal towers and wondered how the trains were directed through with no collisions, how they wove through to the correct platforms. *It would be nice to have clear signals like the trains have. I need something like that to show me how to get to where I want to be.* He smiled openly as he continued his reverie. *That’s a laugh. I don’t even know where I want to be. Shoot! I don’t even know what I am half the time.*

The only thing Eric knew for certain was that his life was about to change in the extreme. The naïve teen could not have known how very much life would change nor could he have guessed in what weird and wonderful choices would open to him.

Mother had said Diana wouldn’t really take her place in his life but he might make up to Diana the wrongs mother had done to her. “Maybe you can fill the gap I left in her when...” Mother was making no sense. There was no way Eric could ever fill the gaps in the life of friend from whom she had drifted away so many years ago. Mother insisted that had been the second time she had betrayed Rhonda and that he must try to make it up to her. Eric had tried to console her, to explain that friends grow apart as their lives take different directions. She was inconsolable and yet she refused to allow him to contact Diana so they might have a rapprochement, however brief, before it was too late. Perhaps, Eric suspected, they hadn’t drifted apart, that their parting had been precipitous, even turbulent.

Mother’s death had left him free to abandon the smug working class neighborhood which was the only home he remembered and yet it was a place, despite its comforting familiarity and clearly defined expectations, in which he never felt at ease, never felt he really belonged there. His obligation to contact Diana Zeiring meant little to him. It was

an empty promise made to his mother as the drugs and the cancer ravaged her mind as well as her body. Then it struck him; *Why not?* He could certainly do worse than put his fate in the hands of this mysteriously enticing woman who offered to shelter him and to support him both emotionally and financially while he sought a place and path which, now that he was free of the strictures of the narrow world in which he had lived until this moment, would be his own. A new place would allow Eric a fresh start, a chance to live free from the awful reputation of being a 'fairy.' But deep in the very center of his soul there was an unspoken desire to be able to pursue his femme persona to fulfillment. But to Eric this was so deeply hidden that he would only acknowledge this need, this dream, this hope in the few seconds before sleep. The movement of the train had lulled him into a light sleep but not so light that he didn't dream. He was no longer Eric but a lithe girl who studied dance and used her beauty to control her life. This dream faded from memory within minutes after he woke.

He sensed it was noisy as he walked along the train platform but a dreadful silence was closing in on him. Something like panic seized him for an instant as he realized he might be giving up control of his life to this baffling person named Diana. The panic subsided to mild anxiety as he realized he would always have choices, always be able to leave Diana's protection. Mother wanted Diana to help him dispose of her ashes; "Dee will know what I want. She always did." Mother had great confidence that Diana would know and understand her wishes in death just she had known her needs in life. "She knew what I needed better than I did myself. Well maybe not always but when it really mattered, she did." Eric had faith in Diana, faith that she would help him find the path he needed, a path he knew could not be trod unless he cut all ties with his previous existence.

He had only the vaguest recollections of spending time with mother and Diana on a kind of beach but not like the ones he knew from visits to the local shore. They were pleasant memories although vague and episodic. It was always peaceful and serene in these memories. There were hazy recollections of idyllic days on tidal flats, of digging clams, of riding a bicycle. There was another child in these visual memories. He couldn't shake the image of this child from his inner sight. Had his playmate been a tomboy or a very slight boy? Was she or he real or imagined? Perhaps a composite he put together of various playmates whose images had merged along with the nearly forgotten moments?

He shivered at the thought this almost forgotten playmate might have been a sissy boy. *Can't be*, he thought. *I would never have played with someone like that. Would I? Oh, shit! What's wrong with me? Why am I being such a jerk about whether some kid I played with was a sissy? Sissy! I hate that word. God, I was made to feel so miserable when they called me sissy. It was just that I was me; me before I learned to hide myself.*

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Ricki shivered again and smiled as he realized this agitated reaction to long buried memories was not only unfamiliar but not at all unpleasant as well.

He began to notice people around him and wondered if somewhere in this new place he would meet those different people who would let him see what he could be.

Diana had been cordial when he first called her. No, cordial wasn't the right word. She had been a touch too formal for her reaction to be described as cordial. She said all the right things but there was still a barrier although it was more sensed than stated. Still, she took care of everything although she did it all without ever coming to New York. The agents and attorneys she had engaged to help settle the small estate were all women; quite remarkable to deal with so many independent and competent women in that era when even the best educated women were expected to find a husband and manage his home as no more than an adjunct to his career.

He loaded his sparse luggage into the first taxi cab in the queue and leaned back in the corner of the rear seat..

"Can you take me to Bridgeton? I think it's right across the river."

"Sure thing. I know the area pretty well. Interesting place in a nice arty way; home to lots of free spirits and a few who wish they could be. Any other luggage to pick up?" asked the driver.

"Nope. That's all I have with me. The rest is coming by Railway Express."

*What's wrong with me, he wondered. I better not start telling my business to everyone I meet.*

"Smoke?" he asked the driver. It was still a time when people rarely lit up without offering everyone nearby a cigarette.

"Nah. Thanks anyway. I prefer my own brand. Go ahead and enjoy. Say, this address you gave me. Not any chance Diana Zeiring?"

"Why do you ask?"

"From what I hear she's pretty influential in certain circles. She's a lawyer who specializes in entertainers, performers. Kind of like an agent. She also provides training for newcomers; aspiring entertainers she thinks have a chance at success in certain specialties she has a market for. Only does it on her terms though. The rumor is some of the kids she

and her people train are into her pretty deeply. She even sells their contracts to people the kids might not like to work for but by then they're in so deep they have no choice. The word is that her activities are pretty wide spread in some circles. Rumor has it that she might even own some venues here and there."

"You believe everything you hear? Anyhow, what do you mean by venue?" Eric was surprised at the hard edge his voice had taken on.

"Venue's a cabaret or café. Could be a nightclub, almost any place that might employ show people, performers."

Eric took advantage of the ensuing silence to light up. It struck him that he was lounging in the seat but with his legs crossed thigh over thigh the way a woman would sit. He had always been teased for the loose wristed way he held his cigarette. *'You smoke like you throw a ball; like a girl.'* *That's what they used to tell me, those shits.* Feeling self-conscious, he adjusted his posture to a more guy-like position. Now his legs were crossed with an ankle resting on his thigh.

*"What am I doing? I don't have to play 'guy' now. I never really cared what anyone thought. Just that they made me feel so terribly scared, so afraid of everything. There is no reason I have to be something I don't want to be. No, I don't.* With that thought Eric relaxed, recrossed his legs to a more comfortable, more natural feeling, and decidedly more feminine posture.

"You an entertainer?" Eric tried to make small talk to relieve the tension and to pass the time in the cab. Perhaps it was more than that. Could it be that Eric really wanted to know more about this perplexingly exotic person?

"I try to be. Really, I'm more of a part time music student. Can't afford fulltime... at least not yet. I sing here and there when I can get a gig. You know the style; sing folk ballads, maybe a few romantic song standards accompanying myself on guitar. I'm not very fussy about where I get work or what I do as long as I earn enough to do what I need to do and be who I am even if it's not all the time. My dream is to live who I am every second of every day." The driver stopped suddenly. It was as if he had said too much already. He resumed a minute or two later. "I promise I won't ever ask you to introduce me to Diana Zeiring or set up an appointment. You can be sure of that."

Eric wondered why the driver was so emphatic about not wanting to meet Diana Zeiring.

"What else do you do besides study music, drive a cab and perform here and there?"

“You’re teasing me, I think. I take some dance classes. The dance classes keep me trim. Really, really important for what I want to be, er, want to do.”

“Pretty talented.” *Pretty and talented*, he added to himself. “How do you find time for all this?”

It’s not easy. That’s why I’m giving up the cab driving. Matter of fact, this is my last shift. Thanks for the compliment, though. There’s a lot of competition out there. Never easy to break into the entertainment field especially when you’re not like ...”

There was a pause. Eric wasn’t about to open up about his own interest in music nor about his skill as an instrumentalist and vocalist.

“You were saying.”

“Nothing worth hearing. I don’t want to lay my personal problems on you...If you don’t mind me asking, what brings you to town and why Diana Zeiring?”

“I promised my mother before she died that I would look up an old friend of hers, Diana Zeiring.”

“Sorry about your loss.”

Eric said nothing; he just clammed up. No way was he going to accept sympathy from this oddball. From time to time Eric caught glimpses of the cabby’s face in the rearview mirror. Then he studied the cabby license that was displayed on the back of the driver’s seat. The driver, Robert by name, was no more than in his early twenties. Robert could never be called handsome although he was strikingly good looking with features that would be pretty on a girl, the kind of girl who would be described as a natural beauty. Eric wondered if the “special problems” Robert avoided discussing were related to his androgynous good looks. He felt sorry for the guy although he had to force himself to fight off his unexpected reactions, positive reactions at that, to so pretty a boy. Pretty! Why had he used the word pretty in thinking about another guy even though pretty was an apt description? Eric’s reaction was turbulent rather than simply negative. There was a visceral quality to it as his heart pounded harder. It was the same way his body reacted when he was confronted with a very attractive or very sexy female, something which, more often than not, overwhelmed the insecure boy. A sudden insight made him aware that he was overwhelmed by Rob’s looks just as he was so often overwhelmed by the presence of attractive females, the ones that struck a strangely discomfiting chord deep within him. He had to admit that the one word he would use to describe Robert was “attractive” and that his own reaction was one of being attracted to, even turned on by this odd young man. He wondered, too, if his own willingness to sit so

comfortably and to allow his wrist to relax as he held his cigarette was, at some level, flirting with Robert.

Then it struck him! Robert was certainly different from anyone he had ever known or even encountered. *Hey! Can this guy be one of those people Mother was going on about before she died?*

The conversation eventually resumed with baseball and then shifted to jazz with a focus on singers, girl singers who did their own piano work backed up by a small combo, often no more than drums and bass, or who performed with such piano, drums and bass combos. The driver was also very up on the folk music trend so popular at the time.

“By the way, my name’s Rob,” he said as he turned to Eric and took the fare. His hands were graceful with well-manicured nails. Eric wondered at the softness of Rob’s skin. He just wanted to get out of the cab, get away from Rob. But why? Eric felt guilty at his reaction to Rob. It was as if he were sneering, trying to make himself feel superior: anything but respond positively to Rob’s inexplicable allure. Ricki wasn’t ever a macho type and had endured more than his share of teasing and abuse for his interests in music and the lively arts when he was in high school. Being well coordinated and graceful, Eric did well in athletic activities as long as the activities weren’t competitive team sports. This helped offset the image of an arty egghead faggot but didn’t totally stop the occasional teasing and harassment especially since Eric, despising competitive games, avoided sports. He would have been much happier joining the modern dance club but his survival instinct told him he would be doomed if he did so.

Eric knew he should have felt some empathy, some compassion for Rob. He hoped the generous tip would mollify Rob even though Rob had shown no offense. More significantly, it might assuage his own guilt at having taken such a superior and macho attitude which amounted to a lie.

“Need help with your bags?”

“Nah, I’m okay with them. But thanks all the same.”

“Good luck.”

“Thanks. You too. Take care of yourself.”

Eric realized he meant it. He didn’t know why but he turned back toward the cab to glance once more at this strange young man who stirred so intense emotions in him. Rob had started to pull away from the curb but had already paused and was looking back at Ricki whose heart seemed to leap up in his breast. “See you around,” he said to this

strangely alluring young cabby although he knew that was not very likely. He knew too that Rob couldn't possibly hear him yet he nodded as a half-smile formed on his lips which then pursed as if in a friendly kiss.

*"Can't be,"* thought Eric. *"Rob's too nice to make fun of me that way. I must have seen it wrong."* Despite that bit of rationalizing he was very aware of an unfamiliar but not in the least unpleasant tingle in his groin.

Eric looked at the corner building. It was old but well maintained, the sort of design that might be attributed to Louis Sullivan or someone trying to copy his work.. There was a series of discreet bronze plaques at the entrance. The top one, the one proclaiming "Diana Zeiring," told him this was the right place. It was doubtful that anyone passing in a car could read any of these. *How then,* he wondered, *did Rob know this was the base of operations for Diana Zeiring? How did he even know Diana Zeiring existed?*

He scanned the other plaques that were under Diana's. The few firms listed, all professional practices of one sort or another, were all run by women. "Rachel Danoff, Ph. D., Psychologist, Psycho-Analyst" seemed straightforward enough. Eric wondered why someone named Gwendolyn Sloan listed herself as an English teacher by proclaiming "English Instruction. All Levels." How many people around here need English lessons? Oh, right. Her services were probably for foreign students at Harvard and M.I.T. The booking service had to be the theatrical agent piece that Rob had mentioned.

Eric took a deep breath and grabbed his valises by the handles. He wasn't sure whether he had taken that deep breath in anticipation of lifting the valises or because in entering the building, he would be taking the last step in his journey, his journey to his new life and his dependence on Diana Zeiring.

The door opened and a singular woman stepped onto the street. She gave the impression of great height although she was of average height and build. Her physical proportions were all that were average in her appearance. She wore an oxford gray one piece dress highlighted by a copper necklace. The dress showed her graceful curves to advantage. Grey leather gloves covered the bottom edge of her sleeves. A cuff bracelet that matched her necklace and earrings was worn over one glove. Eric dropped his eyes for an instant but it was long enough for him to notice the tinted stockings that adorned this woman's shapely legs. The basic pumps on her feet matched her gloves as did the shoulder purse she wore. Despite being dressed in one color, a rather conservative one at that, this fortyish woman's appearance was striking and, to the young Eric, even captivating. A gray cape and matching Trilby styled hat emphasized to the conservative yet individually exotic style of this woman.

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She stared at Eric who felt intimidated by the forceful presence of this woman. Then a smile crossed her lips.

“You must be Eric. Diana told me you would arrive today. Welcome to Cambridge,” she said warmly as she removed her glove and extended her hand. Her handshake was firm, even strong, and confident; so unlike most of the women Eric had ever met.

“I’m Gwendolyn Sloan, but do call me Gwen. Let me take you inside before I dash.”

A wide corridor with an elevator at the far end greeted Eric as Gwen held the door open for him. He was taken aback as Gwen, with surprising ease, took one of the valises. “There’s no need for manly pride now that you’ll be with us. Let me help you,” was all she said. Her tone and inflection when she spoke the words ‘manly pride’ made it very clear that she held such values in utter contempt. It was clear, too, that she had neither need nor regard for men except on her own terms..

There was a directory on the wall adjacent to the elevator. The general impression was that of a comfortable apartment building rather than a commercial or office building.

“What can I do for you, young man?” It was more a challenge than a polite request. The speaker was in her early twenties at most, short and with a full figure.

“Brandi, this is Eric,” Gwen intervened. “Eric, meet Brandi. Diana and I share her services when she’s not working as Rachel’s secretary and receptionist. I’m leaving you in her very capable hands.”

“Sorry I came on so strong. Probably sounded like a real jerk but we have some goons show up once in a while trying to intimidate Rachel from working with certain patients. Sometimes friends and relatives don’t want Rachel’s patients to grow, to change and so become who they were meant to be. They come around to make trouble. Sometimes they send some goons around.”

“What do you when that happens?”

“I have some fun with them and then give them a lesson in humility so they don’t dare show themselves here again.”

Eric was distracted by the sound of the door to the inner office being opened. He glanced over his shoulder at the doorway but was unable to make out the shadowy figure in the room. Brandi’s brashness dissolved..

“Sorry, Rachel. I forgot you might have a patient. This is Eric.

He's..."

"Yes, I was already told about him."

She failed to acknowledge Eric.

The door closed and brought the brief interchange to an end.

"Eric, I'm sorry if she made you feel uncomfortable. " Brandi's voice was almost a whisper. Despite her effort to impress Eric with her toughness and physical prowess, the girl was intimidated by Rachel. "I really don't know why Diana lets her stay in this building. She never has fit in."

Eric studied Brandi as she turned her back to him while she locked the papers in a cabinet. He was attracted by her full bottom, a full bottom sexily restrained by a girdle. She led the way into the corridor and closed the door to the office.

"Okay, let me show you to Diana's apartment and get you settled in."

"Does she live here?"

"Some of the time. She has an apartment here that she uses most weeknights. I'll show you around. You'll have a small suite of rooms adjacent to Diana's apartment.

"There's a dance studio across the hall," she announced as she locked the office door. "We have a gym with weights and stuff that Gwen uses for her, um, apprentices. She also trains some of the apprentices and a few of us in, in...Well, you'll see for yourself one of these days There's a dance supply store, a ladies specialty shop, a beauty parlor, and a custom dress shop in the part of the building that fronts around the corner. Really kind of super to have all these neat things in the building you work in."

He wondered how this curvy cutie could give any goons lessons in humility but held his peace. Her bobbed dark hair highlighted her pretty features and emphasized her large dark eyes. Silver earrings dangled from her ears giving her an exotic, almost oriental attractiveness. She stooped slightly as the elevator door opened and lifted both valises.

"You must be tired from your trip. Let's pretend you're checking into a hotel and I'm the bellhop."

Maybe she really could dispose of goons with no trouble. She

was certainly strong enough. Eric swallowed hard.

Brandi showed him to the bedroom that had been set up for him in small suite of rooms adjacent to Diana's duplex apartment. The furniture was functional although not very masculine, but neither was most of it such that couldn't possibly belong in a boy's room. The vanity was the one piece that didn't quite fit in what was to be a boy's room. It was the one piece clearly meant for a woman's bedroom and which changed the tone of the room, stated unequivocally that this room belongs to a girl.

"I really have to apologize. You see there was some confusion. We thought you were a girl named Erica on account of Diana kept talking about Ricki. We got you some basics to start you off but it's all girl stuff. The jeans and shorts are probably okay. We'll straighten the rest out, though."

Eric looked down at the pajamas and robe that had been laid out on the bed. The pajamas were powder blue cotton with no ornamentation. The top was pull-over, v neck style so there was no issue around which way the buttons closed.

"No need to fuss. I can use these for a few days."

"Super! Why not shower and then I'll treat you to dinner?"

"I'd like that. Thanks."

"Oh...Well I guess it can work. There's a ton of panties in the bureau but lots of them are plain old white cotton. Would you mind...? No, that's too silly. It's just that it might be easier all around if you can make do with white cotton until we can shop together."

He hoped he wouldn't start blushing. She had touched one of his secret fantasies. He remembered trying on girl's panties when he was a little boy but it hadn't stopped there. His cock twitched and became, although not really hard, more than flaccid as he thought about being able to try on panties with no fear of being caught. No, he realized. Not simply furtively trying on panties but being free to wear them, wear them not just for a few minutes behind closed doors but to enjoy panties, panties in all their wonderful styles and textures, as a part of everyday attire.

Eric got out of the shower and took a pair of yellow cotton panty briefs from the dresser. He held them at eye level and turned them so the rear faced him. His breath caught in his throat as he admired the curved rear seam of the crotch. His heart raced as he eased the fine cotton along his legs and over his thighs. Ricki began to feel awkward as he tucked himself in place inside the panties. He promised himself it would

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be just this once or maybe until he could get some proper boy's underwear. Of course he had packed several sets of boy's briefs in his bags. His lavender kimono fell from his shoulders as he dressed in girl's jeans, crew socks and a brand new pair of tennis sneakers. All the clothing fit him perfectly! How, if they had his correct sizes, could they have possibly thought he was a girl named Erica?

"Wow, Ricki, you look absolutely luscious in those jeans."

He was flattered by the compliment. Although 'luscious' wasn't an adjective he would have chosen himself, he felt comfortable with it. It was thrilling to be called luscious just as it was a kick to be wearing panties in public and to feel the tight seam of the girl's style jeans pressing between his nether cheeks.