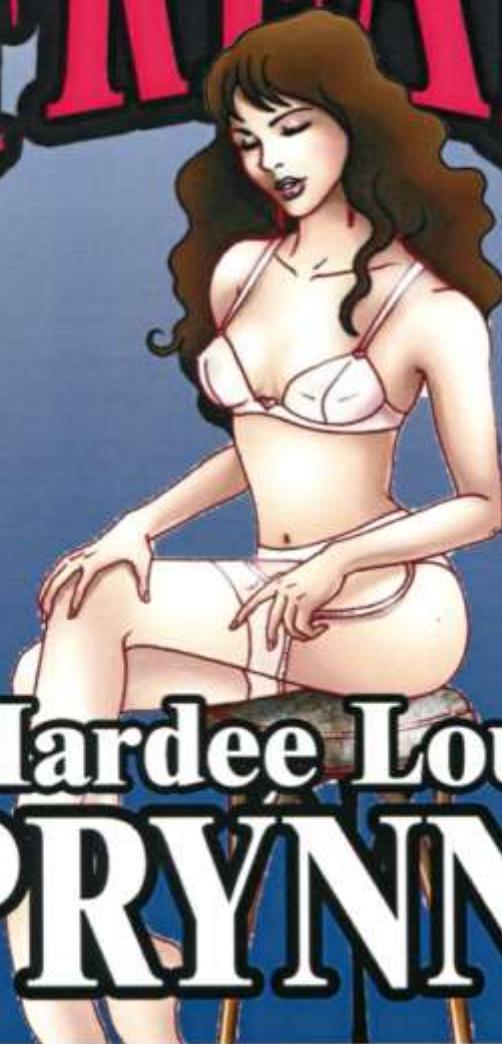
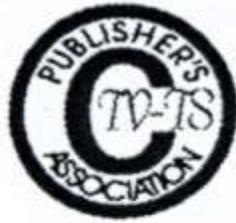


FREAK



**Mardee Louise
PRYNNE**



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Freak

By Mardee Louise Prynne

ALLEN INTRODUCES HIMSELF

I played with the girls when I was little. Of course you could have guessed that. It was okay, not great, just okay until some of the girls started to feel uncomfortable talking about girl things with me around. And so I became pretty much a loner until high school. Then things started to change. Things started to change not just for me, but for a few of the other kids as well.

Although I avoided team games in school I was a fair stick ball player and a very good handball player. Somehow I thought that by becoming good at these games I might free myself of some of the teasing I got for hanging out with girls and playing what were regarded as girls' games. Of course girls played handball too but they didn't usually play against boys. They only played with boys in flirtatious doubles games in which they covered up their often superior athletic skills. I often wondered why the girls avoided competing against the boys when many of the girls were faster, better coordinated, and despite their shorter, more slender frames, stronger.

I became the exception. Some of the girls allowed me to join them in handball and in a variation called KINGS or Chinese handball. Oddly enough, the girls who included me in their games were the more athletic, tougher, less prissy, less self-styled ladylike cliques. I became an adept player but all it got me was the nickname of 'tomboy.' The boys avoided me all the more since it was too embarrassing to be beaten in an athletic game by the 'tomboy.' At least the more athletic girls still let me play with them.

Did I say I've always been a little different? A whole lot different is more like it. Actually, I was a kind of freak in most kids' eyes.

The academic or college prep track courses were what most kids took in my high school. Those courses, intended for students planning on college, formed the nucleus of my program. When it came to choosing electives my being different again surfaced. I chose courses in the commercial track, the secretarial studies classes. The commercial track prepared the girls who were not interested in going on after high school or who were unable to afford college to work in offices by

teaching typing, bookkeeping, and shorthand. This meant the program was almost exclusively followed by girls who, although not in the least dull, had no interest in going to college. Family finances was the reason for some of these very capable girls choosing the commercial track; for others it was their family's cultural values that meant no college, at least not for girls. A significant number were just too ambitious, too bright, and too driven to keep their place. Lots of these girls did eventually attend college on a part time basis and, on completion of college, went on to a better life style than they would have had if they stayed in their place.

A few boys took some typing classes, usually in senior year when they had met all of their other course requirements. These boys claimed it would be valuable to be able to type their papers in college. No one believed them, not for one single second, least of all the very goons who said so. Everyone knew these goons thought it was an easy class and that they would have a high old time flirting with the girls.

I wasn't at all sure why I was taking so many commercial classes. No, that's not so. I knew very well but avoided saying so even to myself. Actually, it was another way to become more like a girl. Being an almost exclusively girls only setting, a setting in which the real girls were able to be themselves without male ogling, afforded an opportunity to learn and practice feminine body posture. While taking shorthand I crossed my legs tightly with one foot hooked behind the other calf. Some of the time I sat with my knees together, my feet flat on the floor in an evocation of feminine modesty. As I sat I wondered what it would feel like to wear a skirt and stockings like all the other girls in the class. Did real girls ever take for granted the sensation of a garter pulling even more tightly as they extended their legs or as they knelt to retrieve something from their purse or from a file cabinet? Most girls wore stockings to school only on special occasions but even on ordinary days how wonderful it must feel to experience skirts and pettis rustling against bare legs, to flirtatiously adjust those skirts as I sat or crossed my legs. To feel the boys' eyes on my calves as I bend forward and pull up my crew socks would be a thrill, a thrill of power.

The control that these girls could exert became obvious almost from the first day I was in a class with them. They were all very nice to me but they delighted in giving the self-styled "big man on campus" types a very hard time, hard in more ways than one. The girls had only to smooth their stockings, or just or adjust the cuffed fold of their bobby-sox to have these jerks staring transfixed. But that was only for openers for these tough minded girls. Once having gotten the boy's attention with their not very revealing but extremely provocative moves, a girl would make eye-contact and sneer. By the time these girls, so different from the so-called classier types who would be going

to college only to earn an MRS, had finished with these boys, they had shattered each boy's confidence almost beyond repair. Just a flash of the lacy hem of a slip or petti would be enough to distract those boys from the day's lesson making them look like the fools they were.



Of course some of the boys did try to get 'handy' with some of these girls. The girls welcomed such attentions, but not for the reasons the boys hoped they would. It gave the girls an excuse to mark the would-be Lotharios with scratches and bruises and, on occasion, sore balls depending on where their intended victims decided to strike. Some of

the boys enjoyed these humiliations as indicated by the hard-on they often got when the girls would verbally or physically challenge them.

Most girls wore those pretty things every single day even though nobody got to see them except a few other girls, their intimate friends. That made me so envious. The variety of textures and colors in panties alone were so special. I longed to wear such finery even for a few minutes. But in the end, even I had to admit that referring to “all the other girls” in the class wasn’t the least bit accurate since I wasn’t one of the girls and could never be. Or so I believed.

There was, I knew from having peeked at a discarded pin-up magazine, some vague hope for me. The magazine had a two page article, a photo essay really, on a female impersonator. It showed a slender man in panties seated at a dressing table applying makeup. Then a photo of him now fully made up, still seated but facing the camera, as he rolled a stocking over his smooth and shapely leg so gracefully pointed in the air. Next he donned his wig and did the finishing touches to his hairstyle with a comb. The final photo showed him as a fashionably dressed, very attractive woman, a woman who was tastefully seductive, a woman whose calm smile told she how confident she was in the power she exerted by her very being. A ‘funny’ sensation which welled up in my tummy became an unfamiliar but pleasant tingle in my groin. I headed for home as quickly as possible without calling undue attention to myself. The magazine was tucked under my jacket and I just knew that if anyone found it they would somehow know that it was the female impersonator photos that prompted me to keep it.

The bathroom mirror confirmed my hopes. I now knew I had the right facial bones and features along with the slender figure to learn to do what this performer was able to but I also knew I didn’t want to perform in a cabaret like some sort of oddity. Even though it was almost nineteen-fifty, the second half of the twentieth century, I could think of no way I could be a girl, even some of the time, without being a freak on display. That wasn’t for me. I would be a real girl, albeit a girl with a penis, pursuing the lifestyle of a beautiful, glamorously sophisticated, powerful, successful woman; successful by her own definition, powerful in her ability to control her destiny. I fantasized this version of ‘me’ would have a succession of lovers but I was not at all certain if my lovers would be women, men or an undreamed of combination.

I knew this to be an impossible dream, a weird jerk-off fantasy so I put it aside and thought of it only in that special instant between waking and sleeping. And yet this strange reverie came to invade my dreams both night and day. It soon became my one major dream, the great hope that kept me going.

The margins of my school notebooks and the pages in back of my loose leaf revealed hints of this hidden self. My scribbles in the margins of my notebooks were really sketches; some were line drawings and others were fully shaded. Almost all the sketches were of girls' and women's fashions or of exaggeratedly pretty faces, shaded to show makeup and wearing earrings or very stylish eye glasses. There were a few sketches of hands: very graceful hands with long, elegant fingers adorned with rings, with wrists sporting bracelets of my own design. Some were conservative and traditional while others were more bohemian. Guess what? I longed to wear jewelry as fashion accents even with my drab boy clothing but I didn't dare any more than I dared to try on female finery from girl's style sweaters to skirts and pettis. I didn't even dare to draw what I imagined the well-dressed girl or woman might be wearing under the clothing I so envied. Oh, I tried such drawings every now and again but the results were so shocking. Each time I began the seductive young girl bore an undeniable resemblance to me. My fear of being discovered, my cowardice, although not totally irrational, overwhelmed my need. Was there a place in this city, even in this world where girls like me could find a place?

I thought I was undone one morning in the lunchroom waiting for the first period warning bell, the signal to go up to homeroom. Marcia, one of the quietly rebellious girls in my classes, approached and sat down. She was strikingly pretty with a great figure and a commanding presence that was intimidating to all she met. She was often accompanied by whichever of her friends who were in her best graces at that moment.

I drew a breath as Marcia approached me as I sat alone at a corner table in the school cafeteria waiting for the bell that would allow us to go up to our homerooms for attendance.

"Gee, Al, I can't understand why you always want to sit by yourself? You know it would be swell if you sat with us."

I managed a smile as Marcia pushed a stray lock of blondish brown hair back from her cheek to behind her ear.

"I'm sure it would be keen but you always sit with a crowd of girls, never any boys."

"Most boys are major drips but you're not like them. You've got some really special things going for you. Trouble is you don't even know it. There are lots of girls who would appreciate someone like you, if you get my drift. I'll bet you don't even know that there are lots of boys who would love to be, well, to be friends with you but they're just too worried about their friends might think."

"I guess so but what about the girls who sit with you? They might not care to be seen sitting with me."

“Just try it and see how quickly you part of the group.”

Was this my chance to become one of the girls? Well, as close to being one of the girls as possible for someone like me. She has to be making fun of me.

My face must have shown my confusion because Marcia perched on the table in front of me. A student marshal motioned for Marcia to get off the table. My new friend screwed up her face in what could have been a frown or a sneer, opened her mouth ever so slightly and touched the tip of her tongue to her front teeth.

The student marshal, a studious girl who was quite pretty in a plain sort of way, broke eye contact with Marcia, and then she looked toward me with a funny, embarrassed smile. There was something about this girl and her smile that made the short hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

Marcia meanwhile had turned my notebook toward her and watched me blush as she looked over a sketch I was working on.

“Say, you’re good.”

“Thanks but I was just playing around. It’s just a line drawing with some shading. No big deal.”

“Playing around? No big deal? These are super! Wait until Miss Preston gets a look at these. You’ll be the star of her program in no time.”

“Now I know you’re making fun of me. Miss Preston hates having boys in her programs. All the kids say she hates boys ‘cause she’s a...”

“Just don’t believe everything you hear. You wouldn’t like me to believe all the stuff they say about you, that you’re some kind of a freak. Like I said before, Allie, you’re not like most boys. You never act like those goons. You’ve got style and class. Miss Preston’s art and design program might be just the place for you to develop some of that talent you don’t even know you have.”

“I still think you’re making fun of me. Even if you’re not, I don’t want you to tell anyone about these.”

I slammed my notebook closed and pouted.

“Allie, just stop feeling sorry for yourself. I don’t waste my time teasing. If you want to sulk just because someone’s trying to help you, just forget it. Forget about sitting with me and my friends until you wake up.”

I felt my face growing warm as I blushed at Marcia’s abbreviating my name to the distinctly feminine ‘Allie.’

“Gee, I hope you don’t mind me calling you Allie. It just came out. Suits you though.”

“I don’t mind at all. It’s just that everybody will make fun of me like they always do.”

“Suppose I call you Allie only when no one else is around? If anyone else hears it and starts using it without being mean, then you know it’s right.”

I nodded and then, without thinking, I answered Marcia.

“No, Marcia. It doesn’t matter in the least if you or anyone else thinks Allie’s the right name for me. What matters is whether or not I feel it’s the right name for me and I do feel it’s right, ever so right.”

Marcia was clearly taken aback but was too surprised by my assertive reaction to say a word.

Tense at first over being invited to do something I had hoped for - for so long, I soon relaxed and walked up to first class feeling almost elated. It suddenly struck me that I was too relaxed; relaxed to the point where I was allowing my effeminate nature to emerge. I was clutching my notebook to my chest the way girls carried their school books. So what if anyone sneers? This is me and I’m tired of pretending. There’s no point in pretending when I’m fooling no one, not even myself. And besides, if I could face down that dolt Ron, I can take care of myself.

Suddenly I found, ahead of me, a cluster of boys and girls moving so slowly as to be all but loitering on the stairs. I tried to edge my way through only to be stopped by Ronald, a minor jock, minor in every way but his ego and his swaggering airs.

Much to my surprise, Ron smiled at me and said “Hi.” No sarcasm, nothing but a matter of fact, almost friendly “hi.” I smiled at him by way of returning his greeting.

His girlfriend, a bullying snob with nothing to be snobbish about, elbowed him and whispered “What are you doing saying ‘hi’ to that thing? Do something right now or your reputation is gone and so am I.”

I felt badly for Ron, but not for long. He released his girlfriend’s hand as he spread his arm across my chest.

“Excuse me, Miss! Don’t you know you’re not supposed to run on the stairs?”

I heard a few giggles from the girls and some sniggering from the boys. “Miss! That’s good,” came from a kid I couldn’t see.

“I said ‘excuse me.’ Now let me pass.”

My tone surprised even me. It was calm, self-assured and, above all, aggressive.

Ron was nonplused by my reaction. It was something no one, least of all me, expected. He stepped aside as I kept eye-contact with him. I moved slowly forward as he leaned away from me. Barbara's voice broke the silence.

"Ronald, you are such a phony. Look at him, everyone, he's backing down from that skinny little fruit."

That did it! Ron had no choice now but to stand up to me; not that that would have been a problem for him or anyone else. I was terrified of a fight or at least I was until that moment.

Ron bounded up two or three steps and stood in front of me with his hands clenched at his sides. It was pretty clear to me that he was even more perturbed than I was.

"Just move out of my or I'll have to move you out of my way." I surprised myself at least as much as I surprised Ron and the group of onlookers.

Again sniggers. I was no longer sure whether I was bluffing or so angry that I would really do something physical to my tormentor.

"Hey, Ron," a voice from the sidelines chimed in, "Are you going to take lip from that faggot?"

To my amusement Ron was beginning to sweat. He was at least as afraid of getting into a fight as I was! Of course he had much more to lose by way of status than I did. Even if I didn't win but just held him off, Ron's reputation would be destroyed. This was too good an opportunity for me to let go by.

"Yes, Ron," I echoed, "Are you afraid of me?"

"No, no I'm not! I just don't want to hit a fruit like you. It would be like hitting a girl. You're really just like a girl, faggot."

"Oh, is that so? Maybe you just don't want to fight a girl, especially not the kind of girl you say I am because it would be just too, too embarrassing if she beat you up." I paused and watched Ron become more and more uncomfortable. Then I added, "Not if she beats you up, but when she beats you up."

This time the sniggers were replaced by laughter. At first I thought they might be laughing at me but then the cat calls started again with Ron as the target!

The confrontation was as good as over and I had won! Ron was steaming but unable to make a move against me. The cluster of kids

dissolved as almost everyone went their separate ways. A few of the guys even patted me on the back. "Good show, Al."

A few of the girls stood in front of me and smiled.

"That was so neat. He really had it coming."

"Yeah, Al, you really told that jerk where to get off." This from one of the boys!

I walked slowly and gracefully, perhaps too gracefully, past Ron. My pace didn't alter as he shouted at my back.

"Fucking faggot, I just didn't want to get in trouble in school. I'll fix you when we're alone sometime. Just watch your back."

"Watch my back, indeed," I shot back over my shoulder. "Don't you think you're watching my back enough for both of us; or is it my backside you're watching?"

By now I had reached the landing. I didn't turn around or even glance over my shoulder but I was pretty sure Ron was still looking at me. To ridicule him even more, I walked forward putting one foot directly in front of the other to make my walk even more girlish, to let him know that he backed down from a fight with a fruit, a faggot.

An angry sound from Ron; a sound that was neither a bellow nor a groan yet was both. Silence, followed by the sound of someone, presumably Ron, hurrying down the stairs. The stairwell exit door opened. Had I gone too far in making Ron flee from his apparent disgrace in front of his friends? And why did he run when most everyone had already left?

It was ever so silly of him to run off. No one would have doubted him if he said he just didn't want to get into trouble for starting a fight with me in school. I mean really no staff member would have believed that innocent, ineffective, timid Allan could start a fight. But if he had said that, he might have to face up to me after school.

The feeling of confidence I had as I sashayed through the school corridors was wonderfully liberating. I was free to be as effeminate as I wanted to be and I no longer feared being bullied. The boys who teased me so mercilessly were now intimidated by the aggressively femme Allie who was replacing the cowering Allen.

**