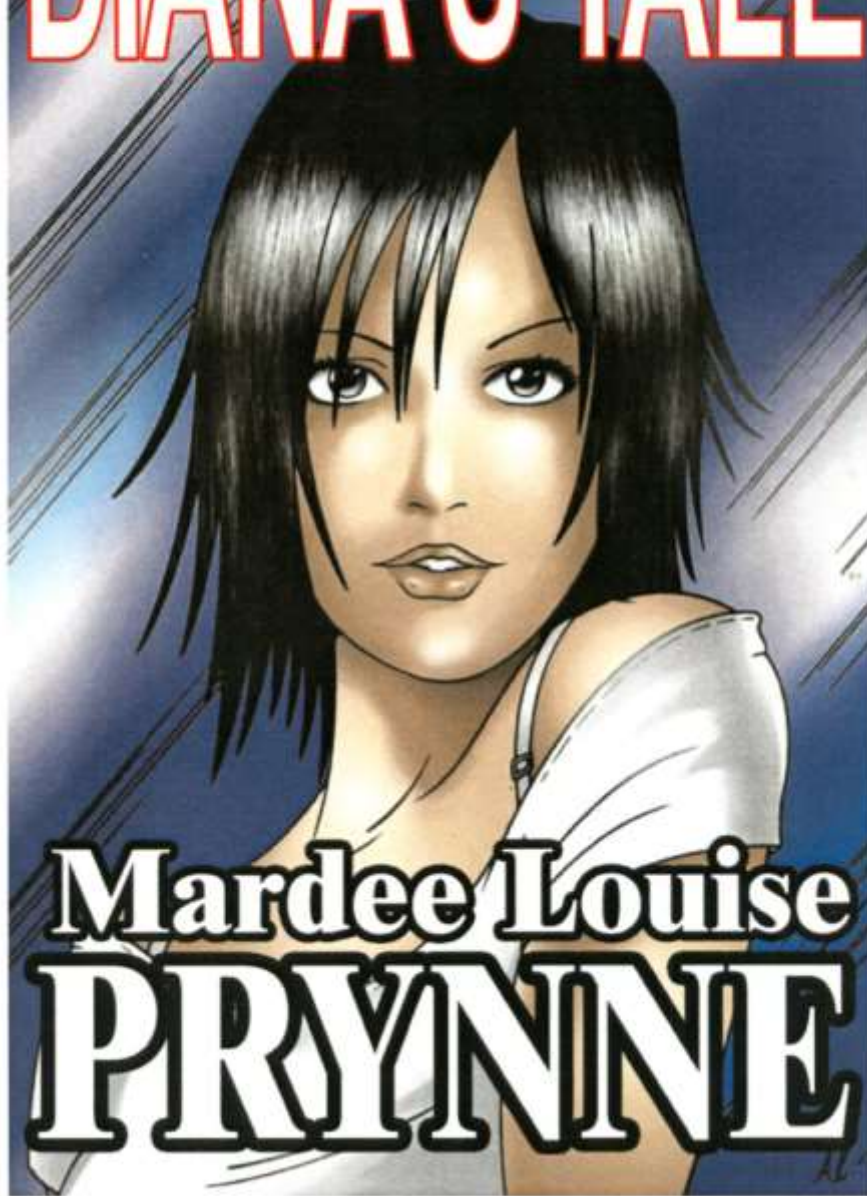


DIANA'S TALE



Mardee Louise
PRYNNE



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Diana's Tale

By Mardee Louise Prynne

Dee's Narrative

I asked Mother why we were moving from this neighborhood in which we had lived ever since I could remember. "Do we really have to?"

I wasn't at all sure why I bothered to ask because I already knew life had more to offer than this pit of bourgeois boredom. Mother looked wistful before she answered by telling me that this would give me a chance to share in the popular ideal of coming of age in America. "Pooh," I answered in my best brat style. Mother smiled at my frank response.

"Darling, it will let you see just how special and talented you are. Now you go and spend a week or two with Cousin Maude and when you come home; well, you'll see."

"How long is a week or two? I'll bet it turns out to be a lot longer than fourteen days"

"You'll just love Boston. There are so many wonderful museums to explore and historic sites to see. I'm sure Maude will take you on day trips all over the north shore and even to Cape Cod."

I made a petulant face and remained silent for a minute or two. Mother folded her arms under bosom and glared at me as she leaned against the doorway of my bedroom. Suddenly she stepped forward, put her hands on her hips as her nostrils flared. Perhaps, I wondered, I had gone too far with my inappropriate girlish petulance, all the more inappropriate because I was a boy! Mother immediately removed any doubt that I had done just that.

"That may have been cute when you were a child but it's not at all cute now. You're an eighteen year old boy even though you may wish you were something else. Unless and until you become that something else you had better start being what society wants you to be or you're in for trouble. Now just get used to the idea that you'll be spending as much time with Maude as I need you to. It's been almost a year since you finished high school and have done little but refuse second interviews for jobs and think of reasons why you're not ready for college. You used to enjoy practicing your music and you were so good at it. You wanted to explore dance so you started ballet and then stopped although I was

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told you were talented and should continue. The same happened with modern dance classes. Your occasional visits to museums and art galleries are a waste of time unless you're prepared to use what you claim to be learning to some advantage. Now you're going to start conforming to my demands or there is going to be trouble."

I thought of telling Mother that I quit ballet and modern dance not because I didn't find it thrilling but because I was so envious of what the girls wore.

"Trouble? Oh, Mother, I'm quivering with fear or perhaps anticipation of this trouble."

"You're not so big and so tough that I can't spank you when you need it. As a matter of fact you're not big and not at all tough."

I pouted hoping to gain a few markers from Mother. In reality I was glad about not having to see that awful high school where I had never had a chance of fitting in and where I was tormented by students and harassed by most faculty members because, although I was bright, I refused to accept their tired old ideas about how things should be. The few teachers who accepted me as I was and even encouraged my original thinking were, for the most part, women. The few students who left me alone or even made occasionally friendly gestures were, for the most part, girls from blue collar families. Miss Garson, a guidance counselor who was my unofficial sometimes therapist, almost had me convinced that my being very bright along with other differences, differences which she insisted made me very special, were threatening to many people but especially to men and boys who were somehow insecure. Even though Miss Garson avoided telling me why I was threatening to certain men and boys, she almost had me convinced except for the fact that it did nothing to get me through the day to day annoyance of school.

It didn't really matter because when I was about to graduate but when Miss Garson announced she would be leaving at the end of the school year I felt I was losing an ally, an ally I might need somewhere down the line although I had no idea why I felt this way.

What was so unfair throughout my high school years was that whenever I fought back against my tormentors, I was the one who got into more serious trouble than the instigators. At those moments I thought of what Miss Garson had so often told me; it was just too threatening to have a skinny little sissy defend himself, however poorly, just as it was too threatening to have a pupil successfully challenge the stale ideas being taught instead of accepting them and all the distorted values they implied.

If I could manipulate Mother by whining about having to visit Cousin Maude, I might be able to get a comfortably large allowance to spend in the shops I hoped Maude would show me. Of course I wasn't clear in my own mind how or on what I would spend this hoped for money. I knew which things I would like to buy but I dared not shop for the clothes that girls were privileged to wear.

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That's not quite honest. In my mind I would have no trouble fingering the delicate fabrics, holding skirts and dresses in front of me as I stood before a full length mirror. And then, of course, I would need the appropriate foundation garments; brassieres, panties, garter belts, girdles and such loomed large in the wardrobe of the girl I knew I was meant to be. Shopping for those so called unmentionables would surely be an even greater thrill than dreaming over ads in magazines and in Sunday supplements.



I was called 'miss' so often, especially on the phone, that all I need do is wear a boat neck tee over Bermuda shorts, two or three girlish rings which I could slip on as soon as I was safely out of my neighborhood, tennis sneakers with no socks, and carry a wallet in my hand as if it were a small clutch purse and I

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would be able to convince any saleslady that I was anything but a boy. Better still, I could 'borrow' one of Mother's clutch purses.

My mind began racing as if in fulfillment of my secret fantasy. My hair! Well, shorter hair styles were becoming not only acceptable but even popular among girls and younger women. I could just put a barrette in each side of my hair to give the illusion that my hair was pushed back behind my ears. As I sat in my room, I fingered my hair. I went into the bathroom, took two of Mother's hairclips, pushed my longish hair, how I despised haircuts at the barbershop, and smiled at the very believable effect I had so easily created. After going to the bathroom, I reached for one of Mother's lipsticks but dared not experiment further. Makeup would have to wait, maybe forever.

Why, you may wonder, didn't I simply do what I so longed to do and shop for at least a few items of girls' clothing? I feared that I would go a few steps further and wear my new things. Discovery, I was certain, would lead to indignities and horrors far worse than those I had already endured. I pulled the clips from my hair, threw them at the mirror, sat on the edge of the tub and collapsed in a sulk.

Somehow I got to my bedroom where I lay brooding on my bed until, exhausted, I slept. The light was fading as I lay on my side, my knees curled to my chest, my thumb in my mouth. The harsh ringing of the phone jarred me out of my self-pitying torpor.

"Everything is fine, Mother. I was very tired so I took a nap and didn't hear the phone when you called earlier... Really, Mother, a nap doesn't mean there's anything wrong... Do you want a bite to eat when you get home? I'll go to the bakery and get some pastries and I'll wait to have dessert with you."

It was close to dinner time when I walked toward the bakery. As I passed the five and ten I gave in to an impulse. The store would close at six. Most of the clerks had already left. It was a simple matter to choose two pair of cotton panties, one blue, one yellow, and to hand them to the middle aged woman behind the counter.

For whatever reason, she smiled approvingly. Her accent marked her as a refugee from pre or perhaps post World War II Europe. Her kind smile made me think she accepted me for what I was. No, she couldn't possibly begin to know anything about me. I was thankful, at least, that she made my first foray into buying feminine apparel a moderate success.

I wondered at the approving smile I had gotten from the clerk in the five and ten. There was not the least of sneering in her look or in her tone of voice. Could it be that people in other countries were more open minded about what I was keeping as a horrible secret? Still, I vowed to never let her wait on me again nor even see me shop for such things. I resolved that all my future purchases of anything intended for girls would take place as far from home as I could possibly manage.