

The Book of Ursula

By Cooper & Kadee and an Anonymous Patron

I pushed the old-fashioned lawn mower ahead, watching as the spinning iron blades thrashed, tossing blades of freshly cut grass into the air. If any other neighbor asked me to trim their yard using an old, iron and wood contraption I had to push around, I would have told them they were nuts, But for Minerva, I made an exception. I just really liked her, and if she said gas powered mowers disturbed the elves, well, then I would not be using a gas powered mower. Minerva was, to say the least, eccentric.

Her house, itself, was odd: a mansion with spires and a widow's walk, rising up on a street and in a neighborhood or ranch homes, painted a deep, midnight purple and slate gray. The wrap around porch sang— no, literally sang— as dozens of wind chimes that had been hung along the upper railing flashed and chattered in the breeze.

I had been inside a few times; I was always doing chores and odd jobs for Minerva, and her love of antiques was apparent inside with rotary phones, wind up clocks that ticked.... ticked... and dark oil paintings of dukes and duchesses and dances and moonlit revelry.

I loved the look and feel of the place— everything was made of wood and metal, marble— things that were warm and real- it was nothing like my house of tacky plastic everything, polyester and silicon wherever I looked. What I wouldn't give to live in a house like Minerva's!

When I finished mowing the yard, my sweat-soaked shirt clung to my lean, slender body. Despite being in my mid-twenties I was still all gangly legs and arms, like a teen-ager, and when I would finally be able to grow a beard, no one could tell. Ah, well. I looked good, clean shaven. I wiped my arm across my forehead, wondering if Minerva would appear and—

There she was, right on cue, floating out the front door and leaning on the banister, her face framed by her thick, platinum blonde hair that seemed to shimmer with pink and purple. As always, she wore a long, flowing dress, and to my eyes, what seemed like a dozen necklaces that glittered in the sun, just like her bracelets. She smiled and looked at me with those eyes, those big, blue-purple eyes, eyes like none I'd ever seen, and as always I felt slightly unnerved, like she was looking right through me. No, not through me. Inside me. "The lawn looks great," Minerva called out. "Come on inside once you put the mower away. I made lemonade."

“Okay,” I said with an awkward wave. I pushed the mower around back to the small, double-doored barn. Minerva’s backyard looked like something from a story book, ancient oaks with sprawling limbs crowded into each other, shading statues of fawns and satyrs, a stone bird bath covered in ancient glyphs. There was even a sundial that stood in the middle of a clearing, the yellow rays of the afternoon sun blazing down and casting just a sliver of a shadow across the grainy surface.

I pushed down on the handle of the mower, lifting the blades so they wouldn’t cut anything, and pushed it into the corner. The barn was stuffed with antiques covered in drop clothes, an ornate mirror, farming tools that wouldn’t have looked out of place in the hands of a medieval peasant. Resisting the urge to check myself out in the mirror, I headed back to the house.

Inside, I found Minerva in the kitchen next to the cast iron stove, and she handed me a sweaty glass of lemonade. “Thanks,” I said, taking a sip, then a bigger sip. Her lemonade tasted like nobody’s business. I asked her what was her secret ingredient once, and she just laughed and said, “If I told you, I’d have to turn you into a toad.”

Minerva sipped her own lemonade. I felt nervous around her; well, I felt nervous around everyone, but more nervous around her. She was so beautiful, and kind, and yet she always had an

amused smile on her face, like she was holding onto some big secret.

“I really appreciate you helping me again,” Minerva said. “You have to let me pay you something.”

“Nah,” I said. “Just being a good neighbor.”

We went through this little dance every time. In fact, I didn’t feel like I should get paid for helping, but Minerva always insisted. We would go back and forth and Minerva would end up giving me 20 dollars. It always went that way. It was kind of funny to me, because I was a grown up with a grown up job and 20 bucks was what you’d give to a teen-ager for something like this, but she insisted and it was beer money, I figured.

Today, though, she didn’t follow the script.

Instead of the usual back and forth, Minerva reached out and touched my cheek. I felt a small shock, like from static electricity, and I jerked back, lemonade sloshing onto the marble floor. “I’m so sorry...” I said. “Let me clean that up.” He grabbed a hand towel from the ice box.

Minerva watched me, her face now a mask of concern, perhaps even sorrow. “You’re not happy,” she said.

I’d knelt on the floor to clean up the spill, and I looked up at her. “What? No. I’m fine.”

“You’re so sad,” she said. “And you think you need to hide it from me, from everyone.”

I hurried to clean up the spill. All my mental alarms were ringing like a thousand klaxons wailing in my brain. “I’m not hiding anything.”

“You don’t have to be afraid,” Minerva said, stepping towards me.

“I’m not afraid,” I said, retreating. “Okay. Thanks for the lemonade.” I pushed through the door and took off, terrified that she had somehow guessed my secret.

Chapter Two

A week passes. I’m a hacker, a computer programmer, currently working for a startup, hoping to get rich when and if one of our APPs hits it big. There’s a small army of us, all wearing the coder’s uniform— jeans, ironic t-shirt, hoodie. My t-shirt reads, Ironic T-shirt. Yeah, I’m that meta.

I come home. I eat. I spend most of my nights playing Allmyth, a MMORPG based on an old tabletop game created by some weirdo. I’m a G.I.R.L. which is code for a female character played by a guy in real life, and it’s weird because the dorks in the game are always hitting on me and giving me stuff.

A week passes, and I forget all about my moment with Minerva, my fear she has somehow guessed my secret. Then, one night, I'm at my computer, solo dungeon crawling through a sea of gargoyles, when the phone rings. It's Minerva.

"Yeah?"

"I hate to bother, Chris, but could you come over to help me with something?"

"Sure, Give me 10, 15 minutes." I find a safe space, save and log out. I need a break anyway. My eyes are watery and my ass aches from sitting here for so long.

When I get to Minerva's assistant, Rose, opens the door. She's just as gorgeous as Minerva with long, jet-black hair and pale skin, big, dark eyes that tonight sparkle with excitement. "Come in, come in," she says. "We're ready for you."

"Ready for me?" I say looking around. The lights are all off, and the whole house glows with soft, flickering candle light.

"Come," Rose repeats, leading me deep into the mansion, down twisting corridors and to a door which opens to a narrow, stone stairway that plunges down at a steep angle. Rose starts down the stairs, and I follow.

"I've never been in the basement," I say.

"Few have."

It's weird and strange and maybe I should be suspicious, but I've known Minerva for years and anyway I'm super curious to see the basement. We go down, down, down and then reach the bottom of the stairs. A large, cavernous room opens before me, and I see Minerva standing next to a podium in a flowing dress that seems to sparkle in the candlelight.

"Chris," she says, her eyes sparkling, that same secret smirk on her face.

"Minerva."

"Go," she says, gesturing. "Stand there in the middle of that circle."

It's like a scene from Allmyth. There's a circle in the middle of the room, carved into the floor and surrounded by more of those mysterious, ancient glyphs. "There?" I hesitate. One thing I would never do while gaming is just walk into the middle of a magic circle. But, this isn't a game and magic isn't real, I tell myself, right?

"Go ahead," Minerva says, and then she waves her hand. "You trust me."

I shake my head. Yes. I do trust her. Of course. I laugh at myself for hesitating and walk right into the center of the magic circle, and then I freeze. Or, maybe I should say I am frozen,

because I suddenly find I can't move a muscle other than to speak. "What's happening?"

"We're making dreams come true," Rose says.

"Just relax," Minerva says. She reaches up and unties the strings hooking her dress around her neck. It floats to the floor as if in slow motion, pooling at her feet. She raises her arms and stands before, candlelight dancing across her flawless skin, sparkling in those big, mysterious eyes. She is utterly confident and unashamed to have me look at her rounded shape, completely smooth and hairless other than her wild mane of thick, lustrous hair. The puckered nipples on her firm breasts point upwards, and I can't help but look at the mysterious shadow between her legs. I am stunned by her beauty, unable to think of anything now but her body.

She begins to read from the book on the podium, chanting in some strange language that seems composed of all watery vowels.

Spectral shapes rise from the within the circle and swirl about me, and I feel them touching me, caressing me, my skin growing cold as they seem to be pulling, drawing something out of me, and for a moment the room seems to be getting bigger, but then I realize I am getting smaller. I look at my hands and watch, amazed as they shrink becoming smaller, softer, whiter, and my

wrists and forearms are shrinking as well, becoming tiny, delicate. “What’s happening to me?” I say, shocked to hear a soft, high-pitched child’s voice come from my mouth.

“Minerva is drawing the masculinity from you, preparing you for your new life,” Rose says, her voice sharp-edged with excitement.

“Macul– what? No!”

“You are a child now, and soon you will be a baby, and then–”

Minerva’s voice grows louder, booming around the stone chamber, and I am shrinking, shrinking, growing more and more tiny until I wobble on my chubby little legs and plop onto my bottom. I realize I no longer remember how to walk or even stand. Am I a baby? I am now draped in my old clothes, which cover my tiny shape like a blanket. “Stop!” I cry out. It sounds like an infant’s bleating, and I am crying now, terrified. The clothes around me vanish and I rise in the air, floating toward Minerva, who lifts her dress.

“Yes, that’s a good little girl,” Minerva says, having finished her spell. “Come to mommy. Come home.”

I’m waving my tiny little arms and legs, crying out, shrinking, shrinking... there’s a flash, and then a darkness, and then– what? Where am I?

I'm floating underwater. There are sounds all around me— the beating of a heart, a whooshing sound that mirrors the heart beat. I panic. I'm going to drown!

But then I hear Minerva's voice. It seems to be coming from all around me, and it is soothing and calming and full of love. "You're safe, honey. Everything is okay. Don't worry. You don't need to breathe," she says. "I am breathing for both of us."

As she says the words, I realize it's true. I am not drowning. She is breathing for me— for us. There is a rocking sensation, and I find myself rolling in the water, changing positions in response to the movement.

"How are you?" I hear Rose say from somewhere out in front of my water bubble. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine," Minerva says, and she sounds so happy. "She's safe and sound in her mommy's womb."

She? Who are they talking about?

I start to explore this strange place I have found myself, reaching around with my tiny hands. There is some sort of tube sticking out of my belly. I grab at it, touch it, feel it. I kick one of my chubby legs and feel it hit something soft and— fleshy.

"Oh!" Minerva says. "She kicked."

"Can I feel?" Rose says. "Of course."

I can see soft light through the semi-translucent substance that makes up this water bag. Then, a shadow appears, moving across the outside of the surface. I kick at the shadow.

“She’s a strong one,” Rose says.

I see two more shadows slide across the barrier. “It’s okay. Relax. Relax. You’re safe in your mother’s womb now.”

Womb? Mother? Okay, sure, all the evidence adds up, and it all seems to suggest I am now a fetus inside Minerva, and that I’m now a girl?

I can’t accept it. Not yet. I can’t believe it because it isn’t possible. I mean, you try finding yourself a female in a woman’s womb when you were a 24 year old man a few minutes before and see how long it takes before you come to believe it’s true.

“I bet you’re hungry,” Minerva says. “Mommy’s going to eat now.”

I can’t talk, so I respond the only way I can– I kick again, wishing I knew Morse code. More rocking and swaying. I think Minerva is walking, climbing the stairs. She starts to sing:

Hush little baby don’t you cry

Mama’s gonna sing you a lullaby..

Her voice is so pretty and so soothing. I find myself growing calm. I am starting to accept the impossible. I am a baby girl, and there's pretty much nothing I can do about it.

Chapter Three

I am surprised to find myself become comfortable in Minerva's womb. I feel warm and safe in this round chamber, comfortable and cared for. How odd to be a fully conscious adult male, experiencing life as a baby inside his— I still think of myself as a he— mother's womb. I had never thought about what life was like for a baby, but I suppose I might have thought it was like being in an isolation chamber— quiet and still— but it is nothing like that. There is sound— the steady thumping of Minerva's heart, the whoosh of her blood flowing through her body. I am aware of light, shadows and movement, as the fluid around me shifts as she sits or stands or lies down. I find myself rolling, turning, adjusting to her movements, and, of course, there is the sound of her voice. She is constantly talking to me.

“How's my little girl?” She'll ask first thing in the morning. “Mommy's going to stimulate that developing little brain of yours,” she promises me, and she does. Music, constant music— Mozart, Bach... she hums along, and I am bonding to the sound of her

voice, and then she conjures magic light shows for me— flying dragons, dancing pixies that poke my little nose, giggling and flitting away as I grasp at them with my pudgy little hands... I giggle in my mind, and I hear Minerva giggle; we are that close now.

I imagine I can picture her, as if watching from outside, floating from room to room, watering her plants, humming, the runes on her dress glowing, the top of the dress half open, revealing her full, gently swaying breasts, and when I see them I find myself puckering, hungry... my whole perspective on breasts has changed...

Rose is always with us, and I come to love the sound of her voice as well. “I checked the perimeter and re-aligned the wards to the east,” she’ll say, ever vigilant, constantly thinking of protecting us...

I don’t have any sense of time. I am just floating, living... and then one day my peaceful world is shattered. Everything shakes, like an earth-quake, and I roll and bounce in my liquid world. I hear Minerva groan in pain. Mommy!

Another quake and another! I kick.

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” Minerva says and then, “She’s coming.”

“Who?”

“I’ll draw a bath,” Rose says.

More quakes, more shakes. Minerva takes deep breaths that whoosh all around me, and she keeps talking to me. “Mommy is fine... you don’t need to worry... Mommy is —” quake and I hear her hiss with what must be pain... “Mommy is fine...” I can feel her changing positions, hear the water from the tub as it sloshes around her...

I listen to her. Despite the shaking, the spasms, her voice is calm and loving, and so I trust her... something is telling me to roll, to turn myself downward...

“Breath...” Rose says. “Breath.” And then, “push! Push!”

I am being pushed downwards, pressed between silky walls, strong muscles squeezing me, drawing me, pushing me... and then, I pass through the walls... and then I am lifted up up... and what’s this? Air? I had forgotten what it feels like to feel air on my skin... Someone smacks me on the bottom and I let out a cry... I hear my voice, crying, sobbing... I am trying to say... Mommy... “Happy birthday, Ursula,” I hear Rose say in a soft, loving voice. Welcome to girlhood.”

Girlhood.

And then I am in her soft arms... nuzzling against her soft breasts... Mommy... Minerva... I calm, resting my head against her chest, I feel and hear her heartbeat again, and I know I am safe, and I have just been born, and I am now a baby girl.

Chapter Four

I cry. I am hungry. I see Mommy look down over the edge of my crib, smiling. “Such a hungry little baby!” She says, as I wave my little arms, kick my little legs. She picks me up and pulls the top of her dress open, letting her full, milk swollen breasts sway free. I grin and reach, and she lifts me to her breast, smirking.

Her teat is my wet mouth, and I am sucking, and there is nothing better on this planet than a mother’s milk. To me, it tastes like honey. As I suckle, I look up at her, and we stare into each other’s eyes, just stare, softly, and she is my whole world, and I love my Mommy. She’s so pretty. I reach up and touch a strand of her silky hair, and she smiles.

When I am done, Minerva lifts me high in the air and turns in a circle, and I giggle and laugh and— burp! And— uh oh! I frown, ashamed as something stinky fills my diaper. But, the loving glow never leaves Minerva’s face.

“Someone needs her diaper changed!” She says, and she carries me over to the table and lays me down. I would apologize if I could. I mean, I’m a baby, but I have the mind of a twenty some year old man, and it’s pretty embarrassing that I keep pooping in my pants.

Mimerva, hugging me to her chest as she climbs into a steaming tub frothing with bubbles. They pop against my nose, and I grab at them, laughing as they squish and vanish. Minerva holds me against her slick skin, smiling down at me, rubbing her nose against mine. “Who’s my little girl? Who’s my pretty little girl?” I blush when Minerva uses a soapy washcloth to clean me, and I giggle when she lifts my arms and rubs it under my armpits. I am ticklish to the point of ridiculous.

There are those big moments. I remember laying in my crib, watching the mobile spin— stars and moons and planets. I heard the door open, and I grabbed my feet, and Minerva’s face appeared. I expected to hear myself make some gurgling sound, but instead out popped, “Mommy.” My first word! It was so exciting.

It was the same when I managed to rise up on my plump little legs for the first time. Shaking, wobbling, I grinned at Minerva and Rose, took three tottering steps and plopped down on my rump, but I was smiling and laughing and I felt so proud— I walked! I’m a big girl!

Chapter Five

Days pass. Weeks. Years. Minerva had seen the truth. I'd always wanted to be a girl. As I grew older, I got to live as the girl I'd always wanted to be. I got to wear skirts and dresses! Mom bought me cute outfits— lots of powder blue and pink yoga pants, t-shirts with Kanna Kamui on the front, and my hair grew out long and pretty. I played with it, putting it in different styles, using hairpins and barrettes and banana clips and ties and all the fun girly things that were forbidden to me as a boy. I went to school, made friends with other girls. Well, some of the other girls.

I am, not to brag, super cute. The teachers all love me, so certain girls, I won't mention Cassidy by name, are so jealous. It's just little things, like Mrs. Fulsome asks me one day if I want to draw a decoration on the white board for Christmas. "Can I?" I say, giggling and clapping as I skip up to the board. I pick up a marker and put a finger in my mouth. "What should I draw?"

"It's Christmas. What do you think?" Cassidy says, and her little wolf pack titters. I pretend to ignore her, and I draw the most amazing scene of angels and reindeer dancing beneath a huge Christmas Tree.

"You're so talented!" Mrs. Fulsome says, and she has me stand in front of my drawing while she takes my picture. I am a good drawer. Cassidy crosses her arms and sneers at me.

I slit my eyes at her. She doesn't know it, but payback is coming. She thinks she's dealing with a 9 year old cutey girl, which I am a little, but I am also a 20 year old man, and I don't take shit from anyone. She's in the lunch room with her back to me when I grab one of her braids and yank as I pass, making her head jerk back. Her friends look on in shock, and she gets up and marches to Mr. Holly, who's on lunch duty.

"Ursula pulled my hair!" She says.

Mr. Holly looks at me. I'm sitting with my group of friends now—we're known as the Goody Goods—and I let my mouth drop open in fake shock and shake my head. I blush— I can actually blush on demand, it's pretty amazing.

"Ursula?" Mr. Holly says. "Come on. It must have been someone else."

Cassidy is furious. When Mr. Holly isn't looking, I stick out my tongue at her. I am armored in a cloud of cute that puts me above all suspicion in the eyes of grown-ups. They simply can't imagine me doing anything that isn't adorable.

I get my math test back. Another 110— I nailed the extra credit—and a smiley face stamp. I'm a college graduate, and the school work is not challenging, but that's fine because I am really more interested in socializing. I just love keeping up with what everyone

is doing, whose parents might be getting a divorce, whose big sister got drunk last weekend...

Who's throwing a big pool party?

Melody!

It's all giggling and laughing and girly girls as we arrive. First, we hang out on the deck, talking, munching on chips and cheese. It's Melody's birthday, so there is a table smothered in presents, and after we eat hot dogs and burgers her dad cooks on the grill, her Mom comes out of the house with a big, white cake, nine little candles flickering. Melody blows them all out in one attempt, and we all clap and she smiles and starts to open her presents, squealing with each one, making sure everyone knows how much she loves it, how much she appreciates the person who brought it for her. That's how Melody is. She's always thinking about others, taking care of their feelings even at her own birthday.

All my friends are like that, actually. We're the Goody Goods, remember? People started calling us that to make fun of us for getting good grades and never getting into trouble, but we decided to own it, and we even made our own slogan: Good Goods: We get good grades and we do good deeds!

After presents, it's time for swimming. We all go in Melody's bedroom to change into our swimsuits. I turn my back as I slip into my bright pink one-piece, and I keep my eyes to myself. It's at

times like these I feel very much a 20 year old guy, and I am not a creepy one. We all run to the pool, and I let my arms wave around and giggle as I jump high in the air and cannonball into the bright blue water. I get some up my nose, and it tastes like chlorine. I open my mouth and let it fill with water, and when I swim to the surface I turn my head up and fountain the water into air like a water nymph.

“She’s really cute,” I hear Melody’s Mom say to Minerva.

“You don’t have to tell me.”

I pretend I don’t hear, but I am pleased. Being cute is my superpower.

Most of the parents go inside, grateful for a break from a bunch of hyper little girls, splashing and screaming. Two stay out to keep watch, but we forget they are even there, and soon it’s

“Marco!”

“Polo!”

“Marco!”

“Polo!”

And I have never understood Marco Polo, and I think it’s kind of lame, but it’s something to do with my friends so, whatever?

“Marco!”

“Polo!”

We decide to see who can do the craziest dives and take turns throwing our arms and legs out, flailing around and making goofy faces as we leap off the diving board and then plunge into the water, bubbles rising all around us.

The sunsets and the air turn cold. “Okay, girls,” Mrs. Grant calls. “Time to get out of the pool!”

“No! Just a little longer!” We complain even as we swim toward the edge of the pool, the ladders. We’re the Goody Goods, after all, and once we towel off and get back into our clothes, Minerva wraps me in a big, soft blanket and I snuggle by the fire while Melody plays with my hair. “What are you doing?” I ask, as it seems to be taking her forever.

“Don’t look!” She says, excited, tugging gently on my hair as she sits behind me. The other girls are getting drowsy, heading home one by one, their equally drowsy parents in tow. Finally, Melody shouts, “Tada!”

I use the mirror function on my phone and see that she has given me a head full of microbraids, each one tied off with a tiny little bow in pink or white. I shake my head and the braids dance, and I giggle and laugh. “I love it!”

And I give Melody a hug, and I feel so warm and happy and connected, and I wish this moment could last forever.

“Ursula? Time to go, hon,” Mom says. I’m disappointed and a little annoyed, but I know she’s right. Melody’s parents looked gassed after an afternoon playing host to a bunch of hyper-active, giggling girls, so even though it makes me sad, I give Melody a final hug and wave goodbye as Minerva takes my hand and leads me out the door. “Bappy Hirthday!” I call over my shoulder, purposely mixing up the first letters.

“Thanks!” Melody calls back, and I hear mother say, “Ursula is so cute.”

Score!

Chapter Six

Back home, I get in my pajamas, crawl into bed. I suppose I am too old for it, but Minerva still tucks me in at night, and I love it. We have a routine. She comes in and sits on the edge of my mattress, puts her hand on my forehead. “Did you brush your teeth?”

“Yes.”

“Show me.” She says, even though I have never once failed to brush my teeth. I smile and show her my teeth, then open my

mouth and stick out my tongue; Minerva insists I brush my tongue.

“Good girl. Did you wash behind your ears?”

“Yes,” I say, though this is a step I sometimes skip. I mean, how dirty do the back of your ears get when you just spent hours in a swimming pool?

Minerva checks. “Okay,” she says. “Just make sure you do, or you’ll grow cabbages back there.”

“Unh unh,” I say, knowing better.

“Don’t forget; Mommy is a witch.”

My eyes go wide.

She pushes the edges of my blanket under me, making a tight little cocoon for me to sleep in. Usually, this is the part where she says, “pleasant dreaming” turns out the light and closes my bedroom door. Tonight, though, she lingers, looking down at me, loving, proud.

“What is it?” I say, confused.

“Oh, you’re just growing up so fast is all,” she says, tapping me on the nose. “It seems like only yesterday I was holding you in my arms for the first time, rocking you back and forth. And now you’re a little lady.”

I don’t know what to say, how to make her feel okay about me growing up, so I just smile. Minerva gave me the greatest gift

anyone has ever given me or could, this new life as the girl I always wanted to be, always was. I never want to cause her pain.

“Yes,” she says. “It’s time. You’re old enough.”

“Old enough for what?” I ask.

“To learn magic.”

And with that, she got up, turned off the light and closed the door to my bedroom.

End Part One