

Metamorphosis

by Janice D. Soderling

One morning as Georgia Samantha was waking up from her girlish dreams, she found that she had been changed during the night into a stiff-spined book.

Change is part of a girl's life, but this was sudden and frightening. It was not like when her front teeth fell out. Or when bumps slowly remapped her chest. Or wiry hairs sprouted. Those changes came gradually. Now Georgia Samantha had undergone a scandalous transformation.

Since she learned to read, her mother had warned her it could happen. "Reading books is not for girls. If you don't watch out, you'll find yourself on the shelf."

Georgia Samantha laughed gaily, or disbelievingly, or rudely, or with the I-know-more-than-you-ever-will attitude that young girls so often have.

Once she said petulantly to her mother, "Well, if you had ever read a book yourself, you would understand."

Her mother didn't answer immediately. She kept on rolling the pie dough, thinner and thinner. "I've read books. In Latin. And not just one."

Georgia Samantha was surprised. She said lamely, "Well, then."

The mother lifted the dough which was now so thin it was nearly translucent. She said, "Some things are best forgotten. Go make your bed, later you will have to lie in it."

Georgia Samantha flounced out of the room. Her mother yelled, "I'm warning you."

Now it had happened. She had turned into a book.

At first all the knowledge inside her stiff covers made her feel superior to other girls. But boys took one look at her and said, "I don't understand you."

Her parents, kind and well-meaning, wanted what was best for her. They decided she would be happiest with those of her own sort.

They took her to a used-book shop. As they feared, she wasn't worth much on the market.

"But she has never been read," her parents protested.

The antiquarian bookseller said disparagingly, "What people want nowadays is something light to divert their thoughts. Nobody wants to get in too deep. This one," and he tapped an impatient forefinger on Georgia Samantha's forehead, "these highbrows are a dime a dozen. I am doing you a favor by taking it off your hands."

Her parents were respectable folk who didn't want gossip. They nodded.

The bookseller put Georgia Samatha on a shelf with similar books. It was crowded and dusty and she had a constant crick in her spine. Sometimes she heard muffled crying in the night, but didn't ask questions.

One day a tall man came into the shop, walked around looking at the books, noticed her title, said, "Hmm." He lifted her, turned her this way and that in the dim light, opened her up, sniffed her pages. She felt a thrill she had never felt before. "Hmm," said the tall man again.

She held her breath. Yes, he was carrying her away from the dusty shelves and across the threshold to the desk where the old bookseller was sorting new arrivals into stacks.

"Found one you liked?"

"I think so," said the tall man.

"One in a million," said the old bookseller. And he laughed and winked though Georgia Samantha didn't see anything funny.

When the tall man had paid and put her in his pocket, he said casually, "I've been looking for this one for years."

He took her home and laid her on the bedside table.

He never opened her again. Never really looked inside her. There was no follow-up of that first thrilling interlude in the dim light of the bookshop. Later he moved her to a shelf in another room and apparently forgot all about her.

Sometimes he would look in her direction and say, "Well, you're so smart, you tell me, Miss Know-it-all."

Later, even that bit of interest waned. He didn't seem to notice when she was in the same room. She stopped being disappointed and became resigned.

She knew he was reading something else. She noticed the glint as he turned the glossy pages, she saw the centerfolds open, heard the zipper. She didn't dare ask what he was doing, but some evenings she wanted to scream. Just scream.

Sometimes she hated him.

She had only herself to blame though. Her mother had warned her. That's what happens when a girl reads too many books.

