

## Breaking the Curse: A Memoir about Trauma, Healing, and Italian Witchcraft

**Alex DiFrancesco**

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Alex DiFrancesco's gripping memoir *Breaking the Curse* is about being unheard, misunderstood, abused, and traumatized by family members and society while growing up transgender.

In childhood, DiFrancesco was forced to dress and present as a girl, though everything in him told him that he was a boy. His cries to be seen and heard were ignored. And when his family finally began to listen, the situation got much worse: they expressed disgust, and DiFrancesco was "swept out of his body, out of knowing himself for decades."

In places, this book is horrifying, covering addiction, mental illness, stays in mental hospitals, rapes, frequent assaults, and a break from reality. In narrating such occurrences, the prose is intimate and multisensory, thrusting attention into a dark alternate reality. There are graphic depictions and distressing scenes in which DiFrancesco struggles for wholeness and authenticity while the world uses and abuses him. His sense of confusion is palpable throughout: while trying to make sense of the world and his place in it, DiFrancesco even forgave one of his rapists.

The stage was set for such troubles, the book says, when DiFrancesco, as a child, was told over and over again that what he saw, felt, and knew was not real. Indeed, the book is persuasive regarding the importance of parents' protecting their small children, noting that their absence in fairy tales is what makes terrifying events possible while, in real life, far greater terror is caused when those trusted to love and protect children instead inflict pain on them. That the book concludes with DiFrancesco connecting to his ancestral roots and seeking forgiveness and healing thus reads like a miracle.

An indomitable spirit triumphs in *Breaking the Curse*, a memoir about growing up transgender in an abusive, dangerous world.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2024)

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