

A Feminine Look Part 1: The School Show

Mysterious Stranger

General Audience (pg)

500 < Short Story < 7500 words

Teenage or High School

Androgyny

Hair Salon / Long Hair / Wigs / Rollers

androgyny

Long hair

school

crush

Reluctant

Posted by author(s)

Chapter One: The School Show

My name's Jamie, and I'm a fourteen year old boy, born and raised in the suburb of Hinsdale, Illinois. It's a really fun time in my life because I'm about to graduate 8th grade with high school on the lookout. All that separates me from the halls of Hinsdale East high school, is a long, fun summer...

However, there's still a week left till our graduation ceremony. And everyone knows that in middle school, all you do in the last week of school is pretty much watch movies in class. It's glorious! In Algebra class, we're watching "Wreck-it Ralph". A classic. To be honest, I wasn't really watching the movie, but rather doodling. I was a big fan of doodling and did so throughout most of my classes. Look, I paid attention and got solid grades, but drawing was really my passion. We were watching the movie, and I was sitting right in front of my friend Annie.

"Jeez Jamie, you're not watching?" she whispers to me.

"I've seen it before. No need to see it again." I say, looking down at my drawings.

She sighs. "You're missing out then."

Annie is my best friend. We've been close since we were three years old, and I really don't know where I'd be in my life without her. I'm a relatively introverted, reserved person, so having her

frantic, outgoing attitude to cling on to was really useful for making friends and plans. Also, I'm an only child, so she kind of felt like my sister growing up – my loving but sometimes unbearably annoying sister.

Suddenly I felt something whip around and hit me softly in my face. Annie had grabbed my hair and thrown it in my face.

“C'monnnn! Watch the movie. I want to talk about it with you afterwards!” she said.

Annie really liked to bug me, as most friends do. But her main target was ribbing me over my straight, shoulder-length brunette hair.

Annie constantly told me how she wished she had my hair. I really didn't care. I always kept it long because I think it looks kind of bad-ass. I mean, think of all the cool guys in the 80s with long hair. It's a cool look that I think I totally pull off.

“I'll just braid it then if you don't watch the movie.” she said assertively.

That shot me up. One thing I definitely didn't like was people braiding my hair, and she knew it. I always thought it looked too...I don't know, girly. Not that I'm the most masculine fella around, but I hate being confused for a girl.

I stopped doodling, put the notebook away, and turned my attention toward the movie.

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About twenty minutes later, our teacher, Miss Gaspin, turned off the monitor and walked to the front of the class. She instructed a student to turn the lights back on.

“Okay guys, being the last week of school – and for you 8th graders, the last week at THIS school – we put a little surprise together for you all.”

The class fidgeted with excitement.

Miss Gaspin continued, "All I can say now is that we've got a special assembly just for the 8th graders. So at the end of the period, everyone's heading to the gymnasium."

The entire class buzzed with excitement.

"Oooh an assembly! What do you think it'll be?" Annie asked me.

"I bet it's an ambush on the 8th graders, and they'll tell us we have to repeat the grade." I responded.

We both giggled.

Eventually, the bell rang and everyone funneled out of their classes and, slowly but surely, the gymnasium filled up with 8th graders.

Our gymnasium was basically a basketball court, but there was also a medium-sized stage that overlooked it. Rows of chairs were already set up facing the stage, split into three sections. Having got there earlier than most other students, Annie and I sat in the second row in the middle section; it was a great view of the curtain hiding whatever our surprise was.

Gradually, the 100 students in my grade found their way into the gym. One of those students, Chris Correa, sat next to me and Annie. Chris was probably my best male friend. We met in sixth grade, and he was also fairly peppy and outgoing. Neither of us had a ton of friends and were both into art, so it only made sense that we became close.

"Sup," he said, "Any idea of what this is?"

"Literally none," Annie responded, "Jamie thinks it's a plot against the 8th graders."

Chris laughed. "I actually heard a rumor that there is someone from the high school coming. Like a high school group here to perform, or something."

This piqued our interest. Hinsdale East was a pretty big high school, and had a lot of student groups that did all sorts of performances.

At that point, the Principal, Mr. Winters, walked out in front of the curtain to address the students. He hushed the students.

“Welcome, welcome! I know there’s a lot of mystery surrounding the assembly, but we’re happy to say the wait is over!”

The students cheered.

The Principal continued, “All of your teachers and staff are so proud of what all of you accomplished over your three years at McMillan Jr. High, so we wanted to reward you with a fun performance. So coming all the way from Hinsdale East High School, I’m proud to introduce, ‘Toned’!”

Just at the sound of that, all the girls in the gym started to scream with excitement, including Annie. The lights dimmed and somebody began to pull back the curtain.

“I knew it.” Chris said under his breath, high-fiving himself for predicting that it was a high school group. Yes, he’s the type of weirdo who would high-five himself.

Still confused from the announcement, I turned towards Annie.

“What’s going on? What is ‘Toned’?”

Annie is about to speak up but is interrupted by Chris.

“Toned is the premier acapella group at East. It’s six guys who are really talented singers, super charismatic, and think they’re just the coolest jerks ever.” Chris’s comments dripped with jealousy.

Annie chimed in. “Well, Chris also forgot to mention that they’re all super cute. That’s why all the girls are so into them... and why he’s so jealous”

“I’m not jealous!” Chris said. I just kinda think it’s stupid that every girl digs ‘em. I mean, why do they get to be kings of the school, throwing cool parties and wearing dope shit all the time.

I turned back to Chris. “How do you know all this?”

"My cousin is the beatboxer in the group," he responded. "And he's the crown jewel of the family! So freaking dumb."

The lights in the gym finally turned off, shading us in darkness. Then the stage lights turned on revealing six guys all in a line, sitting on stools. They looked almost angelic, the way the above head spotlights beamed down. The girls started to cheer, and all six members of Toned looked down upon the crowd, smiling. They really did look cool. There were all wearing super dope outfits in various styles, each one more fashionable than the last. I could see why they were so popular.

The boy on the far left, spoke into his microphone and addressed the crowd. "How are you guys doing this afternoon!"

The crowd cheered with excitement.

He smiled at the cheering. "That's great! So your principal asked us to perform for you guys today." Then the boy turned to his fellow singers. "We've got an hour of music, yeah guys? Y'all ready to have some fun?!"

Everyone cheered even louder, and the six boys all sat for a moment to collect themselves. One of them blew a pitch pipe for the key and began to sing.

The first song was "I Want it That Way" by the Backstreet Boys. Just at the first line of "you are my fire," everyone – especially the girls – went insane.

Honestly, these guys rocked. The harmonies were on point, they looked like they were having fun, and the students seemed to know all the lyrics, so it was a great song to open on.

Annie turned to me with a huge smile on her face. "This is so awesome! And those boys are sooooo cute."

"Yeah they actually are. Awesome...that is." I responded. I really did mean awesome. "How old are they anyway?"

Once again, Annie was about to respond, but Chris interrupted her with the answer first. She made a face at Chris.

Well my cousin, the beatboxer, is a sophomore. Then from left to right there's a senior, a junior, another junior, another senior, and on the far left is a freshman.

"He's a freshman?" Annie said, stunned.

"Yeah, he's the only freshman ever to make the group. He's got some pipes on him." Chris said.

"And he's got some looks too...he's the cutest of the group!" Annie said in a giddy tone. Classic 8th grade girl fashion, being head-over-heels for a boy she just saw.

Toned kept it going with a boppin' rest of the set. They sang tons of popular songs and even some older hits to please the teachers and other adults in the room. Before I knew it, they were done. The same guy as before spoke up again.

"Thanks for being so dope! We're gonna close out with one more classic song. I know the teachers know it, but I hope the students will know it too."

Chris's cousin started a beat, and they all started performing the song 'L-O-V-E' by Nat King Cole – a great one that I've heard my grandparents listen to before.

As they wrapped it up, the group leader thanked the crowd and the lights turned on.

"Wow! Wasn't that great, guys?" Annie squealed. We both couldn't help but agree with her.

'Toned' started walking off stage and Annie turned to me saying, "Ahh, should I yell something out?"

Being this spastic, I knew Annie wasn't asking for permission. She was gonna do it anyway.

She stood up and yelled 'I LOVE YOU!' to the group. A few of them see her and wave to her, including the one freshman.

She sat back down and turned to me. "Did you see that? The cute freshman looked at me!"

"Lucky you," I said, humoring her.

But Chris noticed something. "Actually, Annie, he's still looking at you."

Annie and I look up towards the stage, and we see that the freshman boy is in fact looking at our row, definitely with a 'checking-out-an-attractive-girl' kind of look.

But just one thing was off. I think he was looking at...me.

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I've re-edited and picked this story back up after all these years. Look out for a new chapter every week or so :)

A Feminine Look Part 2: The Mystery Brunette

Mysterious Stranger

General Audience (pg)

500 < Short Story < 7500 words

Teenage or High School

Androgyny

Mystery

brunette

mistaken

Girly boy

Reluctant

Posted by author(s)

Chapter Two: The Mystery Brunette

I'll be honest. I was a little too freaked out by the whole thing to mention it to either Annie or Chris. But it was so strange! I've definitely been mistaken for a girl before from behind because of my long hair, but this was almost like...an attraction. Did he really think that I was a girl?

The assembly was during the 8th grade lunch period, so we were told to have a quick lunch and then get to our next class. I finished the school day not being able to get that moment out of my head – and with the exciting event of graduation coming up, that’s saying something.

I returned home to find that my parents were out of the house. They traveled a lot and would often go on trips for a whole weekend. Being Friday, they must’ve both left.

My parents trust me a lot though. Being an only child, I’ve grown quite independent. With no bad track record, they’ll give me the house for the weekend without batting an eye.

I ended up inviting Annie and Chris over to hang out. Graduation was next Friday, so I realized this was my last Friday as a middle schooler.

Annie arrived first, and we decided to sit on the couch and talk until Chris came. However, as expected, she would not shut up about the Toned performance.

“And then when they mashed up that One Direction song with the Billie Eilish one? Ahhh!”

Times like these I really wished Chris was here. I needed some to roll my eyes with.

She continued. “I swear, I’m going to all their concerts from now on. Imagine, when we get to high school, we’ll be in the same school as them. I could run into them every day!”

“I think you’re a little too giddy about this guy group,” I replied, a bit annoyed. “You can’t get too excited just because they waved at you.”

“Hey, I didn’t say they all waved at me, but the freshman boy was totally checking me out.”

Her last few words caused my stomach to drop again. It only reminded me further how that boy looked at me.

Just as she said that, the doorbell rang. I jogged to the door. It was Chris.

“Yo yo,” he said, overly casual as always.

The group decided to play Cards against Humanity, which we play a lot. Always gets a bunch of laughs.

“So I got a text from Juan,” Chris said, matter of factly, “My cousin.”

At the sound of “cousin”, Annie dropped her cards. “OOOOH WHAT DID HE SAY?”

“Woah calm down. You’ll actually be happy to hear this.” Chris said.

Annie was squealing with excitement. Chris continued, “So apparently, that freshman singer told him that a really cute girl in the audience caught his attention.”

My heart stopped. But wait – maybe this wasn’t me that Chris is talking about. Maybe it’s Annie! Or heck, anyone else. There were 50-plus girls in the audience during that show, so it easily could’ve been them. Maybe he looked at me in addition to the many other girls.

“Eeeep! That had to be me! When I stood up and waved, he totally looked in my direction. There’s literally no doubt!” Annie said, yelling. She then began to stand up and dance around, celebrating her believed victory.

Chris stood up to calm her down. “Jesus, chill. We don’t know if it was you.” Chris started pacing the room. “I’m actually going to a family party on Sunday. Juan will be there. I could ask him who the mystery girl is.”

“Ooooooh this is just like Cinderella!” Annie was beyond giddy.

“Yeah, but in this case you might be the ugly stepsister left holding the bag.” Chris said condescendingly.

I laughed at the analogy, but it was all too possible that perhaps... I was Cinderella.

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The next week at school I got a chance to talk to Chris at lunch. Annie, Chris, and I always sat together. Usually I would draw while the other two bickered about who knows what. But we all knew that Annie was waiting for one thing in particular.

“What’s the news?” Annie said, as Chris sat down. Chris already looked exhausted by her mood.

“Listen, you’re so crazy about this guy, but you don’t even know his name.”

Chris looked at Annie, awaiting her response.

“Pfft, of course I do,” she said, “It’s...”

We both stared at her.

“Alright, fine! I just think he’s really cute so maybe I’m a bit obsessive. Can you tell me?”

“Well I know two things,” Chris began, “Number one, his name is Scotty Allen. He’s a freshman originally from Highman.”

Highman Middle School. That was the school about a 10-minute drive south of our school, McMillan. I didn’t know too much about it.

Chris continued. “The other thing I learned is that Scotty doesn’t know the name of the girl— obviously. But he kept talking about her when Juan saw him over the weekend. So I guess he’s, like, really smitten.”

“But who is the girl he’s in too! What does she look like?” Annie was on the edge of her seat.

Chris turned toward Annie, as if he was waiting for this moment. “Well unfortunately for you, she was not blonde. She was a brunette.”

Once again, my heart dropped. It had to be me. Scotty Allen has a crush on me.

My face turned red, but nobody seemed to notice. Annie was too busy pouting over the bad news, and Chris was too busy enjoying her pouting.

“Hmm, so he wasn’t into me?” Annie questioned. She shrugged her shoulders, “Oh well, there’s plenty of other cute guys on that stage I could go for!”

Chris sat down and opened up his lunchbox, “The only question now is: Who is this mystery brunette?”

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The rest of the day went by normally. It was the last week of school, so that was exciting. We continued to watch movies in class and even received our yearbooks. Throughout the day, kids signed each others’, reminiscing of memories of the last three years.

Once I got home for the end of the day, I opened up my yearbook and read some of the notes. As expected, there were a lot of ‘see you in high school’ and ‘have a great summer’ messages. But there were also a few about my hair, mostly from girls, and how they were jealous of it. Ugh, I guess that’s what I signed up for. though.

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Wednesday was the official last day of school, even though the graduation ceremony was Friday. Lots of tears were shed by the time the bell rang to release us from our final class.

I was at my locker, clearing it out, when Chris approached me. “Hey Jamie, you down to come over after school? I just got this new video game we could play.”

“That sounds good,” I said.

Chris eventually told me the game was the new NBA 2K game. I’m not a big sports person by any means, but I enjoyed the artistic side of basketball: creating plays, weaving bodies, driving to the hoop. Unfortunately though, I was never athletic enough to do it. At 13 years old, I currently stand 5 foot 3 inches, and weigh only 90 pounds, so I’m fairly skinny.

My doctor told me that I entered puberty last year, but still haven't really seen any effects of it yet. So people's voices drop a lot, and some people like myself keep a higher voice. I was starting to wonder if I was short, skinny, and hairless for life.

We arrived at the Correa household. I greeted Chris's mother and father and we went straight to his room. Chris has a really nice family. He and his two brothers are all super outgoing, but like Chris, keep a small tight-knit friend group.

Chris and I sat down on the couch in his room and started to play the game.

"So I did some scouting on who this mystery brunette could be." Chris said while still looking at the TV screen.

I responded quickly and might have sounded a little too defensive, "Why do you keep trying to figure this out? I thought it was Annie's obsession."

He looked at me briefly, and then back at the screen. "Well, Juan mentioned that Scotty brought up the girl again. He told me that he's looking forward to meeting her in high school."

"Well that's not necessarily true," I said, "She...whoever that person is...could be going to Hinsdale West."

"Fair enough," he responded, "but that's where my sleuthing comes in!"

Chris paused the game and looked at me. He pulled out a notebook filled with writing.

"While signing yearbooks, I took note to ask every girl where they were going to high school."

"That's a little creepy," I told him. He didn't seem to hear me through his focus.

"As it turns out, out of the 53 girls in the grade, 25 of them are brunettes, and all of them happen to be attending Hinsdale East next year!"

Chris seemed thrilled with his breakthrough. It was totally in his character to get amped about this sort of thing. That didn't help my nerves though.

“So what’re you saying?” I asked, nervously.

“I’m saying,” he said, focusing his attention, “that Scotty Allen WILL be meeting this girl next year.”

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I've re-edited and picked this story back up after all these years. Look out for a new chapter every week or so :)

A Feminine Look Part 3: The Graduation Ceremony

Mysterious Stranger

General Audience (pg)

500 < Short Story < 7500 words

Crossdressing

Teenage or High School

Androgyny

Contests, Deals, Bets or Dares

Disguises / On the Run / In Hiding

Hair Salon / Long Hair / Wigs / Rollers

Mystery

brunette

mistaken

Girly boy

Reluctant

Posted by author(s)

Chapter Three: The Graduation Ceremony

It felt like being tied to the railroad tracks watching a train coming in the distance. Sure, I wasn't screwed now, but regardless of what I did – at least according to Chris – Scotty Allen would find out it was actually a boy he was checking out, and not a girl.

What certainly didn't help either is the fact that Chris's cousin, Juan, had now twice mentioned Scotty's fascination with that 'girl' he saw. How was I supposed to get out of this one? I must've been an absolute mess the next hour or so hanging out with him.

Enough is enough. I had to tell him. I paused our game and put down the controller.

"Dude! I was winning!" he yelled, quickly changing his tone when he saw my face. "Okay, seriously, what's up?"

"I have something to confess..." I said solemnly.

"Oh no... don't tell me you have a crush on Annie. I can't handle friend drama right now, I just can't."

"What? No! Nothing like that!" I shouted back. Chris was always bad at reading the room. "Look, the girl that Scotty Allen saw... It was me."

He stared at me blankly for a second. Then another second. And as rudely as I would have predicted, Chris started laughing in my face.

"Oh my God no WAY!" Chris was in stitches, rolling on the bed. "The hair! Holy crap it makes perfect sense! Dude, you got the eye of the most popular freshman at East!" Chris couldn't contain himself. He could barely breathe.

But I was starting to get mad. "This is serious, man! There's a popular boy who, if he finds out that it was a boy he was making googly eyes at, he's gonna flip out and end high school for me before I know it! Do you not understand the stakes here??"

Chris was only starting to come down from his immense laugh attack. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it's just so f-u-n-n-y..."

I let him cool down for the next 5 minutes. But each time he said he was done laughing, he'd restart.

Finally, Chris was ready to talk about this like a normal person. "Okay, okay, I'm sorry. So because of your hair, he thought you were a girl. Is that basically it?"

“I think so. There’s not really a reason for Scotty to think that otherwise.”

“Well...” Chris began.

He clearly wanted to say something. “Well...what?” I prodded.

“You’re, uh – and I don’t mean this in a bad way – not exactly the most manly guy in general, right? I mean you gotta admit that.”

As much as I didn’t love admitting he was right, he was right. “I know. I’m small, short, I always hear I have ‘delicate features’, and of course...the hair.”

Chris nodded. While I was an anxious mess, he had a refreshingly calm, curious demeanor. He didn’t have a quick solution. Nobody did. But I strangely trusted his instincts.

“Give me until graduation,” he said. “We’ll think of something.”

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Lots of people like to hate on middle schools and elementary schools for having graduation ceremonies. “It’s not a real graduation!” they’ll say. But there’s something to be said for closing a loop on a significant period of your life – even if it’s just the early tween years.

Much like the Toned concert (and so many other school events), the graduation was held in our gymnasium. Parents and students alike filled the gym, impressed by the decor and grandeur of the space. Students were seated in folding chairs, and parents and other family were seated in the bleachers behind. My perpetually out-of-town parents even showed up!

Our Principal, Mr. Winters, gave an opening speech and then handed it off to Ms. Reznik, a Spanish teacher and favorite of the students for another ‘go forth!’ type of speech. Lastly, the student council president gave her words of ‘wisdom’, and we soon moved into the presentation of diplomas. The reading of each kid’s name was usually followed by a little ‘woo!’ from the bleachers, likely coming from the proud parents. My parents, however, stayed silent. I didn’t mind it though – it’s not their vibe to be rowdy.

All in all, the ceremony was a quick 75 minutes and we were on our way. Friends and family gathered outside the school for pictures in our little red caps and gowns. Chris, Annie, and I took a picture together as our respective parents looked on at us, all proud and tearful.

I was even approached by some classmate acquaintances, looking to chat about the summer.

“Any plans for the summer, Jamie?” this boy named Thomas asked.

“Honestly, a lot of summer reading. And I’m working on a book of fantasy illustrations.” I explained.

“Oh, that’s super dope,” he said. “Anything in particular you wanna do with it?”

“I’m still not sure. Maybe I’ll turn the characters into a graphic novel some day? Maybe I just let ‘em collect dust. Either works for me!”

We shared a laugh and Thomas shared some stories about all the sports camps he planned to do. On that front I definitely couldn’t relate.

“Well anyway man, if you ever want to hang out over summer, let me know,” he said amiably. “I’m around, and never the worst thing to get some hangs in before heading to East.”

Thomas and I exchanged numbers. I liked that he showed the initiative. Thomas was always in the more ‘popular’ clique of kids, but now that a lot of his friends were going to a different high school, he was clearly looking to expand his group. Whatever the case, it was a nice gesture.

But just as Thomas was walking away, Annie came sprinting up to me. She looked furious. “JAMIE YOU ARE A DEAD MAN!”

I threw my hands up in surrender. “What, what! I didn’t do anything!”

Annie peered left and right to make sure nobody was listening. “Chris just told me that you were the ‘girl’ Scotty Allen was looking at?? Are you kidding me!?”

I rolled my eyes and looked over Annie’s shoulder. Chris was glancing over, shrugging bashfully. “Chris told you, didn’t he…”

“Yes, he told me! I can’t believe you’d try to hide that from me. Ugh! I’m heartbroken.”

“Woah woah woah, I’d appreciate a little sympathy,” I said, checking Annie’s self-centeredness. “You do understand how much of a bind I’m in, right?”

She scoffed. “Yeah, life must be sooo hard for you, having a popular boy interested in you.”

“Yes! It is.” I had to call over Chris.

We reexplained the whole thing to Annie and calmed her down. Though she thought it was the end of the world that an older boy – that she does not know, mind you – wasn’t actually into her, Annie quickly understood the stress this case of mistaken identity was causing me.

“Well, if you hens are done clucking, I think I found a solution to Jamie’s problem,” Chris announced. “Come over tonight and we’ll walk through it, okay?”

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Chris, Annie, and I all had our respective family celebrations. My parents and I went to Outback Steakhouse for a quiet meal (very much their decision), while Annie’s and Chris’s families had big backyard celebrations. By the time Annie and I got to the Correa household that night, his family party was still raging.

“Grab some punch, water, or whatever, and let’s go to my room,” Chris instructed us, the moment we got there.

We did as told and met Chris in the room. But when we got inside, there was another familiar face.

“Guys, this is my cousin, Juan,” Chris said. “You probably recognize him from Toned.”

I, of course, played it cool. But Annie immediately went into geek-out mode.

“Oh my god, I love love LOVE you guys!” she squealed, barreling into Juan and giving him a big hug.

“Heh, heh, thanks, Annie,” he muttered.

Her eyes went wide. “And you know my name?”

Chris groaned. “Alright, enough of this. I brought Juan in here because we have an idea on how to solve this. And Jamie, you have nothing to fear. He knows everything.”

Are you kidding me?! How could Chris go behind my back and spoil all of this to his cousin – much less his cousin who is friends with Scotty??

“I am so pissed at you right now...” I said through clenched teeth.

But Juan cooled the temperature. “Hey, listen. I’m an ally in this. I know that Scotty’s into you because he thinks you’re a girl. And none of this is your fault, okay?”

I stared at Juan. “Go on...”

“Chris can be an annoying little bastard sometimes, so I was hesitant to help him. But we’ve come up with a... transactional proposition.”

The seriousness of calling it a ‘transactional proposition’ scared me a bit, but maybe that’s just how juniors in high school talk.

Chris jumped in. “Look, we all want to start off on a good foot in high school, right? And Juan is, shall we say, a ‘popular’ guy. So I proposed that he gets us invited to things with the popular kids.”

Annie had a big smile on her face. “Seriously, Juan? You’d do that for us?”

“But I need something in return. I’m not about to just let my annoying cousin into all my parties without something in exchange.”

I had a bad feeling this ‘exchange’ involved me somehow. “What exchange...”

Juan stood up and paced the room. "Toned had a really good year, but the mood of our guys has been... lacking to say the least. And most of that is coming from Scotty."

Chris was refusing to make eye contact with me throughout Juan's speech.

"So when Scotty caught the eye of a cute girl that he was actually interested in, we were thrilled! We dreamed that she'd be going to Hinsdale East so he could meet her and be happy. And ever since he saw this girl, his mood has been way up. And therefore, so have his vocals. He sounds incredible! And that's all with the prospect of meeting her..."

Juan was stumbling a bit. Even a guy of his confidence sometimes had trouble spitting out uncomfortable sentences, so Chris just jumped in. "Jamie, we need you to be that girl."

I was flabbergasted. "What?! You guys are insane!"

Despite this clearly abhorrent request, nobody was really sharing in my shock.

"We do have a plan for this, you know. And I think it's fair." Juan said. "All you have to do is come to a few parties and events, pretending to be a girl. I'll introduce you to Scotty where you guys will chat, have fun, and do whatever freshmen and sophomores do to become friends."

I fervently shook my head. "But I'm going to high school with him next year. And I'm attending as me. Jamie. A BOY."

Chris leaped up with his finger in the air. "But aha! Here's the kicker. The girl version of you won't be attending. Because this 'girl' is your 'cousin' that's moving away. We're thinking from Texas."

This story was getting wilder and wilder. "Texas?" I wailed. "Are you guys insane? Seriously. We need to get a psychiatrist in here."

"Or honestly, any lie will do." Juan brushed off my fear with surprising ease. "Look, the whole point is this: we get Scotty's confidence up, you get your connections at cool parties for high school. And at the end of all of that, everyone forgets all about the cousin, you'll cut your hair—"

"I cut my hair?" I said, cutting off Juan.

“Yeah... I mean, we need a way to differentiate you for the new school year. Cut your hair in a few weeks when your cousin ‘leaves’. Then ‘boy Jamie’ can start attending the parties, and nobody will ever think you were anyone else. You’ll still have, like, most of the summer to grow your friendships and get all set for high school.”

I paused. Despite the absurd nature of this whole arrangement, I did envision a world where this all worked out.

“Well, what if I refuse?”

Juan looked over at Chris. “Then Toned will suck, and you guys will go back to being lame.”

Annie grabbed my shoulders. “This is a win-win for everybody. I desperately need Toned in my life.”

I thought about it some more. Silently.

“Three events,” Chris said, then appealing to Juan, who agreed. “Just three events. That’s all you need to do. Go to three events as a girl. Talk to Scotty, get him out of his funk, and then your ‘cousin’ can leave town forever. Toned gets its guy back, we get a whole new bunch of friends for high school, and you get to enter high school as a fresh-faced freshman with a cool new men’s haircut. I’ll even help you pick it out!”

In a life full of sighing, I don’t think I ever sighed this intensely. But trust me, it was warranted.

“...Fine. I’ll do it. I’ll be your girl.”

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I've re-edited and picked this story back up after all these years. Look out for a new chapter every week or so :)

-Jennifer

A Feminine Look Part 4: Girl Practice

Mysterious Stranger

General Audience (pg)

500 < Short Story < 7500 words

Crossdressing

Teenage or High School

Reluctant

Androgyny

Contests, Deals, Bets or Dares

Disguises / On the Run / In Hiding

Hair Salon / Long Hair / Wigs / Rollers

mistaken

Girly boy

Reluctant

Panties

Posted by author(s)

Chapter Four: Girl Practice

My friends are the luckiest people in the world. Why? Because their good friend Jamie is willing to do all the heavy lifting, apparently.

I can't believe I agreed to their dumb request. Pretend to be a girl? What the heck do I know about being a girl? As far as I can tell, in each of my 14 years on this Earth I've been a genuine, 100% BOY.

Thankfully, Chris promised it'd only be three events. And it better be. Three times I'd pretend to be a girl, hang out with Scotty, and then my 'cousin' gets to leave forever. Chris, Annie, and myself will be rewarded with a fun, interesting group of friends heading into high school. And maybe it'll end up being super easy.

However, I spent much of the weekend not worrying about any of that. My true passion was drawing and illustrating. Did I want to be a book illustrator, a graphic designer, or a painter? I wasn't sure yet. But much of this summer – outside of spending time making friends – I plan to draw freely, create characters and designs, and hopefully gain a little direction on where my art interests lie.

My favorite thing to draw was young, male protagonists. Much like myself. I was always enamored with the recluse teen that everyone doubted could save the day. I'd create these stories in my head where a seemingly unpopular, uninteresting young boy defies expectations and saves the day. They go from weak to strong, feeble to powerful. That sort of stuff. Hey, who knows – maybe I can channel some of that energy into my task.

=====

At the onset of summer break, everyone rejoices in their newfound freedom. No school, little to no responsibility. But tale as old as time, about a week in, we all get bored. So I reached out to Chris about knocking off my first assignment. We decided to hang out that afternoon. And in the middle of a Madden game, Chris finally dropped some 'good' news.

"So listen, Juan told me one of the Toned guys is hosting a party tonight," he said, mid-Cheetoh munch.

"Wait, seriously? That's perfect! Can we get an invite?"

"Probably. I'll check with Juan." Chris reached for his phone. "Let's hit up Annie too. She'll wanna come."

So while we waited for a response from Juan, Chris called Annie and invited her over. However, she seemed angry and stressed about it over her phone. Very unlike her. She insisted we come over to her house immediately.

When we arrived at Annie's, she was shaking her head with utter disappointment.

Chris kicked off his shoes in the mud room. "Annie, what's the deal? Why are you so pissed off?"

She didn't reply. Just gestured to us to follow to her room. Once we sat down and she locked her door, she finally spoke.

"What do you think you guys are doing? Are you trying to get Jamie blackballed forever?"

Chris and I looked at each other, perplexed.

“You don’t see the problem here?” she reiterated.

I had to get a straight answer out of her. “No, Annie. We don’t. Would you care to tell us?”

“You want to go to a Toned party. Tonight.”

We nodded.

“Well thank god I’m here to stop you. Because if you go to this party without prep work, the whole operation will implode,” Annie was in full ridicule mode. “Tell me, what exactly was your plan?”

I shrugged and looked at Chris. “I dunno, I was gonna, like, borrow one of my Mom’s dresses and give it to Jamie? That should work.”

“My god, you guys are so dumb. You can’t just throw on a dress and call yourself a girl! There’s a nuance to it. An art. Does Jamie have long hair and feminine features? Yes he does. But do you think the moment he starts walking and talking that anybody will buy he’s a real girl?”

I guess we hadn’t thought that far. She totally had a point.

“That’s what I thought,” Annie replied proudly. “That’s why you’re gonna decline the party invite today so we can practice.”

“Woah, practice?” I quickly jumped in. “That sounds a lot to me like extra sessions. In other words... more than THREE.”

She nodded, unfazed. “Of course. If an actor agrees to do a show, do they not also agree to rehearsals?”

“I mean... I guess.”

“Perfect. Then today we’ll practice. Chris, you can stick around or not, but I’m mostly going to be paying attention to Juliette.”

“Excuse me, Juliette?” I asked.

Annie smiled. “Mhmm. I decided just now. You’re officially Juliette. Okay sweetie?”

Chris started to chuckle, but I shot him a mean glare. He stopped.

“While clothes aren’t everything, it’s important for a girl to be dressed as such. It’ll best get you in the proper mindset,” Annie said, digging through her closet. She pulled something out. “Here, try these on.”

She tossed me a pink pleated skirt and a white tank top.

I groaned. “Ugh. Pink. Seriously?”

Annie laughed. “Really? I’m handing you a skirt and your issue is that it’s pink? You know what, just for that, I’m gonna make you wear these too.”

Annie reached into a bin in her closet and threw a pair of white panties at me as well.

“No no no! I’m not wearing your underwear.” I protested.

Chris was starting to look uncomfortable. “Maybe I should leave...”

Annie was starting to lose it. “AGH! You guys are ridiculous! Do you want this to work or not? Tell me. RIGHT now.”

Chris and I were silent. Annie was dead serious.

“Juan is graciously giving us this opportunity to start high school on the right foot,” she began. “We’ll get a great group of friends. Cool friends. All we have to do is get Scotty Allen to believe Jamie is a girl. And despite this gift, you guys are making every step of the way as frustrating as possible!”

Annie turned back to me. "Jamie, who knows the most about being a girl in the room?"

"You do."

"Exactly. So are you gonna do as I say, or are you gonna let us sulk back to the bottom of popularity...Juliette?"

Annie was right. I knew it, and so did Chris. We had to be all in if this was going to work.

Without saying a word, I respectfully picked up the skirt, top, and panties, and took them into the bathroom to change.

I took my pants off and stared at myself in the full-length mirror – naked and fearful of what was to come. But I denied every naturally male instinct of mine and slid on the panties. They fit snug around my package and were, well... actually comfortable.

The skirt was a little less so, and took me a few minutes to figure out how to position it properly with the tank top tucked underneath.

I re-emerged from the bathroom to an approving nod from Chris and Annie.

"You look adorable, Juliette." Annie said confidently. "Now we can get to work."

Over the next several hours, Annie gave me a complete crash course on girlhood. Much of it was aesthetic, but so much more was about demeanor, character, and attitude.

Girls move differently than guys. That's a fact I believed, but never quite understood. Annie had me try on all different kinds of her shoes and did a full lap around the house wearing each of them. She showed me how my steps should be shorter, my upper-body posture tighter, and my hips more fluid. Thankfully her parents were out of the house for the day, otherwise they'd have seen me prancing through the halls every 20 minutes with a new outfit and shoes.

And I tried on ALL sorts of outfits. Over the roughly six hours of 'training' I wore androgynous items like sweaters, hoodies, shorts, and pants, as well as significantly more feminine items like dresses, stockings, nighties, and bras and panties. We'd practically cycled through her entire wardrobe.

Though skeptical at first, I found that my demeanor changed drastically based on the outfit I was wearing. With Annie's blue tracksuit on, I felt powerful and agile. When I wore her pantsuit, I felt like a total 'boss bitch' (as Chris put it), ready to take down the patriarchy.

Alternatively, when Annie had me wear her soft pink panties and flowy pink nightie, I'd never felt so dainty. Just lying back on her cushy bed, stroking the satiny duvet cover with my bare, hairless legs felt like a dream.

"A woman is many things," Annie reiterated. "Clothes aren't all of it, but so much of a woman's being can come from what she's wearing. I hope that you learned that today, Juliette."

I nodded and thanked Annie with a hug. Chris stayed surprisingly active during this whole process, chiming in with his opinions, both critical and complimentary.

It was getting late so I decided to change back into my boy clothes and head home for the night. Chris told us that Juan was confused why we weren't coming tonight, but understood that some 'girl practice' might be necessary.

"What're you guys doing tomorrow?" Annie asked us as we put our shoes on. "Because I've got some ideas for Lesson #2."

"Wait, there's a—" I began to say, but quickly cut off my protest. I promised Annie that I'd trust her with the girl prep. I was but her humble servant.

"I'm free if you are," I replied instead.

Great. Then be at my place tomorrow at 10 AM.

Ten o'clock in the morning felt especially early in the morning for another practice session, but it's not like I had anything else going on. Chris said he couldn't make it, but Annie said his presence wouldn't be necessary.

"Lastly," she said. "I want you sleeping in these." Annie had handed me one of the pairs of panties I'd worn earlier in the day. The pink satin ones I'd worn with her nightie.

“Are... are you sure?” I asked. “You know I’m not being Juliette full time.”

“I know, Jamie. But think of it as ‘passive training’. We only have a short time to get in as much girl practice as we can. Just try it.”

I reluctantly took her panties, but agreed nonetheless.

=====

My parents were home when I returned, but were fully occupied watching some violent drama series in the living room, sipping their new bottle of whiskey. I decided not to bother them.

I still had a little of the night left to myself, so I opened back up my sketchbook. Flipping through the pages I saw a soldier, a giant robot, a sword-wielding teenage boy – each in a different art style. I also had a half-finished cyborg teenage boy that I’d been trying out.

But tonight I didn’t feel like finishing that one. Instead, I flipped to a blank page. I began with a sketch of an androgynous face and body shape. It’s usually at this point that I then add a suit of armor, a fierce weapon, or a mighty animal sidekick.

...but not this time. I graced my new character not with a masculine crew cut, but rather a long, elegant hairstyle. And I didn’t have the character attack an enemy. I had them lying on a bed, wearing a soft, feminine nightie. Was it a boy? Was it a girl? Perhaps something in between.

It wasn’t too in-depth of a sketch, and I only spent about 20 minutes on it. But it was a creative expression that grew organically from my day’s experiences.

Maybe that brief but genuine creative expression of femininity will benefit me in tomorrow’s lesson...

A Feminine Look Part 5: A Trip Outside

Mysterious Stranger

General Audience (pg)

500 < Short Story < 7500 words

Crossdressing

Teenage or High School

Reluctant

Androgyny

Contests, Deals, Bets or Dares

Hair Salon / Long Hair / Wigs / Rollers

mistaken

Girly boy

Reluctant

Panties

Posted by author(s)

Chapter Five: A Trip Outside

Not that she normally does this, but it would've been the absolute worst for my Mom to come into my room to wake me up this morning. I think she would've about died from shock had she seen her only son sleeping in his bed wearing women's panties. I wouldn't even know where to begin to explain the ridiculous clothing choice.

But this is one of the sacrifices I agreed to make. Annie was totally right – there's a lot of prep work that goes into being a girl. I couldn't just expect to show up in some ill-fitting dress at one of the parties and expect Scotty to believe I was a real girl.

So I left my house just before 10 AM to meet Annie for the second day of practice. Funny, she never mentioned how many days of 'girl practice' I'd need. I guess I'm just along for the ride.

When I arrived at her place she grabbed me and quickly pulled me upstairs. "My parents are home," she said, quickly shutting the door behind her.

"Cool... why does that matter?" I asked.

She looked at me like I was a total ditz. "Because I don't want them to see what we're doing."

"I mean, yeah." I shrugged. "Let's just do girl practice in your room then. If they knock, I hide and you say I left."

“Hmm... so, I was gonna wait to tell you this til you were dressed up, but it seems relevant now... I made 11 AM brunch reservations for us.”

“You what??” I nearly screamed, praying her parents didn’t hear me... or her.

Annie sat me down on her chair. “It’s okay, it’s fine. It’s only at Café Soleil. You’ll be fine.”

I couldn’t believe how matter-of-fact she was acting. “Are you insane? Café Soleil is packed like all the time! Don’t you think somebody’s gonna recognize us?”

She snapped her fingers. “Way ahead of you. I already called ahead and asked for a back booth. They said it’s where they put their ‘celebrities’.” Pfft. As if any real celebrities lived in the suburbs of Chicago... the occasional pro athlete, maybe. But still.

But with time, I started calming down. Annie pleaded and pleaded and reminded me how convincing I looked yesterday and how much of a natural I was wearing girls clothes. Maybe – just maybe – we can pull this off.

She picked out a conservative, girly-but-not-flashy, light-pink sundress for me to wear, paired with white summer sandals. I was also given a white bra and panties set to wear underneath. Annie decided to somewhat match me with her own sundress, but hers was light green and she wore navy blue summer sandals.

“My nails are already painted... but I don’t think we have time to do yours. Sorry, Juliette,” she playfully cried, knowing full well I was happy about that.

She also applied a little bit of makeup to my face for the first time. Super subtle, but she insisted makeup would only help hide my identity and make me feel more confident as a girl. Not so sure about the latter, but I rolled with it. Annie even handed me a pair of large, feminine sunglasses as an extra layer of recognition protection.

Soon enough, I was fully dolled up. Annie even took a mirror selfie of us, much to my displeasure. “God, you make for such a cutie!” she squealed.

We left the house without running into her parents, and she told them we were off to meet more friends at brunch.

=====

Café Soleil isn't too far from Annie's house – only a 10 minute walk – but damn did it feel like a marathon. The sandals were comfortable, and I'd gotten a lot of practice yesterday with women's shoes, but the fear that I'd run into someone was immense. We were in my hometown after all. Not on vacation, not in some fake virtual game. Nope. The real world

Annie gave me physicality tips on posture and poise along the way, up to and including arriving at the restaurant. Annie agreed to peek inside first, and if she saw any of our classmates, we'd be allowed to abort the mission. Once the coast was clear, we entered and were seated at our back booth. I wanted to keep my sunglasses on the whole meal, but Annie said doing so would probably attract more attention than if I didn't. I think she was right.

"Okay, I see the server heading over," Annie whispered. "Have you practiced your girl voice?"

"My girl—what? No, I haven't practiced my girl voice!!"

"Oh... she muttered. Maybe we should have..."

But it was too late, the server had already arrived. She was a middle-aged woman with kind eyes. "What can I get for you, hons?"

Annie spoke up first. "I'll do an omelet with cheese and spinach please."

The server nodded. "And for you?"

She was staring at me, awaiting my response. It was my moment of truth. "Uhhh, the same please."

The server smiled, nodded, and walked away. I let out another HUGE sigh of relief.

"Great job!!" Annie whispered. "I mean, you only said like three words, but you sounded just like a girl. Weird, I didn't think you liked spinach though."

“I don’t. I just thought that was the way I could order using the fewest words...”

Annie laughed. “Cheater!”

But we’d done it. We’d gotten through the toughest test.

=====

The rest of brunch went super smoothly. Nobody bothered us, nobody really looked at us. We walked out of the restaurant feeling on top of the world. Hey, maybe this girl stuff isn’t going to be that hard after all. Walking home, I even had a little pep in my step for the first time.

Annie looked at me, impressed. “I gotta say, Juliette. You’re taking this so well. I mean, can you imagine if we asked Chris to take this on?”

I laughed. “He’d never. He’s too stubborn and thinks he’s soooo macho.”

“I just love that you’re sweet and sensitive. That’s a quality that’ll take you far in life.”

I kind of raised an eyebrow to that. Is it? Everything I’ve been told about men – at least from my parents – is that they’re supposed to be strong, confident, family-focused guys. I always felt a little bad about myself, knowing I wasn’t on that path. I’m not into sports. I like art. I’m scrawny with long hair. And now... this? I guess it’s something to consider. Things could get dangerous if I don’t keep my mind focused on the task: I pretend to be a girl, I cheer up Scotty and let him down easy, and boom! We have popular friends for high school.

Annie did her job scouting out her house’s foyer, and smuggled me back upstairs to her room.

“I’m probably good to get this dress off, right? Why risk things any further?”

Annie immediately pouted. “Aww, really? I was having fun with Juliette...”

“Yeah, yeah. Well you can have more fun with her at the first party, assuming we’re done with girl practice for now?”

I think reluctantly agreed with me. "I must admit, you've been killing it. Granted, you said three words to the waitress...but even hearing you practice your girl voice on the walk back... it's pretty stellar."

"That sounds like a successful day then." We high-fived, and I went into Annie's bathroom to change out of the dress and remove the makeup.

"I have wipes in the top right drawer. It's super easy, you'll figure it out."

Annie was right. It was pretty easy to remove the makeup. But it's interesting, even taking it off, I still saw myself as unbelievably girly in the mirror. The way my hair was hung, the fact I was wearing a dress. Kinda crazy that I probably didn't even need makeup.

But then there was a very concerning KNOCK on the door. Not the bathroom, but the bedroom door. "Annie, did everything go okay at brunch?"

CRAP! Her mom was right there. If I weren't in the bathroom, I'd be totally screwed. Pleeese just send her away, Annie. But Annie waited a few seconds, then answered.

"Come on in, Mom!"

WHAT THE HELL! Annie, you're such a dope! Did she forget I was in the bathroom or something?

I couldn't see from my perspective, but I could sense her Mom was exploring the room.

"Do you have a friend over?" she asked.

"Mmhmm." Annie answered confidently. "Juliette. She's in the bathroom."

"Hmm, I'm not sure I know Juliette."

"Well, you can meet her in just a sec," Annie said cheerfully. What the hell was she doing? Was she trying to screw me over?

“Oh, okay,” her Mom said. I don’t think I’ve heard you mention her before.

“Yeah, I met her through Chris,” she said normally, but then her tone sounded a lot more pointed. “I thought I’d invite her back to TRY OUT THE NEW SHEET MASKS we bought.”

What? I wasn’t trying any sheet– wait a sec... this was her way of giving me an out!

“Why are you raising your voice?” her mom asked.

“Oh, no reason,” Annie said. “I just really like the SHEET MASKS IN THE UPPER RIGHT HAND DRAWER.”

“Okay, jeez...” her mom was clearly confused.

But that was all I needed to hear. I frantically opened the drawer and found the pack of sheet masks, which I realized were those things used for facial cleansing and to remove blackheads. While Annie made small talk with her mom, I quickly scanned the instructions on how to apply it. I rinsed my face, pressed the mask on... and perfect! My face was perfectly concealed under a white sheet.

“What’s taking Juliette so long? Does she need help?”

“No, she’ll be out in a sec,” Annie said. As much as I was pissed at her, I mustered up the courage to leave the bathroom after quickly tying my hair up in a bun.

“No worries,” I said, terrified but flawlessly faking confidence. “Hi, I’m Juliette.”

Fortunately, Annie’s mom didn’t stick around too long, and only asked a few questions about how I ‘knew Chris’. Thanks to my girl voice, the dress I still had on, and the concealing white mask, she didn’t suspect a thing. And a couple minutes later, she left the room.

Never having been so stressed in my life, I collapsed straight on the bed. Annie burst out laughing. Once I recovered, I shot back up wanting nothing more than to tackle her like a linebacker. But she held her hand up.

“Nuh-uh-uh,” she motioned me back. “I told you, those three words you said to the waitress weren’t enough.”

“...what?”

“I needed to give you a real test. A real world scenario. My mom didn’t recognize you for you. And congrats, you passed.”

I stared blankly at her, but I finally realized her game. All of my anger washed away and turned into genuine respect. Holy crap, that was maybe the smartest thing she could’ve done.

“NOW you’re done with girl practice. I think you’re ready to meet Scotty.”