

A Small Protest



Patricia Marie Allen



A "Young Adult TV" Novel



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A Small Protest

By Patricia Marie Allen

Chapter 1 - Heatwave

My grandfather's family is old money. His father came from England and he never really left it in his heart. Even though he was a naturalized citizen of the United States, he was an Englishman 'til the day he died. My grandfather and my father both went to school in England. It was commonplace for people in my grandfather's social circles to send the kids to boarding school in Europe. My dad went to one of those "public" schools in London. Now when the English say "Public School," there's really nothing public about them. They call them "Public," because they are not State-run schools. Here in the States, we'd call them *private* schools.

I suppose that my father would have sent me and my sister to one of those schools, except my mother would not have it. She told us that she would not have her children separated from her for twelve years. As a matter of fact, she wouldn't even allow my father to send us to a stateside boarding school. He and my grandfather went to a lot of trouble to find a

private school where we could be “day” students. That is, we could live at home and go to school there. But my grandfather made a huge donation and they brought in a new principal from one of those proper English “Public” schools. The board, in order to keep my grandfather happy, allowed him to run the school in much the same way they do in England.

Now the school already had uniforms and a lot of rules that other private schools had but the new principal, or “Head Master” as he preferred to be called, pushed for more. Only here in the States they needed to be politically correct and so some of the rules got watered down. Not that the Head would admit it, but it bothered him that the school was co-ed. But since it wasn’t a boarding school, there really wasn’t much he could do about it.

As summer approached, the weather got seriously warm. As a matter of fact, the temperature went to near triple digits. A group of us boys were bemoaning the heat. Doug Ferguson got a great idea.

“Hey,” he said, “I know we have to wear the school uniform but what’s to keep us from wearing our gym shorts instead of these long trousers. They are a school uniform and they have the school logo on them.”

So that’s how ten of us happened to head to the locker room before class on Thursday morning and trade our pants for gym shorts. Well, it wasn’t well accepted. We all found ourselves in the Head’s office during the first class of the day.

We talked softly among ourselves as we waited in his reception area. It seemed to be hours as we awaited our punishment and we were sure it was to be punishment. Finally, his secretary came in with a sheaf of papers and we were all given one. I scanned mine and discovered it was a copy of the school’s dress code. I knew that we were required to wear the uniform and, in truth, I suspected we were pushing the boundary by trading our trousers for gym shorts.

As I was pondering that, the Principal came out of his inner office. He looked at us all sternly.

In his clipped English accent, he said, “Would one of you gentlemen care to tell me what prompted this breach of our dress code?” and raised his eyebrows in a questioning manor.

Doug spoke up, remembering his manners. “Sir,” he said, “the weather is unseasonably warm and we thought, given the gym shorts have our school crest, that they would be an acceptable alternative to the trousers. So we went to the locker room this morning and changed.”

“I see,” the principal said. “If you will read the dress code, you will see that it specifically says, ‘trousers’ and there is no mention of ‘shorts.’ The ‘shorts’ you are wearing are required for your sport kit and are specific to those classes only.”

We all nodded as if we were in agreement with that.

“Now,” he continued, “I am a reasonable man as evidenced by the relaxing of the rules allowing you to remove your jackets when the temperature exceeds...” he paused as if in complex thought, “85 degrees Fahrenheit. Five minutes should be sufficient for you to read the dress code. I’ll leave you here to discover the error of your ways. When you’ve finished reading the dress code, if each of you will go to the locker room and change back, there will be no further repercussions. I warn you, however, I will expect full compliance to the dress code in the future. Am I clear?”

We all nodded and he went back into his inner office. We looked at each other and began to read the papers. The nerd in our group, Frank Parsons, was way ahead of us.

“Hey guys,” he said, “this code is for both boys and girls.”

“So?” Jim Harrison asked.

“So, it says, and I quote, ‘All students will wear the school-approved uniform, which will consist of a white shirt, a school tie, a blazer with the school crest on the pocket, or sweater, trousers or skirt, the skirt to be over the knee, and black shoes.’”

“So?”

“So girls wear trousers in the winter, why couldn’t *we* wear skirts when it’s hot? My sister says they’re a lot cooler than pants. And they’re only a little longer than our gym shorts.”

Hank Colson jumped in with, “Hey, now there’s an idea. If we turn up in skirts, it’ll be within the dress code. A couple of days of us in skirts and they’ll be glad to have us back in gym shorts.”

“What if they don’t relent? What if they just let us wear the skirts?” Jim Henderson wanted to know.

“Well then, I guess we’ll just become the skirted boys of Chapman’s Academy,” Frank replied, pushing up his glasses.

Most of the guys shook their heads and started for the gym. In the end, there were four of us; me, Doug Ferguson, Frank Parsons and Larry Carson.

“Are you guys really going to do it?” Larry wanted to know.

“I am,” Doug assured us.

“I’m in,” Frank put in.

They all looked at me.

“Count on me,” I told them.

“I guess we’re the only ones with guts.”

We all nodded.



The five minutes were up so the Principal came out and got a shocked look on his face. “Gentlemen, five minutes have elapsed. I suggest you go to the locker room and change now.”

“We’ve decided to not wear trousers,” Doug told him.

“I see. You leave me no choice. I’ll have to summon your parents and send you home. You will be given a one-day suspension. You may return on Monday, provided you are in strict compliance with the dress code. Would any of you care to reconsider and go change?”

We all shook our heads.

“Very well. Have a seat and wait for your parents.” He turned to his secretary and said, “Miss Hathaway, would you please summon these miscreants’ parents?”

Chapter 2 - My Parents reaction

My mother showed up before any of the others. She was required to sign some form or other to acknowledge she had taken me out of school early and that I had been suspended for one day.

She didn’t say anything to me while we went to the locker room and retrieved my trousers. But once in the car, she said, “We’ll discuss this tonight at dinner. I don’t know what your father will have to say about this.”

So it was that I rode home in silence. I wasn’t sure what Dad would say either. While he had gone to school in England, even to the same school as my grandfather, he wasn’t a dyed-in-the-wool Englishman like my grandfather. I’d even heard him admit that “public” schools in England were way too restrictive and that the older tutors—that’s what they call

teachers there —longed for the days when caning was their go to form of discipline.

On arriving home I was sent to my room with a paper listing the assignment I'd have been given if I'd have attended class that day. Apparently these were collected by the principal's secretary and given to my mother when she signed the papers.

"I hope you didn't think that you'd be allowed to treat your suspension like a school holiday. You can spend your time studying," Mom told me.

When we were seated at the dinner table, I determined that I wouldn't bring up the subject of my suspension; I'd leave that to my folks. That didn't happen until we were all nearly through eating.

"So your mother tells me you were suspended from school for a day. Why don't you tell me your side of the story first," Dad said.

I swallowed hard and then took a drink of my milk before replying.

"Ahh, well, as you know, it's been terribly hot recently... I mean, it was almost 100 degrees yesterday and the forecast for today was about the same. So some of us guys wanted to wear some cooler clothes, but we knew the school required us to wear a uniform. So we thought that since our gym uniform has shorts that are the same color as our trousers, we could substitute them for the trousers. I guess the principal didn't see it that way."

"So, how many were there involved this scheme?"

"Ten of us."

My father looked at my mother with raised eyebrows.

"You're sure that there were ten? I nodded. "Your mother says that there were four of you singled out

for suspension. Why weren't the other six suspended?"

Here's where it got sticky. I had had an option to avoid suspension but decided that I'd not take it.

"Well, you see, we saw this as a kind of protest," I offered weakly. "But the others kind of chickened out when the principal said we could avoid punishment by putting our trousers back on and if we were to follow the school dress code in the future."

"And you and three others decided that punishment would be better than not sticking to the protest?" I nodded. "So then what about Monday? The weather forecast is for the heat wave to continue."

"Well Frank Parsons studied the dress code." I fumble in my pocket for the copy I was given. I handed it to Dad. "It says that the uniform is either trousers or skirts and it doesn't say which is for boys and which is for girls... and the girls wear trousers in the winter when it's cold."

Dad unfolded the page studied it with a serious look on his face.

"So, how does that affect Monday?"

"We were thinking that skirts are cooler than long pants, so..."

"So you four are thinking of wearing skirts on Monday?" Dad wanted to know.

"I know it's crazy, Dad, but it's just not fair that girls can wear either depending on the weather and boys have to be stuck with trousers and skirts are in the dress code. I don't really want to wear a skirt, particularly, but I do want to wear something cooler when it's this hot and skirts are our only choice."

I rattled that all out in one breath and about fifteen seconds in time.

Dad looked at Mom quizzically.

“He does have a point. dear,” she said.

“I admire your courage to stand by your principles and you’re right, it’s not a fair arrangement. Where were you thinking of getting the skirt?” Dad queried

“Ah... I, ah, I’m not sure. I was hoping Loren had some that I could borrow.”

“How long were you planning to do this protest?”

I shrugged. “However long it takes to get a change in the dress code.”

“Were we to support you in this? You’re going to need more than one skirt. I doubt that Loren has enough to outfit both you and her.”

I looked at Loren. She shrugged her shoulders.

“I had to get new this year because my hips got wider, so I have a whole set of them that I haven’t disposed of yet. I was going to wait till the end of the year and see if I could sell them to someone who needed a larger size.”

My breathing was coming in short pants. Then Mom threw a monkey wrench into the plans. She read the next line in the dress code:

“Due to the nature of skirts, only approved underwear and tights or knee socks may be worn under the skirts.” I thought I remembered from when we bought Loren’s new skirts. Martin’s School Attire is the approved uniform store and they supply appropriate underwear with the skirts.”

“I still have the old underwear,” Loren offered.

“I don’t think it’s a great idea for Lynne to wear used underwear and he’ll need at least the knee socks as well since you’re wearing yours. We’ll have to go tomorrow to buy some new. Loren, why don’t

you take Lynne upstairs and give him your old skirts. And Lynne, you need to try on one of the skirts to see that they fit alright. If not, we can buy some when we get the underwear.”

“You guys are going to support our protest?”

Mom and Dad exchanged a look. Dad answered. “As much as I think it’s good to follow the rules, I have to admire your stance and young Mr. Parson’s ingenuity in finding the loophole in the dress code. So yes, I think we can support you in this. I do believe that you will see a revision of the dress code as a result. However, you may have to resign yourself to trousers. The revision I’m sure the Head will push for is to delineate which items are for boys and which are for girls. But you’re free to try for the result you want.”

Loren loaded me down with five of the gray pleated skirts and I took them to my room. I was really going to do it. I think, in the back of my mind, I thought my parents wouldn’t agree and I’d not have to go through with my agreement.

I stripped to my boxers from the waist down and worked out just how to put the skirt on. I knew the zipper went to the back, only I couldn’t get it zipped up back there. I brought it around front where I was used to dealing with zippers. I had to pull the skirt up high and suck in my stomach to get it zipped. Then holding my stomach in, I twisted it around. That bunched up my shirt and I had to twist it farther around and then back. It was really loose in the hips but really tight at the waist. Not very comfortable.

“Lynne?” Mom called up the stairs. “Have you tried on the skirt yet?”

“Yes,” called back down. “I just got it on.”

“Well, come down and let’s see how it fits.”

“Oh Lynne, that won’t do. You’ll bust the zipper before you even get to school. The waist is so tight you won’t be able to sit down without destroying the zipper. Well, not to worry, we’ll pick up some skirts tomorrow when we buy the underwear and socks.

Chapter 3 - My Own Skirts

I was standing a little ways away while Mom explained to the saleslady why I needed uniform skirts. I could feel the fire coming up under my collar and toasting my ears. I thought sure that she would react badly. I’d thought that Mom would have just figured out the right size, go in and buy them, and that would be that. But she took me in and told the whole sordid tale to the saleslady.

“Well you’re in luck. As you’re aware, it’s mid-term. Sales are down and what’s more, we’re near the end of our fiscal year. We have some old stock we want to move so we’re offering a special price on the whole outfit. It’s pretty much at our cost so you can buy everything for less than the price of the skirts... but you have buy it all to get the deal.”

My mother, ever the frugal one, said, “Oh that’s great.”

“Let’s get some measurements and then Lynne can try them on to see that everything fits.”

The next thing I knew I was in the fitting room with not only the skirt, but a blouse and a full slip. Mom had said that I might just as well try on the whole thing. I stripped and picked up the slip and pulled it over my head. To my surprise, it had a built-in bra. It would have been alright but the cups, the part that a girl’s boobs would fit in, had a kind of rubbery filling in between the layers of fabric and wouldn’t lay flat. That was a bit disconcerting. But I put the blouse on. I fumbled with the buttons. They were on the wrong side and it was quite a trick to make my fingers work

the right way. The skirt fit a lot better. I still had trouble getting it zipped up, but I managed.

Mom knocked on the door and said, “Come out and let us see when you get everything on.”

I cracked the door open and asked, “Do I have to? Everything seems to fit OK.”

“I want to see for myself.”

Reluctantly I stepped through the door. Mom was there, as was the saleslady. Mom was all hands on, touching, tugging and using her hands to turn me this way and that. Finally she turned to the clerk.

“What do you think?”

“It appears to me that we did good getting the sizes right. As I remember you said that everything had to adhere to the school dress code. That’s why you wanted panties. So I assume you’ll be wanting some tights and knee socks, since the dress code specifies one of those two items are to be worn with the skirt.”

“Oh yes, you’re right. I’d almost forgotten that.”

Mom turned to me. “I assume that you don’t want tights, as the whole idea is to keep cool and the tights are thick.” Looking back at the saleslady, she continued. “Just the knee socks for now. I doubt we’ll still need them when the weather cools.”

Laden with packages, we made our way back to the car. It seemed unreal to me that we had bought full girl’s uniforms. All I really needed were the skirts.

“Mom, why didn’t we just buy the skirts? I mean, I can see the underwear and the socks so that I’ll conform to the dress code. But the blazer and blouse and that slip thing. I really didn’t need those.”

“We had to buy the set to get the deal. It was only about a ten dollar savings per outfit, but since we

bought six, that's sixty dollars. I'll save that any time I can."

"What are we going to do with them?"

"You can wear them."

"Wear them?"

"Sure, in for a penny, in for a pound, as you grandfather would say."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're going to be wearing skirts, underwear and knee socks, so you might just as well wear the full uniform."

I contemplated that and knew I should be horrified by the thought. But the image I'd seen in the mirror in the fitting room flashed in my mind. It had been that of a girl. Oh sure, my hair was a little short, but there were girls at school whose hair wasn't any longer than mine. They just combed it differently. I imagined that image with hair combed that way and somehow it sent a little thrill through me.

It was late enough in the day that Loren was waiting for us when we came in the house.

"You must have flown home. You aren't usually here for another hour," Mom told her as we carried the packages upstairs with Loren following close behind.

"I blew off the pep club meeting. I wanted to see what Lynne bought."

"Won't that be anticlimactic? You've already got everything he'd have bought."

"Well, I was hoping he'd model it for me. I mean, he'll look different and I think I need to be over gawking at him by the time we go to school on Monday."

“You expect me to put on the stuff so you can gawk at me?”

“Well, you have to admit, it’s going to be unusual for a boy to wear a skirt. I’m going to have to get used to it. And you’re going to have to get used to people looking at you. They’re going to do more than look too.”

Mom insisted that I model the entire uniform she bought. So after I managed to get it on, I reluctantly came downstairs.

Loren smirked. “You look great,” she said. “The only improvement would be your hair.”

My mother smiled and agreed. “Lynne, that almost looks good on you. Loren is right; your hair is out of place.”

I knew I should beware of such talk but a part of me wondered just how changing my hairstyle would make me look. As I noted earlier, there were girls in school whose hair wasn’t any longer than mine.

There was another point I hadn’t really considered. Chapman’s Academy was in the opposite direction from either of our parent’s work, so we had to ride public transportation to and from school.

“You should let us do something with your hair,” Loren insisted. “You know that we ride the public bus to school. It’d be much easier on you if you at least had people guessing about your gender.”

I looked at Mom.

“I hadn’t really though that part through. You know she’s right, Lynne. Right now, it’s pretty obvious that you’re a boy in girls’ clothing. There may be some who take exception to that. It would be better, as Loren observed, if we changed your look enough to make them at least question it.”

Half an hour later, I was looking in the mirror with amazement. My reflection was beyond my imagination. My hair, which was long enough to just cover my ears when allowed to hang straight had been layered, or that's what Loren said she was doing when she snipped at it with some scissors, and with the addition of some styling mousse had been lifted up on top and the front had been swept across my forehead. The result was a do that could easily be seen as a hairstyle.

"I sure hope I don't catch too much flak from the guys because of this hairstyle," I muttered.

"Well, perhaps you should warn them in advance that since you're riding the bus to school, you need to blend in with all the other skirt wearers," Mom suggested.

"I guess I better."

"When you talk to them, you might mention the fact that they need to wear the approved underwear. Since you didn't catch it, it's a good bet that they didn't either. If the principal can pin a legitimate infraction on them, you might end up being the only protester. I doubt that one boy in a skirt is enough to change anybody's mind, much less that of a stern Englishman.

Chapter 4 - Informing the Guys

Mom had a point.

Up in my room, I fired up my laptop and check to see who was online on Facebook. Frank and Larry showed as being online. I opened a chat with Frank.

Me: Hey, Frank.

Frank: Hey, Lynne.

Me: I just got back from the uniform store.

Frank: I thought you'd just borrow some skirts from your sister.

Me: Me too. But my mom pointed out that we probably wouldn't get results right away and we'd have to wear them for a while. My sister gave me some of her old ones, but the waist was too tight. I could get them on but Mom said that I'd bust out the zipper, so she decided to get the skirts from the uniform shop.

Frank: I was going see about getting some from my cousin who graduated last year but she already disposed of them, so my mom is going in tomorrow to buy some for me.

Me: Yeah, well it's a good thing she is because my mom's a lawyer and she looked over the dress code. She says that wearing a skirt requires us to wear a specific kind of underwear and our boxers or even tighty-whities won't cut it.

Frank: So you got some underwear too?

Me: Yeah.

Frank: What kind of underwear is it?

Me: Look, I think we ought to get Doug and Larry in on this, so I won't have to go through it again.

Frank: OK, let's set up a Skype chat.

Me: I have Skype, but I don't know how to do that.

Frank: I'll set it up. Stand by for the call.

It took about ten minutes before I got the ping that Frank had set up the group. I rolled my eyes when I saw the name of the group: "Chapman's Skirt Boys."

I fired up Skype on my laptop and joined the group. I had nearly chickened out. I did drape a tissue over my camera.

“OK,” Doug said, “Everybody’s on board. Lynne, it’s your show.”

“Hey Lynne, what’s wrong with your camera? It’s showing a white screen,” Doug wanted to know.

While I was good friends with Frank, Doug and Larry were just guys I knew from school.

“Ah... yeah. I’ll fix it in a minute.”

“OK, so what did you want to talk about? Frank said something about needing regulation underwear,” Larry chimed in.

“Yeah, my mom the lawyer spotted a problem with our plans in the dress code. In order to wear skirts, we need to also wear the right kind of underwear and either tights or knee socks.”

There was silence for a few beats.

Doug said, “I get a feeling that I’m not going to like the underwear and I know I’m not wearing tights.”

“My mom pointed out that tights would defeat the purpose because they’d be as warm as the trousers. She suggested knee socks.”

“I guess I could live with the knee socks, but the underwear? Tell us what kind of underwear.”

“First of all, boxers or tighty-whities won’t cut it. They have to be approved school underwear.”

“Look, just spit it out. What kind of underwear.”

I paused, afraid to say it to them. I finally spoke up. “Cotton panties,” I said in a soft voice.

“I was afraid of that.” Doug said.

“Panties?” Larry asked. “That’ll seem really weird.”

Frank wanted to know, “Weirder than skirts?”

“I don’t know,” Larry replied. “I don’t think we thought this through too well.”

“In for a penny, in for a pound,” Frank said.

“I suppose there’s no way around it, huh?” Doug asked.

“Look guys,” I offered, “I was pretty weirded out when my mother pointed it out but she said the very same thing as Frank. It’s not really that bad. You don’t really notice the underwear what with the skirt brushing your legs when you walk.”

I could see the puzzled look on the guys face. I decided it was time to uncover my camera. I stood, pushed my chair back and angled my laptop screen down a little so it would show me from the waist down. I reached for the tissue. My hand shook. I paused, took a deep breath and quickly snatched the tissue away before I could chicken out.

“Lynne, is that you?” Larry wanted to know.

“Yeah, I’m wearing the skirt and the underwear right now. I’ve had it on for about an hour and a half. I really hadn’t thought about the underwear. Like I said, the sensation of the skirt kind of pushes that to the background. The underwear feels a lot like tighty-whities. What I really notice is the lack of anything on my legs.”

Doug smirked “I guess this is where the rubber meets the road. It’s time to put up or shut up.”

“You got that right,” Larry observed.

“If Lynne can do it, I can do it,” Frank put in. “How about you guys?”

Larry and Doug sat looking at the screen. Larry was first to crack.

“We’ll look awfully foolish if we back down now. One of the guys called me this evening and asked what happened after they left. When I told them we were going to protest, he said we had more guts than he did.”

“I guess we are indeed in for a penny, in for a pound. I don’t know how my folks will take the underwear thing; they were reluctant for me to do the skirt thing. If it hadn’t been for my grandmother, I don’t think I could have convinced them. But I’ll see if I can get them to go along,” Doug offered.

“Maybe you should talk to your grandmother first and get her on your side,” Frank offered.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. We’ve got our work cut out for us. I’d better call Grams right away and see where she stands on the idea.”

“OK,” I said. “You guys let me know what happens when you tell your folks.”

It was Saturday evening before any of the guys got back to me. But I knew that Frank was in because his mother had called mine and I heard her explain about the underwear rule and the sale at Martin’s School Attire. She had told me that Frank’s mom was taking him to get the necessary things. That and Frank had texted me about it.

Doug saw me online and called me in messenger.

“Hey Lynne.”

“What’s up, Doug?”

“You wanted to know how thing worked out.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard from Frank. His mom talked to my mom. He’s all ready for Monday.”

“Yeah, I saw him and his mom at Martin’s when Grandma took me there. They had a lot of bags. I think that his mom did what your mom did.”

“So I assume that means you’re all set for Monday.”

“Yeah, have you heard from Larry?”

“No, he’s still an unknown. I hope he could talk his folks into the underwear and doesn’t try to fake it. It could blow the whole thing. We need solidarity.”

“If he doesn’t, he should go back to pants.”

Larry: Hey Lynne

“Oh, wait. He just messaged me.”

Me: What’s up?

Larry: I’m in.

“He says he’s in, Doug.”

Me:

“Cool, he got the underwear then?”

Larry: What about the other guys?

Me: You’re the last to check in. All in. We’re good to go.

Larry: That’s good.

Me: I’m on the phone with Doug right now. He saw Frank at Martin’s today.

Larry: OK, I just wanted to let you know. See you Monday.

Me: Bye.

“Yeah, I guess. He asked about everyone else and seemed to be relieved we were all in.”

“Yeah, well me too.”

“My mom and sister think I should wear this stuff all weekend to get the feel of the skirt and all.”

“Might be a good idea. I don’t think I can do that. My dad hasn’t forbidden it but he gave me the stink eye when I showed Mom how I’d look. I don’t want to give him the idea that I like this, ’cause I don’t.”

“Yeah, better not poke the bear. Look, I’ve got to get cracking on some homework. I don’t want to give the school anything to grip at.”

“Yeah, me too. See you Monday.”

“Bye.”

Chapter 5 - Déjà vu

So it was the four of us found ourselves in the Principal’s office again. We were all sitting down, grinning at each other. I was careful to keep my knees together, as I had been instructed to by my sister all weekend.

Mr. McDonald came out of his inner office with a scowl on his face.

“I see you gentlemen are up to no good. Did I or did not inform you that you were to be in full compliance with the school dress code when you came to school this morning?” His English accent was fairly bristling with the subdued rage of an authority that has been challenged.

Frank rose to his feet.

“Begging your pardon, sir, but we are in strict compliance with the dress code.”

Mr. McDonald raised an eyebrow. Frank hurried on.

Looking down at his copy of the dress code, he read, "All students will wear the school approved uniform, which will consist of a white shirt, a school tie, a blazer with the school crest on the pocket, or sweater, trousers or skirt, the skirt to be over the knee, and black shoes." He looked up.

Mr. McDonald opened his mouth, but Frank cut him off and continued, "Due to the nature of skirts, only approved underwear and tights or knee sock may be worn under the skirts." He looked up again.

"Sir, as I said, we are in strict compliance with the dress code... in every respect." He waved his hand down the front of himself and lifted a foot to show the knee socks.

Mr. McDonald strode over to Frank and snatched the paper from his hands. I could see that Frank had highlighted the section. His eyes seemed to steam as he scanned the page. He looked up to challenge Frank.

"In every respect, Mr. Parsons?" he demanded.

"Yes sir, in every respect."

"We'll see about that. Have a seat." He turned to the school secretary. "Miss Hathaway, please summon Mr. MacCallan. Tell him it's urgent that I see him immediately."

Mr. MacCallan was the coach of our soccer team. When he got to the office, Miss Hathaway sent him right in to see Mr. McDonald. About five minutes later, he came to the door.

"Would you gentlemen please come in?" It was more of a statement than a question. I noticed he had a bit of a smirk on his face.

Mr. McDonald studied us with a stern look. He glanced at the paper on his desk, the dress code with the highlighted paragraph. He stood and addressed us.

“You gentlemen say you are in strict compliance with the dress code.” His eyes roved back and forth, looking each of us in the eye. “Well?”

“Yes sir,” we said in unison.

“I’m sure you’ve heard that girls wearing skirts are subject to random checks to see that they are in compliance.” He raised an eyebrow again and we nodded our heads. I couldn’t keep the smirk from my face, though I did manage to subdue it a little.

“I’ve been in conference with the girl’s guidance counselor to be sure that we are doing this correctly. It is policy to have two staff members present when those checks are made, so I’ve asked Mr. MacCallan to be present to verify the results when you are checked. As coach of the foot... er, *soccer* team, he’s seen young men’s underwear before.

“Now gentlemen, kindly turn around and lift your skirts in back so that we can see your underwear.”

We complied.

“Mr. MacCallan, does that look like the underwear we are to see under a skirt?”

“Yes sir. I’ve seen my daughter’s underwear when she was a student here and that looks like the same underwear to me.”

“Thank you Mr. MacCallan,” I wasn’t informed that your daughter had been a student here.” He picked up another sheet of paper and gave it to Mr. MacCallan. “Please give this to Miss Hathaway on your way out. Tell her that each of these miscreants are to have a copy to show each of his tutors. I’ll not have them sent back here at the start of every class.

Hopefully it will serve to thwart any disruption of their classes.”

“OK gentlemen, see Miss Hathaway for your hall pass and return to class. However you will be subject to an underwear check at random times. Be assured that if you should be found to be wearing incorrect underwear, disciplinary action will be taken.”

We started toward the door. “I hope you enjoy your knickers,” Mr. McDonald said in parting.

When Miss Hathaway gave us our hall passes, she also gave copy of that page. We all parted ways and didn’t get a chance to talk until lunch. When I reached my class, I gave my teacher the hall pass and the other paper. He looked at it and shook his head.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve been instructed to point out that Mr. Collins has chosen to wear an alternative school uniform. You are instructed to ignore the difference and concentrate on your studies.” He gave the paper back to me and told me to sit down. “I’m also instructed to tell you that no disruption of studies class time will be tolerated and to remind you of our zero tolerance for harassment.”

I can’t say that the announcement had the desired effect. Every eye in the room was trained on me as I took my seat. The teacher returned to his lecture. As soon as he turned toward the board to write something, Mike Donnelly slipped me a note.

What’s with the get up?

I turned it over and wrote on the back and showed it to him.

Dre s s Co d e protest.

He looked at me and scrunched up his brow in questioning. I added to the note and showed it to him again.

Dress Code protest.

Talk to me after class.

When the bell rang, I was mobbed in the hall.

“Hey Collins, what’s with the skirt? You look like a girl,” one of the crowd asked for everyone.

“I don’t have time to go into it right now but it’s a protest because of the hot weather. We think we ought to be able to wear shorts. They aren’t in the dress code but skirts are.”

“Yeah, for girls,” Jack Ferguson said.

“It doesn’t specify that it’s only girls. Girls can wear trousers in the winter, so why can’t we wear skirts in the warm weather?”

The teacher stepped into the hall.

“You folks will be late for your next class if you don’t move along.”

The four of us sat together at lunch and were besieged with questions. Frank Parsons stood up on a chair.

“I was expecting something like this. Here it is in a nutshell. You all know it’s been hellishly hot these last few weeks and the weather forecast is more of the same for the foreseeable future. So some of us have decided to try to institute a change in the dress code to include shorts. That was turned down last Thursday and when we didn’t back down, the four of us were suspended for a day and told to come back today and be in full compliance with the dress code. We looked at the dress code and found out that skirts are in compliance and they didn’t say if it was for boys or girls. Girls get to wear trousers during the cold weather, so we’re wearing skirts in the hot weather. Actually, it’s much cooler than trousers. You guys ought to try it.”

“What? You mean crossdress and have people think we’re gay?”

“If you do a little research online, you’ll find out that the vast majority of crossdressers aren’t gay. And I’m not really sure that what we are doing qualifies us as crossdressers. We’re involved in a protest. One that, if we’re successful, will benefit all of the guys in the school. They’ll change the dress code so we can wear shorts in hot weather. Now wouldn’t you all like that option?”

There was a general assent in the crowd.

“Now, if you all don’t mind, we only have 35 minutes for lunch and we’d like to eat ours.”

With that, the crowd dispersed. Jim Harrison and Hank Colson came over and sat with us.

“You guys actually did it. I didn’t think you would,” Jim said.

“Yeah,” Hank said, “I knew you got suspended, but I thought you would come back in trousers.”

“Really,” I told them, “the skirts are really a lot cooler than the trousers.”

“Well, you’ve got guts. Even if my folks would let me, I don’t know that I could do it,” Hank said.

Jim said, “Well even if we didn’t join you, we’ve got your back. If anyone gives you a hard time, let us know. I’m sure the other guys who wore gym shorts on Thursday will too.”

Chapter 6 - Skirted Boy talk

The remainder of the day followed in much the same manner. I think the word had gotten around the school about our protest. I noticed in the hall that people looked at Doug and Larry as they walked be-

tween classes, some even turning to stare at them. Of course there were sotto voce comments, some of which I overheard. They were mixed. Some echoed Hank's attitude, some hoped we'd get the school to change the dress code; a few were less than complimentary, but I didn't hear any that seemed totally derogatory.

The thing that I found a little strange was that Frank drew less attention than Larry or Doug. Aside from those who knew me, very few seemed to notice me at all. For the life of me, I couldn't understand that. I mean, I was wearing a total girl's uniform, complete with that slip. Mom insisted because the blouse was a touch thinner than the boy's shirt.

When the final class let out, I hightailed it out the front door and waited for Loren. Doug and Larry were already out there so, in a move of solidarity, I waited with them. Frank joined us before Loren showed up.

"Man, Lynne, you and Frank went the whole nine yards, didn't you? You're wearing the full girl's uniform," Larry observed.

"Yeah, my mom found out there was a sale at Martin's. She save something like six bucks a uniform over the price of the skirt alone if she bought the whole thing. Since she bought them, she said I should wear them. Something about saving my boy's uniform," I told him.

"My mother talked to his mother and she went for the whole uniform deal too. Same logic, I guess," Frank added.

"I don't know about you guys," Doug said, "but I feel really weird dressed like this." He leaned in and added softly, "Especially since we have to wear the underwear too. I'm not telling anyone that part."

Larry nodded agreement.

“Really? Frank wanted to know. “I felt a little strange when I was wearing it over the weekend but by the time I got to school, I was totally used to it. I didn’t really think about it until we had to do the underwear check.”

“Yeah, that weirded me out,” Larry said. “I hope we don’t have to do that again.”

I put in, “I think we better get used to it. I think that Mr. McDonald is likely to insist on it. If you remember, he warned us to expect random underwear checks.”

“Oh yeah,” Larry moaned

Just then, Larry’s ride showed up.

“We going to do this tomorrow too?” he wanted to know as he waved to his mother.

The three of us looked at each other and, after a moment, we all nodded.

“Until they change the dress code or until the school year ends, whichever comes first,” I told him.

He nodded and jogged over to his mother’s car. I noticed how his skirt flounced around his legs as he ran. I glanced at Frank and noticed he was watching Larry run and smiling as if he enjoyed the sight. I looked at Doug. He seemed a bit uncomfortable with the image.

“Hey guys. I see you’re still in school. So how did the first day of your protest go?” Loren wanted to know as she walked up.

“Not too bad. Old McDonald about burst a seam when Frank here pointed out that we were in compliance with the dress code.”

We proceeded to fill her in on the entire confrontation in the principal’s office, including the underwear

check. We each gave her a short rundown on the day at school. I showed her the note we had been given to show our teachers. Loren just smiled.

“Have you ever had to prove you were wearing the approved underwear?” Frank wanted to know.

Loren blushed a little. “Just once. One of the girls in my class got ticked at me and told someone that I was wearing thong underwear in earshot of a teacher. As if I’d ever wear thong underwear. But I still had to accompany the teacher to the nurse’s office and prove what kind of underwear I had on. Mostly, only girls who’ve gotten on the bad side of a teacher or two have to endure it.” She studied us for a moment. “I’d say you guys will see more than your share of underwear checks, considering you’re on the bad side of the Principal.”

Doug moaned. “I was afraid of that.”

Just then his ride showed up and he gave us a wave as he walked sedately toward it. I think he was trying to avoid the swishy show that Larry had provided but just from walking, the skirt swirled lightly around his legs. We were quiet as he clumsily got in the car, showing more thigh than he should have.

“It looks like you two are the only ones going for the full girl’s uniform.”

Frank looked at me and smiled. “Yeah, my mom called your mom and I guess your mom sold her on the idea. She never could resist a bargain.”

“Aside from your hair, you look really good, Frank. You should get someone to do something for it like I did for Lynne.”

Frank looked at me and smiled. “Yeah, I’ve been admiring your hair all day, Lynne.”

“You know we have to ride the public bus to and from school. It’s just easier to let people think I’m a girl.”

“I think that’d be really neat to have people think you’re a girl. I mean, we’re dressed like it so why not go for it?”

“I’m not sure just how convincing I am really. But I’m close enough that at first glance they see a girl and if I don’t give them any reason to change their mind...”

Frank’s ride showed up and he took his leave. I noticed he walked quickly, causing his skirt to dance around his legs. As he reached the car, he turned quickly and waved to us. His skirt flared a little and wrapped around his legs before swirling back to its natural position. His smile spoke volumes. .

“I think Frank is enjoying wearing a skirt.”

I smiled because I had the same thought.

Loren linked her arm in mine and led the way toward the bus stop. “So, how about you, little brother? Are you enjoying your time in skirts?”

I stammered a bit, but couldn’t come up with an answer I was willing to share.

“That little twirl Frank gave before getting into the car was very much like the one I saw you do in front of the full-length mirror yesterday. As I remember, you said you were just getting the feel of a skirt.”

As we waited at the bus stop, she studied me hard. Then she got a devilish smirk and said, “You know if you are enjoying it, it’s OK. And I’m willing to bet that you could pass as a girl anywhere. So ‘fess up, you are enjoying it, aren’t you?”

I looked at me feet and mumbled, “Yes.”

Loren smiled and put her arm around me in a gentle hug.

“Look, since you’re enjoying it, we should make your time memorable. You know, do something really noteworthy so when you look back on this time, you can smile.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“Well... we could take the Number Seventeen and stop by Oak Tree Mall, just for a walk through.”

My heart raced at the thought. I mean at school, I had a reason to be seen in this outfit but to go to the mall, just to be seen. Could I really get away with it?’

“I don’t know. Do you really think I could pull it off?”

“Sure, all you need is a little lipstick and you’ll be really convincing.” She started rummaging through her purse.

“Not here,” I said, looking around.

“OK, we’ll wait until we’re at the mall.”

With that, she took my arm again and we walked the block to the bus stop.

Chapter 7 - Out in the real world

I don’t remember actually agreeing that I wanted to go to the mall but Loren was a force of nature. It wasn’t until we ducked into an alcove near the mall entrance and she applied her light rose lipstick to my lips that I actually found my voice to question what we were doing.

“Ah, Loren, do you really think this is a good idea?”

“You waited a long time to have second thoughts. You could have said something while we were waiting

at the bus stop. We could have simply walked back. And of course if you had brought it up after we caught it, I'd tell you the same thing I'm telling you now. Too bad. We're here and there's some things I've been wanting to get. We're here and I'm going to get them."

"But what if someone notices I'm really a boy?"

"Not going to happen. Look, you've got three options. One, pick a spot to hide out while I go get what I want and I'll come get you when I'm done. But remember, if you choose that option, you're all on your own if someone spots you and reads you. Two, you can come with me and I'll be there to run interference if there are people around. Three, you can go catch the bus home on your own. Again, you're on your own if someone twigs. So what's it going to be?"

Did I really have a choice? "I'll hang with you, but please don't take me anywhere that could be a problem."

"What? You don't want to go to the ladies room?" There was a devilish smirk on her face.

"You wouldn't!"

"No, they have family restrooms. If it comes to that, you can hide out in one of them while I do my business. If you end up needing to tinkle, you can go in there."

So we began our trek through the mall. I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs. I was checking out every person in the mall. I just knew that one of them would look at me and make the connection... Boy In A Dress. Then all hell would break loose. God only knows what would happen then. Was it illegal for me to out dressed like this? That thought had me lightheaded. But rational thought prevailed. My mother is a lawyer and she bought me the clothes and insisted that I wear the whole thing. And then there was the school. Mr. Mc-

Donald had allowed it at school. Surely if it was illegal, he'd have forbidden it. But still people could still make a fuss. So far, no one had even looked at me twice, that is of those who even looked once.

“Lynne, earth to Lynne.”

I snapped my head around to look at Loren as she poked her finger into my shoulder. “What?”

“I asked if you were nervous.”

“Of course I’m nervous. I mean, who wouldn’t be. Any minute someone can read me and embarrass me. What happens when word gets around that I’m not just protesting at school but I’m prancing around the mall masquerading as a girl?”

“Like I said, not happening. Come ‘ere.”

She stepped over to a store window that had a dark background and reflected our image pretty well.

“Look at that reflection and tell me what you see without using the words ‘you,’ ‘me,’ or ‘us.’”

“I see... two people.”

“What kind of people? If someone wasn’t here and you needed to tell them what the reflection looked like how would say they looked like.”

“They are wearing Chapman’s Academy school uniforms.”

“Umm. I think you’re being obtuse on purpose. If you were to ask someone to be on the lookout for them, what would you say?”

I knew what she wanted me to say, but I didn’t want to admit it. My reflection looked like a girl. Our reflection looked like sisters who went to Chapman’s Academy. But what boy wants to admit that just putting on some girl’s clothes and a light coat of lipstick makes him look like a girl?

“Two Chapman’s Academy girls,” I mumbled.

“That’s what I see. That’s what other people see and if you want to keep them seeing that image, you’d better quit doing the bobblehead imitation.”

I scrunched up my nose and looked at her.

“Ever since we walked into the mall, you’ve been swiveling your head all around, looking at everyone. It looks suspicious. I’m afraid someone’s going to figure out you’re not what you seem. Let’s go sit on that bench there by the planter.”

She led the way and sat. I followed suit.

“Now, just people watch for a bit.”

We sat in silence for about ten minutes. There were hundreds of people walking to and fro in the mall. Couples, mothers with their children, groups of girls and people by themselves.

“Now,” she said, “do you see anyone looking at everyone else, or for that matter, looking at *anyone* else?”

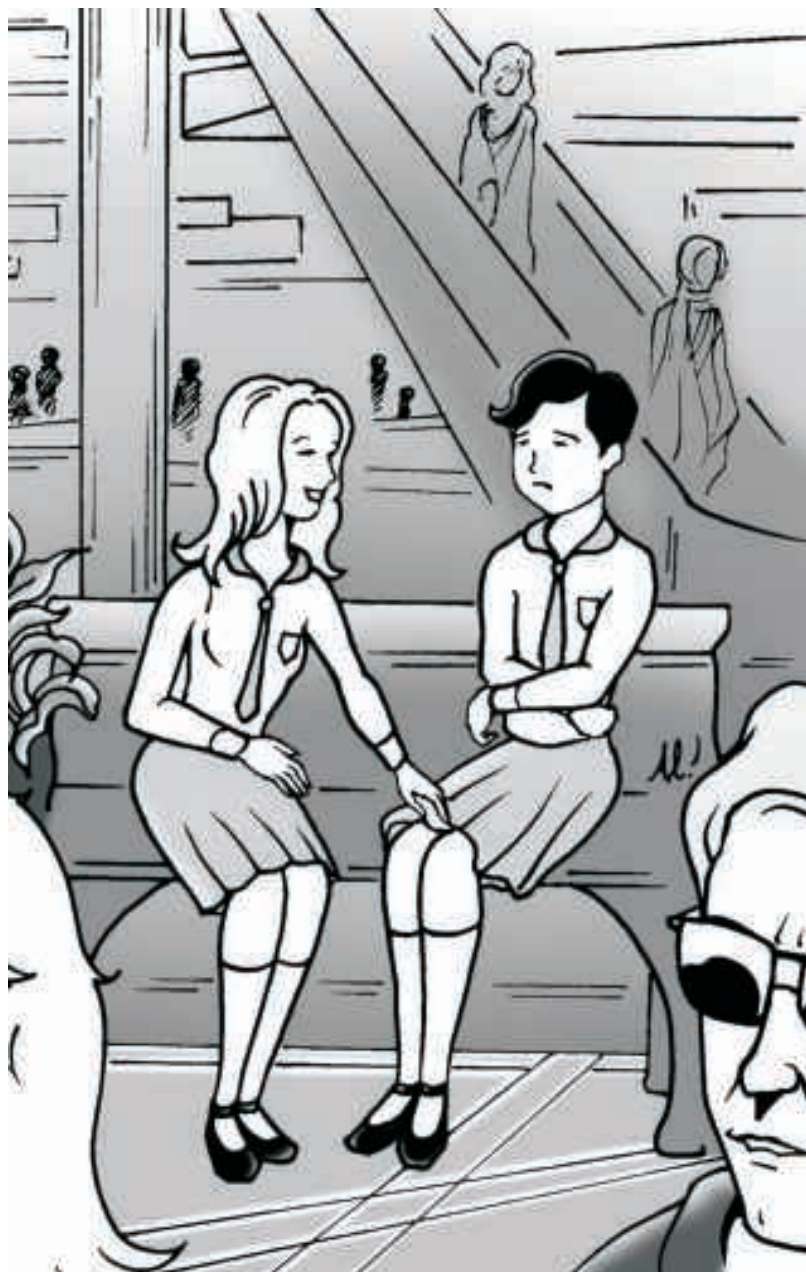
She had a point. The only people looking at anyone else were looking at people they were with and even at that, it was only to glance at them. Mostly people were looking down the mall apparently looking for their destination.

“No,” I said in a small voice.

“So, everyone is here for a reason and that reason is the focus of their attention. You’re just another person they need to avoid running into. You see that, don’t you?”

“I guess.”

“Come on,” she said, standing and started down the mall again. She linked arms with me and contin-



ued, "Let me introduce you to the traditional way girls walk the mall when they just come to hang out."

She led the way to another window. This one had women's fashions on display. There were summer outfits; shorts and tank tops, shorts with crop tops, miniskirts with loose semi-translucent tops and camis under them and a selection of traditional sundresses.

"Now that's what girls should be wearing in this weather. Any one of those outfits would be cooler and more in fashion than what we have on." She looked at me, then back at the window. "You know that blue one on the end there with the flower print would look good on you. I think that the blue would bring out your eyes."

It was a great looking dress. It had an open neckline with just a hint of sleeves over the shoulder. It hung loosely over the bust, gathered at the waist, then flared out to below the knees. I don't know about it looking good on me, but it was a really nice looking dress.

We turned and started down the way again. I needed to look at something and keep my mind occupied, so I started looking in store windows. Being the weather had turned quite warm and it was just the end of April, summer fashions were on display everywhere. I noticed that even the store that sold both guys' and girls' clothes only put girls' clothes on display in the windows. I also noticed that the women's clothes had a lot more diversity in color and style than I'd ever noticed in men's clothes. I'd never really paid attention to such things before.

Loren dragged me into a store and, thankfully, made quick work of picking up some pantyhose. After that, we window shopped our way back to the mall entrance near the bus stop and made our way home.

Chapter 8 - Debriefing

“How did your protest go?” Mom wanted to know when she came to my room where I was doing homework.

I was glad to take a break and turned around in my chair.

“About as good as expected. I don’t think Mr. McDonald was happy but he was bright enough to know that we had him and he allowed us to wear the uniforms we had on.” I fished around in my backpack and pulled out the note to my teachers. I showed it to Mom. “He had Ms. Hathaway give us each one of these so our teachers wouldn’t send us to the office at the start of every new period.”

She smiled as she read the note. “How did the other students react?”

“Mixed, I think. The guys who had changed into shorts with us told us they had our back. The other guys all got the word that the school would not tolerate any disruption over what we were wearing, since McDonald’s note was read in each of our classes. With four of us spread out in different classes for the most part and word of mouth, we weren’t hassled, though some people were talking behind our back. I think some of them think we’re all gay and others don’t understand how this will make a difference.”

“What about you? Do *you* understand?”

“I’m not sure. But I do know that this will go on until one side caves. Either the school will modify the dress code to allow shorts or we’ll give up and go back to long pants. It’s just a question of who will stick with it longer.”

“Loren tells me you had to endure an underwear check.”

“Yeah, that was embarrassing. I can’t believe the girls have to do that. I mean what difference does it make what kind of underwear they wear? I sure never concerned myself with what kind of underwear a girl was wearing and boys don’t have any kind of regulation regarding underwear. It’s really unfair.”

“Yes indeed, there are many inequities across the gender lines.”

I thought about what I had noticed at the mall and how the girl’s clothes were more colorful and attractive than the ones for boys.

“So,” she wanted to know, “are you and your friends in skirts again tomorrow or did some of you have second thoughts?”

“I think we all had second thoughts but we’re determined to see it through. We’ll really look foolish if we back down after the first day.”

Mom smiled. “Good, I’m glad I didn’t spend all the money for nothing. If you all stick to it, I think you have a good chance of making the change you want. I’m sure that every kid in the school will be telling their parents about your protest. I’ll bet a good number of the boys are in favor of being allowed shorts even if they wouldn’t be willing to join your protest.”

At dinner, Dad did his own version of debriefing.

“Did all your cohorts dress as promised?” he wanted to know.

“Yeah, all of us ended up in the principal’s office first thing.”

“That was to be expected. How did that go?”

“He was ticked. Frank took the lead and was all prepared for him. Frank had a copy of the dress code where he had highlighted the appropriate portion. He read it to Mr. McDonald and assured him we were in

full compliance. I don't think oMcDonald thought we were. He called Coach MacCallan to the office and they did an underwear check. I don't think that the principal thought we'd really wear the underwear."

Dad showed some amusement. "It seems your mother was correct. They held you to the letter of the dress code. There are advantages to having a lawyer in the family."

"Yeah, thanks, Mom."

"So what's the plan going forward? I see you haven't changed out of your uniform."

"I'm still getting used to the clothes. I figured I should wear them until I really don't think about it every time I move or sit down. That and I still need to remember to keep my knees together. So until that becomes second nature, I don't want anyone but the staff that does the underwear check to know just what underwear I'm wearing."

I wasn't exactly honest as to my motivation. The last part was true. I was concerned about flashing my underwear at the wrong time but the real impetus for leaving it on was simply that I had learned to like it. I had found myself in front of my full-length mirror admiring my look when we returned from the mall. That light touch of lipstick really made a difference. While looking at myself, I swished the skirt by swiveling my hips and making it flare out and wrap back against my legs. It was bit intoxicating. I'd also wasted some homework time contemplating my experience at the mall. It was a kind of adrenaline high. I was shaking as we sat on the bus, coming down from it. I had had to admit to myself that if Loren suggested it again, I'd go for it. Maybe even go into a store just to look around at all that finery that I'd normally be uncomfortable because of even being in the department it was in.

“So, am I to assume that you will be wearing skirts to school for the foreseeable future?” Dad asked, breaking me from my reverie.

“Looks like it. I think that Old... ah, Mr. McDonald has dug his heels in and intends to break us. I think we’re stronger than that. The first day was hard but with the reactions we got, I expect it will get easier. The only bad thing is that we’ll probably go through the underwear check thing again. I just hope it isn’t every day; that’d be a drag.”

Dad cracked a real smile and chuckled. “A real drag?” he asked with genuine mirth in his voice. I looked at him confused. He chuckled again. “You do realize you just made a pun?”

“A pun?”

“Yes, ‘drag’ as in ‘Dressed As a Girl’.”

“Oh... yeah, I guess I did. It wasn’t intended.” Dad’s smile was contagious; both Mom and Loren were smiling and I couldn’t help but smile myself.

“The four of you are in it for the long haul then?”

“We confirmed that after school let out today, while we were waiting for the other guys’ rides to show up.”

“I imagine it was a bit distracting today... the skirts and all.”

“Um, yeah, kind of but the longer it went on, the easier it was to put it out of my mind.”

“You were able to concentrate alright in class?”

I think he finally got around to his real concern. He was adamant that we, both Loren and I, give our best effort in school. He’d made that point quite clear when he acquiesced to Mom’s desire for us to attend school locally. I decided to be honest.

“It was a little tough but I put my mind to it and I did OK. I think I’ll get better tomorrow as I get more used to it all.”

It was then that Loren tried to be helpful.

“I could see that Lynne was having a little trouble being comfortable in his new uniform so after the other guys got their rides, I took him to Oak Tree Mall to help him get acclimated to wearing the clothes in public.”

I shot her a look. I’d have rather not divulged that little excursion to Mom and Dad. Mom joined in.

“What a great idea,” Mom observed, “I’m confident that no one paid any attention. We did go to some trouble to keep it from being obvious that you were a boy in girl’s clothes since you had to ride the public bus.”

Dad looked at Mom.

“Well, dear, Lynne does need to be out in the public with this. He needs to be comfortable enough so that he doesn’t attract attention to himself.”

Dad looked back at me. “So, Lynne, how did the mall trip go?”

I really didn’t want to have Dad get upset about it so I adopted a casual attitude.

“OK, I guess. It was nothing special. We just walked the length of the mall and back, then Loren stopped in to buy some pantyhose and we left.”

“What I was looking for was how you coped with being in the mall wearing a girl’s uniform.”

“Well, I was a little nervous but then I was nervous when we went into the school too. Loren pointed out that no one was noticing me because they were all there for a reason and focused on that. So I relaxed

and just followed Loren's lead as she went window shopping. No big deal, really."

Chapter 9 - In for the Long Haul

After dinner, I checked in with the guys on Skype. Frank was the only one besides me that kept the uniform on.

When Doug asked us about not changing, Frank said, "I don't usually change out of my uniform, so I just kept this one on."

"What about you, Lynne? I know you usually change," Larry wanted to know.

"I was a bit distracted today with the clothes and I need to work a bit harder than some others to keep my grades up. So I decided to keep it on every day after school until I get used to it and don't even think about it. That way I'll be able to concentrate in class better."

They all seemed to accept the excuse well enough.

It was surprising that Frank took the role as the leader of our group. Being classed as a nerd by most of the student body, he generally took a supportive role in social interactions in order to gain acceptability. But right from the beginning, he'd taken the leadership of our protest. If you remember, he's the one who found the loophole in the dress code.

"So, guys," Frank inquired, "we're all still in this, aren't we? We're going to stay with it until Old McDonald caves, right?"

Larry, who had discovered Alexandre Dumas' book and become enthralled by it, said, "All for one and one for all!"

"What?" Doug asked.

“You know. We’re like The Three Musketeers. ‘All for one and one for all, united we stand and divided we fall.’”

“Yeah, well there are four of us, not three.”

“That’d be you three; I’m like d’Artagnan to your Athos, Porthos and Aramis. Didn’t you read the book?”

“No. So you’re telling me that even though it was called “The Three Musketeers,” there were four of them? That’s kind of dumb.”

Frank rolled his eyes. “d’Artagnan wanted to be a Musketeer but by the time he went to Paris to become one, they were being disbanded. Athos, Porthos and Aramis weren’t having any of the disbandment thing and stuck together and befriended d’Artagnan. The whole book was about what the four of them did.”

Doug looked into the camera with a blank look.

“Oh never mind,” Frank said. “The point is we all have to stick together on this and see it through. So we’re not going to back down, right?”

We all agreed to hang in for as long as it took.

The second day we were all summoned to the gym, first period. Coach MacCallan met us there with his assistant, Coach Johnson. He took us all into the locker room.

“Well, gentlemen, I’m sure you all know why we’re here. So turn around and show us what we need to see.”

We all turned and pulled our skirts up in back.

“Thank you, gentlemen.” Then, turning to Coach Johnson, he said, “You can get back to your class, Chuck. I want to have a wee chat with the lads here.”

Coach Johnson left and Coach MacCallan sat on one of the benches.

“I want you gentlemen to know that I’m in sympathy with what you’re trying to do. Most schools like ours do allow shorts as an alternate uniform. For some it’s even the main uniform, requiring long pants only in the dead of winter.

“But here’s the deal. Mr. McDonald wants to break you of this, and I quote, ‘insubordination’. So every day you persist in this, you’re to report here first thing and prove you’re wearing the correct underwear. If you do this when you get to school, it’ll be better and keep you from missing class time. The teachers have expressed concern that you leaving class for this every day is a disruption to their teaching.

“So can I have your cooperation on this?”

“Yes sir,” we said in unison.

“You know, I’m a third generation Scotsman. When I was about your age, my father took us all to Edinburgh to visit his grandparents. While we were all there, we wore kilts. With the tartan pattern in the skirts, all it would take would be the addition of a sporran for you guys to fit right in with the lads in Edinburgh.” He smiled at that. “What do you guys do about pockets? The skirts don’t have any.”

“I go without until lunch, then go to my locker for my backpack where I keep my wallet. It’s a bummer to haul it to lunch and then back again to my locker before class.”

Coach nodded. “The girls all have purses. Maybe you guys need to adopt some sort of compromise. Think on it. Anyway, get back to class and don’t forget to come here every morning before class.”

We all sat together at lunch again. This time the rest of the guys involved with the shorts challenge sat

with us to show support. There was a little of “How’s it going” kind of thing as each of the other guys joined us at the table. But then lunch conversation moved on to the usual things; sports, girls, and video games, not necessarily in that order.

I took the time to study my fellow protesters. Larry and Doug were obviously boys wearing skirts, but Frank, like me, had opted for the whole uniform. Even though he hadn’t seemed to do anything to enhance the image, his hair was long enough and he wore it in a tousled style, which up until right then, I hadn’t noticed resembled the way some girls wore theirs. Carefully disarrayed to look casual, but with a purpose. Combined with the fact that he was slightly built it was plain that he too was wearing that slip that had the built-in bra. It seemed to be just a bit more prominent on him than on me.

Then I thought about how I kind of liked the sensation of the clothes. The slip, skirt and underwear were so unlike any other clothing experience than I’d ever had. The softness of the slip resting on my legs was just a little exciting. *‘I wonder if Frank feels the same way about it,’* I thought. I decided I’d have to figure out a way to broach the subject with him.

I was at my locker putting my backpack in when Carolyn Bates, one of Loren’s friends, stopped by.

“I saw you and the other guys getting their wallets out of their backpacks at lunch. You don’t carry them around during the rest of the day.”

“Yeah, well, you know these skirts don’t have any pockets.”

“You should carry a purse like the rest of us.” I’m sure I looked aghast. “Well, you know they do make man bags.”

That afternoon after school let out found the four of us congregated outside, waiting for rides. Loren and Carolyn joined us. As you might expect, we were

debriefed on the day. In general we were encouraged by the lack of resistance to our odd uniforms and the seeming support of the student body in general. According to Loren and Carolyn, the girls all thought it was cool that boys were wearing skirts. Carolyn said that Jennifer Brock was trying to get her brother to join the protest. She even had all the things he'd need to do it.

After all the guys had left, Carolyn said, "My mom's not going to be able to pick me up today and I need to ride the bus home. I don't really want to go right home. What about you guys? You ride the bus every day. Anything interesting to do on the way home?"

"Last night, we stopped at Oak Tree Mall," Loren told her.

"That sounds like fun. I almost never get to hang out at the mall. You wouldn't like to go again today, would you?"

My heart rate picked up a little. I think I just gave myself a little hit of adrenaline. Loren looked at me.

"Well, Mom did say that we should do that kind of thing often, to get you to relax about being in public, since you're going to have to wear this stuff for a while."

I shrugged my shoulders.

Turning back to Carolyn, she said, "Sure, next to actually shopping, window shopping is my favorite thing to do."

The three of us were walking through the mall and I was super aware of everything; my feelings, the air conditioning, the movement of the shoppers, but mostly the feel of the clothes I was wearing and just where I was. Wearing the uniform at school was one thing; I had to be there, but I had no real reason to be here. The only reason was for me to get used to people seeing me. Somehow, it felt naughty... deliciously

naughty. I was just coming to grips with it all when Carolyn shattered my composure.

“Oh, look at that dress.” she said, pointing out a dress in the Forever 21 store window. “Let’s go in, I’ve got to see if they have it in my size.”

With that, she marched right into the store with Loren following. If I didn’t want to be wandering around the mall by myself, I had no choice but to follow in their wake. My adrenaline took another spike. Walking in the mall was risky enough. There, everyone I’d pass by would be intent on whatever they came to the mall for. But here in a store, there would be salespeople who would want to assist us in purchasing something.

Carolyn and Loren went straight to the junior’s section and perused the racks of dresses. I followed meekly behind. Sure enough, a saleslady approached.

“Can I help you ladies find anything?”

“Yes, I’d like to see that dress in the window, the green one with full skirt and three-quarter sleeves, in a size eleven.”

“They will be right over here in our featured clothing section.” She led the way two aisles over. “It a lovely dress and quite popular. If we’re out of that particular size, we can order it in for you. Here we are,” she said, stopping at a rack and sliding a couple of dresses to the side. “You’re in luck.” She pulled out a dress and showed it to Carolyn.

“I’d like to try it on, please.”

“Certainly. The fitting rooms are right over there.”

Carolyn took the dress and headed to the fitting rooms.

“Now, how about you ladies? Do you see anything that strikes your fancy?”

“Actually, we were just killing time walking around the mall, but as long as we’re in here, I might as well see if there’s anything I’d like,” Loren agreed. “What do you have in size nine?”

The saleslady moved down the rack and stopped a section and indicated that they were what Loren wanted.

Turning to me, she said, “And what about you, young lady? Can I show you anything?”

“Ah no, I’m just here with them.”

“Wouldn’t you like to try on some of these nice things? I’m sure we have your size.”

“I’m not sure what my size is. My mom bought this uniform for me just this year and I didn’t notice the size.”

The saleslady looked as if she was about to say something more when Carolyn came flouncing up.

“What do you think, Loren? I think it’s great. Does it fit right?”

Loren broke off her browsing to survey the fit. Carolyn gave a twirl to show how the dress moved. I have to say that I thought it was a great dress. It was lighter weight than the uniform skirt and certainly more stylish. I’d bet it would be more comfortable in the heat too.

“I think you should get it. Do you have enough in your clothing allowance for it this month? If you don’t maybe they could put it on layaway for you.”

Carolyn twisted around and pulled out the price tag.

“Yeah, my folks upped my allowance this year and I’ve not really used it much since Christmas.”

The saleslady seem to perk up at that comment.

“Perhaps you’d like to see some other thing in a similar style? We have the entire line right over here.”

She led Carolyn and Loren over to another section. I just wanted to disappear before she came back to pressure me about trying something on. Fortunately, another customer came in and the saleslady went to see if she needed help.

Carolyn ended up buying that dress and two more. Loren tried on two but didn’t buy anything. Mom usually wanted to be consulted before she bought anything and she had been shopping already that month

Chapter 10 - More conditioning

I was relieved when we were on the bus and Carolyn and the saleslady had rattled me. It was good to be away from them. Loren was more observant than I’d have liked.

“You seem a little on edge, Lynne. What’s up?”

“Oh, nothing. The saleslady was just about to insist that I try something on.”

Loren smiled.

“You could have, you know. You’re a size 9 and they have some really nice things in that size.”

I looked at her, shocked at the idea that she thought it would be alright for me to try on girl’s clothes. It was one thing in Martin’s. They were aware I was a boy needing the uniform to protest the unfair dress code. I tried to reason out why I shouldn’t have tried it on without pointing out I was a boy. We were,

after all, on a public bus and someone might overhear us, though I did lower my voice.

“I wouldn’t have bought anything. It would have been a dishonest to try on.”

Loren leaned in, respecting my need to keep the conversation between us.

“I tried on with no intention of buying. Women do that all the time.”

“Yeah, but you might come back and buy something some time.”

Loren grinned and I could tell she was having some mischievous thoughts.

“I’ll wait until we get home to reply to that. I’m afraid your reaction to what I’m thinking might draw some unwanted attention.”

Loren went straight to her room when we got home. I started to do the same when I thought about what she’d said about replying when we got home and curiosity got the better of me. I went to her door which was ajar. I knocked and poked my head in. She looked up from her desk where she’d spread out her homework.

“Just what were you thinking on the bus that you couldn’t say?”

She smiled that mischievous smile again.

“I was just thinking that I wouldn’t be too sure that you wouldn’t come back sometime and buy something.”

“What do you mean by that? I’m a boy, remember? Why would I want go back and buy a dress?”

She kept that smile, almost a smirk.

“I’ve been watching you. When you can manage to relax, like you were when we were just walking around the mall, you enjoy yourself. I’ve seen you in your boy clothes at the mall and you’re just you, doing what you need to do. Just like all the other people at the mall. But today, you were window shopping and appreciating what you were looking at. If you remember, we didn’t stop to look at any shops that featured men’s clothing. I noticed that when we walked by, you didn’t even look at them.”

“So, I was just trying to blend in as a girl. Wasn’t that the whole reason for me being there, to learn how to blend in?”

“Well, yeah, there is that. But before Carolyn dragged us into Forever 21, there were some things that you liked. I’d be willing to bet that if you thought you could have, you’d have gone in to take a closer look.”

She gave me a challenging look, as if to say, “Well, am I right or am I right?” We stared each other down a bit.

“Deny it if you like, but I know I’m right.”

She turned back to her desk.

Back in my room, I sat down to do my homework, but couldn’t concentrate. When I could bring myself to do it, I had to give her some points. She was right on two counts anyway. I had been enjoying just walking around the mall. As I observed earlier, it felt deliciously naughty and who doesn’t like to feel just a little naughty, especially when it’s something they can get away with, without fear of reprisal? What’s more, there were some outfits in the store windows that did catch my eye. I’m not sure that, given the option, I’d have gone into the store to “get a closer look.” After all, I’m a boy and a boy has no real reason to look at girl’s clothes.

But that started a whole new line of thinking. It wasn't as if I could ask to try them on but Loren seemed to think I could have and the saleslady was offering to let me. I stood and walked over to my closet where my full-length mirror hung and looked at my reflection with as critical an eye as I could. I turned a little each way and took in each detail. It kind of shook me when I came to the conclusion that while I might not look like a really good looking girl, I was certainly a passible girl. I'd seen girls, even some in my school, that were a whole lot more butch than I looked at the moment. Then I thought about Frank. I couldn't help but notice that he seemed really comfortable in the uniform. What's more, it looked good on him.

I continued to look in the mirror as I recalled the day. The first thing I thought about was Coach's observation that the skirt was tartan. I'd always thought of the girl's skirts as being grey. Our trousers were grey but in truth, the skirts did have a plaid pattern. The predominate color was grey but there was a background hint of blue and a pale yellowish/green strip crisscrossing the grey/blue. I then marveled at how well the student body was taking to the protest. I'm sure there were those who were disturbed by our wearing skirts but literally no one had been openly opposed. The staff, on the other hand, had given us some decidedly dark looks. I'm not sure if it was the skirts or the fact we were protesting.

It must have taken nearly until Mom called up to say dinner was ready before I could actually do any homework. Fortunately, none of it was due the next day.

The rest of the week went on a similar vein. We seemed to be less and less something to notice. I marveled at how routine school had become. The following Monday, Coach MacCallan relaxed his underwear check. We'd each go to the gym when we arrived at school. I assume he did the other guys the same as he did me. He'd look up from his desk and ask, "You

got the right underwear on?" I'd answer "Yes," and he'd wave me out of the office.

Aside from all of us eating lunch together, including the guys who were our support group, the gang that had tried the shorts, and the four of us after school waiting for rides, everything got back to normal, or as normal as it could be for guys at school in skirts.

On Thursday, as we headed for our lockers to drop our backpacks, Frank asked, "You got any plans for the weekend?"

"No, I'm pretty well caught up on all my school projects. I was just going to hang out at home. Maybe play some video games."

"Yeah, me too. I'm kind of going stir crazy but I'm still wearing the uniform all the time. How about you?"

"Me too."

"Maybe we should hang out together. You know, just to get some of our normal life back. I haven't been anywhere but home and school since the Monday this all started. And I'd like to do something outside my house."

"I don't have it quite as bad as that. I ride the city bus to and from school. My sister and I and sometimes one of her girl friends have stopped by Oak Tree Mall a couple of times, just to hang out for a little while on the way home."

"Really? You go to the mall? How cool. I wish I could do something like that. Do your folks know you do that?"

"Yeah, Loren thought it would be a good idea for me to get used to being seen by people, since we ride the bus. And she never keeps anything from Mom. My mom agreed that I should get out in public."

“So what about this weekend? Do you think you’d like to get together?”

“I don’t know. Like where would we get together?”

“I’d just like to get out of my house, but in this uniform I can’t really go anywhere. You’re lucky to ride the bus home and go to the mall. That gives you a change of scenery.”

Finally, I took the hint. “If you’d like, I’ll ask my mom if you can come to dinner tomorrow.”

Chapter 11 - Visitor

I explained to Mom about Frank’s dilemma and asked he could come to dinner on Friday. She laughed.

“I’ll call his mother and make sure it’s alright with her.”

At dinner that night, Mom informed me, “I talked with Frank’s mother. She thought it would be great for Frank to do something besides sitting around the house.”

“So he’s coming for dinner tomorrow?”

“It turns out that Frank’s parents have something to do on Saturday and so I offered to have Frank overnight. Well, actually over the weekend. I assume you’re OK with that.”

“Oh sure. Ah, you know since we’re both still learning to be comfortable in skirts, he’s still wearing his uniform all the time...”

“As are you,” Mom interrupted.

“Well, yeah, so anyway I just wanted to make sure you knew.”

“Yes, I knew. You explained all that when you asked if he could come to dinner.”

I wasn't really sure Mom would be OK with Frank coming home to dinner but she was not only OK with that but she'd invited him to stay the weekend, wearing his girl's uniform even.

Friday was more of the same. Eventually the novelty of boys in skirts was wearing off so that no one, not even the staff, gave us any notice. Even the lunch room was back to normal, except that more of the guys from the original shorts group sat with us than before. We even had a few guys we didn't even know join our group. It was almost like we were heroes.

After school, we waited with the guys for their rides. There was the four of us, Loren, her friend Carolyn and another of her friends, Sarah, all standing around. Even there the conversation was as about as normal as it had ever been. That is except that Sarah commented on our protest. She assured us that all, and she emphasized *all*, the girls though it was cool and thought the other guys who didn't join in were wusses.

Doug and Larry had both had their ride show up as did Carolyn and Sarah.

Frank informed us, “My mother said I should just ride the bus with you guys.”

“OK, cool. I guess we should head for the bus stop then.”

As we stood at the stop waiting, Frank seemed to be nervous. It was the first time I'd noticed anything like that with him. I was watching him when he looked up.

“I know you've been doing this for a week but this is my first time to be anywhere but school. People really don't say anything or, you know, give you looks?”

“No, I guess I look enough like a girl that they just look right by me.”

Loren leaned in toward him. “If you’re nervous, I could enhance your look a little.”

“How can you do that?”

“The first time I took Lynne to the mall, I added a touch of lipstick. It made a lot of difference.”

Frank looked at me. “Really? You wore lipstick to the mall.”

I shot my sister a look. She really didn’t know how to keep anything to herself. I wondered how many other people she had let that drop to.

“Well, I knew I needed to get used to being seen in this uniform and I was nervous, so I let her.”

“Wow, what was it like?”

“I don’t know... I was really too self-conscious to pay attention.”

“Did it help?”

“I guess, nobody looked twice.”

“OK,” Frank told Loren, “I’ll do it if Lynne will.”

“I told you, I already did it at the mall,” I told him.

“I mean right now. I don’t want to be the only boy wearing lipstick.”

I looked to Loren. She shrugged her shoulders.

“It wouldn’t be your first time but it is Frank’s. You’d be giving moral support.”

I shrugged. “OK.”

We stepped into the bus shelter and Frank watched with fascination as Loren coated my lips. Then he submitted to it himself. When Loren put the lipstick in her purse, Frank was grinning like he'd won a prize.

It's funny, but when we went to the mall I quickly forgot I had lipstick on but sitting on the bus with Frank, with him grinning at me the whole time, I couldn't forget. Every time I looked at him, I was reminded. It was a soft pink, so light it was hardly noticeable. But his lips were shiny and that was a dead giveaway that there was something on his lip. Seeing that was a constant reminder that my lips looked the same.

When we got home, I brought my laptop down and went into Mom's office, fired up her computer and logged on under the family user name. Mom had a business user setup. She didn't have any sensitive documents under that user but she did have her remote login software and some legal software as well as a word processor and spreadsheet. Any work she did from home was saved on the law office's servers downtown. Without her login credentials and the password to her sector, they might just have well been on Mars. Just because it seemed right, I let Frank use my laptop to do his homework and I used Mom's computer.

As we worked, we talked a bit. Mostly about the assignments. Even though we didn't have many classes together, we did have the same subjects from the same teachers, so our homework was virtually the same. We took a break after about an hour and were nearly done. As I mentioned, Frank was a nerd and was able to whiz through his homework. So I used him as a resource and as a result got through my homework a lot faster. I'm not sure that I learned as well as I would have if I'd struggled through it myself but it was a lot faster.

Chapter 12 - Confession

We were kicked back, drinking sodas. I decided that we were alone and I could ask him about the clothes. With no one around, I'd probably get an honest answer.

"You know Frank, this girls' uniform is really different than the boys'"

"You got that right."

"I've never worn anything like it. When I first put it on, I was just a little freaked out but by the time Monday rolled around, I'd pretty much gotten used to it. How about you?"

"Yeah, it's pretty much the same with me. I don't really think about it much unless I do something that calls my attention to it, like when I have to go to the bathroom."

"Yeah, that's a bummer. These skirts don't have a fly so you have to bunch up the skirt and the pull the undies down because they don't either. I think it'd be easier to just sit."

"Actually," he said, pausing as if he were trying to decide if he wanted to go on, "I, ah... I tried that."

"And?"

"It works pretty well. You just lift the skirt, put the underwear down to your knees, lift the skirt again, and sit. Everything's up out of the way and you're free to let it fly."

"So, does that mean you do it all the time then?"

He colored up a little. "I don't know why I told you that but yeah. It really is easier. Besides, at school, with the stall door closed, no one can see your underwear. I'm afraid that if I used the urinal, they might."

He had a point. I'd been trying not to go at school. I couldn't avoid it completely. But there was a unisex handicap restroom near the administration offices. I tried to slip in there when I could, for that same reason.

"I'll have to try that. I've been holding it until I could get to the handicap stall by the office."

Frank smiled a little. "I hope the guys appreciate all we're going through to get the right to wear shorts."

The conversation was starting to drift away from where I wanted it. So I tried to reel it back in.

"What do you notice most about wearing the skirt?"

"Well like you said on Skype that first night, the fact that there's nothing on my legs."

"Yeah, only that's not quite accurate. I mean when you sit down, there's the slip and the skirt resting on your legs. Have you noticed?"

"It's kind of hard not to. The slip is slick and doesn't feel like anything else I've ever worn."

"Do you..." I started but decided that it would be putting him on the spot, "I mean, sometimes I kind of like it. Does it ever feel good to you?"

I could feel my face warming and Frank's face showed a little color so I knew I was on the right track. He looked down at his lap.

"Like right now since you mentioned it, it does feel kind of good."

I smiled. "I'm glad I'm not the only one. I was hoping that you'd agree with me. Somehow, I don't know how, but I just had a hunch you would have noticed that too."

“Can I tell you something? I mean in confidence. You’re the closest friend I have.”

“Well, you’re my closest friend as well, so yeah. If you want me to keep it quiet, I won’t say anything to anyone.”

He bit his lip. “I’m really jealous of you. I mean, since I’ve started wearing this uniform, I’ve been stuck in the house or at school. I’ve really wanted to go out and have people see me. Riding the bus home with you today was the best thing. What I’m really jealous of is that you got to go to the mall and walk around like...” he paused, I guess to gather his courage, “like a girl. Everyone thought you were a girl, didn’t they?”

“Yeah, Carolyn came with us the second time and she took us into a store so she could buy a dress. The saleslady thought we all should try on dresses, even me.”

Frank got a look of awe on his face. “Oh wow, did you do it?”

“No, I mean a boy trying on a dress in the girls’ fitting room?”

“Man, I would have. Ever since Sunday, I’ve been wondering what it would be like to wear something really lightweight. You know, like that sundress your sister wore last Fourth of July.” He looked down again. “Actually, that’s not really true... the truth is that for a long time now, before Sunday I mean, whenever I see a girl in something like that, I wonder what it’d be like to wear it.” He looked up with a kind of fear/hope in his eyes. “You ever wonder about things like that?”

I’m not sure I could deny that but I don’t think I’d really wondered what it was like.

“Not exactly but on the Fourth of July, I can remember being jealous of Loren because even in my

cutoffs and t-shirt, I know I wasn't as cool as she was." Now, I *was* wondering what it would be like to wear it.

"You don't think I'm weird or anything, do you?"

"Naw, I'll bet you're not the first boy to wonder things like that."

"Do your parents track your internet use?"

That was a change of course and I wondered where he was going with it.

"I don't think so. Why?"

"There's something I want to show you but I'm not sure I want any adults to know I've looked at it. At home, I have a VPN I use. Then I go back and wipe my browsing history."

"It's not porn, is it? Because my sister could walk in on us at any moment."

"No, it's about crossdressers... guys who do this." He waved his hand down his front, indicating his clothes, "because they want to... or they say they 'need' to."

I'd heard about crossdressers but I remember that at lunch that day, Frank spoke with authority about crossdressers not being gay.

"Look, I'm sure you've noticed I use Firefox as a browser on my laptop. It has a private window option."

He turned to my laptop and selected a private window. He fiddled around for a while as he tried to remember the search he'd used to find what he wanted to show me. Finally, he called up a Quora site with the headline, "I'm a 13 year old boy. I like to crossdress but I like girls. Any advice?"

“Here,” he said, “read this and the responses.” He turned the laptop toward me.

It was pretty much guys who responded, each one telling the kid he was in it for life, not to fight it and not to worry about his sexuality. They maintained that the two weren’t connected and the majority of crossdressers were straight males.

“OK, so what am I supposed to get out of this?”

“When we decided to do this, I did some online research. There’s a lot of junk out there, some pervy stuff. But the serious stuff stresses that just wearing girl’s clothes is no big deal. Liking to wear them doesn’t mean you’re gay.”

“That’s good. You weren’t worried about being gay, were you?”

“Not really but now that we’re doing it, I’m worried about...” his voice trailed off.

“You’re worried about liking it.”

His head snapped up, mouth slightly open.

I hurried on. “Me too. It’s good to know about the not-being-gay stuff.”

He seemed to be encouraged by my admission.

“What’s really got me worried,” he said, “is that I sometimes wish I had something besides this uniform to wear. You know, something stylish.”

That statement took me back to my trip to the mall, to the image of that blue dress.

“Yeah, when we were at the mall, Loren pointed out a dress she said would look great on me.” I clamped my mouth shut. I hadn’t intended to say that.

“Really? What did it look like?”

I paused. When I blurted that out, I sounded really excited about it. I hadn't meant to. Like I said, I hadn't even meant to say it at all; it just jumped out of my mouth. After a moment's thought, I decided that I might just as well go ahead.

"It was in a store window. Loren was teaching me to window shop. She spotted it. It was blue with flowers on it. Loren said the blue would bring out my eyes. It had an open neckline with just a hint of sleeves over the shoulder. It hung loose over the chest and gathered at the waist, then flared out to below the knees. I don't know about it looking good on me, but it was a really nice looking dress."

Chapter 13 - The weekend awaits

"Was that the store where the saleslady offered for you try on?"

"No, that was the first trip. It was just Loren and me. It wasn't until the second trip with Carolyn that we went into the store."

"Oh, so even if you had tried on, it wouldn't have been that dress, huh?"

I shook my head.

"Do you remember what store it was?"

"I don't know, it was two letters, like M & M..."

"No, not M & M; H & M," Loren said, walking into the room.

Both Frank and I spun around and looked at her. Frank began stammering. Loren walked over to him and pulled him into a hug.

"How much did you hear?" he wanted to know when he calmed down.

“Look, I’m sorry, I didn’t intend to eavesdrop, but I’ve already finished my homework and I was in the kitchen getting a snack. I couldn’t help but hear you guys. You weren’t exactly speaking in hushed tones.

“As for what I heard, I heard enough to know that you did some research and found out that crossdressers aren’t necessarily gay.”

“Oh God, if you heard that, then you heard about...”

“About your curiosity about other clothes than the school uniform?”

“Ah, Loren, I think that Frank would just as soon that no one knew about that.”

Frank nodded his head vigorously.

“Oh, I won’t tell anyone and I won’t tell about you either, little sister.”

“Sister, I’m your *brother*.”

She smiled, cocked her head and looked at me, raising her eyebrows.

“Lynne, given how well you’ve taken to wearing a skirt and that you keep saying you’re still getting used to it, but all evidence points to you being naturally adept at wearing it, I’m not sure it’s as cut and dried as all that.”

I sputtered, trying to come up with a response.

“Mom and Dad will be home soon, or I might be tempted to offer you two the chance to find out what you’re wondering about.”

“Hi kids,” Mom said as she breezed in.

We were all sitting around the family room with the TV on. Some chick flick was on. We tuned in late and I really didn’t know the name of it. It was pretty good.

It was about some guy who was in charge of some big chain store expansion and some gal with a small book store that would probably flounder if the chain opened an outlet near her shop.

“Frank, your mother dropped a suitcase at my office for you. She said it was really too much for you to handle on the bus and that it was easier for her to bring it to me. I left it by the stairs.

“Anyone want to give me a hand getting dinner? We’re having meatloaf and I need someone to get everything ready while I change.”

“I’ll put Frank’s suitcase in my room.” I stated, not really wanting to help with dinner. I knew that Mom would somehow get her helper to chop onions... not my favorite chore.

“I’d be glad to help,” Frank offered, “but I don’t know where everything is.”

“I’ll show you,” Loren offered.

I found Loren and Frank in the kitchen. They had the loaf pan and a mixing bowl on the counter and a pound of hamburger in the sink, still in its Ziploc bag. Loren watched as Frank sorted through the cupboard, getting out ingredients as she read them off the recipe. I stood watching, noticing Frank smiling as he pulled out the seasoning. As I watched, Mom appeared at my shoulder.

She leaned in and said quietly, “I need to talk to you. Wait for me in the office.”

I went to the office and sat on the edge of her desk. I could hear her talking to Frank and Loren.

“Loren,” she said, “you know how to make meatloaf, don’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“What do you say, Frank, would you like to learn how to make meatloaf?”

“Oh yes. That’d be cool.”

“Would you mind teaching him, Loren? I need to go over something with Lynne. I’ll be back before you get it in the oven.”

Mom had closed the door when she came in. She was sitting behind her desk looking at me. I had to wonder if I’d done something wrong or if there was bad news she needed to tell me. The only time I’d been asked to the office without being told why had been to discipline me. Only I couldn’t for the life of me think of anything I’d done.

“You and Frank are close friends, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I think so. As a matter of fact, just today, we agreed that we were each the other’s closest friend.”

“I assume that if a tight situation, you’d have each other’s back.” I nodded. “You know his mother Emily.” I nodded. “I made mention that she had brought Frank’s clothes for the weekend by my office.” I nodded again. “She had called ahead and we had lunch together. I really should socialize a bit more with your friends’ parents. Mothers need to stick together.” I really didn’t know where she was going with that. “As mothers do, we talked about our kids. I turns out that you and Frank have a lot in common. As she described Frank’s prepubescent years, I found many similarities between you two. I thought, as she described personality traits in Frank, that she could have been talking about you.

“I’m going to tell you something about Frank, because since talking with his mother and seeing how similar you are that what she told me about Frank could easily apply to you. Something I hadn’t really thought about until she told me about Frank. What

I'm going to tell you is of a personal nature. I'm not sure that Frank would tell you even though you are the closest of friends. If it weren't for my nagging suspicion that it says something about you, I'd not reveal it."

Now I was confused. She sure was beating around the bush. I think she was searching for a way to say something that would be earth shattering in a way that wouldn't upset me. *'Does Frank have a dread disease; a genetic condition that I too might have?'*

She continued, "It seems that this protest of yours had brought to head something that's been going on with Frank for some time." She paused and looked at me thoughtfully. "She had suspected it and when she told Frank that I had taken you to try on your new uniforms and that she was going to do the same for him, his reaction confirmed it to her. She expected him to be a bit squeamish about it, but that wasn't the case. Right from the moment she brought it up, he was excited about it. She said he was practically bouncing off the walls as he waited for her to gather her purse and keys to go. Once there, he was right in looking at things and seemed even eager to go into the fitting room.

"Emily had noticed before that on previous occasions when Frank had been along while she was shopping, he was quite comfortable in the women's department and was freely offering opinions as to what she should buy. What's more, she said he has good taste in women's fashion and often picked out things to complete her outfit." She paused again. "What I'm going to say next is something a true friend and a person of character would keep to themselves and not allow it to affect how they interacted with their friend." She gave me a no-nonsense look. "I hope I haven't misjudged your character or the depth of your friendship with Frank.

"Emily suspects that Frank has more than a passing curiosity about girl's clothes. He's taken to wearing the girl's uniform with a great deal of ease. It was

his idea to wear it all the time to ‘get used to it, so he wouldn’t embarrass himself.’ As a matter of fact, after he stumbled around with how to say it, he wondered out loud if he shouldn’t adopt some girl’s mannerisms and take it as an opportunity to learn about girls and how they did things. But the capper was when she decided to tempt him. She told him that was a good idea and asked if he wanted to experience more feminine things. She said he agreed in a moment and wanted to know what he could do. She offered to give him a nightgown to sleep in and he accepted.” She paused again.

I took a moment to digest it all and found myself jealous of Frank. The thought of sleeping in a nightgown had my heart racing.

“At any rate, she told me this because she checked and found out that he packed the nightgown. Along with two school uniforms. If he sleeps in a nightgown, are you going to be OK with that?”

I swallowed and stammered a bit but finally managed to say, “Well, I guess. Loren and I noticed that he seemed to be really enjoying the uniform, so I guess if enjoys that, it’s a small step to a nightgown to sleep in.” My heart was racing and my breathing a bit shallow.

Chapter 14 - Mom nails it

“The thing is, Lynne, I’ve noticed the same things about you. When I’ve taken you and Loren shopping for clothes, you never shied away from giving her advice on what to buy and you’ve even taken an active part in picking out things for her to try on. While I thought that you were being a great brother and wishing my brother had taken that much interest in me, I never connected the dots... that is, that you picked the clothes for her that you’d have liked to wear if it weren’t taboo for boys to wear dresses.” She looked at me again while my heart rate ramped up. I could feel a tremor in my legs and was glad that I was

leaning on the desk. “I’m going to ask a question that I suspect you won’t want to answer. Have you ever found yourself wondering what it would be like to wear the clothes you helped pick out for Loren?”

I looked at the floor. That was a question I’d denied myself to consider. It was the root of my envy over Loren’s sundress last July. I glanced up at her and shrugged before looking at the floor again.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Mom said. “Now about the nightgown that Frank brought to sleep in. I’m sure he wants to sleep in it. That’s the reason I’m having this conversation with you right now without discussing it with your father. He’s going to be late tonight and I don’t think there would be time to discuss it with him and then have this conversation with you before you guys go to bed. Do you think you can manage to keep from making Frank uncomfortable when it comes time to go to bed?”

“I hope so.”

She looked thoughtful for a bit.

“It might help if you wore one too. Do you think you might like it if I gave you Loren’s old summer nightgown to wear while he’s here? She says it a bit too tight around her chest these days, so it’s been unused for a while.”

I’m sure my eyes got wide. I know I was visibly trembling. I sucked my lips between my teeth.

“It’s OK, Lynne, if you want to. Emily has decided to let Frank explore his feminine side as far as he wants. I’ll have to discuss this with your father, but I’m inclined to give you the same freedom. Emily has researched it online and is of the opinion that to do otherwise would be emotionally and maybe mentally unhealthy for Frank.

“So, do I get Loren’s old nighty and put it in your drawer before you guys go up to bed?”

Dad had been on a business trip for the last three days and his plane didn't get in until some time after eight. So I'd see him before bedtime. My folks like to have some adult time so on week nights, while we don't have to go to bed before ten, we always go up to our room by nine. Usually, I go up even earlier than that. I use my laptop to get online and chat with the guys or play games. That night was no exception. Frank and I went to my room about eight o'clock. Instead of going online to chat or do Facebook, Frank and I called up English pub pool, an online game he liked. His dad had a pool table in their basement family room. Unlike a lot of those kinds of games, it could be played as two players.

As we played, I thought about what Mom had told me about exploring the feminine aspects and how Frank's parents had decided to give him free rein in that area. She had said she was inclined to do the same for me, pending Dad's approval. *'Do I really want that? If I did explore it, what would I find?'* I knew I wasn't as macho as a lot of the guys at school. I wasn't a sissy or anything but I did tend towards being a geek rather than an athlete. And Mom did have a point. What Loren wore was a lot more interesting than what was available for me. Aside from my school uniform, I tended to wear jeans and T-shirts a lot and shoes were mostly sneakers. In warmer weather, I wear shorts, usually the baggy knee-length kind. I have a dark blue pair and a black pair; I also have a pair of olive green cargo shorts that are a bit dressier. When I went clothes shopping with Mom and Loren, I did get involved in picking out Loren's things. Loren had mentioned that I had a good fashion sense and often consulted me when she was dressing for a special occasion as how to coordinate her outfit, even to the accessories.

Due to my preoccupation with that conversation and Frank's previous experience with the game, he kicked my butt big time. Three in a row of straight pool. I managed to get one out of four in 9 ball, a best three out of five match. But in Snooker, a game I'd



never heard of, he shot circles around me. Three devastating games in a row. Scores like 47 to 28 and 49 to 21. But the capper was when he won while there were still 35 points available on the table; I had 11 points and he gave me 4 of those. The stupid game gives points to your opponent when you don't hit a ball or hit the wrong ball or sink the cue ball or, worse yet, sink the wrong ball. And all the balls have a different point value and even if you get ahead by more than a point or two, the other guy can wipe it out and take the lead by sinking one ball. The site takes pity on you when you're overmatched and calls the game when you clearly don't have a chance of winning or even making a good show. To say I was overmatched is a real understatement.

Around 9:30 we decided to get ready for bed. I opened my drawer to get out my pajamas. My eyes fell on the nightie Mom had managed to slip in there without me noticing.

“Ah, Frank,”

“Yeah?”

“You mentioned that you wanted to stay in character while we were protesting...”

“Yeah; you do too, right?”

“Well, yeah, so I was wondering, how do you do that at night? I mean wearing boy's pajamas would kind make you slip, wouldn't it?”

His face colored a bit. “Well, my mom had the same thought, so she gave me this to sleep in.” He held up a nightgown. Compared to the one in my drawer, his was kind of plain. It was pale blue with straps that were an inch wide that formed a square neckline. It had miniature lace around the neckline and the hem which hung straight down from the shoulders. The look in his eyes said he was searching for understanding.

“Oh, well I guess our mothers are of like mind.” I held up my nightie. It was yellow and had puffy little sleeves that barely cover the shoulder and the neckline was cut low to show some cleavage, which I didn’t have and Loren did. The nightie itself hung loosely down to mid-thigh to a ruffled hem line. The center of the neckline dipped a little and sported a thin bow as did the ruffled hem of the sleeves.

Frank smiled and tossed his nightgown on the foot of the bed and started to get undressed.

Chapter 15 - Exploring the feminine

Mom woke us about eight the next morning. I was surprised that we slept so late. I guess Frank and I had talked later into the night than I thought. We talked about our feelings about cross-dressing. I took a while for us to really open up. Frank admitted to me that he brought up the whole idea of wearing skirts because he had been dying for an excuse to wear the clothes. He told me that he had been fascinated with girls’ clothing for a couple of years. His cousin told him about a neighbor of a friend that was caught cross-dressing by his parents and dragged outside and marched up and down the street in broad daylight for the neighbors to see. His father hoped that he’d be humiliated enough to never do it again but his cousin told him that the guy just got better at not getting caught. The original incident took place five years ago when the guy was fourteen and before the guys father died. His cousin said that when his dad died, the guy started going out dressed as a girl. That’s what got Frank to wondering about the whole dressing-up idea. Over the last year, he fought the idea of getting into his mother’s clothes. So when he saw that the dress code didn’t specify who the skirt option was for, he thought it was his chance to experience it.

I admitted that while I hadn’t been thinking of crossdressing like he had, since the protest started

I'd enjoyed it, especially wearing the skirt; since the trip to the mall where the sales clerk had offered to let me try on, I too had been wondering about all the other clothes girls wore. He then asked me if Loren could manage to give me opportunity to try on other things. would I do it? I thought about it and decided that I should because if I didn't ,I'd probably regret not doing it later, even if I never really wanted to go any farther with crossdressing.

"I've got French toast in the oven keeping warm," Mom informed us. She tossed a robe to Frank and crossed to my closet where she took a robe that matched my nightgown off the hook behind the door where I usually kept my terrycloth robe. "Put your robes on and come on down," she said and left as quickly as she came.

Frank looked at me wide eyed, "She... she saw me in my nightgown."

I shrugged. "Yeah?"

"Has she seen you in your nightgown before?"

"Well, no, but then this is the first time I've worn it," I told him. "I've got to go to the bathroom," I continued.

I scampered across the hall and did my business sitting, like I did while wearing the school uniform skirt. When I got back, Frank was still sitting on the bed with the robe bunched up in his hands. I picked up the robe Mom had tossed me and put it on. It was a curious feeling. The nightgown was two layers of slick synthetic, probably nylon or polyester, something like that.

"I've got to go to the bathroom too," Frank said, heading for the door. He stopped in the hall and turned back toward my room. "Are you really going to just go down like that?"

“Sure, why wouldn’t I? That’s what Mom said to do. I don’t think she wants to keep the French toast warm forever.”

“Nobody, not even my mother has seen me in my nightgown. Oh sure, she knows I sleep in it. After all, she gave it to me, but I’ve never let her see me in it.”

“Well, Mom’s already seen you in it and she gave you that robe, so it will cover up the nightgown.”

Frank looked at the robe in his hands and nodded. “Gotta pee,” he said and scurried toward the bathroom.

“I’ll see you downstairs,” I called through the door.

“Where’s Frank?” Mom wanted to know.

“He’s in the bathroom. He’ll be down in a minute.”

“Good,” Mom said as she dished up my French toast. “I talked with your father last night. We called Frank’s mother and had a long conversation with her. We’re all of the same mind. We’re going to let you guys determine just how extensively you want to pursue this girl’s clothes thing.”

I shot a look at Loren who was grinning. Mom picked up on my concern.

“Loren needs to know. She is going to be around this weekend. Not to mention that if you decide to experiment, you’ll need a source and perhaps a guide familiar with the feminine world. I presume that you and especially Frank would be more comfortable with her being involved rather than me.”

Just then we could hear Frank’s footsteps on the stairs. I looked toward the kitchen door, then back to Mom and then Loren. Loren winked at me.

“You’re just in time, Frank. Sit down, I’ll dish your French toast.”

I’ve got to hand it to Frank. While it was clear that he was uncomfortable to be around my mother in his nightgown, he soldiered on and ate his breakfast. As we were cleaning up, Mom let us in on the latest.

“Frank, just so you know, we talked with your mother. We feel that both of you seem to be taking to wearing the girl’s uniform really well. It has occurred to us that perhaps the two of you may be inclined to explore other girl’s clothes. The four of us feel that you should be allowed to choose just to what extent you’d like to do that. To that end, I’ve asked Loren to help you.”

Frank’s eyes bugged out. I could tell his mind was whirling. Whether it was with excitement about the possibility or with fear as to just where this was going was uncertain.

Mom went on, launching into what could have been a summation in court. It’s the lawyer in her; I’ve seen her do it on more than one occasion. “I’ve sworn Loren to secrecy about this. You and Lynne are in the driver’s seat here. It’s up to you whether or not you want to try something more or if you’ll just maintain the status quo. Dad is out for the day playing golf and expects to close some deal he’s been working on, so he won’t be home until dinner. I’ll be out for most of the day, so it’s up to you three to come to some agreement about just what you’ll do. I’ve instructed Loren to be of assistance to you, rather than to lead. That is, she’ll react to your requests rather than suggest things for you to do. If you feel you would be too embarrassed to do anything, then you are not under any obligation to do it. However, if we’ve read the situation right, Loren has a large wardrobe. Some of it I’m sure will fit you and she’s willing to share as you desire.”

Chapter 16 - Time to Decide

True to her word, Mom was out of the house in less than ten minutes. As Frank and I went upstairs to get dressed, Loren followed us.

“Hey guys, before you get dressed, I think you should decide just what it is you want to get dressed in. As I remember, you two expressed some curiosity about my sundress.” She looked at us for a few seconds.

“I’ll be in my room. Let me know if you want to satisfy that curiosity.”

She passed us on the stairs and slipped into her room, closing the door. Neither Frank nor I said anything as we went to my room. And neither of us made any move to get dressed. He sat on my bed and I plopped into my desk chair. For a long while, neither of us looked at the other. It was a stalemate. I warred with myself. *I’m a boy dammit. Boys don’t wear dresses.* It was a futile argument. I was adamant about not wearing dresses yet for the past three weeks, I’d worn nothing but a skirt and blouse seven days a week. What’s more, I was wearing a nice silky nightgown with a matching robe. *What a hypocrite you are!*

But it was Frank who cracked. Apparently he’d been having the same internal struggle as I had.

“Lynne?” he asked tentatively, “What do you think? Should we do it? I mean, when will we have another chance.”

He seemed like he was still struggling and there was a pleading tone in his voice that seemed to beg me to say I wanted to do it.

“I... I think you’re right. I mean, we’ve both admitted that we wanted to know what it’s like. But what if we like it? Then what?”

“I don’t know but I know that if I don’t, I’ll kick myself and regret it the rest of my life.”

He’d hit the nail on the head. As much as I knew I was going against the norm, I would regret it if I didn’t do it.

I nodded and started toward my door. Frank followed me as I walked back to Loren’s room. I knocked.

“Come in.”

Loren had two sundresses laid out on her bed. I eyed them with trepidation. *Can I really do this? Wearing a dress in no way advances our protest.* I’d have loved to say that it held no attraction to me but that wouldn’t be exactly true. Ever since Frank and I admitted that we had some curiosity about such a thing, it had preyed on my mind more than I was willing to admit, even to myself.

Frank, on the other hand, was drawn to Loren’s bed with a look of wonder on his face. He reached out tentatively and touched the green one. He turned to me with a look that spoke of dreams come true.

“I want to wear this one,” he said in almost a whisper.

“Hey guys,” Loren said.

We turned toward her.

“It’s obvious that you’re going to have take off your nightgowns and I’m not interested in seeing you in your underwear, so the first thing you need to do is pull these half-slips on under your night gowns.”

She handed us each a beige half-slip.

“I’ll turn my back. Let me know when you’ve done that.”

She turned toward her dresser and Frank and I turned away from her. Frank glanced at me with a look of glee on his face. When we were done, we turned back toward Loren.

“We’re done,” I told her.

She turned back and handed me a package of nylon panties.

“If you’re going to do this, you should do it right. I don’t know a girl who wears her school underwear any more than they have to. Part of changing out of the school uniform is changing underwear. So you guys can hash out which pair you end up wearing.”

I looked down at the package to see there were three pair; white, blue and pink. I didn’t want to appear eager so I offered Frank first choice.

He opened the package and took out the pink pair.

“I think I’ll do the pink, OK?”

I could tell he was nervous. I nodded. I nearly picked out the white, but then thought that would be rather boring, so I took the blue.

“Same as before, I’ll turn around,” Loren said.

We turned as well and off came the cotton school panties and on went the nylon. Once I had them on, I shuddered. It was another sensory overload. I glanced at Frank; his eyes were closed and he was rubbing the material of the slip over where the panties would be. My hand unconsciously moved to the same spot and massaged it.

“Are you two decent yet?”

Loren’s voice snapped me out of my trance. I turned toward her and croaked out, “Yes.”

She turned back, holding a bra in each hand. She handed me one and went to help Frank put his on. I

took the opportunity to examine the garment. It seemed heavy. The cups were rigid, nearly. There was something solid around the bottom edge. I'd seen Loren's bras in the wash and only some of them had that feature. But none of them had the well-formed cups like this one had. They were thicker at the bottom than at the top which was lace-trimmed. I felt the thick part. It was soft and squishy and firm at the same time.

When I looked up at Frank, I was astounded. He had cleavage. It looked like breasts were trying flow out above the bra. *Where did they come from? I've seen him bare chested more than one and just a few minutes ago, he was as flat chested as me.*

I watched Frank cup his new appendages as Loren fitted me into the other bra. I refused to call it mine. Frank looked up and there was absolute glee on his face. He was in front of the mirror in a hot second. He turned this way and that, sticking out his chest.

I looked down as Loren reached into the cups and pulled my pecs up while she held the bra down. When she was through, I had that same cleavage as Frank. Again, my hand moved on its own to feel my chest.

Loren said, "Time to put on the dresses. Which dress do you want?"

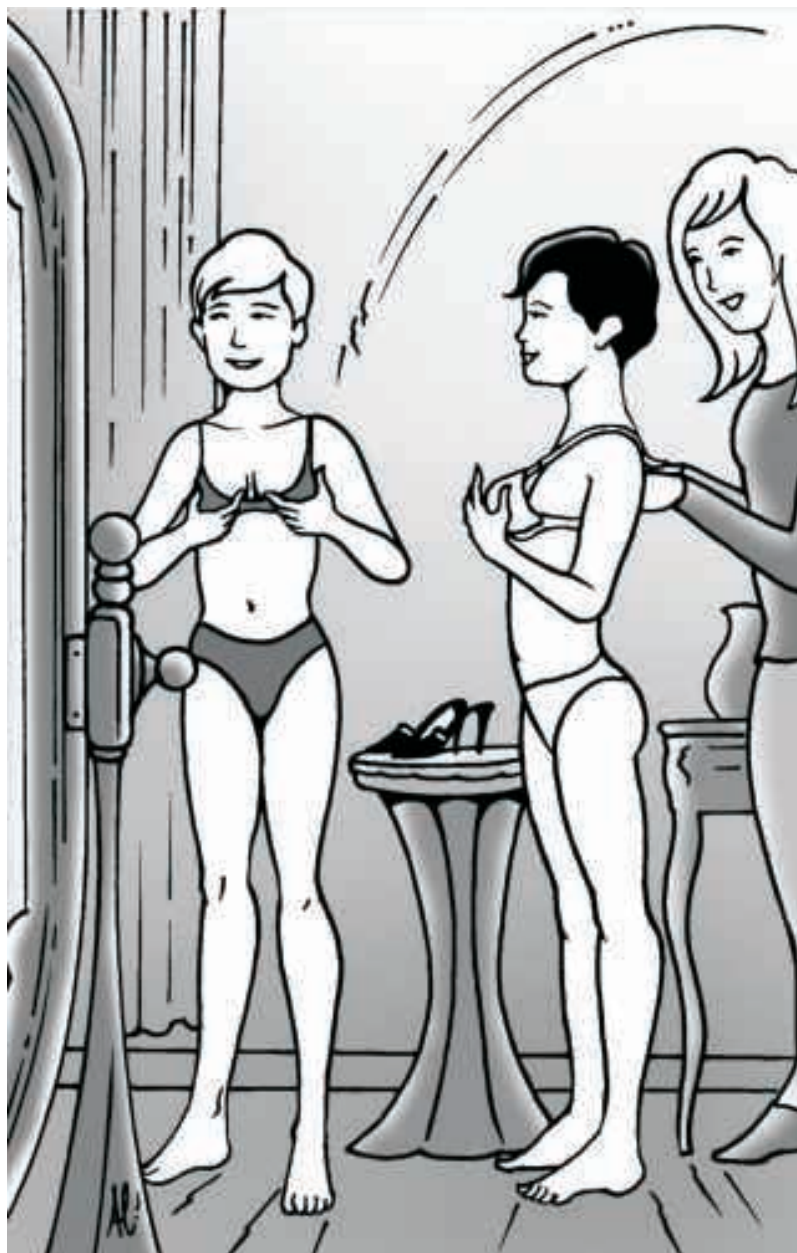
"Let Frank choose first."

Loren looked at Frank expectantly.

"The green one?"

Loren picked it up and helped Frank put it on. I watch with part fascination and part horror. It was really happening. We were going to wear dresses. I was torn. *I'm boy. A real boy; boys don't wear dresses.*

Once Frank was clad in the green dress, Loren turned to me with the yellow one. Mechanically, I co-



operated as she slid the dress over my head. This was unreal. As Loren pulled the material in to the right position, I looked at Frank in front of the mirror again. He was swishing the dress back and forth as he stood mesmerized by his own reflection.

“There you are,” Loren said. “All we need now are shoes.”

She had obviously been prepared because she just bent over and picked up two pair of sandals from her massive collection without even searching. That was a good sign she’d already selected what she wanted us to wear.

“OK guys, sit while I adjust the straps to fit your feet.”

She first fitted a pair of white wedge-heeled sandals on Frank and then slipped a low-heeled beige pair on me. I looked at Frank’s shoes and wondered if he’d be able to walk in the heels. To my surprise he stood and, with nary a wobble, marched over to the mirror. I stood and followed him over. There in the mirror were two young girls wearing sundresses and sandals. Even with our hair doing whatever it wanted because we hadn’t done anything with it since getting up except run our hands through it to get it off our faces, there was no mistaking we looked like girls. Frank was obviously delighted while I was flabbergasted.

Yeah, I knew that Loren was able to mess with my hair so that while I was out and about in the school uniform at first glance people wouldn’t see me as a boy wearing a girl’s uniform, but with this dress on, it was just too feminine for the wearer to be anything but a girl.

Loren began brushing Frank’s hair as he watched in the mirror. I think she just did it there because she knew that she couldn’t pry him away from the mirror. When she was through, with the help of a barrette, his hair screamed “Girl.”

By the time she was through with me, I was in the same boat. It was my turn to be fascinated with my reflection. I was sure that some kind of magic had happened that if I were to look, there would be physical evidence that I was a girl.

“OK, you two. Get out of here so I can get dressed.” It was then that I realized she was still in her nightgown and robe.

Frank and I started for her door. “Frank, be sure to hold on to the banister and go slow on the stairs. The heels can be tricky until you get used to them.”

Chapter 17 - Frank spill his guts

I followed Frank down the stairs. He did rest his hand on the banister on the way down, but he looked straight ahead and didn't falter once. He was as relaxed as if he were wearing tennis shoes. He went straight to the front hall and stood in front of the mirror, grinning like the Cheshire Cat. He was definitely acting strange. He seemed extremely happy.

“Frank?”

“Ah, yeah,”

“I couldn't help but notice that you looked really relaxed coming down the stair. The way Loren was talking, I thought you'd have to take it slow but you practically trotted down.”

“Oh, that.”

He looked back at the stairs and then leaned in toward me and said in sotto voice, “I'll tell you about it but I don't want Loren to hear, OK?”

“Yeah, sure.”

I looked at the stairs. We probably had ten, maybe twenty minutes before Loren came down but standing here at the foot of the stairs, she might hear us talking if she went to the bathroom to

do her hair or put on makeup or whatever. I motioned for him to follow me. I led him though the kitchen and the dining room.

“OK, so what’s the story with the shoes?”

“Well actually, it’s not the first time I’ve worn heels.” I raised my eyebrows. “My mother and I have the same size feet. I got curious a couple of years ago and when she was out, I tried on her shoes. It took some practice, but I can walk in three-inch heels easy and with a little effort I can do four-inch heels.”

“A little practice? Like for how long?”

I had the three-inch heels down in about a month.”

“A month, like every day?”

“Naw, only two or three times a week.”

“You’re alone that often?”

“Yeah, my dad doesn’t get home until six or seven and Mom’s home at five except Tuesdays and Thursday when she’s not home ‘til six and usually they both have something to do at the same time one of the days over the weekend.”

“Man, I’m almost never alone. When Mom and Dad are gone, Loren’s here.”

“The perks of being an only child.”

“Wait, who gives you a ride home? I know it’s not your mom but I thought it was someone who would be at your house.”

“Oh that’s my mom’s PA. She picks me up from school and drops me at home. Then she goes right back to the office.”

“Your mom can have her PA do that?”

“Yeah, she’s the CEO and Mom and Dad are majority stock holders. You know she works at the company my grandfather founded.”

“Oh, no, I didn’t. I’m mean, I knew she was in upper management but I didn’t know it was your family’s company.”

“Yeah, her dad was a real entrepreneur. He and a friend from college started the company two years after graduating. It started kind of slow. As a matter of fact, it did so poorly that his friend wanted out about five years after the started so Granddad bought him out for a song. Shortly after that, he did something his partner didn’t have the guts to do; he took the company public and sold about forty percent of the stock. With the capital, he was able to hire some good people and the company’s been booming ever since.”

As interesting as that was, I want to know more about his learning to walk in heels so I brought the conversation back to that.

“So you have a lot of time alone at home to learn how to walk in heels.”

“Un huh, I started about two years ago. My feet have gotten a little bit bigger so when I wear Mom’s shoes, I have to wear hose.”

“Hose, like pantyhose?”

“Well, not at first. I just borrowed her knee-highs. I got curious about pantyhose but I was afraid I’d ruin them. Last summer, I was able to find a convenience store that sold pantyhose and the girl who works there is kind of freaky. You know, tats and piercings; she doesn’t bat an eye when I buy two or three pair.”

“So you wear pantyhose too?”

“Yeah, you should try it. I wish we had some right now. I’m sure it would be great over the panties.”

“What else do you wear when you practice in heels?”

“I rescued one of Mom’s robes from the Goodwill bag when I started wearing pantyhose. I’ve thought about wearing her clothes only she’s enough bigger than I am that they wouldn’t even come close to fit-

ting. The robe works because I can wrap it around me.”

“So today is really the first time you worn girl’s clothes... that is except for the school uniform.”

“Yeah. This is much better than Mom’s old robe. What about you? Do you think it’s neat?”

I wanted to lie to him and tell him that it was kind of boring but inside I knew it was the greatest thing I’d ever done.

“Yeah, I kind of imagined what it would be like but I had no idea. I mean I had a little idea because of the uniform, but this sundress and all the underwear... no comparison.”

Loren’s voice cut through the house.

“Hey, where’d you guys get off to?”

I grabbed Frank’s arm and hauled him into the kitchen.

“Kitchen,” I yelled, as I opened the fridge.

When Loren came in I was handing Frank a Dr Pepper.

“Want one?” I asked Loren

Loren convinced us to just chill and watch some chick flick. She said that’s what girls at home would do on a Saturday. Frankly, I was surprised how much I enjoyed them. I always thought I’d think they were dorky but if you let yourself get involved in the story, they’re pretty good. I think it’s one of those thing boy just don’t let themselves do because it’s too girlie.

We drank pop, munched chips and fruit and talked about the characters in the movies. Yeah, movies, as in more than one. We got so involved we didn’t even hear Mom come back. She was standing

in the door from the entry smiling when I noticed her. All of a sudden I was self-conscious.

“Mom! When did you get home?”

“Just a few minutes ago. I see you decided to go for it. I was just observing how natural you guys look in the dresses.”

Frank jumped up and had the look that suggested he was a deep breath away from running. I think the only thing that stopped him was that he had no place to run to.

“Don’t let me disturb you. I’m going to be busy in my office for a couple of hours.”

With that, she winked and turned back toward her office

“Do you think we should change clothes?” Frank wanted to know.

“No,” Loren told him. “She knew you’d probably be wearing dresses when she came back. We discussed which ones I’d loan you. Besides, we’ve got about forty-five minutes left in the movie. Sit down and enjoy it.”

It was about five o’clock when Mom appeared again and asked, “Could I get you girls to help with dinner? I didn’t realize how late it was getting. I don’t have time to do the roast I was planning on, so I’m going to broil the chick but I need to get it cut up and I need someone to put together a salad and someone to peel potatoes.”

So we found ourselves in the kitchen again, just like the previous night helping Mom.

Chapter 18 - An offer that couldn't be refused

"Thanks for helping with dinner," Mom said as we all sat down.

"I for one really appreciate dinner being done on time," Dad offered. "Were you working on your week-end again?" he directed at Mom.

"Partly," she replied. "But what really put me behind the eight ball was my conversation with Frank's mother." Dad glanced at Frank and raised his eyebrows to Mom.

"As you know, I've agreed to keep her informed as to the level of feminine activity while Frank is visiting. So when I finish with my work, I called her and we got to comparing notes on our part-time daughters. Time got away from me."

At this, Frank and I were giving rapt attention.

Mom turned to Frank and said, "We, that is your mother and I, feel that both you and Lynne will not be giving up the course you've embarked on for this protest, given the seeming level of comfort you two have shown, not only in the school uniform, but wearing dresses today. Loren tells me that you two took to the dresses like ducks to water. If that's the case, to repress it could cause some psychological distress. To that end, your mother suggested that if we have time," she looked at Loren, "it might be in the best interested of all concerned if we took the two of you to the mall and picked up a basic girl's wardrobe for you. She'll reimburse me up to one hundred and fifty dollars. So what do you guys say? Are you up for a little retail therapy tomorrow?"

I looked at Frank, thinking that he would balk; at least I was hoping that he would. I knew in my heart of hearts that I would be hard pressed to give up girl's clothes when the protest came to an end, especially

since I'd tasted the finer feel of a dress and quality underwear. Frank's face lit up like a kid on Christmas morning."

"You mean buy dresses and things like this?" he said, plucking at the bodice of his dress. "Yeah, that'd be cool, wouldn't it, Lynne?"

Somewhere inside I knew that I should throw on the breaks for this runaway train I'd found myself on, but I couldn't, given his excitement. What's more that excitement was contagious. I found myself nodding vigorously. *We could really try on dresses, not just dream about it.*

I looked at my dad to see what his reaction was. He just looked smug and nodded his head.

"So Loren, I assume that you'll be happy to accompany us, particularly if I give you a bit of a budget to shop for yourself as well."

"Oh yes," Loren said smiling, "retail therapy is my favorite kind of therapy."

It was with some trepidation that I walked into the mall, wearing another of Loren's dresses. Frank and I had traded shoes. He insisted that I try the heeled sandals when we got ready for bed last night. So I had spent about fifteen minutes waking around my room in my nightgown wearing the heeled sandals. It was a totally new experience. There was something decidedly feminine about it, almost as much as wearing the dress, so in the morning it didn't take anything to get me to wear them. But I wasn't entirely confident in my ability to handle them. Frank assured me that in a relatively short time I'd be totally accustomed to them

That was my only real concern. After being at a mall twice and obviously being taken for a girl in my school uniform, there was no doubt in my mind that I'd pass and Frank looked even better than I did.

What's more, he had the mannerisms down. It was like he'd been practicing,

Mom wanted to observe us and people's reaction to us so we stopped by the Orange Julius/DQ for a bite and a drink. Mom had Frank and I order our own as she and Loren observed. Just like I knew would happen, the girl behind the counter didn't even blink.

As we sat at the table nearby partaking of the treat, Mom said in sotto voce, "You know Frank, I should have thought of this earlier, but we can't call you Frank while we're here. It would be totally out of character."

"Yeah, I've been thinking about that. I guess Fran would work. But since we've not been practicing it, someone might forget. It would be easier to quickly correct if you called me Frankie. I knew a girl named Francine once and that was her nickname."

"Francine... Frankie; that would work. Can we all remember that?" Mom said, looking at Loren and me.

"OK, Frankie, eat up, we have some shopping to do," I said, grinning.

"I think I like Francine," Loren said. "I think I'll use that. I don't think I'll forget, but if I do, you're right, it'd be easy to turn 'Frank' into 'Frankie'."

All day long, I was fascinated by Frank's... Frankie's exuberance. While I still had some reservations about going into the fitting rooms, he showed no such concern but led the way. Thankfully, there were no communal fitting rooms, but still... Frank...ie must have tried on four dresses for every one he bought. I tended not to take anything to the fitting rooms unless I'd already made up my mind that I wanted it. But Frankie followed Loren's lead and took the maximum into each dressing room and sometimes didn't even choose one to buy.

I'd reached my one-fifty budget long before he and Loren did. Mom insisted that I continue to try on. She said it would look totally off for a girl to be on a shopping trip with her friends and not be trying on. Mom even got in on the act. She tried on a few dozen dresses and bought two for herself.

It turns out Frankie was right, I did acclimate to the heels. By the time I'd been in the fitting room for the third time, I'd totally forgotten about what shoes I was wearing and was totally into what dress I wanted.

Somewhere around six we'd all maxed out our budget and were loading packages in Mom's car when her phone rang. It was Dad, wondering about dinner. When Mom told him we had just finished and would be home in about an hour, he suggested that we meet him at a restaurant halfway.

Dad was waiting in the parking lot when we go to restaurant. Mom took him by the arm and they kissed a quick peck. She turned toward us and said to Dad, "You'll be happy to know that Lynne and Frankie passed the muster. Not one person gave any indication that they suspected either of them weren't what they appeared to be."

"Frankie?" Dad asked.

"We can't call him 'Frank' when someone else might hear. So Frank became Francine and we call her Frankie, because it's easy to correct ourselves if we forget."

Dad smiled. "Lynne doesn't have that problem."

"No he doesn't. I lay that off on you. Since you were in charge of telling the hospital what to put on the birth records, you insisted that we give both kids unisex names so you wouldn't have to remember two names."

Chapter 19 - Frank's dismay

The restaurant was another trial by fire. Even after spending most of the day in the mall and dealing with countless sales people and other customers walking past or shopping nearby, somehow, going into a restaurant where we'd be enclosed and dealing with the same server multiple times for an hour or more was nerve wracking. *No pressure, not at all.*

We were seated at a table for six. Nothing was unusual about that. Where else would you put a party of six? Our server was an older lady, probably near the end of her career as a waitress. She reminded me of my grandmother, only a lot more energetic. She had a spring in her step, whereas Grandma seems to shuffle a bit when she walks. She said her name was Ilene. She smiled at Frankie... I almost said Frank... a lot. I felt that surely she must have read us but was simply amused by the idea of two boys in dresses.

Frankie's world nearly came apart when his mother walked up and joined us at the table. Before then he was having the time of his life, being out and having the world treat him as a girl. I was going to have to talk to him about that. His enjoyment of our adventure was contagious. I was having a great time too despite my nerves being on edge each time we dealt with a new person or a new place. I was on the verge of being an adrenaline junky.

But Frankie, that is Frank – his face went white when he looked up and saw his Mom. Our waitress had just served us our drinks when she showed up.

“Hello everyone. I got here as quickly as I could. I see you have just gotten your drinks.” She turned to the waitress who was standing nearby. “Could bring me some coffee, with cream please?” The waitress nodded and headed to the coffee station. For the first time I noticed that there was still a menu on the table. Frank's mom picked it up and when the waitress brought her coffee, she ordered the Stroganoff.

When the waitress had taken her order and left the vicinity, Mrs. Parsons, looked at Frank. “Well sweetheart, have you enjoyed your weekend with Loren?”

Frank swallowed hard and nodded. Mrs. Parsons smiled and nodded.

“Did you find a lot of clothes to buy?”

Frank licked his lips and nodded again. His hand gripped the glass with his soda in it with such intensity it thought maybe he'd crush it. His knuckles were turning white.

Mrs. Parsons smiled. “What's the matter, Frank...ie, cat got your tongue? I thought you'd be boiling over with tales of your adventure and the thing you'd bought.”

Frank shook his head and swallowed hard. “Mom, what are you doing here?”

She smiled. I'm sure you know that I've been informed of your level of feminine activity,” she paused and Frank nodded. “When Lynne's mother texted me that you were all coming to dinner here, I decided I'd like to see you in action and texted back that I'd be joining you.” She looked at Mom and said, “I take it you didn't pass that information on.”

“I thought that Frankie would be a little dismayed at that thought so I decided that it would be best if you just showed up unannounced.”

Mrs. Parsons nodded and returned her attention to Frank. She smiled as she said, “You seem to be uncomfortable with my presence. Did you not want me to see you in a dress?”

Frankie shrugged.

“You knew that I bankrolled your shopping trip, didn't you?” Frankie nodded. “Well, didn't you think that I'd want to see what I paid for?”

Frankie finally found his voice. "I... I guess."

"Well then, don't you think it would be reasonable to expect that I'd want to see you wear them?" Frankie nodded. "Well then, seeing you now is just a little preview."

Just then the waitress started bringing out meals. Conversation was a little subdued while we all began eating.

Frankie rode to our house with his mother. Once we were all in the house, he seemed to have recovered and was enjoying himself again. Of course you know we had to put on a fashion show for Dad and Frank's mom.

The two hours were spent with one of us come strutting through the living room in one of our new outfits. When Frank and I were in my room changing, I managed to question him some. He finally admitted that he had had a fascination with high heels since he was about five years old. And he allowed as how women's and girl's fashion had crept into his list of interests at about age eight. He confirmed what my mother had told me about him advising his mother on what she should buy when shopping for herself. And that she liked his suggestions so much that she would arrange her shopping trip to fall on times when he could go with her. When I asked him if he'd ever tried on any girl's clothes before the protest started, he denied it, but did admit to looking longingly at the girl's section when he went with his mother.

At the end of the evening, Frank packed up his things and went home with his mother. Before they left, Mrs. Parsons invited me to come over to their place the next weekend.

"Please say you'll come, Lynne," he begged. "Maybe Mom will takes shopping again, or at least out to dinner somewhere."

That pretty much told me I would be visiting Francine, not Frank.

“You should go,” Loren told me. “You and Francine have a lot in common and there’s not anyone else you can enjoy your new clothes with.”

The weekend left me with lots of unanswered questions. Questions I hadn’t even considered before; that I hadn’t even known existed before. That night, even though Frank wasn’t there, I slept in the nightgown.

Chapter 20 - Back to the protest

Getting back into my school uniform was a bit of a letdown. It meant going back to the approved underwear and the frumpy skirt, blouse. And then there was my hair. I’d had it decidedly feminine over the weekend. But it wouldn’t do to give the guys any hint of what Frank and I had been up to the last two days.

When Loren and I got to school, we were in for another surprise. Hank Colson was out front waiting for us wearing a uniform skirt. He was still wearing his boy’s shirt and blazer and his boy’s shoes, but he was wearing a skirt.

“Thank God you guys are here. I was feeling nervous, standing around in a skirt all by myself. I’ve been trying to work up the courage to go inside for the last twenty minutes.”

“So you’ve decided to join the guys in the protest?” Loren wanted to know.

“Yeah, my mom went and bought some skirts for me. She told me if I didn’t wear them to school, she wouldn’t buy me any approved shorts if the protest succeeded, so here I am. It sure is cooler, but I feel really weird with my legs bare and all.”

“Yeah,” I told him. “It really took some getting used to, especially the underwear.”

Hank blinked at me. “The underwear?”

“Yeah, your mother did get the underwear for you, didn’t she?”

“No... what are you talking about?”

“The dress code says that approved underwear has to be worn under the skirt. You wear boxers, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but how will they know I’m not wearing ‘approved underwear?’”

“They do underwear checks.”

“Really? Who checks your underwear?”

“Coach MacCallan and Coach Johnson. We have to go by his office every morning. Most times he just tells us to go to class but every now and then, he checks to see we have on the right underwear.”

“Oh man, what am I going to do?”

“Wait right here,” Loren told him and headed into the school.

While she was gone, Frank showed up and Hank questioned him about the underwear thing. I think he thought I was jerking his chain. While Frank was talking, Larry Carson showed up and confirmed our story. Hank was visibly upset now.

Loren came trotting out of the school and handed Hank a paper bag. Hank looked inside and shot Loren a look.

“You gotta be kidding. I can’t wear that.”

“Then you’ll be sent home and probably given a one-day suspension. These guys are wearing the un-

derwear. If you're smart, you'll go into the restroom and put those on and go with the guys to the coach's office to get your underwear check."

"That's crazy. Why do they care what kind of underwear I'm wearing."

"For the same reason they care what kind of underwear the girls wear."

"You mean they check the girl's underwear."

"Yeah, if you get on the wrong side of one of the teachers. And by participating in the protest, you're on the wrong side of Old McDonald himself. So you can count on it.

"Oh yeah. I borrowed those from a friend of mine who always has two pair of underwear in her locker just in case she has an accident. I told her you'll bring her three pair of new ones as a thank you for giving you those. So when your mother buys yours, be sure to get three extra.

Hank wasn't the last guy to join our protest. As more and more parents heard about our protest, more and more guys wear pressed into the protest. In all it ended up that we had two dozen skirted boys at Chapman's Academy.

We didn't think we had won because we went the rest of the year in skirts without any indication that the dress code would be changed.

What did change was that when I got home from school each day, I put on one of my new outfits and changed out of the dreaded school underwear. And yeah, Frank's mother did take us shopping and so by the end of that weekend, we both had a sizable girl's wardrobe.

Over the summer, we looked for excuses to go places and do things as girls. Frank's mother was really up for taking us places. She even took us for a

weekend out of town a couple of time and Loren went with us to the movies. I almost didn't wear any boy's clothes the whole summer. Things had really turned around. Now I felt strange when I was wearing pants and as far as wearing boy's underwear. I only did that once. It was just too weird.

We had sort of an informal meeting of the guys the last day of school. About twenty of the two dozen of us congregated out front of the school and mourned the failure of the protest. The weather had actually cooled off and we really didn't need to wear the skirts but it was the principle of the thing that kept us going. But even at that, we all allowed as how we'd be back to trousers in the fall.

I guess that's why Frank and kind of went whole hog on the girl's clothing over the summer. It was kind of like a last fling before the end of it all. To be honest, though, I don't think that either of us really thought that that summer would really be the end. I wanted to believe it but deep down I suspected that I would always want to indulge in the finer things, aka lingerie and dresses.

Epilog - Success

That fall, I put on my boy's uniform and headed into school. I couldn't bring myself to wear boxers under the trousers any more than I could wear them under my jeans that summer. What's more, I cheated. I had no reason to believe they'd be doing any underwear checks on boys and I didn't have any gym classes that year so I wore the nylon undies.

I met with Frank as I ascended the steps into the school.

“Hiya, Lynne. Ready for another year of this?”

“I guess.”

He leaned in and said in a low voice. "I couldn't give up the nice underwear, could you?"

I snapped my head around to see if anyone was in earshot.

"Shhhh." I looked around again. "No, but don't talk about it, OK?"

He just smiled back at me.

Carolyn, Loren's friend, spotted me between classes and walked with me a little.

"I was a little surprised to see you in trousers today. I got so used to seeing you guys in skirts, I kind of thought you might keep wearing them since they didn't approve shorts."

"Well, it really isn't really warm enough right now."

"So when it gets warm in the spring, you guys gonna do it again?"

"I don't know. We didn't get anywhere last year and I doubt we'd get much of a following."

"So I guess I shouldn't look forward to any trips to the mall to shop with you then," she teased.

I blushed because I'd totally love a trip to the mall with her. It was great with Mom, Loren and Frank, but it wasn't like when a real girl, well, one that wasn't related to me, was along. *I wonder what she'd say if I agreed to meet her some Saturday in a dress.*

When I got home that night, I had a stack of papers for Mom and Dad to read and sign. I dropped them on Mom's desk and went up to change and hit the books. I slipped on a skirt and blouse, and yes, I put on the bra as well. I kind of felt naked without it.

At dinner that night, Mom commented on my choice of clothes.

“I kind of picked out the clothes out of habit.” I felt I needed to justify my choice. “You know I actually did better on my homework after I started changing into a nice dress after school last year.”

“It’s OK Lynne; we really did think you’d not give it up after the protest was over.”

“So I can keep wearing this stuff when I want to?”

“Sure. Oh, and speaking of the protest, did you read this year’s revised dress code?”

“Don’t tell me, they revised it to say that only girls were allowed to wear skirts>”

“No, actually they revised it to approve shorts when temperatures are above 75.”

“Really?”

She leaned back and took a paper off the buffet behind her. It was the new dress code. And sure enough, right there in black and white: “All students will wear the school-approved uniform, which will consist of a white shirt, a school tie, a blazer with the school crest on the pocket, or sweater, trousers or skirt, the skirt to be over-the-knee, shorts (when temperatures exceed 75° Fahrenheit) and black shoes.”

“So Dad was wrong. They didn’t relegate skirts to girls only.”

“No. So do you want me to buy you some shorts or will you go back to skirts when it gets hot?”

“You’re kidding, right? Now that we’re allowed to wear shorts, the guys would freak if I showed up in a skirt again.”

Mom ruffled my hair and hugged me. “You know your father and I love you, no matter what you wear.”

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