

Had I realized it would be my last day as a man, I might have done things differently. I don't know how, exactly, but I probably wouldn't have spent my last hours sitting on the couch watching TV, that's for sure. That afternoon, my last afternoon as a man, I'd gone over to my sister, Valencia's, house to move some furniture for her. Being big and strong was one of the privileges I'd taken for granted which I was about to lose, but I didn't think anything of it at the time.

As soon as I pulled into the driveway, my big truck rumbling, Valencia came out the front door to greet me. As I got out of the car, I saw my niece peek out from her upstairs bedroom window. She waved, and I waved. We were always glad to see each other.

"Thanks for coming over," Valencia said. "The fall equinox is tomorrow..."

"... and the furniture needs to be in the proper alignment for the stars and moons and spirits," I said, laughing. I rearranged my sister's conjure room furniture four times a year on each solstice and equinox, so it would be in harmony with the elementals. Hey, it comes with the territory when you belong to a family of witches.

Valencia handed me a schematic she'd drawn showing where each piece of furniture needed to be located, with measurements down to a 16th of an inch. I knew it all had to be very precise and had brought my tape measure. "I'll let you get to it," she said, disappearing into the house.

In the past, she'd supervised me, and we'd gotten into some huge arguments, so she'd learned to just back off and let me work. She'd come in after to make sure everything was right, and I would do my best to give her nothing to be concerned about. I didn't want to hear her complain, and besides, I knew that if anything was even a little off, it could prove very dangerous if she did any conjuring.

I got to work. It was easy for me. I'm a big guy, and I lift four times a week. I'd always thought if my corporate job ever fell through I would start a moving business. As I picked and moved one of the shelves, my niece, Alexis, came bopping into the room. "Hey, Uncle Matt," she said, sitting down on the floor.

"Hey, kiddo," I said. "What's up?"

"The sky," she said, as always.

She watched me work as I moved the shelf into place, took out my tape measure and began to ease it into just the right position. "It must be cool to be so strong," Alexis said. "I bet no one ever messes with you."

Uh, oh. "Bullies again?"

"Yeah," Alexis sighed. "I just wish they would leave me alone."

My niece had just turned thirteen— what a terrible age to be— and she'd gotten her figure early. She had a body like a 20-year old, and the other girls all hated her for it, constantly giving her shit. "Haters gonna hate," I said, having talked to her a lot about the bullying issues. "You just have to stand up to them."

"I don't know how," Alexis said with a sigh, plucking at a strand of her long black hair, which, like her mother's, was streaked with blue. "I bet you could handle them no problem."

"I had to deal with my share of bullies when I was your age," I said. "It's part of life."

Alexis was quiet for a time as I moved The Arcanamium, an ancient marble slab said to have been in our family for almost a thousand years. Then, she asked a question that caught me off guard. "Uncle Matt? Have you ever, I don't know, wondered what it's like to be a girl?"

I stopped what I was doing. Her bright, pale blue eyes had a kind of intensity I had never seen. I thought I knew what was going on. "When we're young, it's normal to wonder what it would be like to be someone else. To have a different life. Just remember, no one has it easy. The grass is always greener. It's perfectly normal for you to wonder what it would be like to be a boy."

"But did you ever wonder what it was like to be a girl?"

"Sure," I lied. "I mean, if I was a girl I could say things like," and I put on a mock valley girl accent, "omigod, that's, like, so totally awesome."

Alexis laughed, but there was this odd smile on her face. She got up, "I'll start putting the things back on the shelves."

Once I'd finished and Valencia had inspected my work, asking me to make a few dozen minute adjustments, we went to the kitchen. She'd lemonade and put out some snacks. My younger niece, 10 year old Stacey, came in, her phone in hand as she pecked away. "Uncle Matt," she said, distracted, lost in her own world.

We gathered around the kitchen table.

"I got an A on my Math test," Alexis said.

"Way to go!" I said.

"By the skin of her teeth!" Valencia cut in. "It only took an all-night study session to ace the midterm exam."

"Mom!"

"Alexis is lazy," Stacey mumbled, still focused on her phone.

"Shut up!"

“You shut up! Anyway, it’s true. Mom even says it.”

“I hate you!” Alexis shouted, storming out of the room.

“I’m proud of you!” I called as her footsteps thumped up the stairs and her door slammed.

“You shouldn’t be so hard on her,” I said, disappointed another visit had gone sour.

“And what would you know about parenting?” Valencia asked. “Mr. Still Single at 26?”

“Okay, okay,” I said, not wanting to get into this fight again. “I’ll just keep quiet.”

“I got all A’s, and I didn’t have to cram,” Stacey said.

“Awesome work,” I said. “Keep it up.”

“Whatever.”

Family drama. As much as I loved my sister and her kids, I was very happy that I got to leave, go home and have some peace and quiet in my bachelor pad. I think all the stress and tension we’d had in the family when I was a kid had been part of why I’d been reluctant to settle down and start a family of my own.

I felt— off, that night. It was hard to pinpoint. There was almost a feeling like someone was tugging on me, pulling me. I should have reacted, been more alert. Like I said, I’d been born into a family of witches, though I had no powers of my own. But there is always danger. I should have known.

I should have known.

I’d been watching a football game, half paying attention, my head fuzzy, distracted. As they went to a commercial, the camera panned along a line of smiling cheerleaders, as they usually did. I got up to go to the bathroom, thinking about the cheerleader with the red hair, what good skin she had. I pushed my sweat pants down and sat down on the toilet to pee, my knees together, feet spread apart. I was thinking about the cheerleader and her skin, wondering what her secret was, when I finished and absently rolled some toilet tissues into a pad and wiped...

What the hell? I suddenly realized I’d sat down to pee— like a woman. That was— should I call Valencia in case this was... it’s no biggie, I thought, pulling my pants up, going back to watch the game.

That night I slept fitfully, tossing and turning, waking occasionally to find myself tangled in sweat soaked sheets. Then, at some point, I plunged into the deepest sleep I had ever known, a total silent blackness.

I opened my eyes and blinked, wondering, where am I? Dark purple walls. A poster. Nightmare Before Christmas. A pair of violet— were those yoga pants on the carpet? There was something on my face, in my mouth—

like cobwebs. I reached up to pull whatever that was away, and my arm brushed against something soft on my chest... or was it? I pushed myself onto my elbows, feeling my chest move and looked down to see—breasts? Jutting out from my chest, swelling out the top of a pink top.

“What the hell?” I said, hearing a squeaky, high pitched voice that sent my hands to my throat. “My voice!” I said, mostly just to hear it again, to confirm what my ears thought they’d heard.

I looked at my hands— small, soft, and i had sparkly blue polish on my nails. My wrists were so tiny. I pushed the covers down, looking past my breasts— my breasts? Slender, rounded legs, the samee blue polish on my toenails. Blue panties.

No, no, no. I am starting to put it together, to confront what all this information is telling me. I am a woman. I roll out of bed feeling my breasts sway, my hair tumbling once more in my face. I pull it back as I catch glimpses of this room— a gaming computer on a desk, a second pink desk with a mirror, all kinds of makeup. Another poster: Helluva Boss. and some kind of sexy looking raccoon. I cup my breasts to try and keep them from bouncing as I run, my wide, soft hips swiveling, and I go right for that mirror, freezing as I stare at the face in the looking glass. Light blue eyes, framed by thick, curly lashes. Black hair with blue streaks. Pale skin and a dusting of freckles across my pert little nose. Plump, pink lips.

It’s a face I know well. I am looking at my niece, Alexis, only I am her. I wave, and she waves. I lean closer to the mirror and squint. She squints. I remember her question from the day before— have you ever wondered what it’s like to be a girl? I know she did this, she switched bodies with me.

“Alexis! Damnit!” I say in that squeaky, 13-year-old girl voice. I look around for her phone. I’ll call her, get her to undo this, to switch us back. I see the note on the floor. She must’ve left it on the bed, thinking I would find it when I woke up.

I grab the note and sit— my butt feels huge. It spreads when I sit, and I feel like I am sitting on a big, plum cushion. “Ugh. I can’t stay in this body,” I think, opening the note.

Uncle Matt—

Yeah, I am sure you are a little surprised. Haha. I can’t face another day as me. My life is hell, and I just can’t deal with it. I need a break, and I know I should have asked, but you’ve always been there for me, and I need you to be me for a while. Maybe you will like it? Who knows? Anyway, thanks for doing this for me?

Oh, yeah. You can't tell anyone who you really are. Sorry, but Mom could probably just swap you back or something so I had to put in a safeguard. Oh, yeah. I keep forgetting things! You'll find you have to do whatever Mom tells you. It'll make it easier, trust me. Okay. I think that's everything.

Don't be too mad, okay? I hope you love being a girl!

Luv— Alexis.

I shook my head. Skimmed over the letter again. Teen-agers. How could she think this was a good idea? Well, once more I resolved to call her, tell her sorry but Uncle Matt really wasn't ready to be a 13 year old girl right now, get her to undo what she did. I finally spotted the sparkly pink jewel case of her phone buried among the bed clothes— I grabbed it, and thank God she had face recognition on— “Call Uncle Matt” I say, still cringing at my voice.

Shit. Number blocked. Now what? How was I supposed to contact her?

Before I decide on my course of action, I heard a knock on my door, and then it swung open. Valencia poked her head in and looked at me, exasperated. “You need to get ready,” she said. “Do you know what time it is? Hurry up.”

I tried to say ‘Valencia,’ but instead I said, “Mom...” I wanted to tell her it was me, that I was her brother, Matt, but I couldn't speak, the words wouldn't come out. I remembered her letter.

“Yes?” Valencia said, staring at me.

I gave up trying to tell her who I was. “Get ready? For what?”

“School, young lady, what else?”

She closed the door. My mouth dropped open again. School? Me? As a girl?

## Chapter Two— Alexis

I'm a man now, and I feel— powerful? Yes. Powerful. I stand up, and it's like I'm standing on a box, but it's just me. I like looking down at the world from this angle. My hands are so big and calloused, and I go to the mirror, pulling off my t-shirt, looking at my thick, broad shoulders and bulging biceps. I have Uncle Matt's face now, with his square chin and I feel like I could beat the hell out of anyone.

It's so much better than being small and weak and a girl.

I lift up the end of the bed, and it's nothing. I grabbed his mahogany dresser and pick it up— it's bulky and hard to get a grip, but once I do I lift it with ease, feeling the power in this body, and setting it back down I throw myself on the bed, laughing, and my voice is so deep.

"Hey, bro," I say, testing it out, trying to speak in those flat tones like a guy. I've been practicing that— talking like a guy, and to hear me now in that deep, powerful voice once again the word comes to me: powerful. No more squeaky mouse voice for me.

It's the middle of the night. Uncle Matt is probably still sleeping, having no idea that he's a girl now. I feel a little guilty. A little. But, I am sure he will be able to handle it better than I did.

The fact is I had to get out of my body, and out of that life.

I drop to the floor and do 10 quick pushups, then a couple of those clapping push ups, and it's so easy in this body, and there's no bouncing and jiggling from my chest. Standing, I shake my shoulders side to side, and I feel so free with my hard, flat chest and none of that extra weight swaying around, and I am so happy as I realize I will never have to wear a bra again with those stupid straps cutting into my shoulders.

Free. Free. Free. No more makeup, and running a hand through my short, neat hair I am thrilled— no more hair ties and brushing and bobby pins and all that stupid girl stuff. No more spending an hour getting ready. I bet I can do it in 10 minutes now. No more—

No more MOM. She never gets to bitch at me again, never gets to give me shit about stupid school. No more school! The old rhyme comes back to me: No more classes, no more books, no more teachers' dirty looks!

I can do anything I want whenever I want. No one gets to tell me what to do.

It almost doesn't seem real. I am a man. I am in MY apartment. I did it. I did it. I cast the spell, and I escaped.

I think back on it all now, remembering.

I'd gone up to the library in the attic. Picture floor to ceiling shelves crowded with ancient books— all leather bound, and the room smelled like musty paper. The corners were all tangled in the webs of friendly spiders, and the room glowed in the soft, golden light of gas lamps. It was the one place I felt safe in the house, even more than in my room, and the one place I would miss.

I'd just been digging through the stacks. I'd had another big fight with Mom— I don't even remember what it had been about, but it was probably just something she made up because she hated me. A book on the bottom

shelf of the last book case in the room, crowded into a corner beneath Bonnie's Web, had caught my eye. I don't even know why. It looked pretty much like every other book, but I'd felt curious and pulled it out, blowing the dust off the cover. Inlaid in the leather was a single word, Tiresia.

I took the book over to the battered, wooden desk, and sat down, paging through it. Nothing really caught my eye. It was mundane, just the usual formulae for potions to cure this and that, and I sat back, disappointed, thinking it was nothing.

Our old house, and especially the attic, are drafty. I was looking around for another book, when a strong wind whistled outside, shaking the windows, and the pages of the book were blown, rifling through and settling open on a page that read, "The Switchingetthe of Two Forms."

It was a body swap spell. I read through it, and already the idea was forming in my mind. I could escape. I could switch bodies with someone, and be free.

The spell worked best when you knew the person you wanted to switch with well. In fact, it suggested the more you knew about them, and the more they knew about you, the more likely a successful swap could take place. I snuck the book down to my room, and hid it under my mattress. At first, I thought about switching with my Mom, gleefully imagining treating her the same way she treated me, having all the power, forcing her to live as my daughter.

But, no. She was a powerful witch and would no doubt find a way to swap back, and then I would be in so much trouble. Who, then? I thought of Uncle Matt, but no. It didn't seem fair. He was so good to me! For weeks I went to bed, knowing that spell book was there, safe under the mattress, and despite my early misgivings, the idea kept growing and growing in my head that I really didn't have a choice. Mother was driving me insane, and the girls at school made my life a living hell. I cried everyday.

I was thinking about suicide.

But I didn't want to die. I wanted to live.

I wanted to be Uncle Matt.

He was always happy, and he had such a great life. He told me once he would do anything for me. I finally decided I would take him up on his offer. I guess I should say *her* offer now, right?

It was only the day he came over to move the furniture that I made up my mind. When I'd started to help by putting the stuff back on the shelf, I saw a strand of his short black hair sitting there on the middle shelf. I needed a strand of his hair to complete the spell, and there it was. It had to be fate. There was no other explanation, just as when I'd been drawn to

that book, when it had blown open right to the body swap spell. The goddess was guiding me. It was obvious, and that belief made me feel certain that this was right, that it needed to be done.

I initiated the first phase of the spell early. This would begin to sync our minds. I would start thinking like Uncle Matt, and he would start thinking like a girl. I smiled to myself, thinking about that, big, muscular Uncle Matt thinking like a teen girl. I could feel myself being drawn out of my body already, drawn toward him and my new life.

Once everyone had gone to bed, I put a silence spell on the conjure room, placed Matt's hair on the Arcanium, then opened the spell book to the proper page. The spell was in Ahnish, an ancient tongue known only to the Celtic Wise Women, and for once I thanked my witch of a mother for forcing me to study. I wore only a thin, black silk robe, and it moved sensuously against my soft skin as I set Matt's hair on fire, raised my arms, my voice growing louder as I reached the apex of the spell. The runes around the base of the Arcanium began to glow, brighter and brighter, an almost blinding golden light. I finish the spell, and I can feel the magic taking hold.

"You're going to love being a girl," I say, staring into the light with a smile, "especially with this beautiful body." I clean up and walk back towards my room, wanting to get into bed before the change happens. My breasts sway, push the front of my robe open, and I am glad to know they will soon be Matt's to deal with. Big breasts, to me, are just a pain in the ass, but I hope he loves them.

### Chapter Three – Matt Gets Dressed

"You need to get ready," my sister had said. "Hurry up." Alexis had written that I would have to do what my mother– sister– said, and it was true. I wanted to go right over to my place and demand Alexis switch us back, but I now felt compelled to do as my sister had told me. Mortified, I take off my pajamas and head to the shower. I close my eyes as I pass the bathroom mirror– this is my niece's body! The shower is hell. I feel like a creep, rubbing soap across my breasts, feeling the warm water sluice down the inside of my thigh, because these are not my breasts and this girl's body doesn't belong to me, and I am freaking out!

Trying not to think about it, look at it and to touch it as little as possible, I go to Alexis' room to get dressed, and I am mortified and humiliated. Alexis goes to a private girls' school, and that means pleated skirts, crisp white blouses, knee socks and girl shoes. I lay the uniform out, and I shake my



head. I'm a man. I can't go out in public dressed like— like a schoolgirl?  
Me?

What's more, I can't ignore these breasts. They are heavy, and they sway and bounce and jiggle every time I move, making them impossible to ignore, and I know I need a bra now. What's more, my sister's order still guiding my thoughts, I have to 'get dressed' and that now includes a bra and, gulp, panties. I find Alexis underwear drawer and go through her panties, and once more I am as horrified by the feeling that what I am doing is pervy as I am by the fact that I am about to put on a pair of panties. I search through them frantically. Surely there is a pair of boyshorts or at least some granny panties, but everything she has is tiny and cute and— all she has are thongs? What the hell, Valencia?

I've been ordered to hurry up, and so I just have to do this. I grab a pair of powder blue panties and step into them, pulling them up, feeling them press tight against the empty space between my legs, reminding me I've lost my junk, that I am no longer a man, and I squeal as I feel the stupid floss slip in between my ass cheeks. It's a shock, knowing that I am wearing panties, a thong. As much as I had always loved the sight of my girlfriends in them, I had always wondered how women put up with that shit, and now I was about to find out. I was embarrassed and ashamed, and I could feel tears building.

No. No, I said to myself. I am not a girl. I am not going to cry!

I grabbed a bra from the drawer. Much like her panty collection, my niece didn't have anything that seemed purely functional. Everything was pretty and cute. I just grabbed one— a powder blue that matched my panties, with a little ribbon at the yoke. I'd seen my girlfriends put on their bras in the morning, but I still struggled with it. Reaching back, I couldn't seem to get the hooks to clasp, and after a few failed attempts, I just used what one of my exes had called her cheat. I put the bra on backwards, then spun it around, lifting the straps and fitting them over my slender, round shoulders before daintily adjusting my breasts to fit in the cups.

I felt the straps pull tight as the cups lifted my breasts and seemed to present them to the world, pushing them together to form a sweet rounded depth of cleavage that made me blush even as I pulled my eyes away. It felt really tight. Was a bra supposed to be this tight? I tugged and pulled, trying to make it feel more comfortable, but it just didn't seem right to have these straps across my back, over my shoulders, like I was wearing some kind of harness. One of the great privileges of being a man to me had always been the fact that we didn't have to deal with bras, and now here I was, wearing one— and needing one.

The need to cry grew stronger, but I pushed it away. I started to hyperventilate, overcome with the impossibility of what I was, what I had to wear, but I'd been ordered to hurry and my skirt— my skirt? Awaited me.

The tears. I fight them back. I do not want to put on that uniform. I'd always found it cute, sweet, feminine. I felt like I would be reduced somehow by wearing this, that I would be surrendering to my new— to this sex. But I had no choice.

I stepped into my skirt, wiggled it over my wide hips and zipped it closed, feeling the cool air over my bare legs, the hem of the skirt coming only to just above my knees. It was not like wearing shorts at all. I felt like that skirt could flip up at any moment and give the world a glimpse of my panties. It made me feel vulnerable.

I struggled to button up my blouse— the buttons were on the wrong side, and for the first time I became conscious of my long fingernails, painted in pink polish. Why do girls love long nails? I wondered, not for the first time, but for the first time experiencing how they complicated even a simple task. The blouse was cut to flatter this figure— hugging my breasts, tapering in to show off this slender waist. Everything about this outfit in fact seemed designed to draw attention to my curves, and I wilted some more, wishing I could put on a baggy sweatsuit, a hat and some dark sunglasses. I pulled on my knees socks, then buckled on those shoes— they were black, patent leather with a thankfully not too high of a heel, but when I stood in them my feet were angled forward, and I felt awkward as I walked across the room, feeling my skirt sway, and stood in front of the mirror and saw me, Matt, a freckle faced school girl. “No,” I whispered in my tea kettle voice. It wasn't possible. This couldn't be me. I was a big, strong, masculine man, but what I saw in the mirror was cute, small, pretty. I looked about as tough and threatening as a bunny.

The tears finally came, rolling down my smooth cheeks. It was too much. I couldn't deal with it all— being a girl, wearing a bra, a skirt... I wanted to crawl under the covers and bury my head beneath my blankets, but I had my orders. “Get Ready,” and I realized that now included brushing out my long, thick hair. I grabbed the brush and went to work, even as the tears rolled down my cheeks, and my chest heaved with sobs.

#### Chapter Four: School Girl Daze

I sit in the back of Valencia's Mercedes-Benz, my legs crossed, and I feel the cold leather on the back of my bare thighs. When I first sat down, my skirt had been flipped up, and I'd sat on my bare bottom, having to arch

my back and smooth it down as I sat. It was going to be hard getting used to wearing a skirt. Stacey gets in from the other side, headphones on, phone in hand. I try to cross my arms, but my breasts are in the way, and after a couple false attempts, I find I have to cross them under my boobs now. I am seriously upset with Alexis for this, and my mood does not brighten when Stacey reaches over and yanks on my hair for no reason.

“Ow!” I say, smacking her hand away. She smirks without ever looking up from her phone. “Brat,” I say, surprised, having never seen her act this way.

“Don’t call your sister a brat,” Mom says in a robotic voice, her eyes on the road.

I glare at Stacey. As soon as I let my guard down, I feel her yank on my hair again. “Stop it!” I squeal, horrified at just how much I sound like the teen girl I now appear to be.

Stacey sticks out her tongue. I don’t know what gets into me, but I am suddenly furious, and I lunge at her phone, thinking to punish her by taking away the thing she loves most. It’s like I have no choice.

“Mom!” She yells, turtling around her phone.

Valencia glares at me in the rearview mirror. “She keeps pulling my hair!”

“I swear to the goddess,” Mom barks. “Leave your sister alone.”

“But she—”

“Not another word.”

My mouth locks shut. I slide all the way against the passenger door, as far away from Stacey as I can get. She gives me a sly, superior look, and it clearly says, I win. I slit my eyes at my little blonde niece, seeing her with new eyes. She was always so sweet to me when I was Uncle Matt! Now, I want to slap her.

And before I know it, we are pulling into the driveway at school. There is a stone arch, and above read the words, Chatterly Academy for Girls, and below that their motto: *pensare, gratia, devotus*. It’s Latin for the three utmost qualities of a Chatterly Girl: poise, grace and devotion.

I stare sourly at the sign, thinking, I will never be a Chatterly Girl. Never! I wear the school coat of arms on my blouse with the very same words. “Out you go! I have to keep moving!” Valencia says, and just like that I find myself standing under that arch, adjusting my backpack, which, of course, the shoulder straps seem to push my breasts together, making them look even bigger, and I am about to embark on my first day at my new girl’s school.

I start to walk onto campus. There are girls everywhere, all wearing the same skirt and blouse as me. Some of them are also wearing the pink school jacket, and I am regretting my decision to skip it as it is a brisk, fall day, and I feel really cold.

I am also stressed, anxious, and self-conscious. As I move among the girls, I feel like everyone is looking at me, that somehow they all know I am really a 26 year old man, and they probably think I am some kind of pervert showing up at their school in a skirt. There are groups of girls in clusters, and if any of them glances at me, I am sure they are talking about me, and I find myself worrying about my hair, whether my blouse is tucked in, whether my socks are pulled up.

Part of me wants to turn and run away, run all the way home, or find a place to hide. What's going on? Suddenly, it hits me. I am thinking and feeling like a teen-age girl. I remember how I'd sat down to pee the night before even though I was still a man, and I realize Alexia and I have traded more than bodies. We have also traded, at least partially, personalities.

And knowledge. I know the names of these buildings. Where to find my first class. I know I— I mean Alxis— has some friends, and I am strangely relieved. I don't want to feel alone in this body.

Chatterly is a K-8 school, so I am among the oldest girls, and there are a lot of much younger ones around, but when I get to the eight grade wing, I am appalled at how short I am compared even to these young girls. Most of them are taller than me! I feel small, darting among all these tall, lanky bodies, and I hate this feeling, because it's even worse than feeling like I am a child again. It's like I am a child among children!

I go to my locker, blushing, ashamed, self-conscious. Alexis has decorated her locker with pictures of boy bands, kittens. She has a mirror and makeup in there. As I am putting my books into the locker, someone locks their arms around my waist and I feel her small breasts press into my back, and she squeals, "Alexis!"

I turn and ease myself free, forcing a smile, feeling like a perv. "Mandy," I say, as I recognize her, and I am annoyed to realize I have a buzzer, higher pitched voice than her. "Hey." I feel awkward. I have no idea how to greet a girl as a girl. Why couldn't Alexis have shared that with me?

Mandy tilts her head to the side. "Are you okay?" She says, clearly sensing something is wrong from my deadpan response.

I plaster a smile on my face. That's what girls do, right? "I'm totally awesome," I say, trying to talk the way I remember girls talking.

The warning bell rings. "See you later," Mandy says, bopping on down the hall. I grab my biology book and head to my first class, thinking- I just

have to get through this one day, and then I'll find Alexis and get my body back!

And so there, impossibly, I find myself sitting at a desk in a room full of girls, my soft, bare legs pressed together, terrified anyone might get a glimpse up my skirt and see my panties. I keep my eyes locked on the teacher, ignoring all the girls around me. Her name is Miss Barret, and she's actually pretty hot, with a banging body. I'd do her, I think on reflex, which is a terrible mistake, because I am immediately hyper conscious of the empty space between my legs, my lost manhood.

Miss Barret pulls up a slide, and there, immense, is an image of the female reproductive system. I cringe as she begins to explain how "our bodies" work. It's a shock to realize I have a womb now, ovaries. The female reproductive system belongs to me now, at least for a day. Miss Barret is talking about the ovaries, how they produce estrogen, and why girls our age are so emotional.

It's another blow to my manhood, as I realize I am just a typical, hormonal teen-age girl.

As horrified as I was at biology class and learning all about my female body, it would soon seem like a vacation in the Bahamas as the bell rang, and I realized my next class was gym.

Oh, shit. Oh, shit. Oh, shit. Gym. Locker room. Changing clothes. What the hell was I supposed to do now?

## Chapter Five

The girls' locker room. When I'd been this age as a boy, it had been like some sacred and forbidden temple atop a misty mountain, a place of wonder and magnificence I longed to look into and yet I, for my part, had never been a peeping Tom, but I vowed to keep my eyes down, stare at my locker, get in and out. In her locker— short shorts with white piping, a sports bra, spanx and a racerback tank top. Slipping out of my uniform and carefully hanging it, I wiggled into the spanx— too tight, but they did seem like they would limit the jigging— and then struggled into the sports bra. For some reason, I'd thought it would be more comfortable than my regular bra. I was wrong. It totally crushed my boobs against my chest. I felt like I was wearing a vise!

"Good thing your butt is so fat," I heard a snarky voice call from behind me. "It distracts from your bloated belly."

"Gretchen!" I spun. It was Alexis' bully, the one who'd been giving her so much trouble. She planted a hand on her hip and arrogantly tossed her

hair. I saw her little squad arrayed behind her in a crescent, smirking. They were all in their gym uniforms, so I didn't have to avert my eyes. She'd obviously grown used to Alexis wilting at her little comments and was gleefully looking down at me— she must have been 5 inches taller than me, with a willowy teen-model figure.

I decided to handle this like a guy— or tried to. I charged her, intending to swing up and punch her in the chin, but my body was so awkward and weird to me I lost balance a little, misjudged and ended up slamming my fist right into her boob,

“Ow!” She screamed, and then I kicked her in the shin. Now she was holding her shin, hopping on one foot, her face a mask of rage and shock. “You witch!”

Her posse looked stunned and confused, but all the other girls, who weren't part of her little group, laughed. I turned on my heel and marched back to my locker, nose in the air.

Gym class was a nightmare of jiggling and bouncing. We were playing volleyball in the gym, and even with my uncomfortably tight bra, every time I jumped or ran after a ball, I could feel my heavy breasts bouncing, and my butt was always quaking. During a break, I sat down and two girls came and sat next to me. “That was so great the way you put Gretchen in her place!”

“You're, like, some kind of superhero.”

Gretchen was sitting on the other side of the gym. She slit her eyes at me. I slit my eyes at her. I stared back until she looked away. Hmpf. Maybe some good would come of this after all, I thought. I doubt Gretchen will be looking at Alexis as an easy target anymore.

It still hadn't entered my mind that I was going to be Alexis for a very long time.

The rest of the day was a blur of boring classes and a pervasive feeling of awkward discomfort. I couldn't get used to the feeling of my skirt swirling around my legs, and that damn thong was torture. Twice, I had to run to the bathroom and hide in a stall as I burst into tears, overcome with anxiety.

But, at last, the day came to an end. My shoulders ached from my bra straps digging into them, and I couldn't wait to get home, kick off my Mary Janes, put on some comfortable clothes and find some way to contact Alexis. I had to get out of this female nightmare.

At least, I thought, the worst was over. I'd made it through school, and what could be worse than that?

I was about to find out, as a group of Alexis' friends approached me at my locker after last bell. Jayne, Cassidy and Leigh. Alexis' memories told me they were all nice girls, the kind I would expect Alexis to make friends with.

"I'm so excited about tonight!" Cassidy said.

"It's going to be so fun!" Leigh chimed in.

"Tonight?" I said.

"Um, your sleepover?" Jayne said. "The one we've been talking about for-ever?"

"Sleepover?" I felt my face getting hot, as I blushed furiously at the thought.

The girls all laughed. "You can be such an airhead sometimes!" Leigh said. Her phone buzzed. "Uh, oh. My mom's here!"

They dispersed, and I stood, mouth hanging open. I was having a sleepover? Me and a bunch of giggling girls? I had to get out of this somehow.

Stacey and I got into the car as Mom pulled up, Stacey with her headphones on, so she couldn't hear. "Mom?" I said, trying to put on a sick voice. "My stomach hurts?"

"Did you spend all day eating candy again?" She said absently.

"No. I think I'm getting sick. Maybe we should cancel the sleepover?"

Valencia reached back and put her hand on my forehead, somehow also continuing to steer and keep the car on the road. "You're fine," she declared.

"No, I really think I might throw up."

"Everytime!" Mom said, exasperated. "The only way you're going to learn to socialize is by socializing!"

"But, I—"

"Young lady, you are having your friends over for a slumber party, and that's final. Understood?"

"Yes, Mother," I said, as her order landed, and I now had no choice in the matter. It looked like Uncle Matt was about to attend his first slumber party, and I immediately started to panic. What do girls even do at these things?

I got out my phone and searched for what do girls even do at slumber parties? I got over 7 million hits. Well, that was a relief. At least I wasn't the only one who had no clue what was supposed to happen, but I was still totally stressed out because this was my slumber party, and I assumed I would have to do the planning. How was a 26 year old man supposed to decide what a bunch of 13-year-old-girls would want to do for fun? I started

stressing about that– I didn't want my friends– I mean Alexis' friends, to be bored and hate *my* party.

I did not anticipate the MOM factor. When I walked into the living room, totally stressing, I saw a couple screens had been set up, fancy lights. "What's this?" I asked.

"For the photo shoot," Mom said, herself seeming pretty stressed. Then, she sighed. "You didn't even read the agenda I sent you, did you?"

"Agenda?" I asked.

"Alexis, you will be the death of me. It's in your email!"

I went upstairs to Alexis' room and threw myself on her bed with a dramatic sigh, and then checked my email. Sure enough, Valencia had planned the evening down to the minute. Well, maybe she wasn't all bad, I thought, and then I immediately started worrying about what to wear.

Once more, I found myself annoyed at my new, female mindset. If I'd still been a guy, I would have just thrown on a pair of baggy shorts and a t-shirt without giving it any thought, especially if it was just a bunch of other dudes. But now, I was worrying about everything– should I wear a t-shirt, a tank top, a camisole? What to do with my hair, how much jewelry to wear, what kind of perfume to choose, whether to wear makeup? Once more, I turn to the Internet, throwing my outfits on my bed, struggling to make a decision. Any decision!

I search– should I wear makeup to a slumber party? In case you're curious, I get 4 million hits. One of my mother's events is what she calls a makeover party, so I decide to do some light makeup. It's a party, right, and I don't feel comfortable going to a party with my friends without anything? I am so weird now. I don't understand myself. How am I already feeling like I should wear makeup? Alexis' personality was over-riding my own. Which is when I suddenly remember I meant to call her. I've been so worried about my slumber party I totally forgot about trying to get my body back!

Maybe I am an airhead? I call Myself. For a second, I have hope. Maybe Alexis is tired of being me. Maybe I can swap out of the whole slumber party ordeal. I mean, what girl would want to miss her own slumber party?

Nope. Number blocked. I feel like crying, my hopes destroyed, but I look at the clock and panic! I only have an hour until the girls are supposed to arrive! Omigod! I am finally forced to just start making some choices! I have to get ready. Now!

I'm putting barrettes in my hair, thinking about switching out my earrings– are the heart shaped earrings too little girl for me?-- when Mom



starts shouting from downstairs. "Alexis! Get down here! Cassidy just pulled up!"

"Ah!" I finish my hair and run down stairs, my long hair trailing behind me.

"You need to be here to greet your guests!" Valencia hisses.

"I know!" I sass back, annoyed.

"Don't you use that tone with me, young lady!"

I am seriously getting tired of being called 'young lady.' Now, Mom decides to humiliate me further, as she toys with my hair, then puts her hands on my shoulders, looking down at me. "Let me get a look at you." I tilt my head back, trying not to roll my eyes as she inspects me, like a drill sergeant looking over a shoulder at roll call. "You look cute," she says. "You did a good job. I'm proud of you." And then she kisses me on the head.

"Thank you, Mother," I say, unable to hide the annoyance I am feeling.

She just tsks, then turns me to face the door. "Remember to smile."

Ugh. "I will." I am appalled at now only being treated as a child by my own sister, but how much I am already acting like a child, but I don't have time to think about it because the doorbell rings, and I now have to play *hostess*.

"Alexis!" Cassidy screams, throwing her arms around me. We hug, and she's so excited I get excited. We're just about to run into the house together when Valencia says, "Say hello to Cassidy's mother, Alexis."

Mom! I think, but I turn, tilt my head back and smile like the little girl I am supposed to be. "Hello, Mrs. Gold," I say.

"Hi, Alexis. You look so pretty!"

"Thanks," I say, blushing and I don't even know why.

"Okay," Valencia says. "Go play with your friend."

I scoot off, and Cassidy and I gather at the kitchen table which is smothered with enough snacks to feed a Roman Legion. Cassidy is, I think, extremely excited about the photo shoot. I say I think because she's talking at supersonic speed, and I am struggling to keep up with her, but I just smile and keep saying, "totally."

Jayne and Leigh show up, and soon the three of them are all chattering away, and I am doing my best to try and keep up as they seem to hop from one topic to another with no rhyme or reason, and then my niece Stacey comes bouncing into the room, her blonde ponytail swaying, and she's wearing all pink, and kitten ears, and there is a kitten on her shirt and everything is just so cute and I am so annoyed because I know how evil she is now. The other girls all turn their attention to my "little sister" telling

her how sweet and pretty she is, and she's putting on her I'm just an innocent little girl act and I want to puke, but of course, she needs to be part of this, so I better just deal.

*Everyone* wants to just go crazy and do the photoshoot, but my mother has a meticulous plan, so we munch food, then gather around the TV to watch a movie about two kids with cancer, and the boy dies and everyone is crying and hugging, and I am crying and hugging, and I don't understand it but I am learning that as a girl crying makes me feel good, and I don't need to feel all my manly shame anymore. I suddenly understand what my girlfriends have meant when they told me they needed a good cry.

We eat dinner, which how anyone is hungry after all the junk food we've been eating is besides me, and then we sit in a circle, legs crossed, playing Marry, Date, Kill. We go around, and someone says the name of a boy, and then you have to tell whether you would want to marry, date or kill him. It's Cassidy's turn first, and Leigh calls out, "Kevin Gloser."

Cassidy starts giggling and covers her mouth with her hands. "Omigod!" She says. Come on, come on all the girls say. Finally, sheepishly, she says, "Date?"

"Gross! He's got pimples!"

"I know, but I love his brown eyes!"

I am freaking out as it goes around the circle and comes to me. They are all looking at me, and Leigh, a wicked smile on her lips, says, "Josh Utmeyer." The other girls all laugh and clap.

But I search Alexis' memory, and a face pops up- a boy with pale skin, freckles and black hair. Josh Utmeyer, and it is not lost on me that he looks like a guy version of her. I don't get any sense of how Alexis really feels about him, but I don't want to marry or date him, for sure! So, I say, "Kill."

The girls all throw up their hands. "Liar!" Cassidy says.

"Omigod! You have the hots for him!" Leigh says. "I caught you checking out his cute little butt!"

My face burns as I feel myself blushing furiously. "No way! I say. He's gross!"

Stacey starts laughing. She loves seeing me embarrassed.

Thankfully, they pass it on to Leigh, and I feel I am off the hook, though I am mortified everyone now thinks I have a crush on a boy! As if.

The photographer for our photoshoot is due in about an hour- Valencia goes all in on these things, I see- so it's time for the makeover party, and there I am sitting while Leigh carefully glues eyelash extensions to my eyes and Cassidy plays with my hair, and it is almost the most unmanly thing I have ever done, but I just suffer through, pretending it's such fun as we talk

about lipstick and eyeshadow and lip pencils and eyebrow pencils and the prettiest new colors and... oh, my God! I almost want to kill myself! How can girls find this all so interesting?

In the end, I find myself looking in a mirror, and I am shocked, blinking those insanely long lashes, which actually partially obscure my vision, and I have smokey eyes, black and silvery eyeshadow, really like a grown woman out for a fancy night, and blush and dark red lips, and I have to admit it. "Omigod," I say. "I look amazing." I do, but it's like the makeup has erased another part of the man I was, and I am terrified to realize— I like the way I look. I know I would drive any boy totally crazy just by batting these long lashes. I give Leigh a hug to thank her for my makeover. She's a wizard with makeup and did all the girls, and all now look amazing and mature and to my mind inappropriate for girls our age!

Mother does not agree. "You all look so sophisticated," she says, looking us over.

The doorbell rings, and finally it's time for the photoshoot. Everyone runs giggling to the living room, and this hip photographer named Fritz is there, with spiky hair and tattoos and he has a big camera, and there are all kinds of outfits and accessories for us to try on, and pretty soon I am in heels, wobbling, a big purse over my shoulder and a string of pearls around my neck, trying to look sophisticated while the girls all laugh and the photographer snaps away, flash bulb flashing like in an old movie. We pose together and in pairs, and we trade outfits, and we're all laughing and giggling and in spite of myself I am having fun, forgetting I am supposed to be a man, and I'm just another teen girl wearing a little black dress now, a hand on my hip as I smile at the camera.

When the photoshoot finally ends, we get back into our pajamas and climb into our sleeping bags, which are laid out on the floor in the Rec Room. Everyone is exhausted, and yet still buzzing from excitement over the big day, tired and hyper at the same time. Valencia has left the gas fireplace on, so the room is toasty and there is a warm, red glow over everything.

I have that surreal feeling again, like none of this can possibly be real, and I drift off to sleep, thinking by now Alexis has discovered it isn't so easy being a man, that no doubt tomorrow she would want to change back. I am almost asleep when Cassidy giggles. Then Leigh. Then I giggle, and Stacey giggles and pretty soon we are all giggling, and we don't even know why, but we just keep giggling until our bellies hurt and we roll onto our sides, and I am smiling and it's all so insane and yet once again, I think— this will be over soon. I bet Alexia hates being a guy!

Sometime in the night, I feel someone shake my shoulder. “You awake?”

“I am now.” It’s Jayne. She has a short, brown bob, light green eyes.

“Come here,” she whispers, and I follow her as she leads me to the closet and closes the door. She takes my hands, and she’s looking down at her, and my heart skips a beat because I know what she wants, I can see it.

“Do you want to make out?” She says, and I can see she’s afraid, terrified of rejection, that this has taken so much courage. And I am a man, an older man, and it would be wrong in every way, but I don’t want to hurt her.

“I’m not into girls?” I say.

“Omigod, I am so stupid,” she says, her hopeful face collapsing into a mask of shame as she turns her back on me, weeping.

I know what I have to do. I wrap my arms around her and hug her tight. “It’s okay,” I say. “I’m sorry. You’re great and pretty and I just don’t like girls.”

“You can’t tell anyone,” she says, desperate, turning to face me, and her terror shocks me, and I am crying now.

“No. Never,” I say, and she turns and is about to leave, but I grab her wrist. “Wait.”

She looks at me, tears pouring down her cheeks. “Promise me we’ll still be friends?”

She looks uncertain, then she hugs me, so hard, and I feel good, because I was worried about her, and I didn’t want her to hate me. When the hug ends, I whisper, “we should wait. If anyone sees we’ve been crying, they’ll know something happened.”

Jayne nods. “Thanks,” she says.

“You’re beautiful,” I tell her, because I think she needs to hear it. “You’ll find a girl.”

She nods, smiles, nods again. I realize she has a crush on me— on Alexia— and right now she probably feels like she will NEVER find love. Oh, young girls are so dramatic!

But I can’t make fun of it anymore. I am every bit as emotional and dramatic as any girl my age. It comes with the territory I am learning, and it’s not a choice.

Come on, Alexia, I think as we wait for our tears to dry. Change us back. Being a girl sucks!

She hates being a guy, I tell myself again. She has to. I mean, doesn’t she?