St Beatrice

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

It was a combination of things that saw Lenny and I become schoolgirls.

Firstly, my girlfriend Hannah, was sent to St. Beatrice by her parents. Hannah and I were close. We had begun to have sex and we were in the throes of not really love, but that early sexual rapture that seems just like it. I did not believe that I could be parted from her. She felt the same about me. It was tragic.

Second, Lenny’s sister Gail, had got into St. Beatrice on an academic scholarship. She raved about the place, in particular the math teacher Miss Hodson. Lenny was a math whiz but was getting no support at our high school. He did not just want to extend himself, he seriously needed to.

Lastly, my pining for Hannah had resulted in my poor attendance at soccer practice and my being dropped. Apart from Hannah, my only joy was sport. The diversion that I needed to cope with being without her, was now gone. It was depressing.

Lenny and I were different people. I loved my sport, and he was a bookworm and (there is no better word for it) a geek. But he lived next door and we walked to school together every day. I just pulled ahead for the last bit of that walk, so we did not arrive together. But he understood why.

So, as we were walking one day, and I was downcast and complaining about life he said: “Maybe you and I could do it together? Apply to go to St. Beatrice?”

“What are you talking about,” I said. “St. Beatrice is an all girl’s school.”

“My sister says that she thinks I can pull it off,” he said. “We can ask her whether she thinks you can too.”

“Pull what off,” I said. I had no idea what he was taking about.

“Pass as girls,” he said. “What can be so hard? If I can do it, then I am smarter than her and a year plus younger, so I will be a shoo in for a scholarship. And you could pick up a soccer scholarship. And it’s a great school. Better than our shitty high school.”

He was right there. Our school had tired facilities, teachers that did not care, and increasingly, students were becoming the victims of violent gangs. If we wanted to get any kind of education, then anything seemed better than that place.

But I could not believe that Lenny could be serious. When I looked at him I saw that he was a little smaller than me (although I too, am a little smaller than average) with long stringy hair and glasses. Maybe. Maybe he could pass for a female geek?

Then I started to consider myself. I was also not a big guy, and I had a mass of blond hair. I could be considered good-looking. I was certainly more athletic, without being too muscular. I started to wonder how I might look, as a girl, hand in hand with Hannah, together again.

It was only that thought, being with Hannah, that made me ask: “Tell me more.”

Lenny had agreement from his mother. She was worried about little Lenny at our school, and was very happy that Gail was at a safe school where a good education was assured. She had already agreed to the outrageous plan, and she would help both of us. But it would require some work on our part, to put into effect.

As for my mother (my father was long gone) she thought it was a huge joke.

“St. Beatrice is a high falutin’ school,” she said. “There is no way that you will get in there. But if you do, good luck to you.” She had my brothers to worry about. I was on my own, but she would sign any paperwork to help me.

The first thing was to apply for the scholarship before the end of the following week. That meant getting a copy of a school record that did not betray his given name or his gender. Lenny had already done that. Sending that in with a letter from a parent and two supporting testimonials would be enough. If the scholarship was not offered that would be an end of it. But if things went as expected Lenny would have to move to Phase 2.

If he was going he had summer break to prepare himself. He said that he would need to take some drugs to appear less male, and would need to remove body hair and keep it off. As for the hair on his head, he said he had been growing it, but it would need treatment. But the hardest thing would be learning to present himself as female. That would require intensive coaching.

“We could do it together,” he said. “My mother and sister could take it on. Maybe Hannah could help when she is home for the summer?”

I was so looking forward to Hannah getting home. As they say, “absence makes the heart grow fonder” and my heart was about as fond as you could get. You would not be able to pull us apart when she was back in my arms.

I phoned her and told her about Lenny’s crazy scheme, and she just said: “You could totally do this,” she said. She wanted me to be with her, all the time.

She explained that while St. Beatrice was a boarding school, or age group had four-bed rooms with internal bathrooms, and the girls had a say in who shared the room. She said that if she and I and Lenny could share, she had a friend who could be in on it and take the fourth bed. The only problem would be gym.

“You need to get a note excusing you from gym-class,” she said. “You can’t be undressing with the others.”

“But Lenny’s plan is that I get in on a sports scholarship,” I said. “I can’t do that without doing gym.”

She said: “Forget sport. You should submit your art portfolio. They have a strong art and design section and they are really pushing that area. Your stuff is really good.”

The truth is that I had always been artistic, but I was a little embarrassed about it. Mixing with the guys that I did I never really blew my trumpet in that area. Our school was not interested. The only people who had seen my portfolio were Hannah and my parents, and they thought it was great. My art teacher had seen it too and I got my best marks from her, but she was not a great teacher and very lazy. I suddenly thought that I would be able to get her to sign a rave testimonial that I could use.

Hannah became a major driver of the idea. But she was concerned about the drugs that Lenny said that we would need to take to help us pass as girls. She said: “We don’t want anything that will interfere with sex.”

Lenny’s father was the local pharmacist and he was supplying Lenny with drugs that he said would have no permanent effect, but would affect potency. It was not a concern for Lenny, but it was for Hannah and me, so he came up with depilatory agents and skin conditioning that would do the job. He also gave me a large bottle of herbal mixture that I needed to take a small cup of each morning.

So, as you can tell, this was going to happen, but only if Lenny and I were accepted by St. Beatrice. I submitted my fine art portfolio and testimonial as “Emily Jane Barnett”. Lenny was “Lilly Patricia Harnsworth”. We both won scholarships. That was when the hard work really began.

Adopting a feminine appearance was surprising easy. For Lenny he was not trying to be a knockout – he was just trying to look invisible. He had the advantage of quite long hair, which responded well to the right treatment and became quite full and shiny. He wore it in braids. He bought a new pair of glasses that were feminine and also made his eyes look much bigger, especially with just a touch of mascara.

But for me, according to Hannah I needed to soften my square jaw with curls. That meant more hair than I had – permanent extensions that were to be quite expensive, but ultimately successful. Hannah also decided that I needed to have my brows shaped and that I should use a little makeup to reduce my masculine appearance. Everybody was happy with the final look.

The more difficult part was in learning how to act as girls. That meant extended role-playing sessions and learning how to walk and talk, as girls. There was a whole new female body language to learn. With help from Hannah and Lilly’s sister during the vacation, we were able to get things pretty close to perfect. The rest would mean learning on the job. Hannah said that I was a “tomboy” but that the standards expected at St. Beatrice would soon correct that.

And so, we started the term at St. Beatrice. We wore or uniforms – dark skirts and white blouses, white knee socks and Mary-Jane shoes, plus a blazer outside class. We had packed only a few other clothes (female of course) and we had no gym clothes as we both carried a letter to excuse us.

We had arranged the shared room and Lilly and I met Hannah’s friend Jackie (and our fourth roommate) for the first time. She was in on the secret and loved the idea of intrigue and deceiving the school but I had expected her to be more welcoming. I quickly gained the impression that she did not like me. It was not immediate, but when it became clear to her that Hannah and I were only interested in one another, that is where the trouble started.

I found out later that Jackie had spiked my herbal drink with Lilly’s hormones – heavy doses that had showed effects within a few weeks. But more about that later.

Lilly fitted in quickly. She was mainly concerned with study and she quickly made the accelerated classes in math. She was also better with computers than almost everybody else and she became heavily involved with a gaming. There were only a small group of interested, but over time they became quite tight. Hannah and I could never begin to understand it.

Lilly kept her secret well. Nobody expected a geeky girl to be overly feminine. Remember, her plan was to be invisible, and that plan seemed to have come together.

I had to work a little harder to keep my impulses in check, but without sport I found a new release in the design class. With my scholarship I found that I was in different classes to Hannah and Lilly. I was doing art, art history and fabric design, and then later fashion and sewing. It was not the way I planned it. I just got really involved in designing for fabrics, and St. Beatrice was almost unique in having a fabric printing machine that allowed my designs to be produced. Once you have fabric it is a natural progression to decide how it should be used. That means not just making curtains or cushions, but designing clothes and using complementary designs and contrasting colours. I never realised that this would become my thing.

The dress making came up because if you are designing clothes you have to know how to make patterns and know how to construct garments. I found myself on the sewing machine.

While I was just involved with my art class I could get away with the “tomboy” thing, because I still had an athletic build and a hard jawline. Artists are expected to be a little odd, and whenever I behaved in a way that was not feminine I was just being non-conformist. But the fashion set were a completely different set of girls. I quickly discovered that fashion was not just about clothes, it was about style as well – hair, makeup, accessories and shoes. I knew nothing about any of these things, but I learned quickly.

If absence makes the heart grow fonder, then familiarity breeds contempt. Well, not quite that bad, but things between Hannah and me started to cool off after a couple of months at St. Beatrice. First there was the fall in my libido. I did not understand it as I knew nothing about the drugs I was taking in with my supplements. All I knew is that the desire had slipped and when it was there, I was not performing well. It went from being in one another’s bed every night humping furiously, to maybe two nights a week and mainly just cuddling.

The second thing was also partly connected to the drugs. My body was getting soft and my hair was getting longer and was definitely girly. I was becoming less attractive to my girlfriend. We both knew it but neither of us said anything. Maybe we should have earlier than we did?

Finally, I was starting to act like a girl more and more. I remember than one evening after a late project at dressmaking I came back to the room wearing a stylish dress I had made. Although my hair was still not long, with my classmates it had been cleverly styled into a French roll. I had chosen the make up myself, to set off the colours I was wearing. It really was a complete look - sophisticated and feminine. Hannah was shocked.

“Exactly who, or what, do you think you are?” she said, angrily.

I said: “It’s just dressing up, Sweetie.” But as I said it I was looking at myself in the mirror and liking what I saw. I felt that I needed to walk down the street like this. I was sure that I would turn heads. Women would say: “That lady has style”. Men would say: “What a fox.” I hate to say it, but next to me Hannah looked quite plain. I think she knew that too.

I still had that jaw that you might think was masculine, but when you look in the fashion magazines you can see that many top models have this same look. Our clothing design teacher described my look as “striking”. I like that.

So, there I was in the outfit I had made, and Hannah was not happy. She had me take down my hair and take off my clothes. It was only then that she noticed my nipples and the swellings on my chest. She cried out: “What have you done to yourself?”

I had not noticed. From the moment that I started at St. Beatrice I had used a padded bra filled with cotton. I just thought that the outline of the bra had left impressions on my chest but I had not thought that these were really added volume. I could now see that I was wrong. I had Lilly call her father to check whether his creams or the herbal drink could be doing this, but we ruled that out. As I said, it was only much later that I learned what Jackie had done. So at that time I just thought that with being around only girls 24/7, somehow I had assimilated the femininity. Dumb, I guess.

That night I wanted to show Hannah that I was still all man, but that was a total failure. I started to wonder if the whole thing was a very bad idea, and I was a bit down. But the following day in our design class I was told that two other girls and myself had been invited to a fashion house the following week. Apparently, images of some of our dresses had been submitted and a major designer wanted to meet us. I was so excited I just forgot about Hannah’s issues with me.

The trip into the city and the day with a major designer and manufacturer was a real buzz. It made me realise that this is what I wanted to do. Everybody agreed that St. Beatrice had the best facilities for teaching about fabric and fashion design, so I needed to stay on. After that, I figured that I could go back to me and enter the fashion world fully equipped, but as a man. I already had an invitation to join that particular design studio as a trainee after graduation. The fashion industry is very understanding of sexuality and gender. I could still take up the internship as a male.

We presented to the whole school on our trip. I spoke and made a point of thanking Hannah for her friendship and support, in front of everybody. After that she hugged me with tears in her eyes. Our relationship changed from that point. We went from being lovers to being friends. We still are.

That presentation also led to the extension of my scholarship. In the school magazine I was described as “Emily Barnett, one of our most talented pupils”. I suppose that up until then my mother still thought the whole thing was a joke. The truth is that we were poor she could never be opposed to my gaining an advantage in life by cheating the system. Now she could see that I had a real shot at a life that was better than hers.

I learned that she started carrying a picture of me on her phone so that she could say: “This is my daughter Emily. She is going to be a serious fashion designer.” And when anybody asked about her son, she would say: “I don’t what he is doing. He dropped out of High School.”

Things were changing for me and for Lilly too. It turned out that she really was a dark horse – she had a boyfriend in town. She and her friends had been online playing games and they had latched on to some gaming guys who lived together not far from the school. The girls snuck out to meet them and things went from there.

Her man’s name was Ted and he was older than Lilly and seemed to have a lot of money. He had invited Lilly out and Lilly asked if I would double date with her. She said that Ted had a friend Andre, who was into design and it seemed like a fit for me. She wanted to go with me because I would be in the same position as her, with our secret, and if things went bad, I was strong enough to look after us. I wanted to help her out, but I was uncertain about the idea of going out with a guy. But I figured that if she was doing it, why not? It was a night out. St. Beatrice allowed “evening passes” for senior girls, but subject to rules.

When we were getting ready Lilly was looking at me naked and said: “Hey, your tits are bigger than mine and I am on hormones!” She was right. I was still ignoring the problem, but it was growing – they were growing.

She showed me her push up bra and what could be done with a little padding and makeup. I was able to get one in my larger size from the stock in the design school wardrobe. I had designed and made something with cleavage a week before. It was a loud abstract fabric and an asymmetrical cut. In it, I looked a knockout, with some extra curls in my hair and dramatic evening makeup. It was a little over the top compared to what Lilly was wearing, but it was me.

I suggested that Lilly change into one of my designs. Nothing too crazy, but a better look than she would normally go for. She let me style her and we were both pleased with the outcome.

We arrived fashionably late to the restaurant Ted had chosen. Both boys rose to greet us. Ted was clearly a bit geeky, but in a good-looking way. He was quite tall. His mouth was open. He had clearly never seen Lilly look so good.

What surprised me about Lilly was just how girly she became in Ted’s presence. I guess I had always thought of her as a guy dressed as a girl, but not obvious about anything. When she was with him she giggled, and gazed, and flicked her hair, and fiddled with her hands, just like a girl.

But then there was Andre. He was foreign. He was dressed in a suit and tie. Who wears that to a high school date? He was quite the best-looking man I had ever seen. He looked like a male model. The phrase “a twinkle in his eye” cannot describe the look he gave me. It was a “come to bed” look. His eyes blazed rather than twinkled. I think my heart skipped a beat when he kissed my hand.

He said that I looked “ravishing” and that this was a new word that he learned. When I asked where he was from, he told me that his family were from Switzerland, but that they lived in Paris, at the moment. He said that they owned a modest design house with select boutiques in “several countries in Europe” and the he was discussing with Ted internet selling internationally.

Paris. The City of Lights. Home of most of the great fashion houses of Europe. Every girl’s dream, or at least every girl interested in style. It had become my dream. When he talked about Paris I hung on every word he said.

The night sped by in a whirl of romance. That is the word for it. I never wanted it to end.

But it did end. Andre paid the bill for all of us. I had never had a meal like it, and it must have been expensive. He produced a black credit card and paid without even looking at the check. All he wanted as an expression of my thanks was a kiss. Just a momentary contact of the lips between two people. Despite my unusual circumstances it did not seem a hard thing to do. Just brief contact, face to face.

But it was not like that at all. It was the merging of two souls in a moment of mind-blowing passion expressed in the tenderest way. As it turned out, it was a life-changing moment.

Lilly and I got a cab back to the dorm and clock in seconds before curfew. On the way to our room Lilly said to me: “You know what I am thinking now? I am wishing that I had a vagina.”

“So am I,” I said. I had not really thought about it, but the words just spilled out. I found myself lying in bed that night wondering why I had said it. Did I really want that? Did I want to be a woman instead of a man? Did I want rid of my penis and my balls, forever? Or did I just want to enjoy sex with Andre as a woman – like a sexual fantasy?

It was not about the sex. I could not shake off thinking about the man. The look of him, the smell of him, his lips on my hand, or my lips. It seemed so odd that a guy who was humping his girlfriend only a few months ago, was now lovesick for another guy. A huge change had taken place. It seemed like nature had been turned on its head.

Lilly learned from Ted that Andre wanted to see me again, but he only had Saturday morning as he was flying back to Europe in the evening on the overnight flight. He suggested that we meet at the park which was near his hotel.

I took some time to style myself, but ended up going for one of my own sportswear designs. I wore my hair up in loose curls and understated makeup. It was just the right look, as he had arranged a picnic. Not only that but we ended up playing soccer with some kids, so I was able to show him another side of me, using the skills that I had neglected.

“You must be the perfect woman,” he said. “Beautiful, talented and a natural footballer.”

We lay on the rug in the sun, beside the hamper of delicacies he had bought and we had only nibbled at, and an empty bottle of Chardonnay, which is not what a girl my age should have been drinking. He had his arms me around and was kissing my forehead. It was the happiest moment of my life, to that point at least. The only thing that broke the spell was the sudden thought that he might reach down and discover the disgusting truth, that this beautiful woman that he was falling for had an ugly secret. The ugliest secret imaginable. The ugliest organs nature had ever devised. In the place where there should be nothing but a pretty mound and delicate moist lips to pleasure him.

“I am only a schoolgirl,” I said to him. He could never find out. It would destroy me. And maybe him too.

“I can wait,” he said. We swapped email addresses and one last lingering kiss, the end to a perfect day. And he was gone.

I was devastated by the thought that I would never see him again. It would not be by his choice I knew, but by mine. In reality, it seemed to me that I had no choice. I was not a woman, so I could never be his woman. Even with surgery and the miracles of modern science, I could never be that.

“I’m not going to tell Ted,” said Lilly. “I am going to sell the program I am working on and spend the money on gender reassignment surgery. I am going to tell Ted that I needed to have an emergency hysterectomy, so I cannot have children. We can adopt. We can have a life together.”

I am not sure whether she believed it or not. She was sobbing in my arms at the time, and Hannah was holding her hand. It seemed like the whole idea of St. Beatrice was a huge mistake. Two normal guys had become two lovesick transwomen with all of the anguish that involved. Don’t transwomen feel it so much worse? The anguish of lying to the man you love, and knowing that the truth will likely end it all?

Except that Hannah was asking us whether we truly were transwomen. How could we be? Before we started this, we were regular guys – or we thought we were.

“For transgirls it’s not about the man,” Hannah said. “It’s about the need to be a woman. If that means being a lesbian or a life-long spinster, then that will make many transwomen very happy. You should not make this about the men in your lives.” She had been researching things to try to understand the position Lilly and I were in.

When I looked at myself in the mirror I saw a woman. I had breasts, now well developed. In a dimly lit room, you could hardly see my penis, concealed in my bush of pubic hair. My hair had grown long and soft and the extensions were now gone. My body was not small, but it was now soft and devoid of obvious muscle. To the school, to all my friends, and my family, I was female. Only to a doctor, I was male.

But that wasn’t true either. Dr Susan Galway never accepted that my breasts had grown by accident. I was on hormones and the source of them needed to be found. When the truth was discovered and Jackie admitted what she had done, Dr Galway completed her diagnosis of my condition and prescribed for me my own hormones - monthly shots as well as daily pills.

“You are progressing as a woman,” she said. “The male body is your problem, and there is only the smallest vestige of it left.” She recommended me to specialists to confirm her diagnosis and discuss “surgical solutions.” Parental consent was not an issue, as my mother had basically said that she knew I would never be a boy again. The only problem was cost.

I was in correspondence with Andre all this time. There were occasional expressions of longing and the sadness of separation, but in the main it was an upbeat exchange about fashion and Parisian life. I longed to live there, with him. He started to talk about his next visit across the Atlantic, and further ahead, my graduation and my eighteenth birthday.

Lilly came home one night and said: “I’ve told him. I’ve told Ted everything.”

“So you’ve told him that you need to have a hysterectomy?” I said.

“No,” she said. “I’ve told him that I was born a guy. That I have a penis that I want to get rid of. That I love him and want to be his. And he is OK with all of it. He wants me, any way I come, he wants me.”

She was so happy. I was happy for her. But I wondered how Andre would react if I tried that approach. I was so afraid that he would just walk away. I just loved being in his life, even if it was just emails and the occasional call, and even knowing that it might not last, seemed better than him turning away from me in disgust. I just could not bear that to happen.

I resolved that I would do what Lilly was going to do. I would tell him that I needed surgery. But maybe I do not have the same courage as my geeky friend. I researched it a little and I decided to say that I had invasive endometriosis. I wrote to him to say that I needed surgery, but I had no money to pay for it.

Of course, he emailed me straight back to say that he could pay, but he had conditions that he could only discuss in person. But he could not leave France straight away. He would send the money straight to the clinic I had booked for the day after graduation.

I graduated from St. Beatrice with a special prize for “Excellence in Art and Design”. My mother had come all the way from our town to sit in the audience and beam with pride – the poorest person in the hall, was my guess, but the proudest.

She stayed on to see me go under the knife. She held my hand as I passed out.

When I came to, she was there, but there was somebody else in the room too. It was Andre!

“Well, they appear to have got rid of that invasive endometrium,” He said. He was smiling ear to ear. “But sadly, it means that we will not be able to have children.”

It was all very confusing for a girl whose mind was still befuddled by anaesthetic. A girl. That was me. And he was there. And he must know that there was no endometriosis. And he had an arm around my mother. He knew.

“You never let me tell you what the conditions of my paying for this special procedure were,” he said. “The conditions are: One, that you must marry me. Two, come to Paris and live with me as my wife. Three, help me build a new fashion house for your pleasure. Four, build a home with me, with children we can adopt, and five …”.

Men love numbered lists, don’t they? That is men – they are not like us. To stop him, with all the little strength I had, I pulled myself up and threw my arms around him, sobbing with total joy.

The End

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