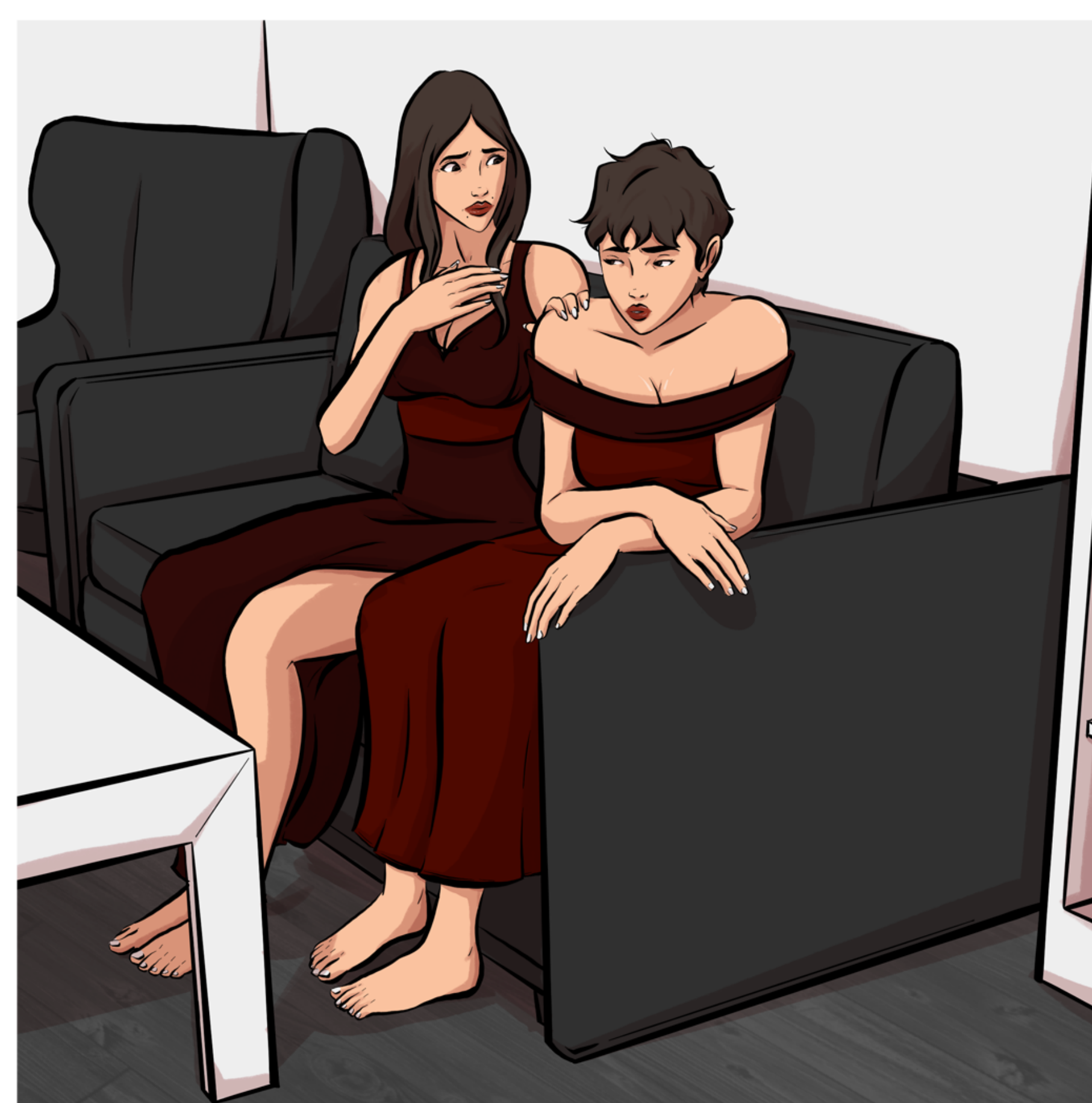


TAYLOR ♂
♀ WOMADE

EPIISODE 2



Taylor stomped into the living room, his heels clicking on the hardwood floor. “I knew I shouldn’t have let you talk me into wearing the dress. What the heck was I thinking?”

“You were thinking there was a problem that needed to be solved, and that’s what we did.”

“And made an even bigger problem!”

“Taylor, I don’t think this is as bad as you’re making it out to be.”

“I’m a thief, Mom. I stole some girl’s future.”

“Hold on. You didn’t know the scholarships were gendered, right? That they awarded five for boys and five for girls?”

“No! They weren’t last year. Why would they change it to make it more old-fashioned?”

“Well, from what I read in the pamphlet while I was in the stands, over the last few years they saw there was a big gender disparity.”

“More boys were getting the scholarships?”

“Once upon a time, yeah. But over the last twenty years the girls started doing better than boys. Last year seven out of the ten scholarships went to girls. I guess the National Scholastic Awards decided to adjust things to keep the numbers balanced.” Mom rolled her eyes. “Figures they’d ‘fix’ something just as we’re catching up. But that’s not the point. You didn’t know about the change, so you’re not a thief.”

“Ignorance is no excuse. I should’ve looked up the rules. I *always* look up the rules.”

“That’s true, and maybe that’s a mistake.”

Taylor sighed. Sometimes Mom didn’t make any sense. “What do you mean?”

“I’m not saying you should be a criminal, but if you follow the rules to the letter all the time, you’ll miss out on a lot of opportunities – not to mention a lot of fun. Like, you have this perfect attendance record, you always follow the dress code, you’ve never had a grade below a B—”

“B-*plus*. Stupid German language.”

“—and that’s amazing, but have you ever asked yourself if the rules are fair? Or if they’re even sensible?”

“Not really, I guess.”

“College is about experimenting. It’s a time to find out who you *really* are. You won’t get to experience that if you follow every little rule. It’ll be just like high school all over again.”



Taylor tugged the hem of the dress. "But what if I mess up?"

"Then you mess up! Making mistakes is part of life. Or, at least, a life worth living. I promise, it's better to fail than to never try."

"Fine. Got it. But how's this relevant to the scholarship?"

"It's *relevant* because the rules were stupid, so to hell with them. You won! Now you can attend MIT, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, or...somewhere closer."

"But the scholarship's worthless. They gave it to Taylor Hughes, a *female* senior from Bloomington High."

"And?"

Taylor squeezed the bridge of his nose. "Did the crossdressing go to your head? I'm not really a girl, remember?"

"Honey, you have to take it. Please. I can't let my son miss this chance just because he's not my daughter."

"But...But usually freshmen have to live on campus with a roommate. Like, in a small dorm room. They'll put me with another girl—"

Mom cocked an eyebrow. "*Another?*"

"Ugh, you know what I mean. Our beds will be ten feet from each other, we'll share a bathroom, I'll see her naked and she'll see me naked and—"

"Oh, honey. I know you like those silly movies, but do you really think we girls walk around naked in front of each other all the time?"

"Well, maybe not all the time, but—"

"Just be the kind, respectful boy I raised, and nobody will be the wiser. Trust me. Heck, you could even walk around with your shirt off and—"

"Are you crazy? I'm not letting a girl see my...my chest!"

"I'm just saying you *could*. Nobody will suspect a 'young lady' as developed as you are is, well..."

"A man."

For some reason, Mom smirked. "Exactly."

"But what about clothes?"

"That's one of the best parts about being a woman. You can wear your hoodies and ugly jeans. People will just think you're a tomboy with zero fashion sense. Unless you want to add some cute tops and a skirt or two."

"No way! This dress was one-time thing!"

"I'm only joking, Taylor."

"Well, you're not funny. I can't really do this. Can I?"

"Yes, you can. Trust me, I wish I could afford to send you to the sort of school you deserve, but, well..."



"I know. And I appreciate all you've done. But pretend to be a girl for college? Isn't that nuts? And, like, unethical?"

"It's neither. Unusual? Sure. But I was serious when I said you might benefit from seeing life on the other side. And after your first semester, just...switch back."

"And how would that work?"

Mom put her hands on her hips. "People are experimenting with their gender all the time these days. You think anybody will bat an eye if tomboy Taylor comes back as a guy after Christmas? And by then, your chest will have probably gone away, anyway."

"But the scholarship is for a girl."

"They won't take it away because you transitioned. There'd be an uproar."

"I guess." Taylor bit his lip. "You really think I could get away with that?"

"Absolutely. And I just can't let you turn it down. You worked too hard. Now, go get the brochure for MIT and I'll help you fill out the application."

"Okay. But can I take off this dumb dress and the makeup first?"

"Yes! Sorry, I forgot you were wearing them. Oh, I'm so proud of you!"

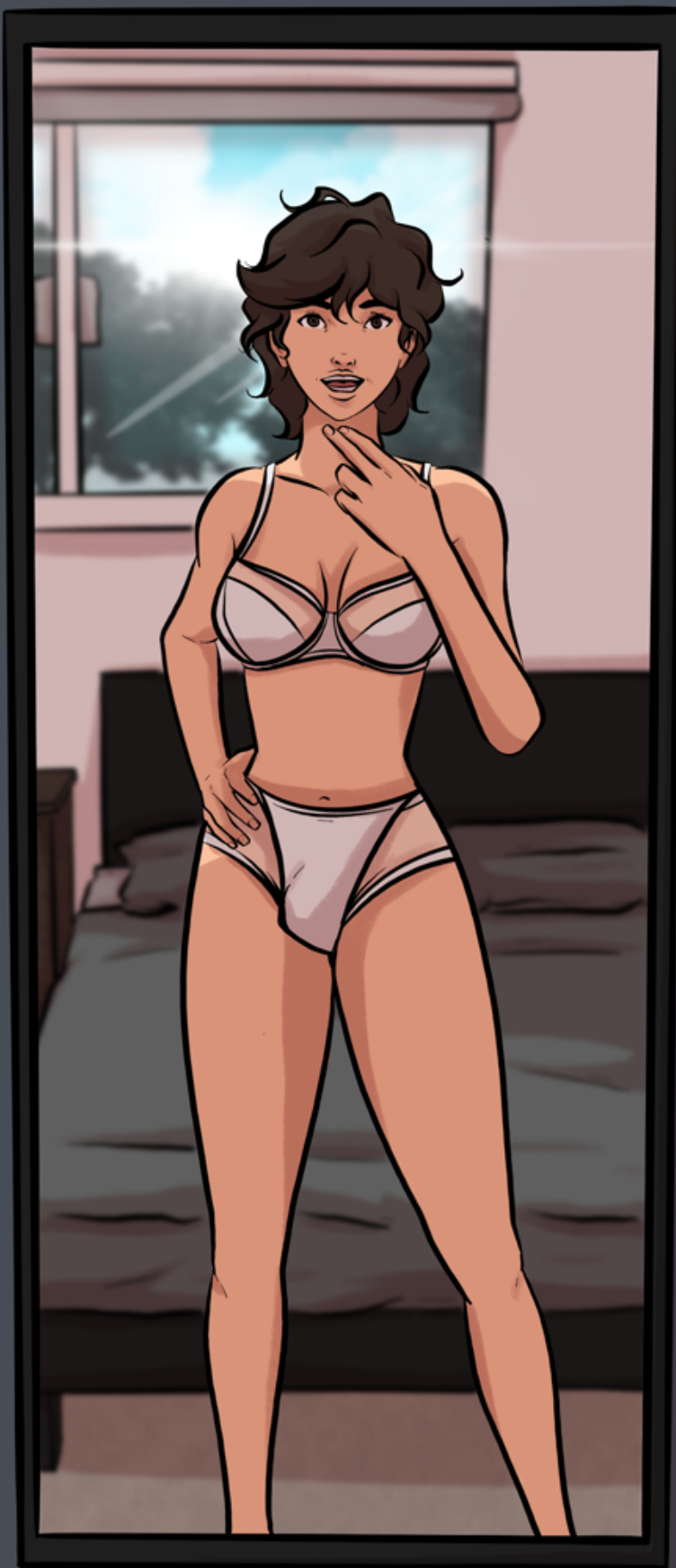
"Thanks, Mom. Just promise you'll never tell Wendy. I'd die if she found out I wore her dress and spent a whole semester pretending to be a girl."

"Your secret is safe with me. And I *especially* won't tell your sister you looked even better in her gown than she did."

"Mom!"

The rest of the school year passed in a blur of college applications and final exams. While most of Taylor's classmates had developed a severe case of "senioritis," Taylor was determined to keep up his grades and prove to all the jocks and bullies that his years of hard work would pay off. The day he received his acceptance letter from MIT was the happiest of his life so far. Somehow, he managed to put the whole "going to school as girl" thing out of his mind.

When the valedictorian announcement was made at the end-of-year assembly, Taylor's name was called. His classmates applauded, but nobody really seemed to care. Still, graduation was a day Taylor would always remember. Walking across the stage in his cap and gown, he felt like he could conquer the world.



But as summer wore on, reality began to sink in. Especially after Mom downloaded an app to help him learn to make his voice sound like a girl's.

"That'll be your main giveaway," she said. "You need to work on that."

Taylor tried, but it just sounded unnatural. "I just won't talk," he said. "I'll be a silent, brooding type. Like that girl from the Breakfast Club."

"Since when do you quit when things get hard?"

"Ugh. Fine!" Slowly, he was able to sound more feminine. The timbre wasn't perfect, but hopefully it was good enough to pass.

Near the end of July, Mom approached him while eating breakfast. She looked wary. "This is a touchy subject, but if you're going to be a girl—"

His eyes narrowed. "*Pretend to be a girl.*"

"—you need bras."

Taylor clutched his spoonful of Cheerios. In the past, Mom had mentioned getting him "support," but those conversations had gone south fast. Instead, he'd used Ace bandages, even though it chafed horribly.

"I know," Mom was saying. "But you can't use your...condition...to help with the disguise *and* tape them down within an inch of their lives. So—"

"You're right." Taylor resumed eating. "Let's order from Amazon."

"Um, we have to measure you first. I have sewing tape. I can help—"

He crossed his arms. "I'll do it myself."

And so, Taylor spent an hour watching YouTube videos on how to measure yourself. His face flushed as he held the sewing tape against his nipples. A few clicks on his laptop later, and he'd ordered his first bra, sized 32DD. The innocuous-looking box arrived the next day. Taylor opened it in his bedroom, handling it like it was radioactive.

He was confident in his measurements, but he knew he had to try it on. As he slipped his arms through the straps his mind rebelled. He was a guy! Only pervs wore women's underwear!

Be logical. You're not wearing this for a thrill, but for practical reasons.

When he fastened the back, the cups settled perfectly around his breasts. The support felt...strange. He felt a moment of triumph for having gotten the sizing correct. Then, he frowned at his new cleavage.

"What the hell am I doing?" He sat on his bed and stared into space. Suddenly, he stood up and took a deep breath. "Too late. I'm going to MIT. There's no turning back."

Turning to his mirror, Taylor put on a fake smile, cocked his hip, and 'switched on' his girl voice. "Hi! I'm Taylor. What's your name?"



Finally, the day arrived. Taylor was leaving for MIT! First, though, Mom insisted on helping him apply “a touch” of makeup.

“You have to practice,” she insisted. “You’ve mastered the voice, you’re wearing a bra—”

“Don’t remind me.” He still hadn’t gotten used to the straps digging into his shoulders all day.

“—but if you don’t learn basic makeup, you’ll always be seen as a little... off by the other girls.”

Her logic was sound, but that didn’t mean Taylor was happy. In fact, seated at her makeup table once again, he was downright miserable. Somehow, being taught how to properly apply lipstick by his own mother felt like the final nail in the coffin of his masculinity.

One semester, he reminded himself. That’s all.

He spent an hour following Mom’s instructions to the letter. As it turned out, she was a great teacher, and once she explained the purpose of all the weird tubes, wands, and palettes, it wasn’t as complicated as he feared. In the end, he looked... normal. For a girl, anyway.

“This is so strange,” he said to his lipstick and mascara-clad reflection.

“You’ll get used to it,” Mom said from behind him. “We all do.”

“We?”

“Women.” She smiled. “It’s a club you’re now a part of now, at least for a little while. And I think you’ll find it has its perks.”

“Like what?”

“What is it you always say? ‘No spoilers?’ It’ll be better if you find out for yourself. You do look gorgeous, though.” Mom beamed with pride. “I know that’s not what you want to hear, but it’s true. And I’m so glad I convinced you to let your hair grow out over the summer. It’ll help with the disguise.”

Taylor shook his head, still not quite believing any of this was happening. “We’re really sure this is going to work?”

“Of course,” Mom said. “You just need to be confident.”

“Do you remember who you’re talking to?”

“Yes, I do. I’m talking to my wonderful, brilliant, and beautiful son. Now, get your luggage. Your plane leaves in two hours.”



Mom drove him to the airport and gave him a big hug right before the security line.

"I'll miss you," she said, her eyes misting over. "I'm an empty nester now. Without you and Wendy to keep me company, this house will be way too quiet."

Taylor fought back the tears welling up in his own eyes. This might be his last chance to act like a man until winter break. "I'll miss you too, Mom. And don't worry, I'll call you all the time."

"You'd better." She wiped her eyes. "Remember, you deserve to be there. And nobody will suspect a thing unless you give them a good reason. People always see what they expect to see."

"I know," he said. "Thanks, Mom."

He hefted his luggage and walked into the terminal. He was really doing it. Taylor Hughes was going to college.

As a girl.

Well, here goes everything...