

## A Night Out

A studio apartment is rarely a place of intrigue; nothing that interesting happens in merely 13 square meters. Today was different. My small room was the backstage for my grand debut. Today was the first time I was going out as a woman.

I had always known that something was different about me, but it wasn't until recently that I admitted even to myself that I was a transwoman. I had thought about it for over ten years, but when I started living alone, I finally had the chance to act on my thoughts and to experiment. My studio apartment became a fashion studio. I put on a wig with luscious brown hair that fell all the way down to my chest; I had never even had my hair cover my eyes. I tried on a pair of short shorts; I had never worn pants that didn't cover my knees. Everything from my hair to my eyelashes was either much longer or much shorter than usual. But as I looked in the mirror filled with these irregularities, I couldn't help but smile. As unfamiliar as it all was, everything seemed so natural. I thought that this answered my question of whether I wanted to be a woman. But my smile soon faded and I was left with more questions than I began with.

By considering myself as a woman after this makeover, wasn't I conforming to the social norm of what a woman should look like? Was I restricting my definition of being a woman to having long hair, putting on makeup, and wearing short shorts? What made me a woman? My appearance? If I was truly a woman, wouldn't I be a woman no matter how long my hair was or what clothes I wore? But what else could I change to feel like a woman?

I couldn't answer these questions, but I knew something had to be done. I came out to my friends as a transwoman. As shocked as they were, they all accepted me and wanted to support my

transition. They suggested we go to a bar to celebrate. Even though I was scared and conflicted, I knew that it would be much easier with my friends to support me.

So, there I was that day, getting ready to debut. I carefully coated my face with foundation; I curled my eyelashes and applied mascara. I added shading. I was ready. I put my shoes on and put my hands on the front door's handle. It was showtime. Like the curtains of a stage, I slowly opened the door. The play had begun.

The first act was my journey through the labyrinth of people in Seoul's subway system. This maze was very much a living thing. Its walls shifted every which way; its hundred eyes wandered aimlessly; it hungered for something interesting. You never knew what might catch this creature's attention. To avoid its gaze, I needed to act like a woman, but what did that mean? Did I need to change my posture or the way I walk? Self-conscious, I slowly descended into its maw, hoping not to draw any attention. I awkwardly stumbled through the mass of people and found a seat. My heart pounded as if I were in the belly of an actual monster. I was startled at the slightest movement. For an hour, I sat there like a statue, unable to move and dearly hoping that no one would pay attention to me. Finally, I was out. I bolted out of the station and found my friends.

After a brief intermission came act two: the inevitable ID check, the rite of admission. There was no getting out of it and my friends couldn't help either. My social security number clearly started with a one — the mark of a man. I looked nothing like the photo on my ID card either. There was no way to go unnoticed. My friends and I sat around a large coffee table. I deliberately positioned myself in the seat with the least light in hopes that the darkness would conceal my identity. As I anxiously sat in my seat, the bartender came. He started with my friend at the other end of the table. With each check, he slowly made his way towards me. Three friends left; two friends left; one friend left. It was my turn. I reached for my ID, but then... *ring ring ring*. The bartender hurried away to pick up the phone. I exchanged

glances with my friends, fidgeting around with my ID. The moment of truth was still coming; the call had only delayed the inevitable. I watched the bartender put down his phone and make his way towards us. He moved near me and said,

“So, what would you like to order?”

He had forgotten about me. What luck! He forgot about carding me! My friend ordered our drinks and with this lucky turn of events, everything seemed perfect. I finished a sweet piña colada and started on a gin tonic. I sipped my way through the drink, talking to my friends and laughing. Then too suddenly, I had to face an impromptu act three; I had to go to the bathroom.

Most people never experience having to pick a bathroom. They just see the sign they’ve grown used to over the years and go for it. That’s all it is. Nothing significant, nothing special. But for the first time in my life, I had to make a conscious decision for something so trivial. I was a woman in a man’s body dressed like a woman. Which bathroom was I supposed to use? I looked at the women’s room. Will I be arrested if they find me in the woman’s room? What if I’m mistaken for some pervert? I could get into seriously trouble, right? But I look like a woman right now, so they might not even notice. I could be totally fine. Did it matter that I was a woman inside? I looked at the men’s room. Will they kick me out if I went to the men’s room? I’ll probably have to explain that I was in a man’s body. Then they’d question why I looked like a woman. Will they ask for proof of some kind? What if...? But nature was calling and I had to answer. I couldn’t hide or hope for some luck as I had with the bartender. It was time to face those questions that I left unanswered. Does my appearance mean that I’m a woman? Does my body mean that I’m a man? What did it mean to be a woman? What was I?

I stepped up and opened the door. I walked through and used the toilet. I stepped out and everything was the same. My friends were still talking and drinking. I sat back down. I was myself.

*Blackout.*

*Curtains close.*