

It's ok To be **TRANSGENDER**



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Chapter 1: I am Special

I am 10 years old, and I will soon be graduating from elementary school. My school has an annual tradition to throw a graduation party for the 5th grade before their official ceremony. Every child is supposed to come dressed as what they want to be in the future. I have heard it is a lot of fun. My brother described it as just like Halloween but only without candies. Mrs. Henderson, my favorite teacher, informed us that instead of candies, there would be pizza at the party. Pizza is only served once every two weeks in the school cafeteria, and it is *SO* yummy. Thinking about eating pizza made all of us very excited, but I was even more excited about dressing up as what I want to be when I grow up. All the children were discussing with each other about what their costumes would be, except me. I knew what I wanted to be. I have always known.

My brother is a year older than me, and he went to his graduation party dressed up as a footballer. When my mother asked me what I wanted to go to my party as at the dinner table, my brother suggested excitedly, "Chris, go dressed up as a footballer!". But I am not too fond of football - actually I am not too fond of any sports.

During PE, my teacher makes me play with the boys in the class. Once my PE teacher caught me skipping practice to play with Amber and Sarah, my best friends from school, and yelled at me for practicing with the girls. "There are different teams for boys and girls, Chris," he said harshly. "You are a boy. You get to play with the boy's team." However, I only enjoy sports when I am playing with the girls. I feel more comfortable around them.

When I told Mommy about it, she invited Amber and Sarah over the weekend to play sports together. Mommy says I can be on the girl's team.

Now Amber and Sarah come over to my house every week to play with me. However, we do not always play sports. We play with dolls, walk in my mother's high heels, and sometimes pretend to be princesses in her flowy nightgowns. Occasionally we would sneak into my mother's room and put on some of her makeup.

Amber and Sarah never treat me as a boy. They understand that I have the body of a boy, but I am a girl in my heart and my mind. Amber even gifted me a doll for my birthday. She said it looks like me. It is so pretty. I have named it Christine.

My mother lets me wear my sister's dresses around Amber and Sarah. She also joins us sometimes during our pretend tea parties. Once, she caught us going through her makeup in her room. I had her pearl necklace over my head and barely stood straight in her bright red high heels. I was really scared that she would be upset, but then she smiled instead.

"You wear those shoes better than me, Chris," she said, looking proud and teary-eyed.

That day she even taught me how to paint my nails. I asked her to paint them pink. It has always been my favorite color. Although purple is a very close second favorite.

I was so proud of my new nails, but Leo, a boy at school, did not like my beautiful pink creation. "Boys do not paint their nails," he said, showing his disapproval. "You are always playing with dolls and playing with the girls," he frowned as he spat these words. "Boys don't do that!"

"Mind your own business, Leo." Amber appeared, with Sarah tagging behind her. They both had their nails painted. Amber a shade of purple, while Sarah had the shiniest color of yellow.

"Pink looks so pretty on you!" exclaimed Sarah. "Maybe your mom can paint my nails too the next time I come over."

Annoyed by the support I had received from my best friends, Leo stomped towards the teacher's desk and complained to Mrs. Henderson. "Chris has his nails painted!" he protested. "And he is always doing girl things!" he added after a short pause.

"There are no boy and girl things, Leo.", Mrs. Henderson explained to him in her calm voice. "Maybe Chris is a little different to you, just like you might be to him. There is nothing wrong with being a little different. It only makes you special", she directed her last words looking at me, and I swear I saw her smile.

That day Mrs. Henderson let me play the role of the queen for our English skit. She had brought a crown that I wore while I delivered my dialogues. "You can keep it, Chris.", she said when I went to return it after the class. The crown was as sparkly as the stars at night. When I went home, I immediately stripped out of my school clothes and put on one of my sister's dresses. I

looked at myself in the mirror as I put on the shiny crown. I looked so SPECIAL.

Soon I realized that I was transgender. I heard the word on the television, and everything started making sense. I told Mommy about it, and she said that she had always known. Since then, I started wearing dresses more frequently around the house. I started to grow my hair. I had always loathed going to the barber's to get a haircut. I even made Sarah and Amber start referring to me as Christine, just like my doll. Mommy also started buying me dresses for holidays, instead of shorts and t-shirts like my brother. She even gifted me a huge doll collection on Christmas and signed the card as "To my beautiful daughter, Christine."

So, when my brother suggested on the dinner table that I go dressed as a footballer, I politely refused. "I want to be a girl in the future, so I should dress as a girl," I announced innocently. I felt a little difficulty breathing at that moment.

"Which one of your dresses do you want to wear?" Mommy said, breaking the silence that felt like an eternity. The feeling of difficulty breathing left me, and I was filled with joy. My entire family came to my room that night, and we all hugged. People finally understood how I feel every day.

We decided on a pink floral dress that my Mommy had gifted me on Christmas for the party. I asked her to paint my nails bright pink, and she even made me a pearl necklace just like hers. I also wore the sparkling crown that Mrs. Henderson had gifted me. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt *special*. I loved the pink nails, the beautiful dress, and my long hair. I felt like myself for the first time. I saw Christine instead of Chris.

When I arrived at the party, all the girls told me how pretty I looked. "I want a dress just like yours!" cried Sarah. Everyone was asking me a lot of questions, and I loved answering all of them. Most of the boys inquired what I was dressed as, and I told that about being transgender. I told them that I am a girl, trapped inside a boy's body. Mrs. Henderson helped me explain to everyone how I was different.

Soon Leo arrived at the party. He was not impressed by my dress, and he made it apparent. He said, "Chris, you are weird."

"Call me Christine," I corrected him sternly. "I am different from you, Leo. I am transgender, and I am special!" I declared proudly. I walked away from him feeling happy and free. He did not bother me anymore.

The rest of the day, Amber, Sarah, and I spent dancing and eating pizza. It was *So* yummy. It was the *best* day of my life.

Chapter 2: Christine Goes to Camp

Now that I have graduated elementary school, I will attend middle school during the next academic year. It is called Burnes Academy, and my brother and sister are currently enrolled there. I have visited it a couple of times for my sister's theatrical performances and my brother's football matches. Compared to my elementary school, Burnes is HUGE. My siblings tell me that children from various elementary schools in the city end up attending Burnes. "It is a great opportunity to make friends. You can find people who are like you and love the same things as you", my brother once told me during my discussions with him about the new school.

He met his best friend Finnley at Burnes. Although he is unpleasantly loud and messy and sometimes can be a little irritating, my brother seems to enjoy himself around him. They like the same sports, admire the same players, and even finish each other's sentences. They are like two peas in a pod.

Although Amber and Sarah will also attend Burnes Academy with me next year, I am looking forward to starting a fresh journey as Christine at my new school. Amber and Sarah are wonderful friends, but they do not live the life that I do. Hopefully, at Burnes, I will find people who are different like me - people who are trans. But I will have to wait to find out since there are still two more weeks until the summer break ends.

I have spent the entire summer playing dress-up, climbing trees, having tea parties, and baking with Amber and Sarah. We have done all things imaginable and were recently struggling to keep ourselves entertained. This was when Mommy suggested that we go to a summer camp.

I have never been to a camp before, and it seemed like the best way to kill time during these two weeks, so I agreed. Amber and Sarah are also going to attend this summer camp, which further convinced me to go. Mommy says that they might not be the only 'familiar' faces there.

"Let's pack your bag for the trip," Mommy said after dinner. Camp starts tomorrow, and I have yet to pack. My clothes were piled up on my bed, socks were arranged in pairs, and my toiletries and stationery were packed neatly in pouches. "Are you sure you *just* want to pack dresses, Christine?" Mommy asked. "Yes, with matching hair clips," I said confidently.

Since my graduation party, I have only been wearing dresses. I wear dresses to school, to malls, to parks - I wear them everywhere. I have also grown my hair really long. I hope one day they are as long as Rapunzel. Although most people do not seem to mind my new clothing style, there are some who do. Maybe Mommy was concerned that such people might also be at the camp.

The next morning Mommy dropped me off at my elementary school. This is where the bus was leaving from. Amber and Sarah were already on the bus and were excitedly waving at me from the window. After saying goodbye to Mommy, I boarded the bus. Soon I noticed a 'familiar' face. Leo was sitting on the seat behind me with some of his guy friends from school. "Guess he was going to keep the girls and I company for the rest of the trip!" I thought.

Amber, Sarah, and I played tic-tac-toe, hangman, and several other games on our way to camp. We had also brought our favorite dolls with us. While playing with our dolls, I heard Leo and his friends sneering and giggling at us from behind. "Do you play with dolls?" he mockingly asked his friend. He made sure it was loud enough so that I could hear it. "No, boys don't play with dolls," said his friend, sounding disgusted yet cynical. I was relieved that the bus soon stopped. We had arrived at the camp, and I would not have to listen to the constant snide comments from Leo.

Many buses soon arrived at the campground, each bringing dozens of children. Camp greeters, who were high schoolers that had volunteered, excitedly welcomed us. They started calling out names. "Eric, Leo, Dugg, Chris". I initially did not respond because Chris sounded unfamiliar until Leo nudged me. "I am Christine," I said. "Well, follow me, Christine," the camp greeter replied, while Amber and Sarah were instructed to follow another female greeter. We followed him through narrow pathways that led to a flight of stairs. Climbing the stairs, we discovered a beautiful cabin that overlooked the lake. "This is your cabin for the trip. Remember, no food is allowed outside the dining halls, washrooms are down the stairs to the right, and beware of bugs," announced the camp greeter.

The idea of sharing a room with the boys, especially with Leo, made me uncomfortable. "I am a girl. I don't want to share a room with them," I protested. "Sorry, but I have to follow the rules. You are listed down as Chris, and this is your room." The camp greeter left me with the boys.

I took the bed farthest from the three. Everyone was making their bed, so I decided to do the same. Eric had a bedsheet with Spiderman printed on it, Dugg had one with Batman, and Leo's had Superman flying on it. "What's on your bed sheet, Chris?" inquired Dugg. I moved out the way so they could see my beautiful pink spread with all the Disney princesses printed on it. All the

boys laughed. However, their laughter soon stopped and turned into screams. All of them were jumping across the beds, crying hysterically. "COCKROACH!" yelled Leo. The brown oval body of the insect crawled near me, and I picked it up in my palms. Sarah, Amber, and I had collected a lot of bugs during the summer. I loved animals. "Move back, Chris!" Leo cried. He was scared. I stepped closer to him. "Call me Christine," I commanded him to respect me. "I am sorry, Christine. Please move back," he said this time more politely. The rest of the boys laughed at Leo and were impressed by my bravery. "You're so cool, Christine," said Dugg, looking amazed. I later let my little brown friend go free outside in the wild.

I left the cabin to go to the washroom. "Down the stairs to the right," I recalled the camp greeter saying. There were two sections, one for the boys, another for the girls. My elementary school had a gender-neutral washroom, but I did not see a sign for it anywhere. While I stood there looking at the signs, my camp greeter walked out of the boys' section. "Go on, buddy, it's free now," he said. I had no other alternative but to use it. I felt embarrassed. This was going to be the worst two weeks of my life.

Soon the alarm rang, and an announcement was made over the speaker. "It's lunchtime. Head to the dining hall." Following the herd of children, I reached the dining hall. A group of girls surrounded Amber and Sarah. All of them were laughing and had their dolls sat in front of them on the table. I waved at them, but they did not see me. Maybe they had forgotten about me. "We are at table 7", Dugg said as he appeared from behind. The table was fully occupied by boys, with only two vacant seats. One was for me, while the other for the camp coordinator. I sat down with my head hanging low when I felt someone sit next to me. It was Mrs. Henderson. She was our camp coordinator. She looked at my sad face and gave me a reassuring smile.

Today was taco day at camp, and all of us were asked to make our own. There was bacon, beef, chicken, fish, hard shell tacos, soft shell tacos, beans, and whatnot decorated on silver platters on the table. "How do you like your tacos, kids?" Mrs. Henderson asked. "I like mine with chicken and lemon," said Dugg. "I prefer beans and beef with some sour cream," Eric chimed. "I like prawns and guacamole!" Leo announced. "That's weird," Eric replied to Leo's answer. Mrs. Henderson smiled, and in her calm voice, said, "Everyone has their own preferences. They are different." "You have to respect everyone's choices, Eric," Mrs. Henderson added. I knew she was turning this into a lesson, like the last time. But I was pleased someone was there who understood me and was willing to help me out. "So, is everyone a taco?" a confused Eric asked. Everyone laughed loudly. "No silly, everyone is unique, and they are amazing, just like a taco no matter what you put in it."

Soon lunchtime was over, and everyone was out on the playground. Mrs. Henderson held me back. "I heard about the rooming situation, Christine. I am sorry," she said. She told me that I could share a cabin with Amber and Sarah and use the girl's washroom. "After all, signs are just shapes. Add a triangle to the circle, and you get a girl; if you leave it out, it's a boy. To be honest, they confuse me," she said. "Me too," I told Mrs. Henderson as I ran to the playground filled with joy and excitement. I was delighted that I will enjoy the camp and have a complete experience as a girl.

Out on the playground, Amber and Sarah had joined my group. They were enthusiastically sharing all the details of their trip and jumped in joy when I told them about the new cabin arrangement. I felt good knowing that they had not forgotten me.

Later, we decided to play Hide and Seek. Everyone was quarreling over who was to be the seeker. I had been hiding my entire life behind circles and triangles as Chris. I did not want to hide anymore but seek all the beautiful things there were in life. So, when the opportunity came, I volunteered to be the seeker. I loved running in the mountains and hearing the wind hit the lake. As I ran, I felt amazing, and I felt *FREE*. Maybe these two weeks would not be bad after all because I had people around me who did not mind me being different. They made me ignore those who did.

I was excited for this camp to end and to begin my journey at Burnes Academy. Maybe I'll find someone who likes a taco with a unique combination!

Chapter 3: First Day

In the morning, Mommy walked into my room to wake me up. But little did she know that the excitement to start school had kept me up most of the night.

Ever since the summer camp ended, I have been counting every day until the start of the new school year. And FINALLY, today is the day that I will be starting afresh as Christine at Burnes Academy - my new school. My siblings currently are enrolled at Burnes, and they have told me all about it. It is like I have a beautiful picture of the school painted in my mind with vibrant colors through my siblings' stories.

For weeks, I had my outfit picked out for the first day. Mommy had taken me along to run errands at Target one day, and my eye caught this beautiful dress with all the colors that one can imagine. Yellow, green, blue, pink, purple - this dress had a hint of everything, and I loved it. So, I forced her to buy it. After a bit of persuasion, I convinced my mother to also buy me a set of matching hair clips that were equally as colorful. For weeks I had been waiting to put these on as they hung ironed in my cupboard. So today, when the day came, I rushed to brush my teeth, shower, and put on this dress.

At the breakfast table, everyone was waiting for me. Mommy had made various options for us - waffles, pancakes, fried eggs, boiled eggs, toast, and whatnot. But because of the excited jitters, my stomach only allowed me to have just a tiny bowl of cereal. I ate while Mommy combed my hair, which had grown longer since the summer camp, into two pigtails secured by the rainbow-like hair clips I had bought. Once done, she put a mirror in front of me to inspect my hairstyle. "AHHHHHHHHH!!!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. I swear my brother, who was sitting opposite me, could see my throat swinging like a wrecking ball. In the mirror, I noticed a couple of red bumps on my forehead. It looked like something my brother had grown last year, and he called it 'acne.' "Relax, you are just going through puberty," my brother nonchalantly said to calm me down. However, the word 'puberty' did not bring me any comfort at all.

Soon, we heard the school bus honking. I saw my siblings rush for their backpacks in the far corner of the room and head out. I did the same, but my mother stopped me and told me she would drive me to school.

Mommy always drives us to new places so that we are familiar with the route. She says it is important for our safety. She did this with my older sister and brother, even though he still does not remember the way. The car ride was

quiet, except for the obnoxiously loud music blasting from the radio. The entire ride, I was examining the red bumps on my forehead through the side mirrors and had forgotten about the glorious dress I was wearing. I think Mommy noticed this and said, "Remember, you are beautiful, Christine," as she opened the door to let me out. However, I did not feel anything close to beautiful. The red bumps on my forehead made me feel gross.

We had reached Burnes Academy, and it looked HUGE in comparison to me. Amber and Sarah were waiting for me in the hallway that was crowded by scores of students. Every girl in that corridor looked terrific. Their hair was silkier than mine, skin clearer than mine, and their bodies more developed than mine. I looked like the odd one out.

"Look! They are having tryouts for the dance team today." Amber exclaimed, pointing towards one of the notice boards. "Maybe we should try out. All those dance routines we choreographed during summer camp might come in handy." Sarah suggested. I agreed with the idea. We had won many awards and accolades at camp for our dances. Mrs. Henderson even told me that I was the best out of the three of us. So, I felt reasonably confident trying out.

Amber, Sarah, and I rushed to the auditorium for the tryouts during our free hour. Standing in line with all the girls, I felt like a giant. I was taller, broad-shouldered, and more muscular than all of them. However, I mustered up the courage to try out, and it went well.

"You were so good, Christine," Amber said after my performance. "You are definitely in," followed Sarah. However, I was devastated when my name was not announced at the end of the tryouts. Amber and Sarah had both made the team, even though we had the same routine. I am sure it was because of the way that I looked.

The rest of the day, I walked around with my hand fixated on my forehead, trying to hide the red bumps on my face. While Sarah and Amber talked to people and tried to make new friends, I was actively trying to avoid any interaction.

During my walk to one of my classes, I bumped into someone because my hand hiding my acne blocked my vision. To my surprise, when I turned around, I saw I had bumped into Leo.

"Hey, Chris! Mom told me I might see you here." "Nice choice of dress," he said after slyly examining me from head to toe. His group of friends laughed. I ignored him and tried to collect the belongings I had just dropped. "I was telling my friends how I have grown some hair on my face during the summer. My father says I am becoming a *MAN*," he said, sounding proud, as

if this was an achievement. This was when one of his friends pointed at me, "Even Chris has grown some hair." All of the boys looked in awe, but I was scared. At that moment, I felt abnormal. I touched my upper lip, and I could feel some baby hair growing there. I immediately rushed to the washroom. I had not seen any girl with hair on their face, so why was I growing it.

In the washroom, I stared at myself in the mirror. I felt ugly at that moment. Locking myself in the washrooms soon became a habit. Every free hour or during lunch, I would go to the washroom to avoid talking to people. I started to become embarrassed of the way that I looked. During classes, I would usually sit in the farthest seat and avoid interactions and participation. I started wearing dresses that were not as colorful, as I wanted to blend in and not stand out. My academic performance soon dropped, and my mother was called to the school.

When I walked into the office with my mother, I soon realized that it was not the principal we were meeting. 'Head Counselor,' the silver nameplate on the table read. Various thoughts ran through my mind. She asked me to sit outside for a few minutes, which seemed like an eternity, while she spoke to my mother. Then she invited me in. Alone. "Are you having a hard time adjusting, Christine?" she asked me calmly. Listening to her voice reminded me of Mrs. Henderson and all the times she had helped me. Maybe she was like her and could help me navigate through my problems. I decided to share with her everything I was feeling.

My meetings with the Head Counselor soon became frequent, and she told me everything about puberty and how I was experiencing hormone changes. She told me that the cells in my body produce hormones that tell my body when to grow and stop growing. Boys produce testosterone, while girls produce estrogen. She told me that the red bumps and the facial hair were due to the increased testosterone in my body. "But shouldn't my body produce estrogen? After all, I am a girl." I asked with visible panic in my voice and tears forming in my eyes. "You were assigned the wrong sex at birth, Christine," she said empathetically. Once again, after a long time, I felt stuck inside a boy's body.

That day I went home crying. Mommy came to my room that night. "Mistakes can be and should be corrected," she said as she cradled me to sleep. The following day she took me to a very friendly doctor, Dr. Garbrielle Lee. She is an endocrinologist. Mommy says she can fix all the glands responsible for releasing hormones into the blood in my body. She told me that she could help me escape the boy body that I was trapped in.

After various appointments with Dr. Lee and her friend, a psychologist, I was prescribed a yellow tablet called Spironolactone. Dr. Lee said that the tablets

would help reduce my growing hair and reduce all my boy-like features. She called this process hormone suppression. Hearing this, I made sure that I took my medicine on time and followed all the instructions from the doctor.

Mommy helped me pluck out the couple of hairs on my upper lip. It twitched, but I bore the pain like the brave girl I am. She also put some cream on the red bumps on my forehead, which disappeared in a few days.

It has been almost a month since I started medication, and the hair has not regrown, and the acne has not reappeared. My body is not as muscular, and my shoulders are not as broad, and unlike Leo, my voice does not crack. I finally feel like I am escaping from the boy-body I have been trapped in. Dr. Lee says if everything goes well, she will put me on estrogen, which will make me look and feel more like a girl. This next process, hormone replacement, will be yet another step in my journey to live a life as Christine.

The changes gave me confidence, and soon I started having lunch in the cafeteria. I would sit around people and participate in class. I would accompany Amber and Sarah and introduce myself to new people. Since Amber and Sarah were on the dance team, I decided to find a place to feel like I belonged. This is how I joined the Drama Club, a place where everyone appreciated my bright dresses.

Now I wear only the brightest colored dresses in my wardrobe, as I want to stand out and not blend in.

Chapter 4: Safe Space

“Scene!” yelled Samuel, and that marked the end of an exciting chapter of my journey at Burnes Academy.

Surely, starting middle school at Burnes was initially a bumpy road, but it seems to be becoming smoother with time. Things were not as vibrant and colorful as my siblings had painted them to be. However, I have been adjusting. Dr. Gabrielle Lee and my treatment under her supervision have been helping me. She has put me on hormone suppression medications, and that has assisted me in loving myself more. I feel like I am embodying Christine and finally letting go of Chris.

Since Sarah and Amber are usually busy with the dance team - (I was not selected despite being the *BEST* at tryouts) - I have decided to join the Drama Club. People in this club are not as popular as the dance girls, and neither do they color coordinate their outfits every Wednesday. Not many people know about the Drama Club. However, people are usually more accepting in the Drama Club, and that was enough.

Samuel is one of the students in my English class. They have bright blue hair cut into layers that are long enough to rest over their right eye. During one of the class projects, I first met them when the teacher paired me with them for a short skit of the famous play Romeo and Juliet. We scored an A in that project, and Samuel deserves all the credit. They are a phenomenal actor. It did not surprise me at all when they told me they were part of the Drama Club.

Samuel does not identify as a boy nor a girl. “I do not feel strongly as either of the two sexes.” Samuel taught me how sex and gender are two different things. Biological sex might be limited to only two traditional options, male, and female. Gender, on the other hand, is not. It is fluid. “I identify as non-binary, just like you identify as a transgender female,” Samuel told me. “I prefer people to use my name - Samuel - or they/them while referring to me.”

In school, I would often hear students and teachers using the wrong pronouns for Samuel. Teachers would usually refer to Samuel as he/him, while students knowingly make the same mistake. However, Samuel made sure to correct them until they referred to him by their preferred pronouns. It was my first-time meeting someone living a life similar to mine and going through similar problems at school. We both were caught up in the traps of sex and gender.

Perhaps this was the friend I was waiting for since my start at Burnes - someone like me.

One day, after weeks of talking in English class and sharing tables in the lunchroom, Samuel introduced me to the Drama Club. This club had their meetings in one of the school corners that was not known to me and most of the student body. However, this meeting room was one of the most vibrant spaces at Burnes. With colors of every shade sprayed on the walls and glitter bouncing off the countless lights there, the room felt like a positive space. The Drama Club called it the 'safe space'.

On my first day, I met many people. Ben was the person in charge of the lights. He wears his hair long, just like mine. During rehearsals, he often has to run around the stage to make sure everything is perfect. Sometimes running around causes him to sweat, and in those moments, he ties his hair into a bun. I had never seen a boy with hair as long as mine before joining the Drama Club.

Lydia is in charge of the set. She manages the backstage and makes sure that every prop is where it is supposed to be. She interacts with the cast and assists them in whatever they might require for a good performance. From costumes, props, actors, she is in charge of a lot of things. Lydia is a very important part of the team, and she makes sure the show runs smoothly.

Although Lydia is a girl, she sometimes likes to wear clothes people might describe as 'for boys'. She often could be seen in a baggy shirt - the pastel color differs depending on the day - and cargo shorts. "Clothes do not have to be labeled by gender. Moreover, I like to be comfortable," she told me once when we were discussing costumes for the actors. She wears the shorts unapologetically and motivates me always to dress the way that I am feeling. Once she showed me a picture of herself at her mother's wedding. She was one of the bridesmaids and wore a purple suit, while the other bridesmaids wore purple dresses. Her mother supports her just like Mommy.

Danny is the writer. He is the smartest, funniest, and most entertaining person in the Drama Club. He is the most creative and the easiest person to talk to. Like me, he was assigned the wrong sex at birth, and since then, he has been living life to correct the mistake. He came out to his parents ever since he remembers talking. He would ask his father to refer to him as his 'good *boy*' rather than his 'good girl'. Like me, he wears the brightest colored shirts with matching bowties. I got along with him since our very first meeting.

I finally found friends that were like me. Although Amber and Sarah are my best friends, they did not live the life that I do. People in the Drama Club have

similar experiences and understand me better than anyone ever has. I was excited to work with them for our annual play.

However, practicing in the meeting rooms of the Drama Club was easy. The room was well lit and painted in vibrant colors. I was scared to take this play to the auditorium, where all annual performances are held, when the time came. The auditorium can be dark, unlike the Drama Club room, and it is huge. Performing in front of an army of strangers scared me to my core. Samuel, Lydia, Ben, and Danny helped me to get over my fear. They would take me to the auditorium and help me read my lines while they sat in the empty seats and cheered me. "Ignore those who scare you, Christine. Look over their heads. They will not feel that you are nervous or scared," Samuel said, trying to pump every ounce of confidence that he could get into me.

Finally, the day of the performance came. The auditorium was filled with a mass of people. It was loud. There were girls from the dance team who had refused to take me on the team. Behind them was a rowdy group of boys who were heckling and shouting. I noticed Leo in the middle of that group. I was scared. However, when I got on the stage, I ignored them all. "Hey, Chris!!" I heard Leo yell. He was trying to mock me and distract me to embarrass me further. But I looked over his head. I delivered my lines, and after a while, he knew I was not nervous and scared. He did not do anything after that.

The show went well, and all the people from the Drama Club helped put on a good show. They were a group of special people who made me feel special and belonged. The Drama Club became a place where I never felt anything other than normal.

Chapter 5: Soccer Girl

Now that the play was finally over, I had ample time at hand. Unlike Amber and Sarah, who still were in their dance season, I had nothing to do. I would usually spend my free hours hanging around with my new friends, and when they were not available, I would go to the library and read a book. However, reading is not my cup of tea. I like visuals more than words. Movies and comic books attract my attention; however, these were not available at our small library. So, I started finding other alternatives to kill the free time I had.

Amber suggested that I join the Pottery Club. The idea seemed appealing at first, but after attending a few meetings, I realized that it was not something that I liked. Firstly, all the clay got me dirty. It ruined two of my favorite dresses. Secondly, I never managed to craft anything. Students around me were making cups, vases, bowls, and whatnot; however, it always ended in the clay deforming whenever I tried. Once I was able to dismantle it perfectly off the potter's wheel, but one of the girls' mistakenly' dropped it and the ceramic cracked.

Sarah suggested trying out for the band. I have always loved music. Every morning I wake up, and the first thing I like to do is play some loud music on my speakers and sing along. On weekends, my siblings shout at me loudly from their bedrooms to turn it off. So, when the band put up flyers around the school for a singer, I volunteered to try out. The audition went well, but I do not understand why the drummer had his hands covering his ears. Perhaps he did not pay attention to my audition. I even saw some of them were busy laughing during my performance. Someone might have cracked a joke during my turn, causing them to be distracted. Well, to be concise, I did not make it into the band. It is fair to say that they missed out **BIG** time.

With struggling to find something interesting and productive to invest my time and efforts into, I almost gave up. Until one day, Lydia mentioned soccer during lunch. Lydia was with me in the Drama Club. She was the backstage manager for our annual production, and she usually likes to dress in shorts and t-shirts just like the boys. We got along very well, and she took it on herself to help me find somewhere to invest my time.

"Soccer season is starting soon. I am on the team, and our defender just had a leg injury." She said this without any pauses and with visible excitement on her face. Before I could register this information, she added, "Do you play soccer, Christine?"

"Yes, I played a lot during summer with Sarah and Amber. Not sure if I am any good," I replied
"Well, try out. I am sure Coach Ruth would be happy to have a replacement."

Although I was hesitant at first, Lydia talked me through my nerves. I had never taken soccer seriously, but I remember I always got appreciated by my friends for being good at it. It was the only sport that I liked until my elementary PE teacher forced me to play with the boys. I had never played it competitively, rather just for fun after that. However, things were changing today. My tryouts were after school. Lydia and I tried to get in a few hours of practice before actually showing up on the field to meet Coach Ruth and the girl's team.

I had changed into shorts, a sports shirt and had tied my hair in a bun. Upon arrival, I saw some confused faces. A group of girls played in the distance while a few waited with Coach, most probably to conduct my tryouts. "Good to see you, Christ...ine," the coach said with evident hesitation in her voice. She was a tall woman with broad shoulders, curled biceps, and a muscular build. She instructed the girls to help me shoot, defend, kick, pass, and tackle. She looked impressed; however, she said nothing to me.

After the match, Lydia took me to the locker room. All of the girls changed in the locker room before heading home. I had never been to a girl's washroom; we had a gender-neutral one at school. However, there wasn't a gender-neutral locker room. Before I could go in, I was stopped. "I am sorry, some girls might not be comfortable," said the Coach. Yet another rejection - another person denying my identity as Christine solely because I did not completely look like a girl. That day I went home crying, but rather than feeling sad, I felt anger. I felt angry that people, like my elementary PE teacher, had not yet understood me. And I do not know if they ever will.

I was surprised when Lydia called me over to join the soccer team and her during lunch break the next day. Everyone was supportive and appreciated my performance in the tryouts. I got to know a lot about the girls during that lunch hour. The middle school's team was a year eight student, and she invited me to walk with her to the practice. After school, we went to the soccer field together.

It was yet another good day of passing, kicking, shooting, and tackling. Despite being a defender, I managed to score a goal that everyone applauded. However, after practice, it was time to head to the locker rooms, and the captain invited me to come along.
"Christine, as I said, some girl might be upset...." Before the Coach could complete, the captain interrupted her. "I asked the girls after yesterday's

practice, and everyone is fine with Christine in the locker room. The entire team is supposed to be in there together. Right girls?" And the entire girls' team behind me nodded their heads in agreement. I thought the Coach would be upset, but I swear I saw her smile. I had FINALLY made it on the team.

However, Leo did not like this. "Chris, I know you are not good enough for the boy's team. But you can't be on the girl's team; you are a boy," he said when I came across him in the corridor before practice. My team captain was with me, and she was visibly angry with his comments. "ChristINE is a girl. And I am sure the girls can beat your team any day in a soccer match." If I had not held her back, she might have jumped Leo.

"Beat us, and I will owe ChrisTINE an apology," Leo challenged us confidently. We had to accept this challenge. After all, we had seen them play, and we were far better.

So, after practice, we played. The boys had initially scored; however, we soon matched up. I tackled Leo twice and did not allow him to take a shot at the goal during the entire match. Lydia scored an acrobatic goal, and I headed one in. The Coach whistled. We had won 2-1. All the girls rushed toward me and lifted me up. They threw me in the air, and I felt very happy. In a school where there were kids like Leo and the dance team, some perceived me as a girl. Regardless of how I looked, they treated me the way I felt and appreciated me for it. It was nice to have girlfriends other than Amber, Sarah, and Lydia. Maybe people were slowly and gradually starting to understand me.

And, by the way, Leo did apologize after the match. He did it in front of the entire boy's and the girl's teams. "I am sorry, Christine," he said with shame in his voice. Although I prefer visuals more than words, at that moment, Leo's words sounded like music. Hopefully, he will never worry me again.

Chapter 6: Trick or Treat

October is about to end, and Halloween is fast approaching. Every year I go all out for Halloween and get the most candy from trick or treating. I do not remember a single Halloween when my buckets were not overflowing with candy. My siblings always complain to Mommy about this.

"Why does Christine get more candy? And she always gets the better ones and not Candy Corn like us."

"It's because of my costume. Everyone likes it. After all, I put many hours into it." I tell them.

Compared to my siblings, I invest a lot of time thinking about and planning my costumes. However, this year is going to be different. I have been dressing up as either Captain America, Superman, Transformers, or Shrek all these years. But this is going to be my first Halloween as Christine - as a girl. I want to dress up as a fairy, a Disney princess, or one of my favorite cartoon characters. There are so many ideas in my mind and so little time to decide. I want to choose a costume that I love and will get me the most amount of candy that I have ever gotten.

Burnes Academy has an annual tradition to throw a Halloween party for its students. I had heard a great deal about it from my siblings. I was very excited when one of my teachers finally announced it in our class. This got everyone around me to discuss what they want to come dressed up as. During classes, I could hear children behind me whispering to each other about their ideas instead of focusing on the lesson. At lunch, while I stood in a queue for my turn at the food counter, I would overhear a bunch of girls talking about the party. Even during soccer practice, the entire team would discuss their costumes. Occasionally Coach Ruth would also drop in some ideas for the girls to explore. There was not a single corner in my HUGE school where someone was not talking about Halloween. It looked like everyone had their costumes picked out except for me.

After days of thinking, I finally came up with a costume. I was initially considering Elsa, Cinderella, and Moanna; however, none of them felt right - none of them felt like me. When my Mommy suggested going dressed up as Wonder Woman, my eyes lit up with excitement. I adored reading her comics and watching her in cartoons and movies. I want to grow up to be as pretty and as strong as her. Also, I love the blue and red in her costume.

Now that my costume was decided, my mother took me to Target to shop for the dress, the mask, and the lasso. While we were there, we also picked up the pumpkins for the pumpkin carving competition for my class. The first position would get a basket full of candies and bragging rights until the next Halloween party.

"Pick out two pumpkins, Christine. I am sure you will mess up the first one." Mommy said.

"Nah, Mommy, I am an artist." I giggled at her concerns.

There were pumpkins of all shapes and sizes. Some were round, some were longer, while some were squared. Some had bumps, while some were perfectly smooth. I carefully chose two of the perfect pumpkins in hopes of winning this competition.

When we got home, Mommy helped me draw faces on these pumpkins with pens. "It will make it easy for you to carve them out just like you want." Mommy guided me. I drew a scary face on one, with big eyes and pointy teeth. On the other one, I went for a happy face with small triangular eyes and a big smiling mouth. The pen marks on the pumpkin made it easy to carve them out.

"See, I told you I was an artist Mommy," I said excitedly as I was able not to ruin either of them.

"Good job, Christine."

The next morning it was Halloween. I woke up to my costume carefully laid out on my table. Mommy had stitched it herself, and it looked pretty. The gold, white, and blue made me love it. I put it on as I got ready for school. I was excited for everyone to see it. Amber and Sarah met me in the corridors, and they loved it too. They were both dressed up as fairies. Sarah was dressed in purple and Amber in blue. Everyone had their pumpkins in their hands; however, nobody's looked quite as nice as mine. I was confident that I was going to win this competition. However, I would have to wait until after school. Until then, we went trick or treating into different classrooms, just like a neighborhood, where each teacher had set up candies.

During the lunch hour, I sat at my table with Amber, Sarah, and some soccer friends. This was when Leo came up to our table. He was dressed up as Superman. "Hey Chris, you could have gone for Batman. You know Wonder Woman is a girl, right?" he sneered as he said it. "At least I look good, Leo. I wish I could say the same about you." I protested. I had gotten used to Leo's

bullying, and it did not bother me anymore. I had become a strong girl like Wonder Woman, and I stood up to bullies.

Hearing my reply, all the girls at the table burst into fits of laughter. Leo looked visibly embarrassed. His face turned bright red, and his eyes became smaller. In anger, he smashed my pumpkin placed on the table, on the ground. He then ran away.

"What will you do now, Christine?" said Lydia. "Oh, you could have won this easily with your pumpkin," Sarah added. However, little did they know that I had also brought my other pumpkin along. It was better than the one Leo had just smashed. However, I had to stand up to this bully first.

Soon I chased Leo out to the hallway. However, I saw that some boys, who I recognized were a couple of years older than us, were surrounding Leo. They pushed Leo around and stole all his candy while he stood there scared. One of the boys even stole his pumpkin. I had never seen Leo this quiet and afraid, except a while ago when I embarrassed him. "Is this why he bullies me? Because he gets bullied himself?" I wondered.

Before I could do anything, the bell rang. It was time for the pumpkin carving competition results. Everyone had to go back to their classroom and get their pumpkin inspected. Coach Ruth was inspecting our pumpkins. She went around carefully, looking at everyone's pumpkin. Soon, she came across one with small triangular eyes and a big laughing mouth. "Who's is this?" she asked. "It is Leo's," I announced. "He is using the washroom," I told her to cover for his absence. Coach Ruth seemed to have liked it because she made notes on her notepad as she examined it.

Leo walked into the classroom a little later. "I think we have a winner," announced Coach Ruth.

"Leo's pumpkin gets the prize." Everyone in the classroom clapped for him as Leo looked confused. However, knowing Leo, I knew that he would not question the decision. And he did not. He walked confidently to collect his prize. It was the biggest basket of candy I have ever seen. I think I did not have the most amount of candy this Halloween, Leo beat me to it. But I had the best costume. Wonder Woman stands up to bullies, but she also helps people who need help. So, I helped Leo.

There was yet an entire night of trick or treating left. I was sure I could make up for the candy I had lost in the competition. My siblings were definitely going to be complaining again.

Chapter 7: The Lucky Shoes

After the annual play with the Drama Club, I had joined the girls' soccer team at Burnes Academy. One of the girls on the team had injured her leg, and this opened up a spot. I was hesitant at first; however, I decided to try out for the team after Lydia's insistence. It was not easy getting in, but all the girls showed great support, and finally, I started fitting in well. Coach Ruth seems to be delighted with my performance. I have the most successful tackles and have scored a good number of goals for a defender. Our performance has earned us a really high position in the Junior Soccer Championship. Coach Ruth tells us that we are the best team she has had in quite a while. She also said to me that I am one of the best players she has ever coached. I think I have finally found something that I might be interested in and good in.

However, the girl I had replaced on the team has recovered from her injury now. Her name is Clara, and I have heard she is a good defender. I am scared that when she returns to school, it will mean that I will no longer have a place on the team. When I heard the news about her recovery, I started training harder at practice. I was always punctual, and I made sure I listened to Coach Ruth's instructions and followed them properly. I love this team a lot, and I do not want to be kicked out of it.

Yesterday Clara returned to school. She is a beautiful girl, with long blonde hair and a friendly smile. She is in my English class, and she speaks with great eloquence and is smart. During lunch hour, she joined the soccer team and me at the table. She greeted everyone and shared smiles and laughter. "Hi, I am Clara. You must be Christine," she said as she shook my hand. "I have heard a lot about you. They say you are a great player," she added. She looked excited to meet me; however, the feelings were not mutual.

During practice, Coach Ruth made me sit on the benches while Clara played with the team. I have never been on the benches before, as I have always been a good player. Lydia says those injured or those who do not perform well get to sit on the benches. I think Coach Ruth thinks I am not better than Clara.

Coach Ruth would train Clara, teach her how to shoot better, pass better, and tackle on time. She used to do this with me before. Seeing her focus on Clara more and forget about me made me feel really bad. "It's called jealousy," Lydia told me when I confessed to her about these feelings. "It is when you want something that the other person has, and you do not. You start to dislike them for this reason," she explained. Maybe I am jealous that Clara is back.

During lunch hours Clara would have interesting stories to tell from her time at the hospital while she was recovering. Everyone would listen to her closely and laugh at her jokes. No one seemed to be giving me any attention anymore. During practice, everyone would cheer for her when she would make tackles and score a goal. They were beginning to like her more than me. I wanted to get back on the field and show everyone that I was better. This was when Coach Ruth told Clara and me that she would observe us for a week and decide who stayed on the team.

However, Clara was still friendly with me after Coach Ruth had told us this. She would teach me her tricks during practice and correct me whenever I was doing something wrong. Even after the practice had ended, she would stay behind and help me perfect my tackles and passing. During one of these days, after practice, she told me that she always wears her lucky boots during important trials and matches. They make her feel confident and perform better. Her lucky shoes were worn out and dirty, but she always wore them to practice. They surely meant a lot to her.

One day, when I was showering after a sweaty practice, I saw Clara's lucky shoes. No one was in the locker room; everyone had gone home. I was staying behind to work on my shooting. So, I took them thinking that I would return them tomorrow.

The next day at lunch, Clara looked evidently upset. "Have you seen my shoes," she asked everyone on the team. "I think I have misplaced them," she added. "Have you seen my shoes, Christine?" she asked me when I joined them at the table. "No," was my answer. I had just told a little lie. Her shoes were in my locker; maybe if she does not get to wear her lucky shoes, she will not perform well. There were still two days before the week ended, and I wanted to make sure that I was selected at the end and not her.

Clara did not perform well during practice that day. She was missing all the passes, and her shots were not on target. I could hear Coach Ruth telling her to get her head in the game. Little did she know that Clara's lucky shoes were missing. That day I went home, and all I could think about was Clara. How sad she would be if she did not make it to the team. Maybe she likes it as much as I do. Perhaps she felt lost without soccer while away at the hospital, just like I did after the drama performance. So, I decided to give her the shoes back. Everyone deserves to feel they belonged.

"Hey Clara, I found your shoes. I forgot I had kept them safely in my locker when I found them after practice," I told her when I met her in the corridor. She looked excited; however, it was not because of her lucky shoes. Her parents had bought her a brand-new pair of soccer shoes. They were purple in

color and looked very cool. "What about your lucky shoes, Clara?" I asked her out of concern. "I don't think I need them. Coach Ruth says I can be a good player in any shoe," she informed me. "Also, these are more comfortable," she added with a giggle.

Clara performed very well during practice. However, she made sure to pass the ball to me so I could show Coach Ruth my new skills. I even scored during that match. Clara had passed the ball to me, even though she could have scored herself. "You are a good friend, Christine. You tried to find my lucky shoes so I could perform better. So, I passed the ball to you so I could be as good a friend as you have been to me," she told me after practice. I realized that Clara is a nice person, without a single bad bone in her body.

That day Coach Ruth informed us that we both had made the team. "I couldn't choose between you two, so I decided to keep you both," she informed us. "You both are one of the best I have ever coached," she added, sounding proud. I was excited. If I had not overcome my feelings of jealousy over Clara, I would not have scored, and maybe Coach Ruth would not have selected me. Being nice to others always pays off, and I am glad I finally decided to be nice to Clara.

Hopefully, we will win the Junior Championship this season. I am looking forward to winning it with Clara by my side as a friend.

Chapter 8: Magic at the Talent Show

The best thing that I like about Burnes Academy is that there is always something going on. One can not possibly get bored in this big school. Every corner has something to offer to its students. In the corridors, you can expect a fight to break out any time and have video clips of it end up everywhere on social media. Sometimes people will end up doing a funny commentary of the fight on social media too. You can expect the Music Club to do a flash mob anytime in the cafeteria and climb on your tables singing romantic love songs. Sarah thinks it is too cheesy; however, I like it even though they get their feet too close to your food. Even the library is not immune to the shenanigans; someone always finds a way to do a funny prank. It was only yesterday that someone hid five alarm clocks around the library. The librarian, who has not the best hearing, had to go around on a mission to find it when one went off. She eloped and left the library unattended when she heard the fourth one ring.

The latest entertainment that the Burnes Academy has to offer me is the Talent Show. Every year there is a talent show, where students are welcomed to come and perform. You can sing, dance, play an instrument, climb on ropes, or even yell. Whatever you think is your talent, you are welcome to display it on stage to the entire school. Last year my brother, who plays rap music, performed with his best friend, Finnley. They used to practice for hours in the basement of our house. I always complained about how loud they were, but it all did not matter when they won. My brother was the happiest that day.

Lydia, my friend from the girls' soccer team, will be showing off her soccer skills. She can juggle the ball without using her hand over 50 times. She showed it to the soccer team during practice one day, and every girl's jaw was wide open. I wish I could do that. However, even if I did, no one wants to see the same act twice.

Samuel, my blue-haired friend from Drama Club, has written a short monologue for themselves. They made me read it after the English class had ended. It was nothing short of brilliant, and I am sure they will perform it even better than it was written. They are so talented. But I have recently acted in the Annual Play, and I want to do something fun.

Confused, I went to Amber and Sarah to get some ideas from them. They are part of the school's dance team. Some of the girls from the dance team are preparing to put up a dance routine as their act; however, they are not a part of

it. Amber, Sarah, and I could have danced, but our choreography will not win the prize. They want to do something different, and fun like me.

“We should try out for the fashion show. A group of girls in the dance team were talking about it,” Sarah suggested. “Does this mean we get to wear beautiful dresses and put on makeup?” I interrogated her excitedly. “Yes,” Amber added from behind.

The fashion show sounded like an exciting opportunity. We would not have to work as hard, and we can have a lot of fun while wearing some of the prettiest clothes. However, when we went to try out for this fashion show, I was rejected. Just like the dance team, Amber and Sarah had made it while I did not. “Your walk is not girly enough,” one of the girls had told me when Sarah asked them the reason why I was not selected. I was saddened because, once again, I was denied an opportunity because of the way I am.

I went home crying; however, my frown soon turned into a smile when I saw my grandmother sitting in the living room. She lived in a different city and had not visited us in a long time. She greeted me with hugs and kisses. She made us the biggest meal that night and sneaked me a bowl of ice cream after Mommy had gone to bed. While I had the ice cream, I asked her, “How do I be more girly, Grandma?” Grandma told me that it was enough that I was a girl. “Every girl is different and acts differently,” she added. “But my walk is not girly,” I said with a sad voice. “Walks do not show how girly you are. But if it makes you happy, I can teach you to walk like the girls on the dance team,” she offered to help me because of my sad face.

That night I stole all the heels from my mother’s room, and Grandma helped me walk in them. She was a model during her youth, so she knew what she was doing. After teaching me how to walk, she taught me how to sit with my legs crossed. She even taught me how to drink tea like the Queen from England, with my little finger poking out. However, while she was tucking me in bed, she made sure to remind me that no matter how I walked, talked, or looked, I was a girl.

I practiced walking in heels every day after school. I would even drink my chocolate milk, pretending it was tea, like the Queen and sit with my legs crossed. I had mastered it in a week; however, I was still without an act for the Talent Show. I could not even try for the fashion show again, as the girls on the dance team had already signed up other students. However, Amber and Sarah had decided not to take part in it. “We want to do something together with you, Christine. We miss you.” They told me when they came over one day. This was when I got an idea.

My brother was hesitant at first, but he agreed. “This will help make our act different than last year,” Finnley added. We had decided to do a magic fashion show while my brother and Finnley rapped. I had seen an act on television where the girl would change her clothes very quickly behind a curtain. It was magic. But my brother had told me that there is a trick. He had learned about it on the Internet. “The Internet has answers to all the magic tricks,” he had told me. We spent the next few days preparing our costumes, learning the magic trick, and rehearsing with Finnley and my brother. We were prepared and ready to perform.

During the Talent Show, the girls from the dance team were first to perform. My brother, Finnley, Sarah, Amber, and I were backstage getting ready. This was when I heard the girls from the fashion show panicking. One of them had spilled juice on the dress, and it had left a visible stain near the shoulder. They did not know what to do. “Just let your hair down. I do it all the time when I spill something. It’s a girl thing,” I advised them sarcastically. They stopped panicking and followed my instructions.

The fashion show was boring. It was just a bunch of girls walking on the stage. I was glad that I had chosen to perform with my brother. We received a lot of applause for our performance. Every time Sarah, Amber, and I did a quick magic costume change; the crowd roared into cheers. It did not come as a surprise when we were announced as the winners.

I was the happiest that day. I had won something for putting on pretty dresses and beautiful makeup. My brother might have helped too – but just a little.

Chapter 9: Take Your Pet to School

The alarm bell rang at precisely 6 am. I woke up when I heard the initial buzzing of the clock. It usually takes me a lot to get out of my bed. Waking up all on my own is a very rare sight. Mommy usually comes into my room and drags me out of my bed. Sometimes she has to sprinkle water on my face to get me to wake up. "You are such a heavy sleeper, Christine," she tells me, annoyed. However, today is the 'Take Your Pet to School' day at Burnes Academy. I am very excited about it, and this is the reason why I woke up when I heard the alarm.

I love animals. Dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, fish - I love all kinds of animals. However, I have never owned a pet. Mommy thinks that my siblings and I are not old enough to take on such a responsibility. "You can't even get out of your bed by yourself, Christine. How will you take care of an animal?" she had told me when I asked her for a pet as a Christmas present. She gifted me a stuffed puppy as a present instead. It is still one of my most favorite toys, and I go to sleep hugging it.

At school, everyone in the corridors had their pets. Lydia had brought her Persian cat. It was as white as snow and had a round head. Her small ears looked cute against her big head, and they stood up in attention. However, I fell in love with her green eyes. Lydia had also brought a laser to play with her cat. The cat leaped at the red spot from the laser and followed it wherever Lydia pointed it.

Sarah had brought her dog, a golden retriever. Her dog has the shiniest coat of soft fur that I have ever seen on an animal. The dog licks me every time I go over to Sarah's house. It is always looking for a ball to play with. Hopefully, Sarah had brought a ball along.

Amber had also brought her pet fish. Her father had gifted the fish to Amber on Christmas. Unlike a stuffed toy like I had received from my parents. She named it Nemo because it looked exactly like the fish from the movie 'Finding Nemo.'

I met many pets as the day progressed. I was over the moon because I got to play with animals, pet them, and hug them. Lydia told me that there were more animals on the soccer field. I had heard that someone had brought their

pet alpaca. I had never seen one before. When I finally saw this magnificent animal on the field chewing on grass, I was amazed that people could have them as pets. Maybe I can have one someday.

However, my attention was diverted by a high-pitched squeaking sound coming from behind the bushes. There was a beautiful parrot - one like I have never seen before. It had shades of red, yellow, and orange but was mostly blue. It had a very pointy beak with a smooth curve. The parrot's blanket of feathers was as shiny as Sarah's golden retriever. But something did not look right. The parrot was injured.

The parrot helplessly tried to flap its wings, but it could not fly. I carefully approached it and laid out my finger. Samuel had brought their parrot to school, and they had shown me how to pick it up. "Be gentle," they had told me. So, when I gently approached this parrot, it immediately gripped its claws around my finger. I picked it up and took it to the veterinarian - an animal doctor.

The vet treated the parrot, bandaged it, and gave it medicine. "Glad you brought it to me on time. You are such a good pet owner, Christine," the vet told me as he handed the parrot back to me. I wish it was my parrot, but unfortunately, I would have to find its owner and return it.

I went from room to room and from building to building, asking everyone if they knew who owned the parrot. After almost an hour, I found Leo sitting on one of the benches in the playground. "Do you know..." Before I could complete asking my question, Leo told me that he owned this beautiful parrot.

"But I don't want it. It's weird," he told me, sounding angry. "It does not speak like everyone's parrot. So, I let it fly away." He did not seem to be bothered by the bandages on the parrot.

Maybe one of the bigger animals attacked the parrot when Leo let it go.

"Nothing is weird, Leo," I yelled at him. "Perhaps, your parrot is a slow learner, or maybe it is SPECIAL," I continued yelling.

"I'll ask my parents to get me a new one that can talk, just like Samuel's," he growled. "You can keep this parrot. It is weird just like you are Chris," he walked away as he hurled these words.

This parrot was like me, not weird but special.

So, I took this parrot home. I hid it from my mother and kept it in my room. I made a home for it using a big brown box that the new refrigerator came in. I tore the front side of the box, so it was like an open cupboard. I used a fallen branch from our garden and hung it through two big holes in the sides of the box. The parrot seemed to love it. That day I woke up all night using the Internet to learn how to look after a parrot. I even gave it a name - Indigo.

I fed Indigo every day, and before going to bed, I would talk to it. "You are SPECIAL," I would tell Indigo. I could take care of it forever.

However, I could not keep it a secret from Mommy for a long time. She found out about Indigo because its loud chirping was not something that could go ignored. I explained everything to Mommy and how Leo had abandoned it. "Mommy, I have been taking care of it for three days now," I told her. "I am responsible enough to keep a pet." And this convinced Mommy to let me keep the parrot.

My siblings and I took full responsibility to clean its home, feed it, and take care of its recovery. However, every night before going to bed, I would talk to it. "You are SPECIAL, Indigo," I would whisper to my beautiful blue parrot. Until one day, I woke up all on my own, without Mommy having to wake up or the alarm ringing. "SPECIAL," I heard a high-pitched voice say. Then I heard wings flutter, and Indigo darted across my room. It was flying, and it could speak. It looked magnificent. I was over the moon; I finally had a pet that I can play with, pet, and hug.

I might not like Leo, but I was happy that I knew him. After all, I would not have a pet if it was not for him.

Chapter 10: A Happy Christmas

Winter is my favorite season of the year. I love how the snow covers my entire city in a thick, white blanket each year. Even my backyard is buried in 3 inches of pure white snow. I love making snowmen with Sarah and Amber. My mother would always complain about carrots missing from the kitchen because we stole them to give our countless snowmen a beautiful long, orange nose. Apart from that, throwing snowballs, sledding down a snow-covered hill, and making snow angels until Mommy tells us to “come on in or you will get sick” is something that usually happens every winter.

Where I live, everyone in the streets is clothed from head to toe in puffy jackets and warm gloves. Mommy makes sure that I wear boots, a sweater, a jacket, and a scarf to school. I almost look like a potato during winters. At home, Mommy and I cuddle on our living room sofa and watch the television every evening while the fireplace calmly burns. Mommy usually makes me a cup of hot chocolate before bed, and I get to sleep a little longer in the mornings. However, none of this is the best thing about winter. My most favorite part about the winter season is Christmas.

Christmas is my favorite holiday. Everyone in my house and at school is always excited about this holiday. The Christmas spirit is quite literally in the air. The Christmas tree usually is placed beside the fireplace, and the entire house smells like Christmas. Even Grandma especially travels across the country to spend this holiday with us. She always cooks us a delicious spread of treats, including cookies and brownies. The smell of these treats and the tree is something that I always look forward to.

Another reason that makes me happy when winter comes is the enormous amounts of presents that I receive. Mommy always makes me write a letter to Santa. He lives in the North Pole with the nine reindeer that help him with his sleigh. He only comes out of the North Pole on Christmas to deliver gifts to all the children around the world. I used to think that Santa would get bored all the other days, except Christmas, in the North Pole by himself. But Mommy says he spends his time training his beautiful reindeers, working on his huge red sleigh. He cleans it until it shines as bright as the Northern star. He also lives with Mrs. Claus, who keeps him busy at other times.

This year I asked Santa for a lot of toys. I made sure to list all the toys I had seen at Target while Mommy ran some errands and added a request for new dresses. I made sure to inform him that I have been good this year. Mommy says that he rewards only good kids and not the naughty ones. I sealed this

letter in an envelope, wrote my address, and posted it to the North Pole. Every year my presents arrive on Christmas morning. Santa places them securely under our Christmas tree.

However, Mommy and Grandma also give me presents on Christmas. Since I am very picky with the kinds of clothes I wear, Mommy takes me to shop for my presents. We went out shopping this year too. She took me to several stores. All of them were decorated in festive lights and had hints of green and red throughout the store. But what stood out were the beautiful dresses. I loved every one of them. I picked them up from the racks and added them to the cart.

“You are allowed only three,” Mommy told me. However, I argued with her to buy me more. “It’s Christmas, Mommy, come on!” I said in an attempt to pursue her. She was hesitant at first and agreed after a while.

On our way back home, we noticed a huge yard sale in our neighborhood. This house did not have any decorations in its backyard and was the only house on the street without any lights. However, there was a beautiful dress placed right in the front that caught my eye. “Mommy, LOOK. Look at that dress,” I excitedly pointed towards the sale. “Can we stop and buy it. Maybe you can find something for Grandma and the other siblings,” I added. Maybe this convinced her because she stopped. We were soon out of the car and looking at all the things in the yard sale.

A beautiful girl, Fleur, followed me around and showed me all the things while Mommy spoke to an older woman.

“This dress is so pretty. I LOVE it!” I almost yelled in excitement at this girl.

“Yes, I love it too. This is my favorite dress. I bought it for my birthday last year,” she replied.

“You have good taste in clothes, Fleur,” I complimented her.

She gave me a weak smile. It soon turned into a frown as I picked the dress up and put it in my basket. However, I continued walking around the yard, looking at some of the toys on display. There was a huge collection of barbies that were almost in pristine condition. It looked like they had been loved and taken good care of.

“Are they yours?” I asked Fleur. “Why are you selling them? Is Santa bringing you new dolls?”

“Santa is not visiting us this year. And my dad lost his job this year, so we are selling some of my toys and dresses.” Fleur said, trying to keep the weak smile on her face.

I approached my mother and asked her why Santa was not visiting Fleur. He was supposed to deliver gifts to all the children around the world. “Fleur’s parents can not afford to buy a Christmas tree, dear. Santa has nowhere to keep all the presents,” she explained. However, she looked sad.

Winter is my favorite season, and Christmas is my favorite holiday. However, these are my favorite times because everyone around me is happy. Amber and Sarah are happy when we are playing in the snow. Grandma is always singing and dancing when she bakes those cookies. Mommy always has a toothy smile when we open presents. However, seeing Fleur sad during this Christmas season made me sad.

“Can I give Fleur all of my dresses, Mommy?” I asked. “Also, can we buy her favorite dress for her?” I requested my mother. I felt bad having all these clothes and Fleur not getting any. Every kid deserved to get presents.

“Yes, Christine,” said my mother as she hugged me and kissed me.

Fleur was very happy when I gave her all those clothes. This made me love Christmas even more.

That Christmas morning, I opened all my presents and took them to Fleur’s house. We shared all the toys Santa had dropped during the night under my Christmas tree. We played all day with these toys until it was time for lunch.

It was one of the happiest Christmas of my life.

Chapter 11: Lost in New York City

I play as a defender on the girls' soccer team at Burnes Academy. Ever since I have joined this team, I have gained confidence. My coach says that I am one of the best players that she has ever coached in her life. I have scored 4 goals this season and have the most successful tackles in the Junior Championship League. Other girls on the team, my teammates, have also been performing exceptionally well. This is the reason why we have made it into the semi-finals. However, this is not the most exciting thing about this. The semi-final and final will both take place in New York City.

Like most of the girls, I have never been to New York. In fact, I have never been on an airplane. Lydia tells me that airplanes can be scary. She once threw up on the flight attendant when she was traveling with her family during a holiday. However, I am excited. I have always loved new experiences, and New York is a place that I have wanted to visit ever since I can remember. I have seen it in movies and TV shows, and it looks absolutely beautiful.

A night before the trip, Mommy helped me pack. It took me hours to pick out the clothes that I wanted to take to New York. The only thing that was easy to pick was the team uniform. After a long time, we decided on a couple of dresses that I would wear when the entire team would go out to explore the city. Mommy helped me pack matching hair clips, sunglasses, and shoes. That night I had a dream. I had a dream about the magnificent city of New York. When I woke up the next morning, I could not believe that I was going there.

I met my team at the airport. Coach Ruth and our principal were also coming along on this trip with us. The plane ride was not scary at all. I loved it. Looking out of the window from the plane, flying at thousands of feet in the sky, made everything look small. I could see the clouds in their purest white form. The sight was beautiful—however, Lydia threw up on the flight. Luckily Coach Ruth offered her a bag in time, or another flight attendant could have ruined her uniform. I think Lydia still hates airplanes.

At the hotel, we were greeted by an extensive lunch buffet. The entire room was filled with dishes from across the globe. There were all kinds of desserts that one can imagine. However, Coach Ruth made sure that we ate healthily. We had to head to the match in a couple of hours. I had butterflies flying in my stomach. I was excited and nervous about playing this match and getting my school into the finals.

Soon we arrived at our opponents' school. We were ready to play the match. We dominated the game from the very beginning. Clara and I made a strong defense. We were like a solid wall that did not let anyone pass. Lydia had scored two acrobatic goals in the first half, and we were surely going to win this one.

"Are you a boy or a girl, weirdo?" One of the girls from the opposite team slyly remarked. They were frustrated and trying to distract me from my game. However, this hurt me. Although we won, all I could think about was this rude comment.

The next morning, for winning the semi-finals, we had earned ourselves a day out to explore the city. "Enjoy and get ready to win the final!" Coach Ruth said. She had paired each girl with another in the team. We had decided on a time and place to meet. Lydia was my partner.

We started from Times Square. Huge skyscrapers surrounded this square. There were thousands of screens around us, each displaying a different advertisement. Thousands of people crowded the square; however, these big screens made everyone look so small. Soon I realized that I had lost Lydia in the army of people. I panicked at first and frantically searched for her. However, I was quickly distracted by what the city had to offer.

I started walking along the footpath and exploring the city on my own. I could see a bunch of women dressed in cowgirl outfits singing songs to passersby while playing their guitars. One of them even gave me a high-five. The pedestrians cheered as they walked by them. I could see people dressed in suits in the crowd, some dressed in pajamas, and some were wearing nothing but their underwear. At one point, I noticed a lady wearing the most beautiful dress that I have ever seen. It had the longest trail and was made of gleaming material. The crowd followed her and cheered as she walked by. I heard some say that she was a famous actor. I was amazed how so many different people walked on the same street, and no one seemed to care.

A little further, I stopped by at a small cafe. I had not eaten anything since morning, and Mommy had given me some money for the trip. While I waited in line to buy a bagel, I saw two men walk hand in hand and kiss each other as they stood in line behind me. No one flinched or shouted something mean from across the room. Soon it was my turn, and I bought my bagel and walked out. On the street, some people were playing their flute while the crowd watched them. Someone would eventually come forward and drop a few coins into the hat laid in front of the performer. A little further were a couple of

artists who were sketching people for some money. I could even see a man dressed as Hulk a bit further.

Across the street, there was a park. I thought about spending some time there before heading back to the location that Coach Ruth had asked us to. Hopefully, Lydia will join us there too. I sat on a bench as I watched a wedge of swans in the pond. Many passersby would stop and feed the birds. Some on foot, some on cycle, while some were on wheelchairs. The city never seemed to stop for anyone, no matter how different they were. It treated everyone as an equal.

I was late when I reached the location and decided to meet Coach Ruth. Everyone was there, including Lydia. They all looked scared. The expressions turned into surprise and happiness when they saw me appear from the crowd.

“Christine, how did you get lost?” Lydia asked. Everyone hugged me, and we left for the hotel. However, I was not lost. In fact, I had found myself - I had realized that there were people that did not care how different I was. Some people accepted everyone’s differences. The girl’s comment from the football match did not bother me anymore. The next day we won the Junior Soccer Championship final.

We left New York with a trophy and a lot of love for the city.

Chapter 12: Make a Wish

In my household, birthdays are celebrated as grandly as any holiday like Christmas or Halloween. Mommy likes to make everyone's birthday a big deal. She makes sure to make that day a memorable one for the person. It was only last year that she surprised me with tickets to Disneyland. Sarah and Amber were also allowed to come on this trip, and we all had a great time. From Mickey Mouse to Rapunzel, we met every character that I had only seen on the television before. I even asked all of them to sign my autograph diary, which I have safely kept in my bedside drawer.

This year I am turning 11 years old. However, this time it is different from the other birthdays. This one will be the first birthday that I will be truly celebrating as myself, as Christine - a transgender girl. All my previous birthdays, I have been pretending to be a boy. Since I have come out, I have been happier. Although I am so glad, sometimes I still struggle with the way that I look.

All the girls in my school are beautiful. They have shiny hair, small shoulders, and pretty eyes. Although my hormone suppression medications are helping me to fit in with them, other girls seem to be going through some changes in their bodies while I do not. I might have hair as long as them, but I do not look like them.

"You neither look like a girl nor a boy," Leo yelled at me once from across the hallway. I was returning from soccer practice. There were some students and some janitors around that burst into giggles. People and some situations have always reminded me that I was 'odd' or 'weird.' However, I try my best to ignore these negative remarks and embrace the fact that I am different.

I had to wait for Dr. Lee to clear me for hormone replacement therapy to take the girl's hormone - estrogen. My doctor told me that estrogen would help me look more like a girl. However, the process can take a little time.

Every year Mommy bakes a homemade cake for my birthday. Last year she made a Hulk cake. I forced her to make me a 'boy' cake because my friends from elementary school were coming to my birthday party. It took her an entire day to prepare it. However, this year I do not wish to impress anyone. Although many children are coming to my party, I still asked my mother to bake me a Rapunzel cake. I am so excited to blow out the candles.

"Make a wish when you blow out the candles on your birthday cake," I remember my Mommy whispering into my ear on my 5th birthday. "It always comes true," she had told me. Since then, I had always wished for things on my birthday that I had dearly wanted. A dress, a toy, a game - everything I wished for had come true. However, I still had to think about what I wanted this year.

Lydia told me to wish for a massive unicorn teddy bear. She had one; her father had gifted it to her on her last birthday. "It is so big that I can climb on it and pretend that I am riding it," she said. I saw it when I went over to her house. It had a beautiful pink mane and had the purest white coat of hair across its body. I would have wished for it, but I already had a cupboard full of toys that would not be closed because of the number of toys in it.

Clara said that I should wish for new soccer boots. "You need new shoes for the new season," she said. It was true that my shoes were old, but I think I liked them the way they were. They felt comfortable. Also, I won a new pair when I was titled the best defender in the Junior Championship League. So, wishing for a new pair would be a waste of a wish because I did not need them.

That night I laid in my bed, thinking about my birthday wish. It kept me up for hours; however, I was not able to make a decision. The following day I woke up to my mother cleaning the house. She was vacuuming all the floor, dusting all the vases, and making sure the cushions were lined perfectly on the sofa. Today was my birthday party. I was finally 11 years old.

At home, Mommy was preparing the cake. She had made frosting in all shades of pink for Rapunzel's dress and had made her hair from brown cotton candy. From the backyard, I could hear some noise. It sounded like someone was vacuuming the lawn. Upon further investigation, I found a couple of men inflating a giant jumping castle. Mommy always made sure to set this castle up for my birthday every year. I love it.

As the day progressed, Amber and Sarah came over to my house. They helped my mother with the decorations, they planned some games to play with the guests, and more importantly, they were going to get me ready for the party. My mother had invited my entire class, and I had to look pretty.

Mommy had bought me a new dress. "It is in my bedroom, Christine. I hope you will like it," she said when I asked her what I was wearing.

The dress was ironed and perfectly laid out on her bed. It was a beautiful yellow dress, with sparkling glitter all over it. The yellow dress came with

matching hair clips with yellow hearts. Both Amber and Sarah loved it to the point that they would not stop talking about it for hours. I quickly showered and put on the dress. When I looked in the mirror, I knew what I wanted to wish for. Although I looked pretty, I wanted to look like all the girls. So, I was going to wish for Dr. Lee to allow me to take estrogen.

Soon, the house was filled with scores of children—some from my school, others from my neighborhood. People were playing on the inflated, jumping castle, while some were munching on my mother's snacks. When the time came to cut the cake, everyone assembled around the living room table. It was a beautiful cake, but I was excited to blow out the candles. I closed my eyes and wished, "Please make a girl!"

The party was soon over, and everyone was gone. I helped my mother clean up. "Did you open my present, Christine?" Mommy always gives me her present last on my birthday. "No," I replied. She walked towards the kitchen and picked out my present from the cabinet. It was as thin as paper but wrapped. "Open it," Mommy commanded. I excitedly opened it, hoping that they would be tickets to Disneyland. However, it was not. It was something much better. It was Dr. Lee's approval for my hormone replacement therapy.

Wishing while blowing out candles on your birthday cake always works.