

Since I've Been Blue - A.Ham

It was the first day of summer vacation in the lovely, quaint town of Oakville. Even though it was barely 9 am, children were already running in the streets. Some of them eagerly played tag and drew with chalk on the sidewalks, while others gathered to throw eggs at the houses of angry old people. Even though they were doing a vast range of different activities, all of these children had scarcely a care in the world. However, despite the excitement occurring just outside their window, one young teenager was feeling less than enthusiastic about getting out of bed to face the day.

“Jenna! Honey, are you up yet?” Jenna Trent’s mother called from just outside her child’s bedroom. “Darling, I need to get ready for the fundraiser today, I just wanted to make sure you were awake first!”

Jenna groaned incoherently and flipped over in bed, shoving her face into her pillow. “I’m awake mom, thanks!” she shouted, although it was so garbled that it sounded as if she were sleep talking.

“Well then,” her mom replied. “I’m going to head out, but remember to meet me at St. Peter’s High School by 2 pm! Some old friends of mine will be there and I haven’t gotten to meet up with them in a while. Of course, they’re all dying to meet you. In fact, they’ve all told me that they’re so excited to see my lovely daughter, all grown up!” With that, she turned and made her way down the stairs to the front door.

“Right, I’m... excited to meet them too!” Jenna yelled back, as she swung her legs out of bed and went to grab some jeans from her dresser.

“Jenny, before I leave could you come here for a second?”

Jenna winced, “Yeah! Sure, mom.” Quickly, she pulled on the jeans and ran down the stairs.

Jenna's mother looked her over once. "Well first things first, I've left a lovely dress for you on my bed. Since it's such a formal event, I thought it'd be a nice opportunity for the two of us to dress up! Now, what do you think of my hair?"

Jenna glanced up at her mom's wavy pink hair, which was pulled into an intricate knot on top of her head. "It looks nice."

"Why thank you dear! In any case, I'll see you later." She bent down and kissed Jenna on the forehead, before walking out the front door.

Jenna sighed and shook her head. If she was being honest, she wasn't particularly excited about her mom's fundraiser. She wasn't excited about the glitz and glamour. She definitely wasn't excited about dressing up and trying to entertain a group of strangers. Besides, knowing her mother, there would be a big scene at some point. Something that put the two of them at the center of everyone's attention. Jenna really wasn't looking forward to that.

As she trudged back up the stairs, Jenna caught sight of herself in the mirror. She was struck by how wrong her reflection looked. For one thing, it just didn't look like her. Logically, it was her reflection but at the same time, it wasn't. It was a mirage, an illusion that showed how people saw her, and she could barely stand it. It made her skin crawl. Suddenly, Jenna was struck by an idea. A way to make who she was on the inside, match her appearance on the outside.

She rushed into the bathroom at the top of the stairs and pulled a tube full of blue hair dye out of a drawer. Jenna applied generous amounts of the blue coloring to her short blonde locks, before leaving it to set.

Thirty minutes later, Jenna had fully prepared herself to go outside. After she'd finished dyeing her hair, she'd pulled on a hoodie and grabbed her phone. She had also stuffed the lacy golden

dress from her mom into a bag, planning to change into it later. Feeling more or less prepared for the day, Jenna pushed open the front door and started down the street.

It was a beautiful, warm spring day in Oakdale and despite her reservations, Jenna felt like the sky was smiling down at her. However, this warm sense of ease was quickly replaced by the distinctly uncomfortable sensation of eyes on her. More specifically, eyes on her hair. Jenna shifted nervously as her neighbor Mrs. Johnson caught sight of her.

“Well hello there Jenna!” the older woman smiled awkwardly, blocking Jenna’s path.

“Hi Mrs. Johnson,” Jenna said back, fighting to keep her eyes off the ground. *Oh god, I was really hoping to not run into anyone I know today,* she thought miserably.

“I won’t keep you long, I just was wondering... well why is your hair blue?” the woman said, through a slightly forced grin.

It suits me, Jenna thought. *This is who I am on the inside. This is what I’m supposed to look like.* “I just...felt like mixing it up I guess.”

“I’m hardly one to judge dear, but you may want to change it back? After all, it’s a bit.. unnatural, not very ‘you’ at all.” She smiled expectantly at Jenna.

“Right, thanks Mrs. Johnson,” Jenna replied hesitantly, before forcing her way past the woman in front of her.

As she made her way into the small, warm coffee shop where her sister worked, Jenna spotted another familiar face. Her friend Ben from kindergarten. She tried to avoid him but to no avail.

Ben quickly spotted her and grinned, making his way over to her. “Jenny is that you? How’ve you been-” he stopped dead in his tracks and stared up at her hair.

“Uh, hey Ben,” Jenna said, trying to look happy to see him. “I’m not bad, how have you been?”

“Not bad... But wow, you’re uh, different,” he laughed awkwardly. “I mean, this is so weird! Am I actually supposed to act like you have blue hair now or what?”

“I mean...” Jenna stared at him, dumbfounded. “I do have blue hair.”

“But you don’t really! Like, I’ve known you since kindergarten. You didn’t have blue hair back then, so you can’t really have blue hair. Even if you dyed it, you’d always still ‘technically’ have blonde hair right? I dunno, anyway, I’m heading out. See you, Jenny!” With that, he turned and made for the door.

“That... could not have been worse,” Jenna mumbled to herself as she went to order a latte.

After an awkward discussion with her sister, who had told her that, *“Even though she had blue hair, she should still go to the washroom where people were mostly blonde.”* Jenna had changed into her dress. She felt awkward, but there was nothing for it. As she left the coffee shop, she couldn’t help but think back to the rest of the conversation.

“I mean,” her sister continued. “I work here Jenna and I’m just trying to be reasonable. What if someone figures out your hair isn’t naturally blue? It might make people a little uncomfortable is all.”

“But my hair is blue,” Jenna replied.

“Well does it look that way on your passport?” she shot back.

“How would anyone know what my hair looks like on my passport?” Jenna hissed, barely restraining herself from snapping.

“They just would Jenna! C’mon, please don’t make a scene at my job,” her sister pleaded.

Jenna shook her head to clear away the uncomfortable memory, before checking the time on her phone, which read 1:50 pm. Realizing she was nearly late, Jenna ran at the speed of light towards the high school.

Just as the event was about to kick off, Jenna pushed open the front doors of the school and made her way into the auditorium. Before long, she saw her mom running towards her.

“Jenny! There you-” her mom stepped back with a gasp, as she took in Jenna’s appearance. “What have you done with your hair?” she cried “It’s perfectly awful!”

“It’s just dye, mom,” Jenna mumbled, eyes on the edge of her own glimmering, golden gown. “No! This isn’t who you are at all,” her mother insisted, turning to her friends with an uncomfortable smile. “She’s just being difficult.”

“How...how could you possibly know who I am, better than I do,” Jenna whispered, through clenched teeth. She could feel the eyes of nearly everyone in the room on them now and she hated it.

“Now Jenna! Don’t make a scene-” her mother hissed, waving her arms about to try and cut Jenna off.

As Jenna’s mother ranted on, her child looked away. *I’m not a ‘she’ and that’s not my name. God, I keep trying to tell her, but she just doesn’t care.* It had been such an awful day and all at once, he just couldn’t take it anymore.

“My name is Jason! You know my name is Jason!” he shouted desperately. “I’ve told you a thousand times... but you never listen. I’ve tried so hard to give you time mom, but I can’t take this anymore! I can’t take you acting like you can control who I am. ”

Just like he had earlier in the day, Jason saw his reflection in a gold-framed mirror, which was sitting in the corner of the room. Despite the dress, Jason felt somewhat like himself, but it wasn’t enough. He whirled to face his mother’s friends, tears stinging his eyes. “Hi! I’m your friend’s son,” Jason practically spat.

“I don’t have a son!” Jason’s mother shrieked, “I have two daughters and you’re embarrassing us both!” She clasped a hand to her mouth, pretending to sob. “Why are you trying to hurt me?”

As the uncomfortable crowd stared at the woman wailing in the middle of the room, Jason sprinted off into a hallway. He ran left and kept going until he finally found an empty classroom.

Finally, Jason burst into uncontrollable tears. *I’m so tired*, he thought desolately. *I just want to be myself, why does that have to be so upsetting to everyone I know?* As he managed to get his crying under control, Jason felt his phone ring. Looking at the screen, he saw that the incoming call was from his best friend, Xander.

“Hey Xan,” Jason said quietly, as he wiped away some stray tears.

“Heya Jason! How’s it going man?” the energetic boy on the other end of the phone replied warmly. “Oh! By the way, I saw your Instagram post, love the blue hair bro-”.

As Xander ranted on about a thousand different things, including how much he loved Jason’s hair, Jason smiled to himself. He felt better than he had all day. *In fact*, he thought, as he pulled his black hoodie over his dress. *I feel better than okay, I feel like myself.*

“Hey, Xan?” Jason said, cutting off a speech about Doctor Who.

“Yeah? Oh, wait, you sound upset dude... Did your mom misgender you again? Because I’ll lose it! I swear I will!” his friend declared passionately.

Jason laughed, tears stinging his eyes. “Yeah... it’s like she doesn’t even try sometimes.” *Or ever*, he thought, “Thanks for calling, I needed it.”

The other boy chuckled softly, “Anytime for my favorite guy, Jay.”