My Son Wears Heels
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I stretched out on the couch, propped up two cow-print pillows behind my head, and instantly lost myself in Alice Hoffman’s latest book, *The River King*. I didn’t look up from the page until Harry entered the living room.

I felt my brows arch to their highest setting. “Harry!” I laughed.

He was wearing the plain pale pink gathered-waist dress he’d found at Goodwill for his lunch-lady Halloween costume. A string of pink plastic beads hung around his neck. His eyes batted at me from behind the red plaid frames I’d bought for Heidi years ago when I thought he’d keep his protective glasses on if she were wearing them, too. I recognized the black and gold deco Monet earrings I’d worn for a work portrait the year he was born.

“What?” he asked, putting his hand to his hip as if nothing about his appearance had changed. Then he flashed a huge grin outlined in thick magenta lipstick. “I’m Linda Schneider.”

I stretched a broad smile. The name Linda Schneider was somehow funny. “So you want to record something now?”
“Well, if I’m getting all my hair cut off tomorrow, I have to film Linda Schneider’s farewell.”

I had no idea what prompted Harry’s desire for short hair. His thick shoulder-length head of hair had always seemed such a big part of his identity, a feature he’d been so proud of. But as I’d learned with Harry, it was best to just go with the flow and let him keep expressing himself.

“Okay, Linda,” I said, sitting up. “Where do you want to be?”

“In the dining room,” he said, voice trailing as he ran to the kitchen for the video camera he’d brought home from Ken’s.

He had me stand at one end of the dining room table with my back to the windows. He sat at the head of the table opposite me.

“Tell me when you’re ready,” he said.

I checked the 8mm videotape. I was surprised to see more than half of the sixty-minute cassette had already been used up. I centered his image on the view screen and pressed the red button.

“Action,” I said.

“I have some very bad news,” Linda began quietly, her face somber. “Me and Texas Jake will not be on the ‘Five O’Clock News at Six’ or the ‘Seven O’Clock News at Eight’ anymore.”

I steadied the camera with both hands to silence an uncontrollable shoulder laugh.

“We’ve been transferred to the London News,” Linda said, lowering her head with a loud sigh. “Well, to all of my fans out there . . . to all of those girls I’ve been a role model for, please!” She threw her right hand into the air. “Still watch me on the news. I’ll be there, just on a different channel . . . It’s sad for me to leave . . .
Now I believe Texas Jake would like to say something. I’ll go get him.”

Linda got up from the table and I switched off the camera.

“That was really good, Harry. And I love the ‘Five O’Clock News at Six’ show.”

“I’ll be right back,” he said, bounding up the stairs.

I shook my head. I was impressed with Harry’s impromptu on-air monologue. I remembered him play-acting in the wig department at Boston Store and his grand entrance at the family barbeque. Harry was no longer just a little boy in a dress; he was a funny boy in a dress who had finally worked his act to the screen.

Harry returned to the dining room table news desk a few minutes later wearing a tan Panama hat, black wire-rim sunglasses, and a red zip-up shirt with black stripes down the sleeves. I stared at Harry and lost myself for a minute in his concentrated attention to this new character. Every bit of his demeanor had changed. He was definitely no longer Linda Schneider.

“Mom!”

“Sorry, honey.” I took my position with the camera and started rolling.

“Hi, y’all. Texas Jake here,” he said with a southern drawl. “As Linda probably told ya, me and her are gettin’ transferred. And after I just got me a new pair of sunglasses so I could impress y’all! Well the world’s a circle, and we’ve gotta keep on movin’.”

I stuck my tongue between my teeth to keep quiet.

“We’re probably going to be replaced by some snooty people who don’t know what they’re talking about,” he continued. “Y’all know what I’m sayin’? That sucks. Well, I guess this is goodbye.”
Harry nodded and I shut off the camera. It was hard to fathom how easily he’d shifted from Linda to Jake.

“Great job on the accent, Harry. And, to be honest, I’m kind of sorry to see Linda and Jake go, too.”

“Don’t worry, Mom. I’ll have new characters for when my hair is short.”

After school the next day Harry and I drove downtown for his appointment with Philip at the small salon Ken went to next to the King & I Thai restaurant. Ken had thought Harry would appreciate Philip’s leopard-print leggings, six-inch black lace-up platform boots, thick eyeliner and blond hair down to his butt. He was right, and I thought Philip exemplified for Harry the guy who gets to wear whatever he wants to as an adult. I did wish he swept up hair clippings from his floor between customers, though.

Harry explained that he wanted his hair short on the sides and back, and long enough in the front to spike it up.

“You sure about this, Harry?” I asked, as Philip fastened a black nylon cape around his neck.

“Yup,” he replied, smiling at my reflection in the large parallelogram-shaped mirror in front of his chair. “I want something new.”

I felt a twinge of sadness as the first large clump of Harry’s mane hit the floor. I thought of it as a marker of his individuality. I realized I didn’t want him to lose any aspect of his unique personality. But if Harry wanted more of a boy cut, who was I to stop him? It just seemed funny to me that years ago I would have preferred his hair short to fit in more with other boys, but now I found myself already missing Harry’s singular look.
When Philip finished and was putting some new gel product in Harry’s hair that I’d no doubt have to buy, I noticed Harry had the same look he gets before a tetanus vaccination. It stayed with him all the way to the car. He pulled down the passenger side visor, slid open the lighted mirror and scowled.

“You don’t like it?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“No! Philip did not listen to what I wanted,” he said, pulling up on hairs in the front.

“You’ll be able to get it right when you can gel it yourself,” I said, trying to sound reassuring.

Harry took a shower when we got home to wash off any loose itchy hairs. I was opening mail at the glass table in the living room when he came out of the downstairs bathroom wrapped in a towel.

“My hair is not only not spikey, it’s fluffy!” He didn’t wait for any feeble nice-try-mom replies before marching up to his room.

The next afternoon, I could see that the few short peaks he’d managed to carve for himself in the morning had fallen over onto his forehead like spider legs. He slumped into the front seat.

“Mom, you have to take me to get a buzz cut right away. I got laughed at more today than I ever did for having long hair.”

“Okay, honey, but I don’t think I can get you in to see Phil—”

“No!” he blurted. “I will never go back there. Can’t you just take me someplace I don’t need an appointment? What about Supercuts?”

“I don’t know, Harry. Isn’t Supercuts just for stylists in training? Maybe if I call Suzanne she can squeeze you—”

“Puh-leeze, Mom, I’m ready to shave my own head. We’re making movies this weekend and it can’t be with this hair.”
Harry’s eyes blinked with the urgency of hair despair, a condition I understood from my awkward days of sleeping on brush rollers in junior high.

“Okay,” I said. “Supercuts here we come.”

Two days later, with his hair sufficiently buzzed off, Harry was home plotting new movie scenes with friends Ian and Max while I ran a few Saturday afternoon errands. While at the end of a long checkout line in Kohl’s Food Store, I pulled my cell phone from my purse anddialed home to check on the boys. After four rings, my call went to voice mail. Why didn’t Harry pick up? I redialed and hoped it wouldn’t be an EMT, policeman, or fire marshal that answered.

“Hello?”

I wondered why Max was on the phone and why “hello” was a question.

“Max, hi, it’s Julie. Can I please talk to Harry?”

I heard muffled voices and laughter in the background.

“Can you call back later?” Max asked. “He can’t come to the phone right now.”

“No, I cannot call back,” I said, forgetting I was in the grocery store. The female shopper in front of me, with a child munching Cheerios from a sandwich bag, raised a reprimanding eyebrow. I lowered my voice. “I want to talk to him now, please.”

Max covered the phone for a few seconds and then replied, “He’s in hair and makeup.”

As funny as that sounded coming from a ten-year-old, it was not the answer I wanted to hear. I couldn’t believe Harry wasn’t coming to the phone. I imagined lipstick and eye shadow smudges on my yellow towels. “He’s in hair and makeup?”
“Yeah.”
“Listen, Max, is everything okay there?”
“Uh-huh.”
“All right. Tell Harry I’ll be home soon.” I closed my flip phone and decided I wouldn’t stop at Goldi’s boutique across the street.

Lugging a two-and-a-half gallon plastic jug of Arrowhead Mountain Spring Water in one gloved hand, with several uncooperative bags of dry cleaning sliding on my parka sleeve, I turned my key and pushed open the front door. I heard the boys in the dining room as I slipped off my black Uggs in the tiny vestibule. The interior leaded-glass door cast prism rainbows on the hallway walls as I opened it. Two steps inside, I stopped and stared into the dining room.

Harry and Max sat next to each other, in the same spot Linda Schneider and Texas Jake had said their goodbyes. I gulped when I saw Harry. I wasn’t sure if he was supposed to be a boy or a girl. His Army-issue haircut was now the color of a neon lime, accomplished surely with a can of spray dye he had talked me into buying at Bartz’s Party Store. In addition to lipstick and eyeliner, he was wearing my retro-styled Harley-Davidson motorcycle jacket. His black boots were crossed on the table, and he was filing his nails with an emery board. Max was dressed in Harry’s Nerd Squad t-shirt, and a pair of no-lens glasses with masking tape wrapped around the bridge rested on his nose. Ian held the camera and tape was rolling. I tiptoed past them into the kitchen. I couldn’t help but overhear.

“What?!” Harry asked, sounding edgy and tough. “I’m filing my nails. Oh, yeah. I’m supposed to talk.”

I heard his feet drop to the floor.
“This show is bogus! I just want to say that right off. We’re the new news members, and this geek . . .”

He shoved Max as I walked past for my boots and another trip to the car.

“Hey, Rita!” Sam countered.

_He’s Rita! Or, she’s Rita._ I wasn’t sure how to refer to Harry in character. Linda was so obviously a girl, but Rita seemed more androgynous. Now that I knew her name, it struck me that Harry had created a very believable butch-girl character. I was in awe of his ability to transform from his ultra-feminine Linda Schneider into someone so markedly different in manner, expression, and tone. It was as if Harry’s haircut had given him a new kind of gender freedom that allowed other personalities to emerge.

“You and me, after the show, in the parking lot,” Rita barked. “See you then. This show is bogus. I’m getting out of here!” I heard her push away from the table and walk off.

Where had he come up with the word “bogus”? I was so entertained I hated to leave. I zipped my coat as Harry whispered. Then I heard Max say, “And now for some commercials.” I headed out the door as the three of them ran upstairs to costumes, hair, and makeup.

A week later, I asked Harry for some birthday gift ideas. The first item on his wish list was “Wigs, Wigs, WIGS!!! (a blue one and other colors)”

“A blue wig?” my brother asked.

“Yep,” I told him. “He’s making movies these days. And they’re pretty good. In addition to writing, directing, and producing, he’s also the star.”
“Okay,” Jack said, reluctantly. “I remember when all he wanted was a blue teddy bear.”

“He still has Brambles, Jack. It’s his favorite stuffed animal.”

For his eleventh birthday my brother sent a bobbed cobalt-blue wig. Harry thought it was one of the best gifts he’d ever gotten. He also received a shoulder-length brassy blond style with bangs from Ken’s brother Larry, and Uncle Bobby Baby filled out the spring season collection with a gigantic afro and a crimped Lady Godiva-length wig in ash blond. Harry’s costume wardrobe expanded, too, because a Goodwill retail store opened two blocks away from Ken’s.

The movie-making continued into sixth grade. Other comical characters Harry paraded in front of the camera included crystal ball fortune-teller Madame Fondue and blond Valley girl Kelly, host of the weekly talk show “Totally Kelly.” A live news report that cracked me up described Harry, shrouded in a gray towel and lying on the powder room floor with an empty bottle at his lips, as a nun who had died of alcoholism in Central Park. It struck me that some of the kids’ movie scenes were similar to Harry’s earlier Barbie doll dramas of broken hearts and untimely deaths. At least the kids were no longer sending Barbie cars careening down our wooden staircase into a deadly whirlpool.

I was impressed by Harry’s aptitude for creating and developing so many different characters. While he was still quite the comedian and was comfortable in front of the camera, I couldn’t get over how fluidly he moved from one persona to the other. I wondered if his creative range meant he was perhaps a naturally gifted actor. Or maybe these new characters were just the next incarnation of Harry’s imaginative play, dolls no longer required.
I was also moved by Harry’s passion and dedication to his movie-making, as well as his capacity to work so hard. I wanted to be as excited and focused on my career as he was about his art. But the reality was that the ad agency had changed drastically since the terrorist attacks of September 11. Prospective clients’ marketing budgets were frozen and many had a wait-and-see attitude about how the disasters might affect their company’s bottom line moving forward. Few marketing directors on my hit list were eager to talk about changing agencies in the wake of such uncertainty. Amid a seemingly endless slowdown, I told the partners I’d be wrapping up my work for them by December. I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do next. But I had decided to take a cue from Harry.

Sipping coffee at the kitchen breakfast bar one morning, I read a newspaper story about a local feng shui practitioner. He talked about how the “art of placement” could help individuals gain control over their personal lives and businesses. The words “gain control” set off a spark of enthusiasm that tripped major circuits in my brain. I set down my mug and leaned in closer to the page. According to this expert, feng shui was the ancient Chinese art of using the five elements to “cure” bad energies and activate an environment for harmony and prosperity. The flow of chi was good; clutter was bad. I looked up at my perfectly organized cupboards and countertops. That was it. I could channel my controlling tendencies into a positive place now that I was loosening up on Harry. I could become a clutter expert!

During lunch at my desk, a lengthy internet search located an international feng shui master academy operated by a seventy-eight-year-old Chinese grandmaster in Kuala Lumpur. Classes
were offered in cities around the world, with a required final ten-day field study in Malaysia. After talking on the phone with the regional director for North America, headquartered in Miami, I enrolled in Module One. My first three-day class was set for February 2002 in Chicago. To prepare, I bought books on feng shui at the local bookshop and ordered more reading from Amazon.com. I was determined to be a star pupil.

Over the next year and a half, Harry and I both focused on academics. From Day One in my classical feng shui mastery program I learned there was no such thing as a clutter expert; the concept was laughable in Asia. All of the American “pop” feng shui ideas about crystals, mirrors, and Chinese cultural items meant zip in the mathematical formula–based study of authentic feng shui.

Harry had more homework than ever in seventh grade and during the week stayed up studying hours after I went to bed. I woke up thirsty around 1 a.m. one night and squinted when I opened my door to bright lights in the hallway. Harry wasn’t in his room. I found him downstairs at the glass table hunched over an art project, an X-Acto knife in his hand. As I got closer, I saw that he was cutting out tiny letters on a stencil.

“Harry, honey, what are you doing up so late?”

“I’m almost done,” he said without looking up. “I want to do really well on this piece.”

“You know it’s okay if you get a B-plus once in a while, right?”

Harry straightened to face me in stunned silence. After the shock of my words wore off, he narrowed his eyes. “No, it’s not okay, Mom. I’ve never gotten a B, and it’s not going to happen now.”
“Well, I’m just concerned about you. Two of your teachers told me at midyear conferences that sometimes you have trouble staying awake in class.”

“I have to get As,” he said with determination. “Smart kids don’t get picked on, Mom. Nobody ever bothers Matthew Henderson.” He turned back to his stencil.

It had never occurred to me that Harry’s work ethic was a defensive measure. I hadn’t thought about the smart kids not getting picked on. But obviously Harry had witnessed how others respected Matthew, who’d always been at the top of the class. I realized in that moment that Harry was trying to get the same respect. He wasn’t about to give up the red and purple hair, spiked leather collar, and Herman Munster boots that were his form of self-expression. He had counterbalanced the way he dressed with being a straight-A student, and I was proud of him for figuring that out.

“All right,” I said. “I get it. But please promise me you’ll go to bed soon.”

“I promise,” he said.

I knew there was a chance he’d be up all night, but I wanted to give him his space. As a classical feng shui expert, I knew that energies could be measured. And the five elements of fire, earth, metal, water, and wood related to how environmental energies interacted with an individual’s personal energy. Harry was water; I was earth. While I had learned that a little bit of earth could empower water energy, I knew too much earth could destroy it. I needed to stand back from attempts to control Harry’s life, especially when it came to knowledge, a strong attribute of water energy.
A few weeks after Harry’s thirteenth birthday, he came home from a weekend at Ken’s all excited about a new movie he wanted to see.

“It’s called *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Mom. Can I please go? Please, please, please, please, please?”

*To see the transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania?* Are you kidding me? You’re a kid! I’d been to a midnight showing at the Oriental Theatre soon after the movie opened in the mid-seventies. It was campy, outrageous, and fun. People in the audience took props. I’d shaken rice from my hair after the opening wedding scene and laughed when slices of toasted bread flew overhead during the champagne toast. I’d also learned to duck when squirt gun sprinkles accompanied the onscreen rainstorm. I had loved it. I flashed on an image of my crush Tim Curry dressed in a sparkly black lace-up corset, fishnets, and spiked heels doing “The Time Warp” dance.

“Please, Mom, please?” Harry pleaded with his hands held in prayer.

I did a quick inventory of the facts. *Rocky* was a musical, but the content included bisexual lovemaking. It had actually been an educational movie for me back then. There hadn’t been any full nudity or explicit sex scenes, but I did vaguely remember Dr. Frank N. Furter hopping from Janet’s bed to Brad’s and back again to Janet’s. But I was out of college then, and Harry had just turned thirteen. He still wore braces.

“What’s so special about *Rocky Horror*?” I asked.

“I don’t know that much about it,” Harry replied. “Katharine said it was about a couple who gets lost, but she couldn’t really
explain it. I went to the Oriental with her and Dad, and when we came out I saw all these people dressed in crazy costumes waiting in line to see it. And I want to go so bad! Please, please, please can I?”

My gut instinct was to say no. The movie was rated R. It started at midnight and didn’t get out until after 2 a.m. Even though his dad lived four blocks from the theater I didn’t want him walking home alone so late. But the exhilaration that swept Harry’s face describing the people in costume had softened me from giving him a hard “no.” I didn’t think he really cared about the movie. It was the wildly costumed fringe characters he wanted to experience.

“I’ll have to think about it, Harry. I’m not saying no, but I need some time to mull it over.”

I wrestled with the decision for weeks, much to Harry’s cliff-hanging anticipation. In the end, still against my better judgment, I decided I was not beyond bribery in extreme cases.

“Harry, your dad thinks it’s okay for you to see Rocky Horror.”

“Yes!” Harry shouted with a leap.

“Wait, I’m not finished. I will agree under one condition.”

His eyebrows wrinkled.

“You can go to Rocky if you promise never to get any piercings or any tattoos.”

I could see from Harry’s face that he hadn’t considered either idea, but I was set on banking for the future.

“I mean it, Harry, never. Not now, not in high school, not in college. Promise me.”

“Okay, Mom, I promise.” Then his whole face smiled and he gave me a hug to match. “Thank you so much!”
Still apprehensive, I pulled my car up on Farewell Avenue across the street from the Oriental Theatre at 11:45 p.m. What was I doing dropping Harry off this late by himself? I eyed the older teenagers and twenty-somethings in line under the lit marquee that read “Rocky Horror Tonight!” They all looked so old compared to Harry, who looked like a kid. I spotted a woman with a gold glitter jacket and top hat, another in a strapless red satin dress with a huge tattoo on her back, and a young man wearing a long turquoise cape. I stayed where I was until Harry entered the theater, just in case he got turned away for a ticket. Then I reluctantly pulled away from the curb and turned the corner, headed for home.

While waiting at the traffic light on North Avenue, I wondered if Harry had found the friends from high school he said would give him a ride to Ken’s or if he was sitting by himself. I cringed imagining flasks of alcohol being shared among a rowdy crowd, couples making out and some college kid next to Harry passing him a joint. When the light changed to green, instead of going straight I turned left, back in the direction of the theater. I wanted to know what was going on in there.

I felt lucky to find a parking place in the small public lot behind Von Trier’s Pub on the corner across from the Oriental. I locked the car, shoved my hands in my jacket pockets, and walked briskly across the street to the theater box office. I opened the heavy ornate door to the main theater and was surprised the house lights were still on. I put my head down and quickly ducked into a seat at the end of a back row, hopeful Harry hadn’t seen me sneak in. There was a lineup of people in *Rocky Horror* character costumes standing in front of the screen on the theater stage. It appeared to be some
sort of contest. The crowd was well behaved and I didn’t smell any weed. I stayed only fifteen minutes into the movie and left as quietly as I had entered, fears of exposure to debauchery subdued.

I couldn’t fall asleep that night. I was sure Harry was fine inside the theater, but I felt my heart accelerate at the thought of him getting home safely after two in the morning. I waited until nine o’clock to call Ken’s. Katharine answered and confirmed that Harry was sound asleep in his bed. I hung up the phone and exhaled an audible sigh with relief. Harry was growing up and there was nothing I could do about that.

By the end of eighth grade Harry had a regular posse who accompanied him to the Oriental on *Rocky Horror* nights. He now dressed in elaborate costumes and encouraged his friends to do the same. Because Ken lived so close to the theater, they got ready at his house. And after only one pre-*Rocky* episode left my upstairs sink filled with open pots of iridescent eye shadows and the bathroom rug covered with enough glitter to look like Aladdin’s magic carpet, I had insisted they get dressed at Ken’s.

That summer, the items Harry bought shopping at Goodwill, Closet Classics, and the vintage shops on Brady Street expanded to include costume-worthy garments and whatever inexpensive high heels he could find in his size. I was amazed by his taste and style, as well as his resourcefulness in putting outfits together. I thought about asking him to be my personal shopper.

Harry burst through the back door one August afternoon flushed from the heat and wearing a super-sized grin. “Look what I found!” he said, reaching into a white plastic bag.
I shut off the kitchen tap and set down a colander of fresh-rinsed blueberries. When I turned around I was surprised to see him holding up a small cream-colored women’s cardigan. It didn’t look like something Harry would wear, but I held back from commenting. Harry’s fashion sense was still a notch up from my own.

“That looks tiny, honey.”

“I know, Mom. It’s supposed to. I’m going to be Janet at the next Rocky Horror Picture Show. I’m going to enter my first costume contest this time.”

“You are?” I asked, my heart fluttering a little.

“Yeah, the next show has a beach theme.” Then his eyes widened like a kid who’d just been given his own pony. “Wait till you see the really cute floral-print bikini I found at Yellow Jacket!”

Oh my God. You’re going to be wearing a bikini?

“Let’s see it,” I said, infusing a dash of upbeat inflection in my voice to counter the scary visual in my head of Harry wearing a bikini to the Oriental. This wasn’t just the dress-up box anymore, or creating costumed characters for his funny home movies, this was my son making a costumed stage debut in the outside world. He would be up there in front of a packed theater of strangers.

Then I realized Harry was going to be competing, and I wouldn’t be there to see him. I thought about asking him if I could go, but the last thing he needed was to know his mother was in the audience.

“Oh, I didn’t buy the bikini today. It’s at Dad’s.”

I hid my disappointment with a default smile. “That’s okay. What does it look like?”
“Well, there’s a bullet-shaped bra top with little cones,” he said, standing back to pose and gesticulate the rundown. “The bottoms are high-waisted with a metal zipper in the back. It’s definitely vintage 1960s, maybe early 1970s. Oh, and I found the perfect white floppy hat.”

Harry described his costume with so much pride that I didn’t even care he had just referred to clothes from my high school years as vintage. He’d found exactly the items he wanted to make Susan Sarandon’s Janet character his own. I was proud of him for pulling it all together, even if he hadn’t needed me to take him shopping.

Harry cinched first place for his Janet portrayal and won two tickets to see the Skylight Music Theatre’s local production of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. “Huh,” I’d thought. Harry’s education about transsexuals was about to be furthered by another rock musical. Ken and I had seen John Cameron Mitchell’s movie version of his off-Broadway show when it was first released in 2001, but never the play. I was eager to know what Harry would make of a story about a so-called botched sex-change operation.

“So, what did you think?” I asked him after he’d seen the show with a girlfriend from school.

“It changed my life,” he said.

I was taken aback by his answer. Harry’s clothes, hair, makeup, and attitude had all changed already in real life. I tried to imagine what it was about the play that had moved him so deeply. Was it the character of Hedwig who so defiantly didn’t care what anyone else thought? I wanted to know more.

“Really, how so?” I asked.

“Well, first, the music was so good.”
I remembered the “Origin of Love” about the world being filled with sets of children of three sexes before the gods broke them apart. It was a sad and beautiful song about how love in the world was meant to be. My eyes had watered when that song played in the movie and I’d thought of Harry. “What else?” I wanted to know.

“Oh, the hair and makeup. And Hedwig was a rock star!”

Harry didn’t say anything about the sex change or why Hedwig attempted it. Still, I couldn’t help but think he’d identified with a character so liberated and immensely free to be her authentic self. Then it dawned on me that both Hedwig and Frank N. Furter were male performers who had openly celebrated their female identities. They had connected Harry to the world in ways I never could, and he was embracing that world. I liked the image of Harry with his arms wrapped around the globe. I felt like I learned from him all the time about confidence and self-esteem. He was so different from the awkward, insecure kid I had been the summer before high school.

That night, as I put on mascara in front of the bathroom mirror, I imagined Harry doing the same thing over at Ken’s. And I realized that if I hadn’t let him go to Rocky Horror in the first place he might not be feeling the joy he did right now. I felt one corner of my mouth turn up; I had done something good for Harry. A year and a half earlier I’d made a decision that most parents probably wouldn’t have made, one that was now helping my self-esteem soar a little bit, too. I winked at my reflection, proud that I’d come so far.
Christmas at Harry’s dad’s house