

Large Scandinavian Women

Class starts at nine every morning, and I am promptly up at seven. The next two hours are intended for coffee, makeup and hair. With a low rumble of the morning news on, the first forty-five minutes is makeup: layer after layer until I am designer pretty, meant for a photoshoot where I wouldn't be photo shopped. My skin is paled to become one shade without any question of freckles or pimples, and then it comes to the deliberate marks on my skin to make me look as if I have cheekbones that stick out and to make my eyes look wider so the green enthalls. The next forty-five minutes is the perfect space for my hair, where every hair is straightened without any thought of wave or frizz, and it frames my face. The clothes are already set out on my bed, and I slip one limb in at a time, like armor for battle. I maneuver the tight shirt across my torso until it fits into place.

For the last ten minutes before I head off to class, I carefully eat the granola not to ruin my makeup. I put on my heels that make me another two and a half inches taller, and I know I will tower over anyone I encounter.

The wind isn't always nice when I walk, but as I strut, the wind blows back my hair, like I am damn Beyoncé. My concern comes back to if the breeze will curl my hair again to become another large mess. I am mindful of the matte lipstick on my lips, how shiny it is and how enlarged my lips look instead of the usual lines my thin lips; I must keep watch that my hair does not stick. I run my tongue over my white teeth, and I smile at everyone I walk past. Each of my strides dwarfs the steps taken by people around me as we head to the commons at college.

"You look good today," comments a girl, who I only see but never know her name.

"You're wrong because I look good every day." I stop so they might marvel at my beauty. "You look good too."

She laughs. "How do you do it?"

"It only takes a few minutes." I wave off their question.

"You're just so pretty."

"I definitely Longbottomed."

"You just always look so good," the girl gushes. Her cheeks turn pink and her eyes go down to the table. "I mean, where do you shop? Your outfits are always *on point*."

"There are a lot things on point," a guy says, walking past, "including something else." He and his friends laughed as they walked away. Their voices echo as they finally left the building with no one else but us around to hear their comments.

Go away, I think, still staring at the girl in front of me, and neither of us open our mouths to speak. We watch each other, both with pursed lips, and we wait. The smile I had been wearing fell off my face as I duck my head, as if they can't see me any longer. A deep red blush inches across my skin. "I'll see you later."

Another day without knowing her name, and I leave her behind as I walk to my next class. I am self-conscious about how I feel, like everyone is staring at me, and whatever remarks they might make just make me feel uncomfortable. Eyes linger on me for too long, and I shrink inside myself. With every long and graceful step, I glide like I am on ice, and I feel wrong. All the clothes I wear feel wrong, and my face is caked wrong. I want to go back to my room and take it all off.

"Damn," offers another compliment from my best friend, Cath, who says she wants to try but never does. "I know you don't look good for anyone else but yourself— but damn."

“Thank you.” My eyes dart down.

Her soft eyes watch me. “Someone already shit on your day, didn’t they?” Cath shakes her head. “Fuck them. Who cares what they think?”

“Thanks, Cath.” I walk away.

“I mean it: don’t care. It’s a waste of time.” Her voice trails off into the distance.

Sitting in class, we work on a group project. My eyes focus on the assignment sheet as other people in my group talk about their weekends and everything they did. I feel if I focus on the paper enough, somehow the few girls behind me will stop looking at me. I already heard them say my name.

“I think we should do the history of the Celts,” I say. “They came up through Europe to settle in Ireland and Scotland, so it will be easy to track their language.” My eyes come up to the group, and none of them have faded in conversation.

When the professor stops at the table and asks, “What is your group project?”

I begin, “We—”

“We’re going to research the Celts coming up through Europe.”

“That’s a very good idea, Chad.” The professor leaves.

Anger boils in me, and I purse my lips. “That was my idea.”

“Don’t be a bitch.” He smirks. “*Teamwork.*” Chad pushes the assignment sheet over to me, and he has already chosen what he wants, which is the easiest part. He goes back to speaking with his friend from the table over, filling up the classroom with loud laughter and even louder swear words.

I return to the assignment sheet, reading the rest of the positions, and when I see what he has chosen, it is obvious he means to do it last minute, if at all. The other members in my group grumble over the parts they have to do. When I say that those doing the easier portions should take two, I am ignored again.

“Why do you think she dresses like that?”

“She doesn’t want to be a virgin anymore,” responds a girl behind me. “You can tell she is. She’s so desperate.”

I turn to them, letting them know I can hear.

They both giggle. “You know, you shouldn’t have chosen that lipstick.”

Shaking my head, I turn back to my group and look at the clock, and this hour is barely over. The day isn’t over either with a few more hours of class and then work. My stomach growls, and I am sure everyone can hear it. Chad looks at me and arches an eyebrow, but he says nothing. I swallow and hold my stomach, wishing for it to shut up.

When I walk into the next class, I am only a few minutes early, and all eyes turn toward me as my heels *click-clack-click* against the ground, like I am a tap dancer. The loudest noise in the whole world, and it echoes in this small classroom. Even as I lean onto my tiptoes, the heels still hit the ground, and everyone turns silent. Even the teacher at the desk looks at me.

I finally sit as class begins. I try not to move my feet, just in case a sound might come from my heel.

“You know,” whispers a guy who has never spoken to me, “you’re really tall.”

I look at him and wait.

His face morphs like I’m stupid. “You shouldn’t wear heels.”

It's not my problem you're short, I want to say, but I don't. He turns back to the board and writes down notes, and I move my foot. The heel comes down, and his eyes glance over. I freeze. His eyes go back to the whiteboard. I bring down my heel three more times until the guy looks at me again, and I smile at him, challenging.

When class ends and the loud conversation starts up again, I am finally allowed to move. My heels don't make so much sound as I move through the hallways. Everyone else's shoes squeak against the tiles. Black marks are left against the floor. I *click-clack-click* against the floor, and I walk into the bathroom.

As I pull up my pants after peeing, I see above the gray bathroom stall door and stare at my nose through the mirrors. There is a girl at the sink, just washing her hands, and like she feels me there, she glances back through the mirror. Her mouth pops open. Immediately she finishes and leaves. Coming out of the stall, I bend down to wash my hands.

Another girl walks into the bathroom, unknown to what just happened. "Hey, I really like your shoes."

"Thank you," I murmur, checking myself in the mirror. I don't know what it is worse: looking perfect and having everyone comment, or not looking perfect and knowing how much effort I put in. Even as I stare at myself, I feel like I am not perfect with all the effort I put in. The girls in my first class are right: this lipstick doesn't look good on me. This morning, I thought it was a good idea, but apparently I was tired and delusional.

In my next class, I sit in the front row, and I let my legs unfold. A few students walk in, late to class, and I have to pull my legs back so they won't trip. I cannot cross my legs underneath the table because my knees hitting it.

"Just let your legs go free. They go on for miles," someone says next to me. "What did your parents feed you?"

"Um... the usual, I guess."

"Oh, so it must be your genes?" they ask. "Large Scandinavian women."

I'm not Scandinavian, I think to myself as the teacher begins, and he paces. It is a constant in and out with my legs, hoping he won't trip because he doesn't look down. No one else's legs go out that far. When he finally stops to write on the board, it feels so nice to let them stretch.

After class, I grab cheese curds from the quick snack shop before heading off to work. Some girls eat too, and I feel their eyes crawl across my skin. Their whispers never reach my ears except for the noise. Shaking my head, I ignore them. The feeling doesn't go away, and I look over to the girls, whose eyes are on me, but their whispers immediately stop. I swallow a cheese curd, feeling it add five pounds onto my body. The two girls go back to whispering, and now I know they are speaking about me. I leave them, throwing the cheese curds as I go.

At my job, I sit down at the desk in the math lab, and I start working as my client comes in. Even as he is directed over to me, he is hesitant. "You're my math tutor?"

"Hi, I'm—"

"You don't seem like a math tutor." My eyes narrow on him and my friendly smile fades, and he explains, "You don't look like a math tutor. Aren't they supposed to be all nerdy? And you're, like, pretty."

"I can assure you that I know what I'm doing."

"I don't know." He looks around. "What about him? Is he free?"

“Um...”

“Hey, dude.”

My client walks away, going toward another math tutor, and I am left sitting at the desk. My client goes with my colleague, even though my colleague doesn't know how to do trigonometry, and when my colleague asks for my help, I do help. “Think of it like football and how wide the field is.”

“I didn't take you as a football person.”

Of course you didn't. I smile.

When I am done with work at five, it is time for dinner. My friends are already packed into our booth, and I go to grab a drink. Appearing in front of me, the girl that is in my English class plainly states, “I don't want you to think that I'm a bitch, but I don't think that shirt fits your body type.” She has a lazy grin on her face, and her eyes seem hopeful that I'm not angry.

“I don't remember asking you, bitch.” I walk away.

When I come back to our booth, Cath asks, “What did she want?”

“She says my shirt doesn't fit me well.”

“Do you want me to fight her?” Cath is always ready to go into battle for me. “And she's wrong. Your shirt is great. I mean your boobies look amazing.”

I look down to make sure. “They do, don't they?”

When I am finally able to go back to my room, I walk through the commons of my college again. Some people stop to look at me as I go past, but the confidence I wore earlier drastically decreased. There are pieces that remain of my morning confidence, and with the face I wear, a hurricane cannot take me down. I know when I wake up tomorrow morning, I will do all of this over again.

“How's the weather up there?”

“Fucking sunny,” I smile. “Have a nice night.”