Schoolgirl Caption

“Jonah? I found this on your computer.”
“Geez, Ma. Invasion of privacy.”
“Don’t change the subject, young man.”
She placed a printout on the kitchen table.
“Would you care to explain this?”
Jonah paled noticeably. “I, uh... sure. It’s just some weird picture I found online.”
“I see. Why then would you save it in a folder named ‘My Captions’?”
“Oh, uh... I dunno. How’d it get there?”
“Also, it has your name on it.”
“That’s why it’s so weird. I figured it’d be, you know, a laugh or somethin’.”
“Oh, I see. So you were going to show it to your friends, is that it?”
“Sure. I figured they’d get a kick—”
“But you haven’t, have you?”
“Huh? Well, no, not yet, but—”
“Why not do it right now? You could call Lawrence over; he’s right next-door.”
Long pause. “Don’t feel like it.”
“Of course you don’t. You don’t want Lawrence or anyone else to see this so-called ‘caption’, because the girl in the picture is you.”
“C’mon, Ma. Just ‘cause it’s my name...”
“Is that, or is that not, your face?”
Another long pause. “I can see why you’d think—”
“Oh, come now, Jonah! I know my own son’s face when I see it. And I know what programs like Photoshop can do these days.”
“But we don’t even own—”
“You know what I mean. You swapped your own face onto that girl’s body. I’d like to know why.”
“Oh, shit... It was just a joke, okay?”
“A joke. Really. Then what’s the punch line?” She pointed to the caption. “What’s so funny about a mother forcing her son to dress up like a little girl? What’s so funny about a boy being forced to attend a girl’s school, as a girl? Well?”
“It just is, okay?” Jonah pushed his chair away.
“Not so fast, young man. You’re not leaving until we settle this.” She sat down at the table and studied the printout. “This isn’t funny at all. I don’t think it was meant to be. But I do know what it means.”
Jonah stared out the window, saying nothing. Her voice softened. “I think... a girl.”
Jonah shook his head. “Nope.”
“Are you sure? Because I could understand that.”
His eyes flickered. “You could?”

Jonah Gets Ready for His First Day in a New School

Of course. Girls don’t have to run around and pretend they’re tough. They don’t have to play baseball, if they don’t want to, and they aren’t expected to be good at sports or anything outdoorsy. They might be, but they don’t have to be. They aren’t judged.”
Jonah nodded, staring at the floor.
His mother smiled. “Girls get to have long hair, don’t they? They’re allowed to wear pretty little dresses, and nice shoes, and they smile a lot. Being a girl is fun.”

“Girls have problems too, dear. It’s not all sugar and spice and everything nice. But I do understand how you feel.”
“Thanks.”
“Can I go now?”
He picked up the printout.
“You may. Have fun.”
She leaned back. “I made copies, of course. Of that picture, and all the others. And hid them.”
Jonah stopped dead. “The others?”
“Yes, over a hundred in that folder alone. You’ve been quite the busy little bee.”
He turned away. “You better not’ve read ‘em.”
“I certainly did. And I’ll say this, your writing skills have definitely improved. I’m happy about that.”
“Yeah, well... that’s why I did it.”
“Of course. Why else would you write about boys turning into girls? But there are other skills you could practice too, don’t you think? Walking in high heels, for instance. Doing your own hair, makeup. And most important of all—feminine etiquette.”
Jonah ran from the kitchen. The back door slammed open and frightened footsteps fled down the garden path. A gate slammed shut. A dog began barking. His mother lifted her head and laughed.