The Spring Fling Dance

A tomboy becomes the belle of the ball.

By P.J. Repond

It was the spring of 1950 in Hawthorne, N.Y., and, for the first time in the history of the school, Hawthorne Elementary's sixth-grade class was having a dance. Our whole class was ecstatic.

Everyone, that is, but me. Why would I be? I wasn't one of those frilly girls who curled her hair and wore dresses. I was every bit a tomboy, and I didn't want to go to some old dance. Could I play baseball, climb a tree or do cartwheels at a dance? Could I build a raft, swing from a vine, or even chase rabbits at a dance? The answer was no. I couldn't do any of the things I liked to do at a dance.

And I would have to do all the things I didn't like. I'd have to suffer through my mother fussing over my hair—curling it, or maybe even giving it a perm. I'd have to scrub my fingernails with a brush until they were white. I'd have to stand perfectly still while Mom fitted me for a new dress, and then I'd have to wear the dress to the dance. I'd have to polish my shoes and let my sisters paint lipstick on my lips and nail polish on my fingernails. Yuk!

I'd probably even have to dance. That was the decision maker—I wasn't going, and that was all there was to it. I didn't care that Miss Timm, our teacher, wanted perfect attendance, or that I was supposed to feel honored and special that the school was breaking with tradition in allowing us to have a Spring Fling Dance. The only reason we were having a dance in the first place was because two of the most girly-girls in our class had fathers on the school board, and they had begged them to let our class have a dance. Thanks a lot, girls.

For the next week, I whined, fumed and fussed. I wasn't going to a dumb old dance. I wasn't! No one could make me!

My mom, meanwhile, ignored my tantrums as she assembled all the supplies she'd need to complete my transformation. She bought a Toni home permanent, a Butterick pattern, several yards of frilly fabric, a garter belt and stockings, nail polish and lipstick. Yes, *lipstick.* She hadn't heard a word I'd said.

The entire next week was consumed with preparations. I had to scrub my nails every day—before and after school and again at bedtime. At night, after my bath, Mom rubbed her special lotion, the one that smelled like lily of the valley, on my face and hands. She even insisted she measure my chest to see if I was ready for a training bra. I wasn't.

Then, a week before the dance, Ross asked if he could take me to the dance. Ross! Ross asked me to the dance. I couldn't believe it. Ross was the best pitcher in Little League, played dodgeball like a pro, and had even climbed to the top of the tallest tree in town. He was also the cutest boy in the whole school, and all the girls drooled over him, even Pam.

Suddenly, everything changed. Wearing a dress didn't seem so bad. Clean fingernails were worth the trouble, and I decided I could tolerate lipstick for just one night. I didn't squirm or squeal as Mom permed my hair, fitted me for my new dress, and wore herself to a frazzle transforming me into, of all things, a girly-girl.

The night of the dance, my skin was soft and oozing lily-of-the-valley scent. My lips were painted. My nails were polished. My head was a mass of tiny curls, and my dress was a creation any mom could be proud of.

At 6 p.m., our doorbell rang, and I stood nervously in the foyer as my mom opened the door and ushered Ross inside. He smiled shyly and handed me a corsage.

Mom pinned the corsage to my dress and gushed over how handsome Ross looked and how beautiful I was. Then she pushed us next to each other.

"Hold her hand," she instructed Ross. He did, and she snapped a picture with her Brownie camera. I didn't even care! Ross was taking me to the sixth-grade Spring Fling Dance, and I was in love!

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