

In your own words



Heat of the moment

It was a hot summer. I cannot remember why a new teacher was taking us for some of our lessons; perhaps he was a student. Whatever the reason, he had very definite ideas. He deplored the cinema and the boys' desire to emulate James Cagney or Roy Rogers, and the way we girls drooled over the sequinned gowns of Greer Garson, or Alice Faye. Such things were for adults. He also said that we wore too many clothes. We all sat up at that. He told us we should take off our outer clothes when we went out to play. This was better than learning the nine-times table. We rolled our eyes at one another in delicious anticipation.

When playtime arrived we wondered if we could do it. Dare we do it? Our primary school had only a concrete playground that flung the heat back at us, but the notion was very tempting. Soon, the boys stood bare-chested in their grey flannel shorts, and the girls flung aside their cotton frocks to reveal vests and knickers in an assortment of colours. Out we whooped like demented nymphs and satyrs.

The word went round and interested onlookers watched as we leapt and raced and performed handstands to show

how liberated we were, thoroughly enjoying our 15 minutes of fame. At the end of break, we returned to our classroom and reluctantly put on our clothes. All except Dawn.

She had long, wavy hair and the sun had flicked a few freckles across her pert nose. She declared she was staying as she was, and sat down firmly on her locknit knickers. Our regular teacher arrived and

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looked very surprised when, backed up by the rest of us, she assured him she had acted on orders. He told her he would prefer it if she wore her dress.

Dawn moved out from behind her desk, rolling her eyes to the ceiling. Slowly, she picked up her frock, shook it and smoothed the creases. She adjusted her vest. Our teacher said he realised why she was often late for school. She peeped at him from under her lashes, grinning. By now, she had the complete attention of the silent class.

Fifty-one pairs of eyes watched her slide her arms gracefully into the sleeves of her frock, swaying a little as she did so. She had some trouble with the neck but at length her head emerged and she shot a triumphant look around the room. I glanced at the teacher, and saw from his face that he felt it might have been better to ignore Dawn's state of undress. She pulled at the frock and wriggled her hips until it fell to her knees. Her fingers fumbled at the button holes so it took an inordinate length of time to fasten the frock at the back, but she was not yet finished.

The sash had to be twirled and straightened, then the bow had to be tied, and retied at the back. Finally, she slipped her hands behind her head and lifted her hair free of the frock, shaking and flicking it round her shoulders. She slid back behind her desk, raised her eyebrows and rested her chin on her hand. It was a magnificent performance.

In a year or two, we moved on to secondary schools and I never saw Dawn again. I wonder how many of those in that overcrowded classroom, smelling of chalk and children, remember that day. I wonder if Dawn herself recalls it? ●

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