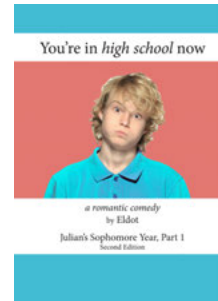


from *You're in high school now*

This unabridged excerpt is a complete chapter; it tells about part of the protagonist's very first dance—and very first date. Just past the midway point in the novel, it gives a peek into some of the inner conflict that the fifteen-year old boy has to resolve.



20 The Sadie Hawkins Day Dance [9411 words]

Julian's eyes were frozen in an unfocused stare. It was a good thing that the parking lot was smooth and level, because walking like a zombie was all he could manage right now. That was easy enough in this rubber coat.

The full weight of what he was about to do had taken him over. He was escorting Rita Mitchell—that's *Dance Team* Rita Mitchell—to the Girls' Gym; that's where the event was being held. He was dressed in a special costume—custom made by Geraldine. He was supposed to look exactly like the Li'l Abner character in the comics. She had cut out a panel from the Sunday funnies and tacked it on the bulletin board in his room so he could study it. They even made him wear his hiking boots so he would look more authentic.

That part was okay; but then she pulls out this huge yellow rain slicker—*rubberized*—heavy as the dickens, and wraps me up and snaps me in tight as if I might blow away in the wind or something—man. I have to admit it keeps me warm; still, I feel like something that wandered off the Gumby show. I can't even see my feet.

It was fun to watch Geraldine and Mom fuss and cluck over the costume; surprisingly, it was even fun to take dancing lessons from Geraldine. It wasn't as hard as I expected—I'm pretty good at it, from what she says. But now it's the *real thing*. Mom and Geraldine aren't here. I get to do this all by myself.

He looked over at Sammy, Barbara's date. Lucky guy; he has on a regular school jacket. I don't know him, but he seems okay—sort of tall and skinny. But it's good to have some company. Since we're in Barbara's car, Sammy rides up front. Fine by me... this big yellow coat would really stand out up there.

Julian wasn't a shy person and he usually didn't care one way or another about how he looked. But even a dummy like me knows when he looks really silly. It's a safe bet I'm the only one wearing a yellow raincoat, so rubberized it could practically stand by itself; if need be, you could stand it in the corner along with the umbrellas—or better yet, park it on the back porch. At least I have Li'l Abner's hat on instead of whatever goes with this yellow thing. I feel like a big traffic cone—one that wears a straw hat and bobs across the parking lot on hiking boots. I'm tempted to stick out my arms and waddle across making goofy noises. If it wasn't for Mom and Geraldine, I prob'ly would.

Julian hadn't done a whole lot of dancing in his life; he expected to be pretty clumsy no matter what, so wearing boots might not make that big a difference. I didn't wear them for the lessons because they always squeal and squeak on the hardwood floors. They do that on any kind of floor. I bet they'll be super bad tonight: the dance is in the girl's gym.

Why do I hear Rice Krispies all of a sudden? He glanced up at the brim of his straw hat. Is it gonna rain? He held up his arm... sure enough, teeny droplets had appeared everywhere on the bright yellow sleeve. It wasn't supposed to rain, but you never know. At least I'm dressed for it.

In spite of all the coaching and rehearsing, he was still worried; I don't want to mess this up. The real thing is never the same as practice. Geraldine's over an inch taller than me, so the lessons were kind of awkward. At least I'm a little taller than Rita; I wonder if that will make a big difference on the dance floor. Her waist will be lower... that might help.

This isn't like the sock hop I went to last year at Wallace. That wasn't a real date, for one thing—I went with Sid; we had a lot of fun goofing around. We didn't do any *actual* dancing with a girl. But I saw what it was like; that's why I didn't ever go to another dance... until this came along. Boy, oh boy, did it ever make Geraldine happy. And Mom was too—although she isn't as fanatical about it. At least it took care of that movie date problem—for a while, anyway.

He wasn't attracted to Rita, especially. When it came to being attracted, girls were not all that interesting. His sights were fixed on one person, and no one was likely to get in the way of that. Certainly not a girl.

But he felt an obligation to her for inviting him—and getting him out of that movie date. It was a huge compliment, evidently—at least that’s what Geraldine said, and she knows all about this stuff. I plan to have fun—might as well; and I want Rita to have fun too. Just so I don’t foul up... do they let you take your boots off if they squeal?

He braced himself. Pretty soon, we’ll be right under that big light over the fake barn door—it looks like the decorations committee has gone all out on this. Put on your smile and try to look like you know what you’re doing. He looked over at Sammy... he looks just as worried as I am... comforting, in a way.



Rita was in her element. Mischief was on her mind most of all, and she was very pleased at how things were going. She had just made certain that Barbara’s Wolf Gal earmuffs fit perfectly; her prospects tonight with Sammy are excellent. Now it’s time to show off. My taste in men is going to make me look very good tonight—wait until Sherri gets a look at what *I* have in tow. This blond masterpiece is quite a catch. She lifted his left arm and tucked hers underneath; he’s such a sweetie! Why he doesn’t have a flock of girls following him everywhere is amazing. He hasn’t been broken in yet. Well I’m just the one to do that! She promised herself that she’d behave—at least for a while. Who knows what might happen? There isn’t much I won’t be able to get away with. She had learned long ago that all she needed to do was be alert; when to nudge, when to back off—these were practiced skills.

First thing is to put him at ease, make him feel safe and in control. He’ll follow the clues, no problem there; boys are so easy to play; this one will be a breeze. Those deep puppy dog eyes are special.

What is Big Man On Campus Tracy doing tonight, do you suppose? Besides not coming to the Sadie Hawkins Dance with me, that is. The true benefit of tonight’s dance will be the new Tracy. Taking her for granted was not going to remain a problem after tonight; those so-called “alum nights” will be over, or else. His facial expression when I told him I had invited someone else to the dance was *delicious*. Having his complete attention was more thrilling than I expected... I could get used to that... in fact, I plan on getting used to that. This is the first time I’ve strayed from Tracy—there will be a *lot* of talk about that! I might as well enjoy myself while I’m at it.

She smiled with satisfaction: yes... this blond cutie will give them *lots* to talk about.

She was eager to get inside—the air is a little cooler than expected; Daisy Mae’s costume is a summer outfit. The raincoat covers everything well enough; at least there’s no wind. She looked eastward—the moon was blurred by a surprise mist that had come up. Hmm... the forecast said clear skies tonight. I’m counting on that later at Fowler’s Point. This costume will simplify things there... that’s where to go after a dance if you want to do any *serious* necking. With this outfit, even a complete amateur could figure out what to do.

She glanced over at her date... it’s odd, really—he looks kind of like Li’l Abner; a little shorter. Funny about the hair—he has Daisy Mae’s blonde, and I’ve got Li’l Abner’s brunette! Otherwise, we look perfect.

She sent a silent request to the moon to shoo away the clouds while she was busy dancing.



These pants feel weird. Julian was used to his pants being more on the tight side, held on with a belt. Geraldine got these overalls from Jake, one of the guys on her landscape crew... said he needed a new pair anyway. They’re a couple of sizes too big, so she rolled the pant legs up high and pinned them so they wouldn’t roll back down—the socks are supposed to show above the boots. She made them look just like the comic strip by sewing brightly colored patches over the torn places and on the knees; she unhooked the right bib strap and pinned the loose corner inside. Just as well: it was almost ready to fall off on its own.

The strap in the back is folded inside too—which means that only one shoulder strap is keeping the thing on. I don’t want to think about what would happen if it fell off my shoulder—in a flash I’d be standing there in my skivvies; the red polo shirt doesn’t go much below my belly button. I’ve never had a polo shirt before. Basically, it’s just a T-shirt with a collar and pocket. Fire engine red—urg. Not my favorite color. But it was nice of Geraldine to buy it. She could have gotten a larger size... “Oh, no... this will do just fine,” she says and squeezes my shoulder. I caught her giving Mom a wink—which means it looks sexier if the shirt is a little tight. Honestly.

When this is over, I'm gonna box these overalls up and bury them in my closet. I'll give them to Uncle Max next summer; he wears these things all the time. After tonight I won't need them.

He turned around to see who was behind—the cars are pouring in. Will anyone from the troop be here? None of the Arrows are coming... neither is Sid... Jeremy either. It would be nice if I knew at least one person... oh well. Randall, the lucky guy, avoided detection by the girl squads—once in a while you could see them out there surrounding some poor unsuspecting guy like they did me. Some guys *want* to go, and are glad to be caught; I saw that a few times too... come to think of it, lots of guys appreciate it because they're too chicken to ask a girl to go out. I know how that feels.

We're in the front of the pack... I wouldn't have minded being late. But here we are anyway, standing under the huge floodlight. The outside entrance was decorated with huge doors opened wide as if a giant red barn had been reserved for the event. Bales of straw were stacked on both sides.

“Hi!” Rita chimed with an exaggerated wink, flashing her dance program at the girl taking tickets. Dotty was one of her *inside* circle. She leaned close—Dotty had some special, secret information. “Perfect!” Rita was delighted. She turned to Julian enthusiastically. “We have the best spot!”

“Great!” He smiled back as if he knew what she was talking about. *Nyugh!* the sudden urge to rub his nose was hard to ignore; a big whiff of her perfume just now almost bowled him over. He grinned at Rita's friend. “Hi.” One syllable words are easy enough. I'm impressed a little though; the girl is a junior, and treats Rita as an equal. Her stare made him want to zip inside as quick as he could. Oh... maybe it's the yellow coat.

He pulled the gymnasium door open like a gentleman and ushered Rita in just the way Geraldine taught him. They walked into the “barn.”

> *Squip-squipp—squip-p-p—* <

Oh, no! The tire tread boot soles were just as bad as he had feared; the freshly polished floor made the sound extra crisp. What am I gonna do?

“Ahem!”

Before he could take another step, Miss Audrey Fredericks, the head girl's PE teacher, barred the way. With a frown on her face she pointed at their feet and swung her arm to the left, forefinger aimed at a stiff bristle doormat. “Shoes,” she commanded. She looks different. The costume did not diminish her foreboding demeanor... at least two inches taller and ten

pounds heavier than Julian, she looked like Lucille Sweeney in the comics, only with a frown.

The command to wipe off shoes wasn't a surprise: one of the first rules spelled out in P.E. class was how to treat the gymnasium floors. It was required to clean your soles of any sand or dirt before walking on the gym floor. In the Boys' Gym, you had to take your shoes clear off and *leave* them off. He stepped onto the doormat and drew his feet backwards... boy, is it ever stiff! He chuckled... this is what dogs do in the park; they piddle on a tree then do this... I never figured out why they do that.

Miss Fredericks nodded at last and allowed them to pass. When he stepped on the floor his boot soles didn't squeal... he took another step... whoa. He glanced back at the coarse floor mat. What do you know... I need to get one of those. Do they make smaller sized ones?

The light was subdued, so it took a minute to see the setup. In place of tables and chairs, bales of straw were scattered around the perimeter, creating a home base for each couple. Reservation numbers matching the dance program were pinned on one of the bales in each group. Rita grabbed Julian's hand and pulled him forward.

"We're over there—it's one of the best locations!" She led the way across the dance floor to a cluster of three bales; the number 32 was pinned atop the bale that stood on end. She removed her raincoat and reached back to grab a hanger from a portable clothes rack conveniently located behind their straw bales. As a member of the decorations committee, she knew what was where. She indicated with a nod where to hang the slicker.

"Oh—yeah." Julian hopped over to grab a hanger. Boy, am I glad to be rid of this! I feel about ten pounds lighter. He put the hat on top of the upright bale of straw and looked around—I lost track of Sammy and Barbara. They must have their own bales; too bad. He was curious about their costumes; I couldn't see what was under their coats. About the only thing I noticed was her oddball earmuffs and Sammy's shoes—they're the exact opposite of hiking boots: classy—the kind that have a second layer on the toes with small holes punched in a fancy pattern—shoes for going to church in, basically; they look brand new.

> *plop!* <

An odd rubbery sound came from behind. Oh, no: the slicker fell off the hanger! He stepped around to look... there it is, resting on the floor. Might as well leave it be; at least the stupid thing didn't roll away.

Julian surveyed the layout. Wow... this is really something... so well organized. I had no idea it would be such a big deal; Geraldine was right about that. A big Sadie Hawkins sign stretched across a platform in one corner. A disc jockey was sorting through a stack of LPs. Behind him a rack displayed covers of the record albums he would be playing. Huge speakers were spread around the gym, aimed at the wall—this diffused the sound and allowed the volume to be turned way up. To set the mood before the dance started, Moon Mullican's *Shine on, Harvest Moon* was playing at a low volume. Strings of small lights had been strung from special wooden stands—the effect suggested a barnyard. Alternating white and yellow bulbs led to a small stage. Split rail fence units bordered the sides and back; the disc jockey stand had the same kind of fence. Rita's right about the location—he had an urge to grab his sketchbook and make a couple of drawings. Silly... I don't have it with me.

“Turn around a jif.” Rita had a 3 x 5 card with a big number 32. She pinned it on the back of his overall strap. “This way they can tell who we are when they do the judging.”

“Judging?” If they're judging how good I dance, there's no point. He didn't say that aloud.

“They have *lots* of awards at this dance—you'll see.” She turned him around to get a good look at his outfit. “You look perfect! Oh—remember to put on your hat later. That will cinch us for best costume.” She leaned over and gave him a sisterly peck on the cheek. She winked, noting the lip print. *Now* it's perfect. “How do *I* look?”

She glanced down at her Daisy Mae blouse. She'd never been able to wear anything like this before—the special order strapless demi-cup felt sexy; it was certainly doing its job tonight. I'll pretend everyone is admiring the big polka dots. She did a slow rotation so that he could see the full effect of her outfit. She loved the way the sleeves felt; she wasn't worried about them slipping—the elastic held them in place halfway down her shoulders. Too bad Tracy can't see me...

Julian gulped. He hadn't really looked at her until this minute. Am I glad the lights are dim. The comic strip page Geraldine had put on his bulletin board came to mind—Daisy Mae was depicted as well as Li'l Abner. Maybe it *didn't* exaggerate the girl's top and bottom curves: half of Rita's boobs are pushing out the top! And her skirt is so short! She better not bend over or sit down wrong. He had not noticed before that she had such a large rear end. She isn't fat or anything—but she's... really *big*. Her buns have to be twice as big as mine.

“Wow,” he managed. He looked her in the face. Obviously she wanted something more. “You look exactly like the cartoon!” Is it okay to wear such skimpy clothing? She’s practically naked. Personally, I’m happy with my blue denim tent.

Rita was slightly disappointed... Tracy would have started to drool the second I took off my coat. Later on he’ll be a little more enthusiastic—a few minutes on the dance floor will do the trick. She sat on the bale of straw and patted the space next to her. A few things needed to be covered before making the rounds. That’s why we had to arrive early—obviously he doesn’t know what’s expected—but he’s smart enough, I can tell that much. Rita rarely left anything to chance.

Julian sat down where he was told, right next to her. It took a minute to get used to that: not only did it bring him closer to that ugly perfume smell, it forced him to see down the front of her bulging blouse: he tried not to notice—but it was hard. It looked like they would pop out completely if they got the chance; they were half way out already. Those are *weird*... made him glad he wasn’t a girl. Having to deal with them all the time must be a real pain. Finally, she held the program so that it blocked the view. She wanted to explain how the dances were planned in advance—I’m gonna be exchanged to dance with another girl about halfway. That’s pretty scary...

After Rita completed the briefing, she led Julian on a mini tour to meet some of her friends and compare costumes. It felt good to move around. Some of the other guys looked a lot more comfortable; lots of cutoff jeans with ragged bottoms... those would be a lot better than these bib overalls. It’s too cold, or I could have worn my work cutoffs—no, on second thought, those are way too short. He laughed to himself... they’d sure go with Rita’s skirt! At least I don’t have to wear a flannel shirt. Lots of kids had corn cob pipes and raggedy straw hats. Some couples wore matching shirts and blouses. Not everyone has a costume... a few of the kids have regular school clothes.

He wasn’t the only Li’l Abner. Must be six or seven guys in overalls. One had both bib straps; some had the right side unhooked, some the left. His overalls looked more used and worn than the others—and bigger. I’m the only one with big heavy boots. There are other Daisy Maes too. Rita is more like the cartoon than the others as far as boobs are concerned. They all have big butts.

Rita did all the talking. All he had to do was smile and look interested. No problem. He tried to figure out some of the costumes while she chattered away. It was hard if they didn't have the name written down somewhere. When they were talking to a guy named Teddy—he had a big gold sheriff star pinned on his shirt—a loud fanfare erupted from the speakers. The evening was about to begin.

“Oo, quick,” Rita grabbed Julian's hand and hurried back to their straw bales.

The first thing they had to do was walk in a big circle before the judges. They were giving points for the costumes; Rita grabbed the hat and put it on me just the way she wanted. Where are the judges, anyway? I don't see them anywhere. Just as well. It helps me act natural. Walking a full circle around the dance floor helped put him at ease; he didn't have to talk or say anything.

Just as they got back to their bale, the music came on: Ricky Nelson singing *Hello Mary Lou*—that meant the first dance had begun. A couple came out onto the floor and started to dance—Julian didn't know who they were. Right after that, other couples joined in.

He took a deep breath and held out his hand—thank you, Geraldine—he followed her lesson to the letter. From the beginning it went just fine... no squeaks at all. Soon, they were well into the song... hey, this is easy! The beat was clear... it took no time to get the hang of how to do this. His self-confidence was building steadily. This is fun! Then—

“*Ouch!*” Rita stumbled awkwardly; they had to stop.

“Oh, man—I'm sorry—are you all right?” The second it happened he knew: his right boot had trod on her left foot. He felt awful. He looked down and felt even worse: she's *barefoot!*

Rita winced. She had taken off her street shoes for the costume parade and not bothered to put them on again—Daisy Mae was always barefoot in the cartoon; it felt better to dance barefoot, anyway. Something had to be done differently: her foot really hurt. She looked around quickly—luckily, no one was paying attention. “I think it's all right...” she didn't want to scare him, but she had to know how bad it was. “Let's sit down a minute.” She led him back to their bale.

Julian was devastated. I am such a *clod*. The whole night is ruined. And, it's my fault... How am I going to face Geraldine? And Mom? The *first* dance! Cripes. What do I do now? He watched her walk... she's limping!

Rita sat and swung her left leg up onto the bale. If only it wasn't so *dark*. She looked up at Julian—he looks so sorry. Her heart went out to him. “It’s not *that* bad. Come here and look at it, will you?” She smiled reassuringly. It never hurt to play the maiden in distress.

He jumped forward at once and got down on his knees. The foot isn't bleeding, at least... what should I do? he looked up—oh. Droplets of sweat broke out on his forehead... I'm lucky it's this dark. Otherwise I'd probably be able to see what I'm not supposed to see.

“Go ahead, look real close—is the skin broken?” She could tell that he was afraid. Getting him to handle her foot was an unexpected bonus. That will come in handy later... give him some confidence.

He bent close and looked around both sides. “It looks okay!” He grinned wide.

“Feel it, try to tell if it is sprained...” She wiggled her toes. They felt much better now. She looked out to see if they were being watched. Not yet.

He took her foot into his hands and... what should I do? He gave it a small twist to the right and looked up. She nodded that it was okay. He twisted it the other way a little and checked again.

“Look at the toes.” His hands holding her foot felt very nice; now if he'll explore a little...

He touched the big toe and looked up. Ok; then the next one... okay. Hmm. He lifted each of them up and down, very gently; nothing seemed to hurt. Maybe I bruised the top or something. He tried pushing lightly above the toes.

“Ooo!” Rita cooed. “That helps. Do that some more.”

Julian did a few tentative pushes with his fingertip. He looked up and saw her smiling and nodding. He rubbed a little, then made a circular movement. Danny's massage at summer camp gave him an idea of what to try.

“Mmm, yes, that's wonderful,” Rita purred. This had taken a turn for the better. She watched him concentrate... perfect. But we mustn't get carried away. When he included the ankle, she wiggled the foot to indicate that he could stop. “That was very nice. You have fixed it; I'm all better now. We can go back to the dance. But—maybe you could take off those boots?”

“Oo, yeah!” Julian attacked the laces on his right boot then and there. What a relief. I'm so glad she's okay. The night isn't ruined after all.

Rita watched him remove the boots. This is going nicely. *Very* nicely. As Patsy Cline sang, *I Fall to Pieces*, she extended her arm to be escorted back onto the dance floor. The string of lights set off his profile and highlighted his wavy blond hair. He might be new and awkward, but he is *very* handsome.

Taking the boots off made a huge difference. Considering his inexperience, he was surprised at how well he was able to do; dancing is fun. Rita is definitely easier to dance with than Geraldine.

The bop and the two step were the most common, which was good; those were the ones he had practiced. By the fifth dance he had adjusted well to the way she moved. Sometimes she varied things by putting her hands on his shoulders—he was supposed to put his hands on her waist. This made them dance face to face instead of side by side. That was better in a way; it was easier to avoid stepping on her toes. Sometimes she reversed that because her arms got too tired and she put her hands on his waist behind his back.

These different positions made it more interesting. When he checked around it looked like everyone was doing pretty much the same thing, 'cept for this one guy—he took up a lot of floor space doing some special fancy stuff. People had to steer clear of the area by the DJ. It looked interesting, but he couldn't watch them and pay attention to his feet at the same time. Besides, doing those things with Rita wouldn't be a very good idea. The boobs would probably pop out—that overhead toss thing would show off *everything* down below, for sure.

He didn't keep track of how many dances there were; sometimes they played a set and went on to a second and third song without stopping. When it came time for the exchange, the DJ announced that a five minute break would happen while everyone got squared away. Rita led us over to straw bale number 58. That's where the guy named Teddy was. His girl is named Theresa. I didn't know her at all, but I've seen her in the hallway a few times. "Moonbeam" was her character; she wore a super wide belt.

She was fun. First they did a special dance called the mashed potato. It was weird. He didn't see the point. You held both arms out in front while you took turns grinding one foot and then the other; you were supposed to flutter your arms one at a time too. The concept was that you appeared to be mashing potatoes with your feet. It took a while to get the hang of it. They never said why it was called that, either. Where do they mash potatoes with their feet?

It's a good thing that dance was with Theresa; watching Rita jiggle and flutter might have been scary. He really thought she was going to pop out of that blouse any minute. I like dancing with Theresa... she's very friendly. We talked a little during the next song—it was a regular dance, not a potato.

“Why don't I ever see you around?” Now that she had seen him up close, her interest deepened. He dances very well. Where did Rita discover this one?

Julian shrugged. “Don't know.” I'm not hiding or anything.

“What do you do for lunch?” Theresa had an idea that after tonight he'd be free. Rita's not about to dump Tracy. Terrible Teddy wouldn't mind if I had some fun on the side.

“I have second lunch. I usually sit in the atrium.” Now that it's so cold out, I'm back inside during lunch. He didn't mention that he always had lunch with Randall.

“You never eat in the cafeteria?” No wonder I never see him. Who eats in the atrium?

“Sometimes. My mom makes me a lunch every day. Once in a while I get a carton of milk or a cup of juice.”

“Well, someday why not join us?” She smiled coyly. “We always have a good time.” She twirled again. “Bring along your lunch.”

“Okay...” Julian was flattered; Mom and Geraldine always nag at me about making more girl friends. All I ever do is scouts and hang out with Randall. Well, that's all I want to do. I could rack up some points with them by having lunch in the cafeteria a few times! I can bring Randall along! “Yeah! I'd like that.” He nodded. This might help with the movie problem, too.

He liked Theresa most of all because she didn't smell as strong—that perfume of Rita's is pretty potent.

Julian's smile took Theresa by surprise. His face seemed to transform when he smiles... it made her heartbeat increase. She didn't remember that happening before. “We sit over near the windows on the south side.” She looked closely every chance the dance allowed... the combination of dark pupils and bright blond hair was exotic and magical... his dark eyebrows made the eyes stand out even more... and *perfect* eyelashes. Boys don't have eyelashes like that! *perfect* white teeth and full lips... he's like a poster come to life.

Second lunch is perfect. Now then... do I tell anyone? Wait a second... no. Let him be an “unexpected” surprise. No point in giving Brenda a heads up. She might just pounce before I’ve had a chance to get acquainted. Besides, Teddy will be there too. Life gets complicated at times. Rita will be back with Tracy, that’s practically guaranteed—he’ll be right at her side starting Monday morning. She sure knows how to keep him in line. They’ll be having lunch somewhere else—by themselves.

Teen Angel finished playing and the DJ announced a twenty minute refreshment break. Teddy and Rita rushed over to join them in the center of the dance floor.

“Isn’t this fun?” Rita gushed, lunging at Julian; she ruffled his hair and gave him a hug. She stood back and grinned wide, pleased with herself; Terrible Teddy had held her close during *Teen Angel*, and precisely what she intended had occurred. Out of the corner of her eye she could see him failing to hide what had arisen below his belt.

“Yeah!” Julian grinned. The hug was unexpected, but it was okay this time... the perfume was a lot fainter now. Maybe it wears off or something. I hope she doesn’t have a stash of it in her handbag.

Rita realized too late—I shouldn’t have winked at Theresa... she’s looking downward—Teddy’s receding erection had stalled at the nine o’clock position.

“What do we do now?” Julian asked eagerly.

“Isn’t he cute?” Rita grinned. “Now is when you and Teddy go to the refreshment table and get us punch and cookies!” She reached her left arm over to her friend. “Us hens will wait for you back at the nest!” She looked at Theresa—“yours or mine?”

Theresa wasn’t ready to react. “Yours, I guess.” She wasn’t jealous or angry, really, but still... She gave Rita’s polka dot blouse a baleful glance. I hadn’t occurred to her to try anything like that with Julian. Well now. If Teddy can play a little...

“C’mon.” Teddy nodded toward the refreshment table. He was a junior, so he knew the routine. Besides, he needed to make an adjustment; standing in the crowd at the table is a good place for that—no one will notice.

Julian was eager to do this. He was thirsty and ready for a break; he followed alongside. Teddy seems like a good guy—kind of muscular. Reminds me of Kurt. “You a wrestler?” Might as well be friendly.

Teddy looked at him sharply. “What makes you think that?”

“Because you’re so muscular, and everything.” Julian held up his arm and flexed, to show how small his bicep was. Maybe he plays football.

Teddy was flattered. “Naw, I’m just in good shape. I work out and such with my pa.” He looked at Julian a second time, curious... “How’d you get hooked up with Rita, anyway?” Is Tracy history? Serve him right if he was.

The question threw him. “Hook up?”

“Well, yeah—I mean, in case you haven’t noticed, she has the biggest jugs in the room. There’s lotsa guys here that wouldn’t mind being in your shoes tonight,” he nodded forcefully as his left hand worked to solve his problem; it was hard to do via his pocket, but reaching under his belt wouldn’t be very cool. This was one time a hole in this pocket would have come in handy.

Julian blushed. Unknown to Teddy, he’d be glad to turn the assignment over to any or all. No way could he say that, though. He noticed Teddy’s problem... ooo-ee.... bad place to get a stiffy! How did *that* happen? Oh, I get it: Rita’s boobs! He calls them jugs! He wanted to laugh but was able to hold it in. Good thing it’s kinda dark. I’d like to fix it for him, but I can’t do that either. He looks about Chuck’s size down there; I wonder if it curves to the left.

Don’t think about that now, warned the Inside guy.

Yow... an image of Beta had begun to form... that will cause Little J to wake up real quick. He shook his head and focused on Teddy’s question.

“Dunno. I don’t really know her at all. One day she stopped me in the hall and handed me that flower. I didn’t even know what it meant.” He shrugged. “Beats me why I got picked.” He leaned close—“I didn’t even know how to dance—I had to take *lessons!*”

Just a minute—is this guy for real? “You never been to a dance before?!”

“Sock hops at Wallace.”

Teddy pondered the import of this... so he’s from Wallace. Maybe that explains it. “You come in your car or hers?”

Julian laughed. “I don’t have a car! I can’t even drive yet. I get Driver’s Ed next semester. We came in Barbara’s car. They picked up Sammy then came after me.”

Wow. Teddy had a small envy attack; after the dance this kid will be in the back seat with those jugs. Wow.

It was their turn at the table. A sign on the post read: “Kickapoo Joy Juice Here.” Two punchbowls were being administered by girls clad in gingham. The puffy shoulders looked like some of Lucy’s grade school dresses; they had those ribbons too.

“Lemonade or Fruit Punch?” asked one holding up an empty cup. What would Rita like? He looked at Teddy for advice. “Take one of each; she can pick the one she wants.”

Good idea. “One of each, thanks.” His eye fell on the plate of cookies. Urg... the store bought kind, little round factory things. Taste awful. He took two for each cup anyway and slipped them onto the saucers. He stood to the side and waited for Teddy.

“Hey, Wolf!” Norman gave Julian a nudge in the ribs.

“Hey, wow!” His hands were full or he would have elbowed Norman back. Norman was now Patrol Leader of the Wolves, his old patrol. I miss being in that patrol... but being in the Flaming Arrow is good too.

“Looks like you’re doin’ pretty good,” Norman gave Julian the double Groucho eyebrow lift.

He smiled and shrugged. Norman was referring to his “date.” I’m not about to brag or anything. “Who brought you?”

“Ann Jeffries.” They’d been steadies for almost a year, so it figured, really. The punchbowls drew his eye. “What’s the red one?”

“Some kind of fruit—I haven’t tasted it yet.” Probably too sweet. I got lemonade because it doesn’t fizz up. I hate carbonated drinks; make me feel too full.

Teddy appeared with his punch cups, ready to go back to bale number 32.

“Hey, do you know Teddy?”

Norman looked over—he knew of Teddy; he’s all right, for a football player. He nodded. “Hey.”

“Hi,” Teddy nodded, impressed. Norman Miller was just made the captain of the basketball team. This kid isn’t as out of it as I thought.

“Catch you later,” Norman moved up to the punchbowl table.

Julian concentrated on the task of carrying two cups of punch across the dance hall—it wouldn’t do to splash punch all over the place. I’m pretty good at this; I learned how to run a cup of coffee back to the cabin last summer. Mark always wanted a cup first thing.

Rita and Theresa were sitting together talking excitedly about something—so excited that they merely paused to take a cup, wink thank you, and carry on as if they had been served by anonymous waiters.

Teddy gestured toward the other bale; they sat beside each other like obedient servants, and sipped their punch.

Julian's eye landed the lettering on the big sheriff star. "What's 'F F' mean?"

"Fearless Fosdick," Teddy grinned. He reckoned his costume was about the easiest to make in the entire dance: a yellow paper star, pinned on his black shirt. All I had to do was buy a cheap hat.

Julian did not recognize the name; Teddy's about the only guy that doesn't look like a hillbilly. He doesn't look like a sheriff either... prob'ly best not to ask.

Teddy had been thinking about the comment at the refreshment table. "First dance? Really?" Kinda hard to believe.

Julian figured the sock hop didn't count, especially since he'd goofed off, fake dancing with Sid more than anything. He didn't offer an explanation. Inside guy had alerted him: on this matter, explanations could cause problems. He looked around the room... are any other boys here like me? Maybe I'm not the only one that got snagged by mistake.

Could be, Inside guy observed... you know, this date might come in handy at school, just like at home with Geraldine and Mom.

Julian nodded. It never hurts to look normal. People usually think you're just like they are because that's what they want; no reason to disappoint and cause trouble. Just smile and keep your mouth shut.

Teddy nodded back, knowingly. He remembered his first dance. Boy was I ever clueless. The girls were always a step ahead. I never could figure them out. Not worth the trouble to try. I always had a good time; sometimes they left me horny as hell, but sometimes I got my rocks off pretty good. Theresa usually put out when it counted.

"Don't sweat it," Teddy advised sagely. "You're doin' fine." No point in alerting him to the after-the-dance part. Nobody's *that* stupid. Besides, Rita has it all planned. I just wish I was gonna be the one in that back seat. He shook his head in envy. Man.

Another fanfare burst from the DJ stand. An intense beam of light from the Disc Jockey's platform appeared suddenly—the Drama Department's brand new Altman follow spot illuminated the small stage at the opposite corner of the dance floor. "Can I have everyone's attention?"

A dazzling eighteen foot wide pool of white light surrounded the Girls' League President; a microphone had replaced the refreshment table. The awards were about to be presented.

It seemed to take *forever*. Julian had never heard of so many silly awards. It looked like they tried invent one for everybody! Dogpatch stuff... lots of laughs, though; people were having a great time. He joined in by applauding and laughing along with everyone. He didn't get what most of them meant; the costumes gave a hint, but not being a fan of the comic strip didn't help matters. The funniest one was Pantless Perkins; the kid came out barefoot in a nightshirt. Hard to tell if anything was on underneath. Julian focused on the mid section... yeah... no wag; that means he's wearing skivvies; too bad.

Then, at last, one he did understand: the best Li'l Abner costume. Incredibly, the possibility that he might win had never occurred to him. But the girl on the platform had just said his name. It took a minute to sink in. He looked at Rita in shock.

Rita was not surprised, of course—this was part of her plan. And, he *was* the best Li'l Abner. While the boys were getting refreshments, she'd made the last minute preparation: the rawhide boot strings were now tied together, creating a handle. At the applause, she grabbed his left hand and forced him to take the boots. Then she plopped the straw hat back on his head and pushed him onto the floor.

Julian had never been the center of attention like this; he didn't know what to do or not do. But he'd had such a good time it was only right to show his appreciation. Besides, this is for Geraldine, not me; that delighted him most of all. Happily, he skipped across the room swinging the boots with his left hand and holding down his straw hat with his right. He bowed low to the presenter, and gave her a big smile. The expression on her face sort of gave him goose bumps... weird. He accepted his award—the certificate read, "Best Li'l Abner." He waved it at the audience and ran back to bale number 32. I can hardly wait to give this to Geraldine.

The fun wasn't over: as soon as he got back, the announcer asked, "And who is the best Daisy Mae?" She looked around as if she was searching the room. She paused and held up her clipboard. "Rita! Rita Mitchell!"

Julian's jaw dropped. I don't believe it! But it's probably the right call—when it came to the boobs, Rita had them all beat.

Next, completely unexpected, she grabbed his right hand and pulled him alongside. She wanted him there when she got her award. He barely had time to drop the boots and certificate. They were there in a flash—it went so fast his head spun. This is *terrific*—it meant Rita had a great night! Bringing a clumsy guy like me didn't matter. Mom and Geraldine will be proud. Maybe they'll lighten up some about girlfriends—if Geraldine had her way, I'd have a new one every day.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the President of the Girls' League Association, “I present this year's official Queen of the Sadie Hawkins Day Dance, Rita Mitchell!” The crowd erupted in applause, whistles and cheers.

Proudly, he watched the other girl on the platform put a brightly colored wreath around Rita's neck—it's made out of those Sadie Daisies!

As the certificate was awarded, Rita smiled graciously. She curtsied and quietly asked the presenter to keep the certificate until later—she needed her hands free. In a swoop, she jumped on Julian and gave him a huge kiss on the lips. She took her time and, lest he try to escape, held the back of his head firmly—a full five seconds.

Julian was not prepared for anything like that—but something clicked in his head, and he pretended to be pleased. When she stood back, he gave her a big grin and a perfect Geraldine bow—unaware of the garish imprint covering his lips.

The crowd cheered and laughed; one guy slapped his knee and pointed gleefully. Julian bounced on his toes... this is really *fun!*

He did not notice the sudden attention many girls were giving him. Rita had showcased him perfectly—Julian's life at Jackson High School had been relatively quiet and anonymous up to now; the Sadie Hawkins Dance kiss changed that instantly. Every girl in the school now knew who he was, or soon would. And several, beginning tonight, would have their eyes on Rita's prize blond discovery.

Delighted with herself, Rita gave Julian a big hug before putting her hands around his neck—her signal that it was time to dance.

The DJ took that as his cue and started the next set with Neil Sedaka's *Stairway to Heaven*. The floor filled with couples. As the song progressed, the spotlight—centered all the while on the prizewinning pair—narrowed slowly to black.

Rita needed to frame her next words with care, so she waited a few minutes into the dance. After the spotlight had closed and they were surrounded by couples, she purred, “That was some kiss, Julian.” Actually,

it was rather wooden: she had pounced without warning, usually a bad idea. But her instincts were pretty good about these things. Now the barrier was down for later on. Before the night is over, I'll have him trained and asking for more.

How can she say that? Julian puzzled. I didn't think the kiss was good at all. Danny's kisses back at Camp Walker came to mind—the only real kisses I ever had. There's no comparison.

What if she really thinks that? What did Geraldine say again? 'Don't expect to get a kiss right away, Julian... these things take time. Maybe by the end, just before you take her home you can try something...' Sheesh! As if wanted to do that anyway. I'm not worried. If Geraldine only knew. It must have been a lot harder when she and Mom were my age. Besides, Rita's taking *me* home.

Nah... it isn't a big deal... it was just a big thanks, a sudden burst of energy; it didn't mean anything, really. How could it? She's just naturally affectionate is all. And grateful. He looked around... people had stopped paying attention to him and Rita; everything was back to normal. One good thing was that daisy necklace. It sat right across the middle of Rita's chest. It wasn't big enough to cover things completely, but as far as Julian was concerned, it improved the view. Is she supposed to wear that for the rest of the dance? I wonder if it itches.

Just then Rita answered his unspoken question. She pulled her arms away and took it off. "Can you wear this for me? The stems are too scratchy." Without waiting for an answer, she put it around his neck. "You can give it back when we go back to our little nest." She wasn't about to give it away... she planned to wear it all day Monday. She could hardly wait to see Tracy's face.

Julian couldn't do anything but smile and silently agree; his chest was well protected. As they resumed dancing, he noticed that off near the door some guys were standing around talking about something. Their dates were a few feet away, dancing with each other. That's okay; at the sock hop lots of girls danced with each other. I bet none of the boys were doing that though. Too bad. Now that I think about it, what would it be like to dance with a boy? Huh. He couldn't quite imagine it, but still, he had to ask himself: 'why not?' Dancing is *fun*. Why does it have to be with a girl all the time?

I'm gonna ask Nick about that. I bet he knows. What would it be like to dance with Randall... hmm. Doesn't fit, somehow. Of course, there's only one person he wanted to dance with. Fantasizing about it now wouldn't

help any, either. Maybe later... what an idea! I never thought of that before... he smiled his secret smile.

Without a pause, the second song in the set began: *Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini*. It was perfect. They did the bop step and had a great laugh. The crowd joined in and chanted the refrain at the end of each verse. By the last stanza, practically everyone sang "...an itsy, bitsy, teenie, weenie, yellow polka-dot bikini!" in unison. That's funny: I'm dancing opposite the *least* teenie weenie polka dots in the room. He had stopped worrying about the blouse emptying its contents—afraid he'd have to catch them or something. How far would they fall, anyway? That blouse must have some kind of special built in grabber or something.

A short pause after the last chord of *Bikini* ... the DJ put on the third song in the set: *Moon River*.

"Oh, that's my *very* favorite song," Rita sighed. She put her hands around Julian's back and started a slow two-step. She pressed her cheek to his and closed her eyes. Soon her mind wandered... dreamt about other times, other places; before long, she was revisiting one particular dance—the one that had made Tracy hers. She forgot, for a while, that she was dancing with Julian.

He was startled a little when she pressed so close—the cheek-to-cheek thing was new... without breaking his contact, he glanced around at the other dancers—most were doing the same thing. Well... okay. Maybe that's what you're supposed to do during the slow songs. It was easy to do, actually—no worry about getting your feet in the wrong place. I haven't stepped on her toes at all. Lucky the perfume has worn off... otherwise this wouldn't be much fun. I hope the flowers hold up...

Rita's hands had slipped downward gradually and were now resting on his buns. He didn't pay much attention to that at first, since the overalls were so loose and rough; earlier in the evening she had slipped her hands into the back pockets for a minute, which he thought was kind of fun. But when she slipped her hands into the open sides between the front bib and the panel in back, he paid attention real quick... what is she *doing*?!

"...you dream maker, you heartbreaker..." Andy Williams' smooth voice was in contrast to the words he was singing.

Rita was extremely fond of this texture... caressing cotton that's stretched tight over a boy's buns is one of the best teases she knew... Tracy *loves* it when I do this. These little buns are firm, and *so* sexy... after a while, if she wanted, she could slip her fingers under the elastic in the back—a gap

was waiting there by the spine, a small gap, sometimes a half inch, sometimes more if the back is arched, perfect for one fingertip, then another. What would these cheeks feel like... they're so warm. The muscles now under her palms were a reminder—one *fabulous* time with Tracy, she'd explored that gap and moments later cupped his amazing glutes in her hands; under the tight cotton, she had massaged and squeezed in time to the music, thrilled by his inviting, pleading, begging, *demanding* thrusts...

Julian's shock soon gave way to an unexpected sensation—pleasure. It was so strong that it held him in check—he had to see what this was about... the music was hypnotic... she was caressing his buns now—it was like last summer. Instantly he was in the supply tent at Camp Walker and Danny was massaging his buns, slowly and gently. He could feel every finger pressing, pushing, stroking, pulsing... he would be turned over soon and...

Little J awoke, dissolving Julian's reverie in an instant. He broke into a sweat. The skivvies were resistant to Little J at first, which intensified the pleasurable tingle in the early stages of arousal. That hastened the enlargement, which, thanks to the gentle swaying back and forth with the music, provided even greater pleasure—each pulse in the upward arc was a special treat. A side benefit of the dance was eliminating the need for any manual adjustment to relieve discomfort—the two-step movement provided what was required. In six steps Little J was roaring ready, in full salute.

The gentle rubbing back and forth caused by the dance steps was oh so nice—but oh so scary. Flashes of the recent Initiation activity burst into his consciousness... enhanced by the rhythm of the music, reinforced by her skilled massage strokes. He saw Delta, then Gamma... He wanted the song to end right now! Little J, on the other hand, didn't. His balls were humming, too—

“...We're after the same rainbow's end...”

Julian was scared but he was thrilled... Little J was taking over; gradually, he transposed the sensations Rita was producing on his backside: now they were his own hands at work caressing the buns of the six foot two man of his dreams—the man named Mark who was standing in front of the table in the Camp Walker cabin. This was the imaginary world he dissolved into every time he saw that image. Somehow, at this moment, in the center of the dance floor, it seemed more real than ever. The friction Little J was enjoying in front was a direct reminder of Zeta—somehow he had joined in. Julian's conscious mind had been moved aside; now he was in the tent at

Hayden Park and Zeta's nose was at work, this time in sync with Andy Williams' mellow voice...

Rita caught herself at last—she didn't allow her fingertips to invade that secret entrance after all. Her good sense had returned. Instead, as the song reached the last refrain, she grasped the gluteus muscles with both hands and pulled Julian tight, pressing him in a last embrace. She did not place a kiss, though she considered it; the sensation of her breasts and torso pressing against him was very nice... the hardness she had caused below was larger than she had expected. She was careful to withdraw her arms without making a direct contact... that was saved for later. *Mmm...* that's *two* of those tonight!

“Last dance special!” exclaimed the DJ. No need to announce the title for this one.

> ***Boom-boom-boom!*** < “*Come on baby, let's do the Twist!*”

Chubby Checker had come to the rescue.

