



SCHOLASTIC ART & WRITING AWARDS

founded in 1923, the Scholastic & Writing Awards is the longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens and the largest source of scholarships for young artists and writers in the U.S.

Joyce Maynard

Joyce Maynard is a writer who was made famous by her article "An Eighteen Year Old Looks Back on Life," which was published in The New York Times Magazine in 1971 when she was 18. Joyce Maynard received multiple Scholastic Art & Writing Awards between 1966 and 1971.

Do You Wanna Dance?

By JOYCE MAYNARD

*"Squeeze me,
All through the night.
Baby, do you wanna dance?"*

The dance doesn't begin until seven-thirty, but by quarter past an eager crowd waits in front of the school. Brandon is in full regalia. Tonight, he wears his polka-dotted shirt, paisley tie, and houndstooth pants, belling slightly over black boots. Leslie tosses back her hair, letting everyone see the dangling silver crescents hanging from her ears. She hikes her miniskirt higher as she catches sight of one that might outdo hers in brevity. In a corner by the door, Bruce demonstrates to friends his hand buzzer and watersquirting ring. Marti has made sure that she will not be missed: She wears a paper dress, red vinyl cape, and black fishnet stockings. The boys hover together at one side of the steps, overpowered by the girls' carefully set hair and fancy dresses. Girls toy with earrings, or wobble proudly in high-heeled slingbacks.

A few unfortunates who wear old and unfashionable school clothes are talked about in vicious whispers by the eighth-grade elite, parading confidently in their never-worn dance dresses. "Did you see Stefanie's skirt? Must be two inches below the knee. God! And Ellen with her hair all frizzed up! Must be one of those home permanents." Others do not even count enough to be talked about, and shrink back clutching patent leather purses in shabbily gloved hands, or shifting uncomfortable feet, bobby-socked and squeezed into too-tight Mary Janes.

The heavy oak doors swing open. Inside, the gym is draped in swirls of crepe paper and shadowed with blue lights. It is dark; small groups fumble for the seats lining the walls. "Just look at me!" screams Diane, squinting in her hand mirror. "Help! I'll have to go to the girls' room. My mascara's running." A bunch of followers troop after her, looking with awe as she takes out a gold-cased Maybelline and



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skillfully brushes eyeliner. Susan, a conscious first-timer, struggles with her nylons. “The tops of my stockings were showing!” she shrieks. Then, in a whisper, “Do you think they saw?”

Now music blares and the dim lights grow dimmer. Some girls sprawl carelessly on chairs, confident that they will be chosen; others sit stiff and tense. The music becomes louder; the room seems to quiver with its beat. “Do you wanna dance,” comes the singer’s voice, “under the moonlight?”

Dancers turn blue and green as they move in and out of the lights. Harold hops stiffly from foot to foot as Cathy gyrates frantically in front of him. Alison and Charlie scarcely move, holding hands and staring into each other’s eyes. “Squeeze me”—the song again—“all thought the night...” A tall girl dreamily drops her head on the shoulder of a too-short partner. “Do you—do you wanna dance?” the singer wails.

By the sixth dance, the unasked have clustered together, conspicuously filling seats surrounded by empty chairs, laughing animatedly in high pitched voices that are a little too loud. “Wasn’t it a scream in math class, that joke Mr. Thomas told!” and “Look over there. Albert Miller hasn’t asked anyone yet. They shouldn’t let people like him stay. It’s not fair!” They smooth hair that doesn’t need smoothing and giggle coyly as potential partners pass. Eight o’clock...eight-thirty...nine...A boy approaches, and a girl rises happily. He passes her to ask someone farther down. The girl stumbles off to the water fountain, her third trip in ten minutes. “Oh, these hiccups!” she laughs, a bit too gaily.

Halfway through the evening, a perky redhead sails in. Tangled in her casual flip is a scattering of confetti. “I’ve just come from cheering practice,” she says airily. She hasn’t taken off her coat yet, but already a rugged six-footer (basketball star, student-council president) has asked her to dance. She gives him a winning smile and tosses off her coat.

By nine-thirty everything has jelled. Most of the wallflowers have been reduced to “girls’ choices”; the rest have gone home. Partners are steady. Girls lean on shoulders; boys hold them close. The atmosphere is gay as voices rise and sing along—“We all live in a yellow submarine”—but the pace is slowing. “I’m starved,” says the redhead. Diane, the pretty blonde, nods. “Me too.” The student councilor in the surfer cut picks up his coat. “Let’s go to the Pizza Den. This is getting to be a drag.”

There is talk among the chaperones. One of them puts on his jacket and leaves, looking grim. Half an hour later her returns, followed by the slightly tousled redhead and company. She flounces off to the Coke machine; a group of sympathetic



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admirers trot after her and soothe. “Made you come back? God! The nerve!” “Yes!” The queen is petulant. “And it isn’t as if we were doing anything. We just went for a pizza.”

The crepe paper is torn now, and streaked with splashes of Coke. The decorating committee dashes about, taping fallen streamers. The room is hot as couples jerk. A pudgy seventh-grader with wide, gathered corduroy trousers and glasses flails his arms wildly and wiggles. He pants heavily as the singer moans (low-voiced, passionate): “You give me fever, fever, FEVER....”

It is the last dance. The “outs” no longer attempt to look gay. They sit, slumped, cracking their knuckles. Couples are drapes over each other, almost motionless. Some sway a little, close in each other’s arms.

“Squeeze me, All through the night. Baby, do you wanna dance?”

with so little, while others are never happy. I have heard questions of wise men answered by children. I have seen the veneer scraped off life, exposing its plain, dull surface. Somehow, I have become fess selfish, and more satisfied with my lot.