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Comprehension story 15

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow, using your own words wherever possible.

In the matter of girls, I was different from most boys of my age. I admired girls a lot, but they terrified me. I did not feel that I possessed the peculiar gifts or accomplishment that girls liked in their male companion – the ability to dance, to play foot-ball, to cut up a bit in public, to smoke, and to make small talk. I couldn't do any of these things successfully and seldom tried. Instead, I stuck with the accomplishment I was sure of: I rode my bicycle sitting backwards on the handle bars, I made up poems, I played selections from "Aida" on the piano. In winter, I tended goal in the hockey games on the frozen pond in the Dell. None of these tricks counted much with girls. In the four years I was in the Mount Vernon High School, I never went to school dance and I never took a girl to a drugstore for soda or to the Westchester Playhouse or to Proctor's. I wanted to do these things but I did not have the nerve. What I finally did manage to do, however, and what is the subject of this memoir, was far brassier, far gaudier. As an exhibit of teen-age courage and ineptitude, it never fails to amaze me in retrospect. I am not even sure it wasn't un-American.

My bashfulness and backwardness annoyed my older sister very much' and at about the period of which I am writing she began making strong efforts to stir me up. She was convinced that I was in a rut, socially, and she found me a drag in her own social life, which was brisk. She kept trying to throw me with girls, but I always bounced. And whenever she saw a chance she would start the phonograph and grab me, and we would go charging around the parlor in the toils of the one-step, she gripping me as in a death struggle, and I

hurling her finally away from me through greater strength. I was a skinny kid but my muscles were hard, and it would have taken an unusual powerful woman to have held me long in the attitude of the dance. 25

One day, through a set of circumstances I have forgotten, my sister managed to work me into an afternoon engagement she had with some others in New York. To me, at the time, New York was a wonderland largely unexplored. I had been to the Hippodrome a couple of times with my father, and to the Hudson-Fulton celebration, and to a few matinees; but New York, except as a setting for extravaganzas, was unknown. My sister had heard tales of tea-dancing at the Plaza Hotel. She and a girl friend of hers and another fellow and myself went there to give it a try. The expedition struck me as a slick piece of arrangement on her part, I was the junior member of the group and had been roped in, I imagine, to give symmetry to the occasion. Or perhaps mother had forbidden my sister to go at all unless another member of the family was along. Whether I were there for symmetry or decency I can't really remember, but I was there. 30 35

The spectacle was a revelation to me. However repulsive the idea of dancing was, I was filled with amazement at the set-up. Here were tables where a fellow could order cinnamon toast and from the safety of your chair observe girls and men in close embrace, swinging along, the music playing while you ate the toast and the dancers so near to you that they almost brushed the things off your table as they jogged by. I was impressed. Dancing or no dancing, this was certainly high life, and I knew I was witnessing a scene miles and miles ahead of anything that took place in Mount Vernon. I had never seen anything like it, and ferment must have begun working in me that afternoon. 40 45

Incredible as it seems to me now, I formed the idea of asking Parnell's sister Eileen to accompany me to a tea dance at the Plaza. The plan shaped up in my mind as an expedition of unparalleled worldliness, calculated to stun even the most blasé girl. The fact that I did not know how to dance must have been a powerful deterrent, but not powerful enough to stop me. As I look back on the affair, it's hard to credit my memory, as I sometimes wonder if, in fact, the whole business isn't some dream that has gradually gained the status 50 55

of actuality. A boy with any sense, wishing to become better acquainted with a girl who was “of special interest”, would have cut out for himself a more modest assignment to start with – a soda date or movie date – something within reasonable limits. Not me. I apparently became obsessed with the notion of taking Eileen to the Plaza and not to any darned old drugstore. I had learned the location of the Plaza, and just knowing how to get to it gave me a feeling of confidence. I had learned about cinnamon toast, so I felt able to cope with the waiter when he came along. And I banked heavily on the general splendor of the surroundings and the extreme sophistication of the function to carry the day, I guess.

Questions

- (a) Suggest a suitable title for the passage (02 marks)
- (b) What according to the passage, were the expected qualities in male companion? (06 marks)
- (c) In not more than 100 words, show how the writer is socially transformed. (12marks)
- (d) Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in the passage, using you own words wherever possible
- (i) Small talk (line 05) (02 marks)
 - (ii) Tended goal (line 08) (02 marks)
 - (iii) Have the nerve (line 12) (02 marks)
 - (iv) Stir me up (line 17-18) (02 marks)
 - (v) Afternoon engagement (line 27) (02 marks)
 - (vi) Rope in (line 35) (02 marks)
 - (vii) For decency (line 37) (02 marks)
 - (viii) Powerful deterrent (line 53) (02 marks)
 - (ix) Gained the status of actuality (line 55-56) (02 marks)
 - (x) Extreme sophistication (line 64) (02 marks)
- (20 marks)

Spellings, Punctuation and Grammatical Expression (SPGE) (10 marks)

Suggested answers

(a) Suggest a suitable title for the passage (02 marks)

- ❖ The expected qualities of male companion
- ❖ The dance at the Plaza
- ❖ Teenage courage

(b) What according to the passage, were the expected qualities in male companion? (06 marks)

The expected qualities in male companion were the ability to dance, to play football, to cut up a bit in public, to smoke, and to make small talk.

(c) In not more than 100 words, show how the writer is socially transformed. (12marks)

HOW THE WRITER WAS TRANSFORMED SOCIALLY

The writer was inspired by the experience at the Plaza Hotel; awakened up and transformed from timid to courageous boy. He learnt the location of the plaza; to cope with the waiters when they came along and to order cinnamon toast. He also gained enough confidence to invite Eileen to the Plaza.

(d) Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in the passage, using you own words wherever possible

- (i) Small talk (line 05) (02 marks)
Seducing chat/general conversation with girls
- (ii) Tended goal (line 08) (02 marks)
Goal keeper
- (iii) Have the nerve (line 12) (02 marks)
Courage/guts/boldness
- (iv) Stir me up (line 17-18) (02 marks)
Awaken/arouse/stimulate
- (v) Afternoon engagement (line 27) (02 marks)
Past midday activities/program
- (vi) Rope in (line 35) (02 marks)
Forced/coerced/dragged/drawn
- (vii) For decency (line 37) (02 marks)
For good reason/ for courtesy
- (viii) Powerful deterrent (line 53) (02 marks)
Barrier/restrain/discouragement/obstacle

- (ix) Gained the status of actuality (line 55-56) (02 marks)
Became real/true/ become confident
- (x) Extreme sophistication (line 64) (02 marks)
splendid/impressive/magnificent/ very complicated (20 marks)
- (20 marks)

Spellings, Punctuation and Grammatical Expression (SPGE) (10 marks)

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Thanks

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