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Marie Dishman

Marie Dishman was almost everything I thought I would like to be. We never became close friends. I'm not sure that she had any really close friends, but I thought she was an exceptionally attractive person and I couldn't help admiring her to the extent of envying her some of her attributes. To begin with, she had hair with just the right amount of curl - not fuzzy and untamed like Delno Swartz's, not tentative like Margaret Atkins' which might or might not curl on any given day. Marie's hair was light brown, wavy about her ears and curling up in a positive way over her forehead and around her neck. When she came in from a windy walk from the streetcar to school, her hair was slightly tousled but not messy. She could pull off a knitted cap in cold weather and leave her waves and curls in fetching order. And yet her hair was silky soft and always shining. By high school I had permanent waves, but my hair always looked considerably less than perfect. On a windy or rainy day I knew that the most I could hope for was to keep my brown locks tamed, and taking off a hat always created havoc on my head.

Marie knew and seemed to like everyone, and everyone seemed to delight in her company. She was not an especially bright student, but she usually prepared her assignments, resulting in teachers' finding her acceptable, especially since she never misbehaved. I'm not sure how she handled the notes frequently passed to her by both boys and girls in our English classes and in study hall. I know she received them and probably answered them, but she never seemed to attract the unfavorable attention of the teachers. At lunch, almost every table had a place saved for her, even occasionally at a table occupied by boys. Those privileges she handled in such an equitable way that no one ever seemed to feel slighted. Looking back, I have to admit that I never had to sit alone at a table, but I didn't have the multiple choices that Marie had.

We were freshmen in high school, most of us just beginning to notice the other sex and value attention from boys as well as girls. I was sure that Marie's social poise resulted from the fact that she had two older brothers, one a football player. As the oldest in my family with a brother four years younger, I felt that to have an older brother would have solved all my problems. I was sure the older brothers in Marie's life added dimensions to her attractiveness, and I envied her brothers as well as her ability to attract the attention of boys.

Marie dated, but none of the rest of my acquaintances did. She was modest enough about her dates that none of us girls envied her too much. Mostly, we gathered together for informal parties on the weekends without pairing off, although most of the girls expressed preferences for one or another of the boys. I was younger than most of the group and I felt that age was my greatest handicap. Consequently, when I attended a party at Marie's house one Friday night, I was somewhat abashed when Marie put some popular records on the phonograph and boys and girls paired off to dance. She apparently had decided to take me under her wing and teach me some social graces. She signaled her approval when Don Battle made the beginning of my evening a success by asking me for

the first dance. As we made our way around the living room floor, Marie passed closely and whispered in my ear, "Flirt, Mary Frances, flirt!"

Flirt? I had no idea what she meant. I watched her as she moved lightly about the floor, smiling at her partner and other people on the floor. I was smiling too, but apparently Marie didn't approve of the quality of my smile, for she repeated her instruction to flirt several times during the evening as I danced with first one boy and another. I doubt that she had any idea what her instructions did to me, but I was so absorbed in trying to emulate Marie and "flirt" that I entirely missed the fun of the evening and went home feeling defeated and inadequate. I realize now that I was far from a social wallflower, but Marie's urging me to do something I could not grasp made me feel that I had been a complete failure for the evening.

I never ceased to admire Marie and wish that I could develop some of her characteristics. I knew the softly curling hair was out of my reach, but surely I could learn the mysteries of flirting and become a social success. I just never could figure out *how* to flirt. My failure has nothing to do with my hair or with having a little instead of a big brother. Flirting is just not my thing, and it took me a long time to figure that out.