

## NOTES

In her humorous coming-of-age essay, author Michaela Murphy revisits her youth and recalls her first boy-girl party. This selection should be performed by a female and may be entered in Prose Interpretation; however, a performer might choose to present this selection as a monologue and enter it in Humorous Interpretation. There is an art to keeping a secret, and Michaela is determined to keep her chosen costume a surprise until the party. Her determination to create her own costume and wow her friends should be the driving force used to build the suspense of the story. There are definite emotional transitions found within this story. Play those moments. Strive to really show Michaela's surprise and disappointment when her costume ultimately isolates her from the others; after all, it is at this party she learns one of life's most important lessons—being the center of attention can sometimes have its disadvantages. If used in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer when to turn the pages in her manuscript.

When I received the invite to my very first boy-girl party, a costume party, I was absolutely thrilled. The prospect of me and my eighth-grade all-girl schoolmates mingling with students from the all-boys' school while dressed up as someone else struck every one of us as the perfect opportunity to stand out and make those boys take notice. With the artful application of some make-up and a well-thought-out costume, this was our chance to be seen the way we wanted to be seen. Looking back, I can see so clearly that this was exactly where the pubescent road forked. Everyone else went gleefully in one direction, and I unwittingly took the road less (if at all) traveled.

In the weeks leading up to the party, my friends and I would gather in the cafeteria and brainstorm a million transformational ideas. Betsy was going to be a sleek black cat. Kelly gushed about how she filled out her mother's prom dress and that would make her the perfect princess. Two of my best friends, Lori and Tracey, begged me to team up: We could "feather" our hair and go as Charlie's Angels! I politely declined and instead offered counsel, tossing out excellent suggestions for a Wonder Woman bustier or a switching cat's tail. Whenever anyone asked me what I was planning to go as, I'd just shrug—but not because I didn't have a plan. I was afraid that someone might steal my idea.



While all of my friends were busy combing the malls for cute kitten ears and black Danskin leotards, I was busy at home sketching forms and experimenting with fabrics and *recipes*. See, I had a plan all right. Oh, I was going to get noticed. Never again would I be just another anonymous girl in a navy-blue plaid skirt, knee socks, and loafers. You see, I was going to be *The Phantom of the Opera*.

I made a voluptuous ruffled ascot to billow fetchingly around my neck. I made gloves and stuffed them to deform my hands. I shoved pairs of socks into my father's boots to disguise my feet. Over my dark hair I wore one of my mother's short blond curly wigs. My goal was to be completely unrecognizable—I wanted my very gender to be indistinguishable. The costume itself was fantastic, but it was really just a backdrop to the “main” event that I was creating. The real masterpiece of total-Michaela-annihilation was in the mask that I had concocted—and it took me weeks to get it just right.

I took double-sided tape and affixed it to my face. To this I stuck puffs and mounds of toilet tissue and then slathered peanut butter, oatmeal, food coloring, and Karo Syrup all over the tissue. Then I used a Gillette Supermax blow dryer and blew hot air all over this mealy-mess until it crusted and cracked all over. When I was finally dressed, I looked into the mirror and gasped! I did not recognize myself at all—not even a little bit. I was overjoyed!



So that no one would recognize our car and blow my disguise, I had my father drop me off a block away from the party. I walked up and rang the bell. I will never forget the look on Mr. Passerelli's face as he opened the door to let me in. To this day, I think of that look as the definition of the word “dumbfounded.” Mr. Passerelli literally had to shake himself back to reality, and then he led me to the basement stairs. I opened the door, took a deep breath, and began my descent.



I was about three-quarters of the way down the stairs, when, like a raging forest fire, my arrival swept over the crowd and brought the party to a screeching halt. Instantly I was not only the natural center of attention—I was the undisputed core of my eighth-grade universe. Every jaw was dropped and I saw that yes, my costume had indeed blown everyone away.

For me it was like puberty had unmasked itself. All around me my girlfriends were debuting their budding sexuality, cute cat ears and all,