

A Small Protest



Patricia Marie Allen



A "Young Adult TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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A Small Protest

By Patricia Marie Allen

Chapter 1 - Heatwave

My grandfather's family is old money. His father came from England and he never really left it in his heart. Even though he was a naturalized citizen of the United States, he was an Englishman 'til the day he died. My grandfather and my father both went to school in England. It was commonplace for people in my grandfather's social circles to send the kids to boarding school in Europe. My dad went to one of those "public" schools in London. Now when the English say "Public School," there's really nothing public about them. They call them "Public," because they are not State-run schools. Here in the States, we'd call them *private* schools.

I suppose that my father would have sent me and my sister to one of those schools, except my mother would not have it. She told us that she would not have her children separated from her for twelve years. As a matter of fact, she wouldn't even allow my father to send us to a stateside boarding school. He and my grandfather went to a lot of trouble to find a

private school where we could be “day” students. That is, we could live at home and go to school there. But my grandfather made a huge donation and they brought in a new principal from one of those proper English “Public” schools. The board, in order to keep my grandfather happy, allowed him to run the school in much the same way they do in England.

Now the school already had uniforms and a lot of rules that other private schools had but the new principal, or “Head Master” as he preferred to be called, pushed for more. Only here in the States they needed to be politically correct and so some of the rules got watered down. Not that the Head would admit it, but it bothered him that the school was co-ed. But since it wasn’t a boarding school, there really wasn’t much he could do about it.

As summer approached, the weather got seriously warm. As a matter of fact, the temperature went to near triple digits. A group of us boys were bemoaning the heat. Doug Ferguson got a great idea.

“Hey,” he said, “I know we have to wear the school uniform but what’s to keep us from wearing our gym shorts instead of these long trousers. They are a school uniform and they have the school logo on them.”

So that’s how ten of us happened to head to the locker room before class on Thursday morning and trade our pants for gym shorts. Well, it wasn’t well accepted. We all found ourselves in the Head’s office during the first class of the day.

We talked softly among ourselves as we waited in his reception area. It seemed to be hours as we awaited our punishment and we were sure it was to be punishment. Finally, his secretary came in with a sheaf of papers and we were all given one. I scanned mine and discovered it was a copy of the school’s dress code. I knew that we were required to wear the uniform and, in truth, I suspected we were pushing the boundary by trading our trousers for gym shorts.

As I was pondering that, the Principal came out of his inner office. He looked at us all sternly.

In his clipped English accent, he said, “Would one of you gentlemen care to tell me what prompted this breach of our dress code?” and raised his eyebrows in a questioning manor.

Doug spoke up, remembering his manners. “Sir,” he said, “the weather is unseasonably warm and we thought, given the gym shorts have our school crest, that they would be an acceptable alternative to the trousers. So we went to the locker room this morning and changed.”

“I see,” the principal said. “If you will read the dress code, you will see that it specifically says, ‘trousers’ and there is no mention of ‘shorts.’ The ‘shorts’ you are wearing are required for your sport kit and are specific to those classes only.”

We all nodded as if we were in agreement with that.

“Now,” he continued, “I am a reasonable man as evidenced by the relaxing of the rules allowing you to remove your jackets when the temperature exceeds...” he paused as if in complex thought, “85 degrees Fahrenheit. Five minutes should be sufficient for you to read the dress code. I’ll leave you here to discover the error of your ways. When you’ve finished reading the dress code, if each of you will go to the locker room and change back, there will be no further repercussions. I warn you, however, I will expect full compliance to the dress code in the future. Am I clear?”

We all nodded and he went back into his inner office. We looked at each other and began to read the papers. The nerd in our group, Frank Parsons, was way ahead of us.

“Hey guys,” he said, “this code is for both boys and girls.”

“So?” Jim Harrison asked.

“So, it says, and I quote, ‘All students will wear the school-approved uniform, which will consist of a white shirt, a school tie, a blazer with the school crest on the pocket, or sweater, trousers or skirt, the skirt to be over the knee, and black shoes.’”

“So?”

“So girls wear trousers in the winter, why couldn’t *we* wear skirts when it’s hot? My sister says they’re a lot cooler than pants. And they’re only a little longer than our gym shorts.”

Hank Colson jumped in with, “Hey, now there’s an idea. If we turn up in skirts, it’ll be within the dress code. A couple of days of us in skirts and they’ll be glad to have us back in gym shorts.”

“What if they don’t relent? What if they just let us wear the skirts?” Jim Henderson wanted to know.

“Well then, I guess we’ll just become the skirted boys of Chapman’s Academy,” Frank replied, pushing up his glasses.

Most of the guys shook their heads and started for the gym. In the end, there were four of us; me, Doug Ferguson, Frank Parsons and Larry Carson.

“Are you guys really going to do it?” Larry wanted to know.

“I am,” Doug assured us.

“I’m in,” Frank put in.

They all looked at me.

“Count on me,” I told them.

“I guess we’re the only ones with guts.”

We all nodded.



The five minutes were up so the Principal came out and got a shocked look on his face. “Gentlemen, five minutes have elapsed. I suggest you go to the locker room and change now.”

“We’ve decided to not wear trousers,” Doug told him.

“I see. You leave me no choice. I’ll have to summon your parents and send you home. You will be given a one-day suspension. You may return on Monday, provided you are in strict compliance with the dress code. Would any of you care to reconsider and go change?”

We all shook our heads.

“Very well. Have a seat and wait for your parents.” He turned to his secretary and said, “Miss Hathaway, would you please summon these miscreants’ parents?”

Chapter 2 - My Parents reaction

My mother showed up before any of the others. She was required to sign some form or other to acknowledge she had taken me out of school early and that I had been suspended for one day.

She didn’t say anything to me while we went to the locker room and retrieved my trousers. But once in the car, she said, “We’ll discuss this tonight at dinner. I don’t know what your father will have to say about this.”

So it was that I rode home in silence. I wasn’t sure what Dad would say either. While he had gone to school in England, even to the same school as my grandfather, he wasn’t a dyed-in-the-wool Englishman like my grandfather. I’d even heard him admit that “public” schools in England were way too restrictive and that the older tutors—that’s what they call

teachers there —longed for the days when caning was their go to form of discipline.

On arriving home I was sent to my room with a paper listing the assignment I'd have been given if I'd have attended class that day. Apparently these were collected by the principal's secretary and given to my mother when she signed the papers.

"I hope you didn't think that you'd be allowed to treat your suspension like a school holiday. You can spend your time studying," Mom told me.

When we were seated at the dinner table, I determined that I wouldn't bring up the subject of my suspension; I'd leave that to my folks. That didn't happen until we were all nearly through eating.

"So your mother tells me you were suspended from school for a day. Why don't you tell me your side of the story first," Dad said.

I swallowed hard and then took a drink of my milk before replying.

"Ahh, well, as you know, it's been terribly hot recently... I mean, it was almost 100 degrees yesterday and the forecast for today was about the same. So some of us guys wanted to wear some cooler clothes, but we knew the school required us to wear a uniform. So we thought that since our gym uniform has shorts that are the same color as our trousers, we could substitute them for the trousers. I guess the principal didn't see it that way."

"So, how many were there involved this scheme?"

"Ten of us."

My father looked at my mother with raised eyebrows.

"You're sure that there were ten? I nodded. "Your mother says that there were four of you singled out

for suspension. Why weren't the other six suspended?"

Here's where it got sticky. I had had an option to avoid suspension but decided that I'd not take it.

"Well, you see, we saw this as a kind of protest," I offered weakly. "But the others kind of chickened out when the principal said we could avoid punishment by putting our trousers back on and if we were to follow the school dress code in the future."

"And you and three others decided that punishment would be better than not sticking to the protest?" I nodded. "So then what about Monday? The weather forecast is for the heat wave to continue."

"Well Frank Parsons studied the dress code." I fumble in my pocket for the copy I was given. I handed it to Dad. "It says that the uniform is either trousers or skirts and it doesn't say which is for boys and which is for girls... and the girls wear trousers in the winter when it's cold."

Dad unfolded the page studied it with a serious look on his face.

"So, how does that affect Monday?"

"We were thinking that skirts are cooler than long pants, so..."

"So you four are thinking of wearing skirts on Monday?" Dad wanted to know.

"I know it's crazy, Dad, but it's just not fair that girls can wear either depending on the weather and boys have to be stuck with trousers and skirts are in the dress code. I don't really want to wear a skirt, particularly, but I do want to wear something cooler when it's this hot and skirts are our only choice."

I rattled that all out in one breath and about fifteen seconds in time.

Dad looked at Mom quizzically.

“He does have a point. dear,” she said.

“I admire your courage to stand by your principles and you’re right, it’s not a fair arrangement. Where were you thinking of getting the skirt?” Dad queried

“Ah... I, ah, I’m not sure. I was hoping Loren had some that I could borrow.”

“How long were you planning to do this protest?”

I shrugged. “However long it takes to get a change in the dress code.”

“Were we to support you in this? You’re going to need more than one skirt. I doubt that Loren has enough to outfit both you and her.”

I looked at Loren. She shrugged her shoulders.

“I had to get new this year because my hips got wider, so I have a whole set of them that I haven’t disposed of yet. I was going to wait till the end of the year and see if I could sell them to someone who needed a larger size.”

My breathing was coming in short pants. Then Mom threw a monkey wrench into the plans. She read the next line in the dress code:

“‘Due to the nature of skirts, only approved underwear and tights or knee socks may be worn under the skirts.’ I thought I remembered from when we bought Loren’s new skirts. Martin’s School Attire is the approved uniform store and they supply appropriate underwear with the skirts.”

“I still have the old underwear,” Loren offered.

“I don’t think it’s a great idea for Lynne to wear used underwear and he’ll need at least the knee socks as well since you’re wearing yours. We’ll have to go tomorrow to buy some new. Loren, why don’t

you take Lynne upstairs and give him your old skirts. And Lynne, you need to try on one of the skirts to see that they fit alright. If not, we can buy some when we get the underwear.”

“You guys are going to support our protest?”

Mom and Dad exchanged a look. Dad answered. “As much as I think it’s good to follow the rules, I have to admire your stance and young Mr. Parson’s ingenuity in finding the loophole in the dress code. So yes, I think we can support you in this. I do believe that you will see a revision of the dress code as a result. However, you may have to resign yourself to trousers. The revision I’m sure the Head will push for is to delineate which items are for boys and which are for girls. But you’re free to try for the result you want.”

Loren loaded me down with five of the gray pleated skirts and I took them to my room. I was really going to do it. I think, in the back of my mind, I thought my parents wouldn’t agree and I’d not have to go through with my agreement.

I stripped to my boxers from the waist down and worked out just how to put the skirt on. I knew the zipper went to the back, only I couldn’t get it zipped up back there. I brought it around front where I was used to dealing with zippers. I had to pull the skirt up high and suck in my stomach to get it zipped. Then holding my stomach in, I twisted it around. That bunched up my shirt and I had to twist it farther around and then back. It was really loose in the hips but really tight at the waist. Not very comfortable.

“Lynne?” Mom called up the stairs. “Have you tried on the skirt yet?”

“Yes,” called back down. “I just got it on.”

“Well, come down and let’s see how it fits.”

“Oh Lynne, that won’t do. You’ll bust the zipper before you even get to school. The waist is so tight you won’t be able to sit down without destroying the zipper. Well, not to worry, we’ll pick up some skirts tomorrow when we buy the underwear and socks.

Chapter 3 - My Own Skirts

I was standing a little ways away while Mom explained to the saleslady why I needed uniform skirts. I could feel the fire coming up under my collar and toasting my ears. I thought sure that she would react badly. I’d thought that Mom would have just figured out the right size, go in and buy them, and that would be that. But she took me in and told the whole sordid tale to the saleslady.

“Well you’re in luck. As you’re aware, it’s mid-term. Sales are down and what’s more, we’re near the end of our fiscal year. We have some old stock we want to move so we’re offering a special price on the whole outfit. It’s pretty much at our cost so you can buy everything for less than the price of the skirts... but you have buy it all to get the deal.”

My mother, ever the frugal one, said, “Oh that’s great.”

“Let’s get some measurements and then Lynne can try them on to see that everything fits.”

The next thing I knew I was in the fitting room with not only the skirt, but a blouse and a full slip. Mom had said that I might just as well try on the whole thing. I stripped and picked up the slip and pulled it over my head. To my surprise, it had a built-in bra. It would have been alright but the cups, the part that a girl’s boobs would fit in, had a kind of rubbery filling in between the layers of fabric and wouldn’t lay flat. That was a bit disconcerting. But I put the blouse on. I fumbled with the buttons. They were on the wrong side and it was quite a trick to make my fingers work

the right way. The skirt fit a lot better. I still had trouble getting it zipped up, but I managed.

Mom knocked on the door and said, “Come out and let us see when you get everything on.”

I cracked the door open and asked, “Do I have to? Everything seems to fit OK.”

“I want to see for myself.”

Reluctantly I stepped through the door. Mom was there, as was the saleslady. Mom was all hands on, touching, tugging and using her hands to turn me this way and that. Finally she turned to the clerk.

“What do you think?”

“It appears to me that we did good getting the sizes right. As I remember you said that everything had to adhere to the school dress code. That’s why you wanted panties. So I assume you’ll be wanting some tights and knee socks, since the dress code specifies one of those two items are to be worn with the skirt.”

“Oh yes, you’re right. I’d almost forgotten that.”

Mom turned to me. “I assume that you don’t want tights, as the whole idea is to keep cool and the tights are thick.” Looking back at the saleslady, she continued. “Just the knee socks for now. I doubt we’ll still need them when the weather cools.”

Laden with packages, we made our way back to the car. It seemed unreal to me that we had bought full girl’s uniforms. All I really needed were the skirts.

“Mom, why didn’t we just buy the skirts? I mean, I can see the underwear and the socks so that I’ll conform to the dress code. But the blazer and blouse and that slip thing. I really didn’t need those.”

“We had to buy the set to get the deal. It was only about a ten dollar savings per outfit, but since we

bought six, that's sixty dollars. I'll save that any time I can."

"What are we going to do with them?"

"You can wear them."

"Wear them?"

"Sure, in for a penny, in for a pound, as you grandfather would say."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're going to be wearing skirts, underwear and knee socks, so you might just as well wear the full uniform."

I contemplated that and knew I should be horrified by the thought. But the image I'd seen in the mirror in the fitting room flashed in my mind. It had been that of a girl. Oh sure, my hair was a little short, but there were girls at school whose hair wasn't any longer than mine. They just combed it differently. I imagined that image with hair combed that way and somehow it sent a little thrill through me.

It was late enough in the day that Loren was waiting for us when we came in the house.

"You must have flown home. You aren't usually here for another hour," Mom told her as we carried the packages upstairs with Loren following close behind.

"I blew off the pep club meeting. I wanted to see what Lynne bought."

"Won't that be anticlimactic? You've already got everything he'd have bought."

"Well, I was hoping he'd model it for me. I mean, he'll look different and I think I need to be over gawking at him by the time we go to school on Monday."