

Box Step (6 mins)

It's after breakfast on Saturday morning, I'm lying on my back on my scratchy red wool Hudson Bay blanket, staring up at the model airplanes hanging from my ceiling. I'm fifteen and wondering how old I'd have to be to learn how to fly that P-61 Black Widow Night Fighter. Mom is sitting across the hall in her bedroom humming and knitting. She usually hums when she's not stitch-counting. She sounds louder than usual, almost loud enough to be singing. The humming is in a drumbeat rhythm and she suddenly breaks into a full-throated song:

*"Charleston! Charleston!
Made in Carolina,
Some dance,
Some prance,
I'll say,
There's nothing finer..."*

She hops out of her chair, dropping the knitting needles and a clump of half-finished sweater into the chair and begins to dance flinging her arms and kicking her feet crazily. I sit up, and stare across the hall, grinning to see Mom acting so chipper. She sees me and stops. "That's the Charleston! It's what your Grandmother danced in the twenties. It's making a comeback." She stops to catch her breath then continues, "The girls in those days were very stylish." She emphasizes the word "very." "They wore beads and short dresses

with fringes that swished all over when they danced the Charleston." I look at Mom, with her curly red hair standing in a pastel yellow sweater and wondered what her plaid skirt would look like with a fringe. "What were fringes for?" I ask. Mom playfully slides her hands down her hips to her knees and extends all ten fingers and swings them back and forth where the fringes must have been. "They just were there. They made the dress shimmy, too. Girls were called Flappers. I would love to have been a Flapper." She starts singing again and waving her hands:

"But the Charleston -

the new Charleston -

That dance is surely a comer,

Sometime,

You'll dance it one time,..."

She stops and waves at me." Gary, come here. I'll teach you ~~the~~ ~~the~~

Charleston." "Naw, not me. I can't dance. I hate dancing." Mom

for persists, "Come here! It's so easy. Stand next to me. Just try it." She points to the floor next to her feet and smiles. "Aren't you going to the Teen Arena dance this Friday? They might play a Charleston and you'll be all ready." I think to myself, I am going to the dance on Friday but I'm just going to watch. I'm not planning on dancing. "Mom, I can't dance, I don't know the dances. I just watch."

She pulls on my arm so I'm standing next to her. "Now do what I do..." and she starts humming a slower version and lifting one foot at a time and waving her palms in synchronized circles.

I follow and she speeds up the song and I speed up my shuffling but I

get so far behind the beat that while I rush to catch up, I trip myself to the floor. We are both laughing. She says, "You almost had it. Now, I'm a Flapper ...and you're a Flopper."

We both laugh and I say, "No one's going to be playing the Charleston, Mom. It's all that other stuff I don't know how to do."

Mom thinks for a moment and says "I'll show you the basic box-step. It's easy and all dances, the, Foxtrot, Waltz and even the Rhumba, start with this step. Here, stand next to me and follow my feet." I stand next to her and follow her footsteps forming a square on the floor. She counts: "One, two, three, four, again one, two three..."

Fifteen minutes later I can make the box step pretty well and Mom shows me how the man leads a partner. She places my right hand on her waist and her left hand on my shoulder. She takes my right hand in hers and straightens our arms. Then we count together and I'm actually making a box without stepping on her feet. "Very good, she says. "You could stand-in for Fred Astaire. I love Fred Astaire!" Mom is standing about five inches away as we step slowly into a Foxtrot. I'm feeling more confident. Mom starts to throw her head back "...and I am Ginger Rogers. Let me show you the Dip." She grabs my waist tighter and pulls me towards her "Now bend me over...but don't drop me!" I pull her against me for balance and lean way over. Mom is pressed up against me, probably not sure if I will drop her. We're dipping and something else is going on.

This is the first time I ever stood in an embrace with a girl and I feel Mom's breasts against my chest for the first time. Suddenly, I realize

that I have acquired a surprise erection and instantly yank her upright to stop this embarrassing close contact. It's too late.

I just know Mom has felt this surprise poke. I'm so embarrassed that I have to sit down and pretend that I'm out of breath.

Mom is still in a dancing mood and says "O.k., let's practice the Lindy, I'm sure they'll be doing that at the dance." "Thanks, Mom but I've gotta go help D.J. cut his lawn."

I walk back to my room, my face scrunched tight in embarrassment. I'm thinking that at the dance, on Friday, I'll just watch from the sidelines at a safe distance and hum along.

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