

## On Wearing A Suit to Prom

Five girls cram into one small box of a bathroom.

There's barely enough space, yet makeup bags, hair curlers, jewelry boxes, and brushes scatter the edges of the compact sink counter in front of us. *We can't help but create clutter with the objects of our femininity.*

Even more feminine are our faces, painted with rosy lipstick, glittery eyeshadow, and the soft pinks of our deliberately blushed cheeks. Sofia's applying the final touches of her eyeliner, Rachel's spraying the freshly minted curls in her hair, River's basking in the scent of her floral perfume, and Maisie's adjusting her tiara. We all prepare for the most anticipated event of our highschool lives, anxiously thinking about the nearly 600 other seniors we will see tonight. The nervous anticipation washes over us, this oh-so-special school dance lingering in the backs of our minds.

Five girls stress over prom in one small box of a bathroom.  
But only four of them are properly dressed.

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Every girl in Northville thinks about prom. This isn't a generalization, it's impossible to avoid it. Our hallways are littered with plastered signs, our emails are cluttered with student council reminders, and our school spirit offices are filled with stacks upon stacks of promotional material. The ritual is shoved down our throats from the moment our homecoming dance finishes to the moment the night of prom begins. We really can't avoid it.

Yet our school's prom culture is as much of an annoyance as it is a highly anticipated moment, and boy was I among the crowd of girls who were bouncing-off-the-walls excited. I'd spent four years carefully dreaming up the perfect plan, the perfect date, and especially the perfect outfit. Now was finally my time to shine.

With my nails freshly painted, my hair artfully done, and my makeup finally touched to perfection, I sat in that little bathroom, the splitting image of femininity.

Then my mom came in with my new, dry cleaned white suit.

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I never planned to be "controversial", to "throw away my womanhood", to "toss the most important moment of my highschool experience down the drain", or any of the other things my parents, friends, and peers' faces told me when I first laid out my idea to wear a suit to prom. It didn't matter, they all reacted as if I had regardless.

First they gave me disbelieving smiles, then wide eyed shock, and finally skepticism when the reality sunk in: I had my mind set.

“But how will our pictures look?”

“Won’t people stare at you weird?”

“Are you sure?”

“Are you *really* sure?”

At the time I’d defended myself loudly and defensively, saying things like: “Well I want a *dainty* suit of course”, “don’t worry I’ll wear a proper *lady’s* corset under it”, and “it’ll be white anyways so it will look really *girly*”. I threw feminine buzz words around like arrowheads showering down on the scrutiny threatening to break down my walls. Yet though people eventually accepted my convictions, they didn’t take satisfaction in them...

...and as I sat in that tiny bathroom, biting my nails and bouncing my foot in a nervous frenzy, their words all came back to me. I started to doubt everything myself.

Then my mom came in with my new, dry cleaned white suit.

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The suit smelled of crisp sandalwood and appeared starkly white against the shades of yellow that washed over it from the sunlight. When I pulled the heavy weight of its fabric over my shoulders I saw the cuffs fitting sharply against my wrists, the lapels falling fashionably against my collar, the pocket rising and falling with each of my shaky breaths, and the stitching of the canvas lining up in tight rows, firmly and robustly creating the final touches of the piece.

Under the suit I wore a custom corset, resting softly against my skin. The floral patterned design enveloped its silky fabric, flowing neatly in the front and clipping gracefully in the back. Little pearls were stitched into the mesh sheen, and they twinkled like milky stars in the light. As I brushed my hands over the corset’s detachable straps, each felt velvety soft to the touch.

“How handsome,” my mother had said, squeezing my shoulders affectionately before draping a matching pearl necklace over my neck, “and how beautiful.”

Her simple words struck a chord deep within me. Was there really a way for me to feel both *handsome* and *beautiful*? Could there really be a way for me to embody both?

Yes. This was what I had envisioned. This was what I was hoping for all along.

Like the rain washes away mud and dirt, I felt my worries flood out from within me and disappear entirely. I'd never felt so excited, so happy, and so comfortable in my own skin as the moment I put on that outfit, and at last I let out a small smile of relief and blissful acceptance.

Now, the memories of that dazzling prom night melt together in the corners of my mind, and I can only recall a sweet rush of blurred emotions. Yet I can still see the exact moment I put on my suit, I can still visualize the exact second I realized that my femininity wasn't defined by others, and I can still remember the perfect time when I began to understand that my identity was truly mine to make.

I will never forget the place I began to love all sides of me, whether they be masculine, feminine, or something else entirely.

I will never forget how us five girls crammed into one small box of a bathroom.

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