



## Scarecrow

“Hey, ‘Bones,’ “my brother, Parker, asked me, “what are you going to be for Halloween?”

The elementary school party started at 7:00 p.m. The winner of the prize for the most original costume got two free tickets for the Sunday matinee. Parker was dressed and ready to go.

I watched him parade in front of the mirror in his pirate costume. He’s so handsome, I thought. All the girls in the fifth and sixth grades were madly in love with him. I’d spent the afternoon defending myself from his rubber dagger.

Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen  
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(Adapted)

"I'm not going!" I replied.

"Why not?"

"No costume."

"That's dumb," he said. "You hardly need a costume. You're already a perfect scarecrow!"

I was used to these observations. Furthermore, he spoke the truth. At twelve, I was already six feet tall and weighed eighty-nine pounds. Tack on red hair and freckles and it added up to one thing: I was a scarecrow. School days were charged with searing taunts. "Down in front." "How's the weather up there?" "Are those skis or shoes?" It was hard to smile back, and even harder to make friends.

I tried plastering my hair down flat on the top of my head and prying the heels off my shoes. I took scalding hot baths, hoping I'd shrink.

In bed at night, I put my feet against the footboard, hands against the headboard and pushed, hoping to press myself back together. Nothing worked. So I saved nickels and dimes in a cider jug to pay the future surgeon who would make me the same height as everybody else.

"When I grow up," I told Parker, as he brandished his cutlass in front of the mirror, "I'm going to live on an island where there's no one to stare."

"It's going to be a double feature. One's *The Wizard of Oz*. Ray Bolger plays a scarecrow." He had reached the fourth step. We stood eye to eye.

"And the other's *The Sea Hawk*," I said. "Can you believe it? Errol Flynn plays a pirate!"

"Are you taking anyone special?" Parker asked.

"Yes," I said. "Want to go?"

Penny Porter

Later, classmates came over to talk with me. “How’d you ever get such a good idea?”

“Parker,” I said.

“Where did you get the costume?”

“My daddy.”

And in that single moment, I recaptured a memory that had almost slipped away. I was sitting on Daddy’s lap and I heard him say, “I love you, sweetheart, just the way God made you.” I felt his fingers riffling my hair, and I smiled inside, glad that God had made me a scarecrow. I left the party early, but not before Nancy had said, “You’ll come over to my house sometime, won’t you?”

I didn’t want to stay and dance - the boys’ heads did not reach my shoulders.

But on my way home, I decided that Parker was right. A deserted island would be pretty awful. I waited up for Parker that night. I wanted to hear about the fun I’d missed. “Did you dance a lot?” I asked.

“Sort of,” he said. “If you think it’s any fun for a fifth-grade guy to dance with a bunch of puny third- and fourth-graders!”

“Oh, I almost forgot,” he said, as he was going up the stairs. “Here’s your two tickets.”

“Thanks.”

My brother raised his eye patch and looked at me hard. “Sounds awful,” he said, and left for the party. Alone, I listened to the cheerless night and pictured the costumes my classmates had bought. I had tried on a few, too, but nothing fit. I could picture my classmates in their costumes, having a wonderful time.

As I wandered about the house, I remembered happier days — before Mommy and Daddy were separated. When Daddy lived with us, he always made me feel loved and wanted. Seeing him now for short visits wasn’t the same.

The more I brooded, the more my self-pity grew. Then I spotted a broomstick standing in the kitchen corner. Maybe I could make a costume, I thought. Outside, a sheet and pillowcase billowed on the clothesline. I could be a witch or a ghost. Then my gaze fell on the back of the cellar door. My father’s old plaid work shirt, faded overalls, jacket and cap were hanging right where he had left them.

“I could be a hobo,” I murmured as I buried my face in the dusty clothes. But Parker’s taunt kept coming back at me. “You’re a scarecrow.” As much as I hated to admit it, he was right. Well then, a scarecrow was what I’d be.

The closer I got to the school, the louder the cheers and clapping became, and the more my fears grew. What if they

laughed at me? Worse still, what if they didn't do anything? Hiding behind the tool shed next to the gym, I started to dress.

Because I was so tall, I could peek through the high window and see everybody. Ghosts, princesses, monsters, cowboys, soldiers and brides - they were all there, clad in store-bought costumes, fragile dreams for one night. My teeth were chattering. Would they clap for me? Would they whistle and cheer? My stomach ached from anticipation.

I'll run home! I decided. No one would know I had been there. But Parker came on stage and glanced at the window. If I left now, he'd call me chicken.

I watched him bow to the audience and listened to the squeals from the girls as he leaped on chairs and tables and parried with his sword. Next, a small gorilla climbed on top of a ladder and ate a banana. Lincoln gave a brief address. Cleopatra danced with a rubber snake in her hands, and a soldier marched and twirled his gun. Only Tarzan remained. Maneuvering carefully through the entrance, I went in, held my breath and prayed, Please, God, don't let me make a fool of myself.

The applause was so loud for the King of the Jungle when he gave his call and swung on a curtain rope that no one seemed to notice me walk slowly to the center of the stage. A pillowcase covered my head. With arms outstretched and hands clutching

the broomstick inserted through the sleeves of an old plaid shirt, I wore a felt hat and faded overalls stuffed with straw. The room was suddenly still.

Nobody clapped.

Nobody cheered.

The only sound I heard was the hammering of my own heart. I'm going to die, I thought, right here in front of everybody. The world was tilting, and my ears were ringing when the hood slid down my nose, just enough so I could peer through the eyeholes. And that's when I saw my classmates for the first time, as they really were.

Petite blonde fairies with golden wands — and steel braces on their teeth. A baseball hero with a bat and mitt — and bottle-thick eyeglasses. A boxer with fighting gloves — sitting in a wheelchair.

Someone asked, "Hey, who is that?"

"Parker's sister!"

They looked at one another, surprise brightening their faces. Clapping and cheering filled the room.

The principal came up on stage. "The first prize for the most original costume goes to..." I never heard my name, only Parker, fear in his voice, saying, "I'll hold those tickets for her. She can't let go of that broomstick or her shirt will fall off."