



Hey—you dance with a girl at this thing tonight!” That was the dagger. It was my first 7th-grade dance at my new school in Kansas City—a Halloween costume party—and I’d been anticipating a leisurely night of camping in the far corner with my fellow wallflowers, texting my serious girlfriend from my old school in Dallas whose number looked strangely similar to my mom’s. But with those words

my dad uttered before I walked out the door, it became clear, to my chagrin, that I was actually going to have to try.

But, it wasn’t like I had no shot. 2010 was a different social time—years before Congress passed the Monotonous Dance Act of 2012. Though most of the night would consist of jumping into each other like zombies having muscle spasms and doing the Soulja Boy, we were guaranteed the DJ would

cue the Adele at least once for the “snowball” dance.

If I had to ask someone to do the deed, I knew who it would be: Alison Burmeister.

Her name had a lot of syllables and I dug that, but she was also mysterious. I rarely saw anyone talking to her at school, and the only way I knew her at all was by getting stuck as her gym partner time and again. She was hardly anyone’s No. 1 pick in the 2010 snowball draft, but she seemed nice—and 7th grade Jack’s sole criterion was *female*.

So that night I lingered over to her quadrant of the dance floor, looking fine in my Tony Romo jersey. We proceeded over the next hour to give each other all of the 7th grade signs—the excessive fake laugh, the awkward half-smile, and the random conversation over whether or not *iCarly* was better than *Drake and Josh* (D&J was vastly superior). But then she tipped her hand: she told me she hated this music and really preferred the slow dances.

Oh baby, The Chief was foxtrotting tonight!

So, right on cue after “The Hamster Dance,” Adele’s “Someone Like You” wafted through the speakers

and coupling commenced.

I took the multi-syllabic Ms. Burmeister to the center of the floor and remembered my training from Junior Cotillion—right, forward, left, back, right, forward, left, back. I was clearly *en fuego*, and remember vividly thinking “wow, these Cotillion skills will really help me out a lot at high school dances.”

She fell right in step, and we gazed into each other’s braces. I didn’t want that moment to end—but we’re talking about *me* here. Something had to go wrong.

And that something was one of my football teammates tapping me on the shoulder.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he cried in horror.

“Having the time of my life!” I thought to myself.

“No, no, no,” he sputtered out, “not with her. Have some self respect, bruh, she’s hideous. You play football, you can do so much better. *Nobody* dances with *that*.”

At this point quiet a crowd was growing, and I was stuck with Alison in the middle of a tribal circle.

“Don’t listen to them,” she broke out in tears, “we can still dance. We can go behind the pavilion where nobody can see us. *Please*.”

It was a dilemma straight out of *Grease*: the girl making you choose between her and your status with the boys. So which do you think I picked? I’m a pretty nice guy, right? Probably told my friends to pack sand and let me live my life? Went and fox trotted behind the pavilion, became steady boyfriend and girlfriend, and still stay in touch to this day?

No, man, I was a coward.

I brushed her off and went and did the Cupid Shuffle with all of my cool and popular friends while Alison spent the night behind the pavilion alone with tears in her eyes. It’s funny because I honestly couldn’t tell you any of those best friend’s names anymore, but I’ll never forget all of those beautiful syllables in Miss Burmeister’s. In fact, I’ve never gone to a dance since where I didn’t think about what I did to that girl in the 7th grade. But hey, at least I was popular for one night.

If anybody reading this knows an Alison Burmeister from Kansas City, MO, tell her Jack Kieffaber would still really like to foxtrot behind that pavilion—if somehow she’d be willing to dance with a jerk like me.

—Jack Kieffaber