

What Can Happen in a Dance

The theme of the dance was “Sci-Fi Extravaganza”—a theme guaranteed to have some classic costumes, as well as some truly bizarre outfits.

Vikki Lance combed her hair as she thought about the coming dance. At twenty-six, she felt like life was passing her by. She had her college degree in wildlife conservation, causing her to move from one temporary job to the next with no guarantee of ever having anything permanent. Everyone kept telling her that, “The field is great once you get your foot in the door.”

What they didn't tell you was that getting your foot in the door almost took murder.

She was tired of moving from one random tasteless apartment to the next. The hours didn't bother her, but she hated the inconsistency and the loneliness.

It was the loneliness that got to her the most. She had a few friends, but they were all moving on in their careers while she was staying stagnant.

Two of those friends entered the bedroom behind her.

Lula Moore was a vivacious, loud, and fun brunette whose dark skin and thick accent indicated her Polynesian descent. The same age as Vikki, she was a business intern with a lead on a job. Of the three girls splitting the room to attend the Arkansas dance, she was paying most of the bill due to having the money. Vikki had to eat nothing but PBJ for two months just to show up.

“Are you ready, Vikki?” she asked, dancing across the room to a beat that only she was hearing.

“I suppose,” sighed Vikki, her eyes still in the mirror. In contrast to her friend, she had pale skin that simply refused to tan, light brown eyes struggling to come to terms with life, curly light brown hair, and a figure that she had overheard one college classmate refer to inaccurately as “plump.”

“Uh oh,” said the third girl, the thin, analytical, and reserved Shania. “What's wrong?”

Vikki tried holding back a sigh, but failed. Shania was a graphic designer who had recently done work on the newest Disney repeat, so much that she refused to watch it with her friends. Her green eyes, slender frame, and curly blonde hair made her one of the most sought after girls in their group, even if very few of the guys would put in the work to get past her reserved exterior.

“What's wrong, chica?” asked Lula.

Vikki spun around to face her friends. “I'm just worried. I always thought I would be doing more with my life at this point.”

Lula grinned and twitched her eyebrows twice. “What you need is a man!”

Vikki scoffed. “There's not a man alive who's interested in me! I've stopped looking because I'm too tired of being disappointed!”

“What about Alan Turner?” Shania asked quietly.

“Alan?” she asked incredulously. “We've been friends for eight years and nothing's happened. That ship has almost definitely set sail!”

“If he was willing...would you be interested?” Lula asked, waving her hands elaborately.

Vikki spun back around with her hands up in the air. “You know what? I'm not going to think about all of this tonight. I'm just going to have fun, and deal with it tomorrow.”

"Sounds great!" Lula said, springing beside her. "Besides, you never know what can happen in a dance!"

Two hours later, the three friends showed up for the dance. Vikki was dressed as a member of Starfleet from Star Trek, wearing black leggings and a red Star Trek uniform that went down to her midthigh.

Lula had looked at her outfit with a raised eyebrow and said, "You know what they say about red shirts?"

"The way I'm feeling about tonight, that just might be the case."

Lula herself had chosen to dress up as Spider-Woman, despite her friends telling her that most people thought of comic books as more fantasy than science fiction. "She's sci-fi, and if there are haters there who can't accept that fact, well then that's on them and not me!"

Shania was dressed up as Doc Leroy from the *Back to the Future* franchise with a white lab coat, a pair of sunglasses on top of her head, and a white Einstein wig with hair that was going every direction and, if one went by the frequent scratching and adjusting, itched something fierce.

As they entered, they quickly scoped out the other costumes. There were a lot of Jedi with varying degrees of accuracy, one girl who was very elaborately dressed like Rey, one girl who wasn't so elaborately dressed like Rey, a couple who were dressed like Neo and Trinity from the Matrix, a monkey that the girls guessed was from Planet of the Apes, a Luke Skywalker, Marty McFly, a boy dressed as the Terminator (with clothes on), a girl dressed like Leeloo (without clothes, she was asked to leave), someone at the far end of the room was dressed like Dr. Grant from Jurassic Park, another boy was dressed like Chris Pratt from the Jurassic World series, someone with a lot of time and money on their hands was dressed like Sonny from *i, Robot.*, a kid was dressed like ET, a girl they knew was dressed like slave Leia, and one family was dressed as Star Wars characters, with the kids dressed as droids. There were others, but she had no idea what they were supposed to be.

Lula clenched her fists in the air. "Yeah, it's gonna be a fun night!"

"I hope so," Vikki muttered. Just then the music turned on and she felt Shania gently nudging her to the floor while Lula pulled her over with an excited squeal.

As the latest pop song started playing, they danced and a change started to come over them. Shy Shania started bouncing to the beat like someone possessed as her body took on a life of its own. One moment she was dancing on tip toes with her hands bouncing in the air and the next saw her twirling around her friends, her eyes shut as she just lived in the music. Quite a few of the attendees sat back and watched her.

Vikki and Lula danced a little quieter, staying on the sides to give their friend room, but Vikki felt a change too. Everywhere else, she might feel more ill at ease but on the dance floor with her friends she was able to put that all aside and just enjoy dancing with the music. Her and Lula bopped to the music, lip syncing the lyrics to each other as the song played.

The first three songs were fast songs that got everyone's blood pumping, then they did the Chicken Dance. After that, the DJ gave them a brief respite with a slow song. Vikki took refuge at the snack table. Shania, whose dancing had caught the eyes of a lot of people, was immediately asked to dance by Luke Skywalker. Lula stayed by Vikki's side until a dark-skinned boy who, upon closer inspection, was a Klingon, asked her to dance.

"Wouldn't you rather dance with your fellow Trekkie?" she asked, gesturing to Vikki, who shyly waved.

"No, Klingons don't care for Starfleet personnel," he said smoothly, sticking out his hand. With a look of apology, Lula accepted the offered hand and started dancing.

The song was halfway done when she heard a deep voice behind her. "Officer Lance, I presume?"

She instantly spun around, a smile forming on her face as she looked at the Dr. Grant she had noticed earlier. There in front of her was Alan Turner. "Dr. Turner," she said, eying him up and down. The two had been close friends through college, but afterwards life had caused them to split up somewhat. He had become a teacher, gotten his Masters, and was now teaching history in rural America. He was good about keeping the friendship going through texts and even letters when her jobs took her to areas without good cell service, but she hadn't seen him in four years. She flushed a little as she realized he was eying her up and down as well.

That flush died as she put more attention on the subject of her interest. The Grant character wasn't too far from Alan's usual attire of blue jeans with a shirt tucked in. In fact, she remembered him wearing the aquamarine dress shirt before on a trip to the movies. His eyes, which looked green next to the shirt, were friendly and warm. His blonde hair was covered by the fedora that was a part of his costume. His shoulders had filled out over the last few years, she noticed.

"I like your costume," he said after a long moment.

"I didn't think you cared for Star Trek," she said.

He laughed, a sound that somehow reminded her of a brook running over stones. "I don't, but I still like your costume." They were speaking loudly because of the music so he stepped closer. His eyebrows went up. "Did you see the Leeloo?"

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Yes, I can't believe anyone would show up to a dance, never mind a church dance, looking like that."

He was also shaking his head. "Yeah, that outfit definitely doesn't leave much to the imagination." He glanced at the far end where slave Leia was talking to someone in a cardboard robot outfit. "Not that slave Leia's much better." He looked at her again. "Before I forget, if the monkey from Planet of the Apes asks you to dance, turn him down. Don't ask, you don't want to know."

She giggled, but nodded her head. Typical of Alan, there was an elaborate waving of hands and an animation that came to his body and voice as he talked, but she knew he was serious.

"So how have you been doing?" she asked.

He shrugged with a smile. "I'm doing good," he replied. "I've got my dream job, corrupting young minds. It's a holiday weekend, so I was able to come over. How are you doing?"

She laughed at his job description, then sobered up slightly at his question. "I'm doing okay, still no real job."

His face fell slightly upon hearing that. "Oh? I'm sorry, Vik. I wish those bozos would see how awesome you are. If so, they'd give you a full-time job in a heartbeat!" His words were said with honest vehemence that only made sense if it came from Alan Turner.

Eager to change the subject she said, "I didn't realize you were coming."

He smiled again, the beginnings of a guilty smirk playing on his lips. "I was hoping to surprise you!"

"Well you succeeded, so good job!" she said with a laugh. She realized suddenly that she had spent the last four years missing him. Talking with him now...it just felt like she was coming home, and she was having a hard time believing she had ever left.

He said something to her, but she missed it as she pondered why she felt so strongly about missing him. "Sorry, what was that?"

He stepped closer again, not realizing it was distraction and not the music that caused her to not hear. Her breath caught as his voice, inches from her ear, asked if she wanted to dance.

Before she could reply, the song ended. He laughed, saying, "Saved by the bell." Then his expression changed and he hastily added, "I was referring to you...being saved from dancing with me."

She laughed again, this time at the concerned look on his face. "I know what you mean, although I bet you're a good dancer."

He shook his head. "No, why do you think I spent the whole Dallas dance talking to you about books?"

They both laughed at the memory. When they were in college they had attended a similar dance and started talking. Having trouble hearing each other over the loud music, they had moved to the entryway and discussed books for the next two hours.

Just then a One Direction song came on, causing Lula to run over, grab her arm, and dart back to the dance floor. Vikki cast an apologetic look at Alan, who just chuckled and gave a jaunty wave.

Vikki tried to lose herself in the dance, but struggled. Her mind kept going back to Alan. Those green eyes had a confidence that wasn't there when they attended college together. His laugh had changed too, she realized. Beforehand, it was never the same laugh twice, almost as if he was trying them all out to find one that he liked. During their whole conversation, he used the same laugh, and she loved the sound of it. It looked like Alan had figured out who he was supposed to be.

And maybe I'm starting to figure out who I'm meant to be, she surprised herself by thinking.

There was more. As she tried to dance, she thought of everything she knew of and had experienced with Alan. He was nice, kind to everyone he met, fiercely loyal, a hard worker, fun, gentle, slightly mischievous, and funny. She had known all of this for years now, but for some strange reason she'd never thought of them until now.

As soon as the dance was done she pulled Shania and Lula aside.

"Have either of you talked to Alan lately?"

The two girls looked at each other, then turned to her. "It's been a while," Shania said vaguely.

Lula covered her mouth. "Was that who you were talking to?" Vikki nodded. "What? Is he, like, really different or something?"

Vikki tried three times to answer the question before she could find the right words. "He's...him, still, and yet it's like he's all grown up. He's more sure of himself, more comfortable in his own skin."

Lula playfully rolled her eyes. "You realize those all mean the same thing, right?"

"Those are all good things, right?" Shania asked, ignoring Lula.

"Yes, they're great things!"

Lula was grinning from ear to ear. "Then go talk to him!" she said, gently but forcefully shoving Vikki out of the corner they were huddled in.

Vikki suddenly had a sense that she was the only one remotely surprised by how things were going. She squinted at her friends. "What do you two know about this?"

"We'll tell you later. Go find him!" Lula said. Shania giggled and waved as she was ushered off by Lula.

She promised herself that there was going to be a long talk between her and those two girls in the very near future. But at the moment, she wanted to talk to Alan. Really wanted to talk to Alan.

As if picking up on her thoughts, he appeared beside her. "Hello again!" he said cheerfully.

She gave a slight jump, then with a chuckle answered with her own, "Hello again!"

The DJ announced a lady's choice slow dance. She turned to Alan with a smile. "May I have this dance, good sir?"

One of his eyebrows raised slightly and he had a massive grin on his own face. "It would be my pleasure, my lady." He reached out his hand and she gently took it. There was strength in his hands that she didn't remember before, not that she had spent that much time holding hands with him before.

He escorted her to the middle of the dance floor, then gently placed his right hand on her hip and grabbed her left hand with his own. He pulled her close and she felt her breath catch. There was strength in the arms that held her, and she unconsciously took comfort in that. She could also feel his warmth and felt her cheeks turn red at the thought of how much she liked feeling it.

They started moving with the music. He wasn't the most graceful partner she had ever danced with, but he was far better than he gave himself credit for. Unlike some men she had danced with, he was leading the number and knew what he was doing.

She had always made fun of movies like *Pride and Prejudice* where a couple were on a crowded dance floor and suddenly it was as if no one else was there. To her, it seemed very unrealistic and hopelessly corny.

Apparently she was feeling hopelessly corny and unrealistic because for the next two and a half minutes, while Hunter Hayes sang about wanting to feel wanted, she was only aware of him and her.

"How long will you be in Arkansas?" he asked her softly. Her ear tingled from where his lips accidentally brushed against her skin, and the rest of her tingled from the sensation of his accidental touch and the warmth of his breath.

"I have to leave first thing in the morning," she said. "If it wasn't for the university I'm working for celebrating the holiday weekend, I wouldn't have even been able to show up this long." She whispered, causing him to tilt his head down to hear her. She wondered if her breath on him had the same effect as it did the other way around.

He nodded his head. "Pity," he replied. "I guess we'll just have to make the most of the dance tonight."

"How long will you be in Arkansas?" she asked, knowing that his teaching job was over in Kentucky.

"I'll be leaving first thing in the morning."

She couldn't tell if he was offering her an opportunity, but she decided that she would seize it anyway. "Do you want to have breakfast at Denny's before we head out?"

His smile answered her question before his voice had a chance. "I would love that," he replied.

She smiled back at him. "I can't wait," she said.

"In the meantime, let's enjoy the time that we have," he said with a smile that set her heart aflutter.

"I like this plan," she said. The music ended and she gradually realized that there were others present.

He looked at her sheepishly. "I guess we're done."

The music started, a quick-paced song that matched the racing of her heart. "Oh no we're not!" Grabbing his hand, she pulled him over and started moving both of them to the beat. For two quick minutes they danced and laughed together.

While they caught their breath, another slow song came on. "Ready for another one?" he asked with a slight grin as he caught his breath.

"You know it," she said, grabbing his hand and shoulder.

As they started dancing, Alan smiled at her. "I love this song."

"I love you," she said, then the full realization of what she said hit her. Her cheeks flushed crimson but she stayed silent. The ball was in his court, however accidental it had been thrown.

"Do you mean you love the song?" he asked gently. She noticed that his hands were trembling softly.

"It is what I meant," she said but she hurried on before she could talk herself out of it, "but I also mean the other." The flush from her cheeks faded slightly as she flashed the most heartfelt smile she had ever had at him. "I love you, Alan Turner."

A look of relief swept across his face and he smiled. "I love you too, Vikki."

They both laughed nervously and she gently rested her head on his shoulder. She looked up at him. "Lula and Shania know, don't they?"

He laughed. "Lula is actually the one who told me I was in love years ago."

She raised her eyes. "Really? How long ago did all of this start?"

His answer was quick, showing her that he had thought about this often before. "There was a time when we were bowling that first year in college. I told you to be careful because some bowling games ruined friendships."

Her brows came together as she tried to remember. "What did I say?"

"You said, 'Only the weak friendships,' and promptly beat me."

She shook her head, chuckling. "Why did that do it?"

He shrugged. "That made me realize you're strong, independent, and sassy. That's a hard combo to beat."

She shook her head and laughed.

"When did you..." he asked, not fully sure how to phrase his question.

She thought that over for a moment. "I just now realized it, but I think I started falling in love with you when you anonymously bought candy for our entire dorm after you found out none of us got anything for Valentine's Day."

The look of shock on his face was priceless. "I was anonymous. How did you know it was me?"

She giggled. "Lula spotted you leaving."

He rolled his eyes, prompting more laughter. Looking at him, she knew she had found her future and realized Lula was right. You never could tell what can happen at a dance.