

LESSON 18

HOW TO TALK ABOUT A FANCY DANCE

Walter and I arrived at the dance-fashionably late, of course-after a surprisingly civil dinner. I have to hand it to the committee: They did a fantastic job with the decorations. Normally, the Philip J. McCracken Community Center was a total boring dump-think Eagle Scout ceremonies and square dances. But tonight, with the lights low and the decorations up, it looked like a totally different place. The theme was "Rock the Casbah" (which narrowly beat out "Post-Communist Prague" and "The Brady Bunch"), and the whole place was done up in a Middle Eastern theme. The centerpieces were bouquets of peacock feathers, and silhouettes of domes were etched on the walls. The whole place was dripping in gold: streamers, balloons – Janet had even managed to arrange a gold disco ball instead of a silver one. The students weren't about to be outdone by the decorations, either. Some girls had obviously spent more on their formal dresses than I could imagine spending in a *month* of shopping.

Walter and I felt really awkward for a while-this was totally not our scene. We spent the first twenty minutes or so standing by the refreshments, watching as a bunch of punks kept trying to distract Mr. Limbergh, the principal, so they could spike the punch. Really I'd had enough, so I pulled Walter onto the dance floor. Tom the DJ was spinning a great Jackson Five song, and we threw up our hands and jumped around like a pair of fools. For a second, I thought about how much fun it would have been if Rex had been there with me ... but then I put it out of my mind. After all, here I was having a great time with someone I once considered my mortal enemy-shouldn't that be enough?

When the song was over, Tom announced that he was taking a short break, but that a friend of his was going to take over for a while. Walter and I were about to head over to get some punch when the microphone let out aloud squawk, followed by a voice that said, "A few weeks ago, a girl did something really gutsy for me. So I guess I'm going to have to return the favor." I turned around to see Rex – wearing a tuxedo and his Converse sneakers – flanked by the rest of the Giants. He gave the audience a sheepish grin. And then the Giants launched into the loudest version of "Hard for Me to Say I'm Sorry," by Chicago, that I think has ever been played on this earth.

Walter and I stood watching the stage; he had a faint grimace on his face, but I could tell he was hiding admiration. "Well, that's pretty stupid. And he's not even a senior. How the hell did he get in?" He looked over at me, and I couldn't hide the fact that I was grinning like an idiot. He let out a loud, dramatic sigh. "Oh, all right. There are some chess team kids over there I want to say hi to anyhow. But," he said as he walked off, "if you make out with him, don't expect a ride home."

The Giants ended their song and Rex shuffled off the stage. As he walked toward me, I could sense that every pair of eyes in that place was watching. I forced myself not to blush. Rex, on the other hand, wasn't doing such a good job. "Um, hey," he said.

"Hey," I replied. And then, even though it meant I might have to walk all the way home, I kissed him.

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WORDS ABOUT NOT FITTING IN

The idea of me at a formal dance was pretty **farcical** – especially being therewith Walter Chen.

farcical (*adj*): resembling a farce; ridiculous and confused

RELATED WORDS

A synonym for farcical is **ludicrous** (*adj*): ridiculous.

It quickly became **manifest** that Walter felt as awkward there as I did.

manifest (*adj*): made obvious or clear

We stood near the punch bowls, feeling totally **extraneous**.

extraneous (*adj*): extra and unnecessary looking around, I immediately felt incongruous.

incongruous (*adj*): strange and out of place

I was sure everyone could sense that I was an **anomaly**. I was **incompatible** with all the people I saw around me. I shouldn't have been so paranoid, though. No one was **ostracizing** me, even though

my date was a social **pariah** like Walter.

anomaly (*n*): something that doesn't belong

incompatible (*adj*): unable to blend in or get along

ostracize (*v*): to avoid or exclude someone from a group

pariah (*n*): an outcast

I was proud of the fact that I was wearing my Doc Martens – I hate being a **conformist**!

conformist (*n*): a person who always thinks and behaves in socially acceptable ways

It was all so perfect in there – I kind of wish my brothers were around, so they could do something **disruptive** like set off a cherry bomb in the boys' toilet.

disruptive (*adj*): causing disorder

One girl was wearing a totally **anachronistic** dress that looked like it came from the turn of the century. I had to give her props for being original.

anachronistic (*adj*): from the wrong period of time

When Walter went to the florist to pick up my corsage, he realized there was a **discrepancy** in the order: instead of red roses, the shop had written down orange camellias.

discrepancy (*n*): a difference between two things that are supposed to match

WORDS ABOUT CLOTHING

Some of the girls' dresses were so **embellished** with beads and sequins that it was hard to tell what color the material was underneath.

embellished (*adj*): having lots of ornaments and decorations

RELATED WORDS

These words all have to do with being fancy or extravagant.

I have to admit, all the **sumptuous** dresses swirling around me were kind of exciting. But I was glad to be wearing my simple dress and not some **baroque** monstrosity. I mean, some of those girls must have paid **exorbitant** prices for their outfits. Some girls managed to look classy and elegant, but lots of others looked **garish** and **gaudy**.

sumptuous (*adj*): luxurious, magnificent

baroque (*adj*): excessively exaggerated in style

exorbitant (*adj*): extravagantly large or high

garish (*adj*) and **gaudy** (*adj*): excessively colorful or shiny, with the added impression of looking fake or cheap

And these words have to do with not being fancy or extravagant.

With all those dolled-up girls, I actually felt quite original in my **nondescript** dress. And the sparkly clips in my hair kept me from looking too **austere**.

nondescript (*adj*): plain, uninteresting

austere (*adj*): extremely simple, severely plain

I saw one girl's high heel get caught in the skirt of her **voluminous** dress.

voluminous (*adj*): large, expansive

In general, all the girls looked quite **comely**.

comely (*adj*): pretty, attractive (applies to women)

I especially liked Janet's dress, a **sinuous** silk one that showed off her figure in just the right way.

sinuous (*adj*): slinky, winding

The straps of Janet's dress were covered in **gilt**.

gilt (*n*): a thin layer of gold

Things made of gilt would be **lustrous** (*adj*) and **refulgent** (*adj*): both words mean "shiny." Lustrous describes a soft shine, refulgent a bright one.

Janet **enhanced** her bright green eyes by wearing bright emerald earrings.

enhance (*v*): to improve a particular quality in something

Tara Mickleson, the head cheerleader, was wearing an airy **gossamer**

dress that left little to the imagination.

gossamer (*n*): a very thin, filmy material

These words all describe dresses you can see through.

translucent (*adj*): letting light through, but not completely transparent

diaphanous (*adj*): gauzy, delicate

ethereal (*adj*): insubstantial, airy

Obviously, Tara got named Queen of the Formal. When they put all the **regalia** on her, she looked like she was born to be a beauty queen.

regalia (*n*): formal, ceremonial clothing and objects worn by members of royalty (crowns, robes, scepters, etc.)

WORDS ABOUT DECORATIONS

I was amazed at the **opulence** of the whole thing—the decorations must have cost the committee a ton of money.

opulence (*n*): affluence, luxurious splendor

RELATED WORDS

The walls were **resplendent** with gold metallic streamers and pearly balloons. I thought the eight-foot-tall ice sculpture in the shape of our school mascot was a little **ostentatious** and **grandiose**, but other people seemed to like it.

resplendent (*adj*): dazzling in appearance

ostentatious (*adj*): showy, obvious

grandiose (*adj*): magnificent, but often also implies pretentious or unrealistic

I was especially impressed because the community center is usually so **spartan**.

spartan (*adj*): very plain and austere

The ice sculpture was a total **behemoth** – I was worried the table underneath was going to collapse from the weight.

behemoth (*n*): something huge and powerful (The Behemoth is an enormous beast referred to in the Bible.)

The **incandescent** bulbs were covered with frosted shades, which cast a soft glow over the room.

incandescent (*adj*): giving off light

Some synonyms for incandescent are **effulgent** (*adj*) and **luminous** (*adj*).

The large, open community center was transformed into a **palatial** space.

palatial (*adj*): spacious and luxurious, like a palace

Some synonyms for palatial are **capacious** (*adj*) and **commodious** (*adj*): spacious.

The refreshments table was **replete** with goodies prepared by the Parents Association.

replete (*adj*): fully supplied

There were copious amounts of legal, nonalcoholic beverages

available.

copious (*adj*): large in quantity

There were clumps of trees outside the community center-a perfect place for lovers' trysts.

tryst (*n*): a secret, prearranged meeting, usually between lovers

The parent volunteers were running around **frenetically**, trying to keep kids from spiking the punch.

frenetic (*adj*): frenzied, rushed

The photographer had a palace-themed set for the pictures, but the building itself was just a **façade**-a painted piece of cardboard.

façade (*n*): the outward appearance of something. When used to describe people, it usually implies that there is a discrepancy between what is outside and what is inside: "I thought Tara's sweetness was just a façade, but it turns out she actually is that nice."