THE DANCE PROFESSOR

(*A single spotlight slowly goes up on center-stage. In a large auditorium, a single man walks onto the dimly lit stage. With light brown hair and broad shoulders, standing at an even six feet, the man appears to be in his early thirties. The man turns to a boombox. Inserting a CD, a soft, rhythmic tune emits from the device. The man looks around, as if making sure that no one was watching. He begins to dance to the rhythm of the music—a four-step routine, swaying his hips from side to side as he dances. Closing his eyes and holding his arms outward—his left arm raised high and his right arm waist-level, he appears to be dancing with an imaginary partner. As he slowly turns, he opens his eyes and notices someone watching in the distance.)*

PROFESSOR LIONEL: Oh! Pardon the atrocity.

(*Seeing that the stranger is looking for an explanation, he talks further.)*

Bachata. It's a Dominican dance that looks absolutely elegant when it's executed perfectly. And what you just saw was NOT executed perfectly…It also works better with two people.

(*Sitting down on a chair he finds on the stage, the man appears to be reminiscing as he tells his story to the stranger.)*

I love ballroom dancing, in case you couldn't tell. Well, the bachata isn't really a *ballroom* dance, *per se*, but still I love ballroom dancing. I suppose it first started at my senior prom, when I was…forced to slow dance with my date. I was never good at talking to girls in high school as it was; adding this whole dancing portion to it only made my struggles worse. I had never danced at all before that moment, which showed strongly; the next morning, my prom date told me that she had bruises the size of baseballs on her feet.

After the dance, I noticed a girl standing off in the corner, wearing a long, beautiful, silky red dress. When my date went to get some ice for her throbbing feet, I walked over to her and introduced myself. She said her name was Karen. She also laughed, and said that I was a terrible dancer. Tonight, seeing you come in to the auditorium, watching me dance—it reminds me of that moment when I first met Karen, of the wonderful times that we spent together after that…that we can no longer spend together…and I sit here, remembering.

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(*By this time, the stranger has left, but the man still sits, talking to an invisible*

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audience he imagines in the seats in front of him.)

Now, Karen's and my story isn't the most glorious ballroom dancing story, but nevertheless it is an interesting, though short, one. We met each other a couple of times in the hallways after prom, and she was the one who first introduced me to ballroom dancing, claiming that she would teach me the ways to be a better dancer. And she did. Well, I improved at least. Before I had met Karen, I could scarcely keep a source of rhythm; in fact, I was once jokingly *(or more so humiliatingly)* named Jell-O Feet. But whenever we danced together, it was as if she inspired my dancing rhythm. You could call us the star-struck pair of dance partners. Unfortunately, after we graduated from high school, our college lives got in the way of our dancing, but we—or should I say, Karen and her overly-clumsy dance partner—still managed to take first place at a couple of amateur competitions.

In 2003—about three years after Karen and I graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in dance instruction—we opened up our own little dance school in New York City called The Dance Teachers. Silly title, I know, but we could not come up with anything better. Since my last name was impossible to pronounce, our students called me Professor Lionel, and they called Karen, Professor Karen. Eventually, we changed the name of our school to The Dance Professors. I know, it's still a cheesy name, but we liked the ring of it. It sounded like an old 1940s movie, where the two leads would get on stage and dance the night away to love and beautiful ballroom dance music.

The first couple of months were rough. We didn't get many students, since there were so many other dance schools around, and we could barely pay the lease on our section of the building. We rented apartments next door to each other on Forty-Fourth Street—just two blocks away from the school—but soon had to move to a cheaper complex, because of the tight money, but we managed.

In our third month in New York, Karen auditioned to be one of the background dancers in the Broadway version of Wicked, right alongside Kristin Chenoweth and Idina Menzel. Unfortunately, she didn't make the cut, but was called to give a one-night performance when one of the dancers for the opening number was sick. After that, business boomed with our dance school. Who *wouldn't* want to be taught how to ballroom dance by a *real Broadway dancer?!* Of course, our students didn't know that Karen's Broadway experience had only lasted one show, but within a couple of months, we had to open up classes on the weekends to make room for all of the new sign-ups.

I had to laugh at the sudden turn of events. Here Karen was, a "legend", and all because of a one-song appearance in a popular Broadway show. And then, there

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