

**HERE?**



**IN FRONT OF  
EVERYBODY?**

When a relationship is still but a hoped-for fancy, one errs on the side of caution. So although she was Jasmine in my heart, I called her Ms. Errol. There would be plenty of time for advancement later.

Jasmine possessed qualities I never even knew I'd admire in a woman: height, for one; also her staid attire I found oddly alluring; even the fact that she could write upside-down — I know, a fatuous thing to find hot, but I was crushed out. Jasmine towered goddess-like over my inexperience, quickening in my body something deeply sweet.

Several others who saw her day in and day out as I did were smitten by her ineffable charms. And since she was the boss, we outdid ourselves to come across as competent, agreeable self-starters.

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But one day, a bizarre happenstance caught me off guard.

A party — somebody's birthday, surely — saw us eating cake, singing, and then schmoozing. It wasn't especially stimulating, just what you'd expect. Until someone — it had to be Jasmine: only she had keys to the sound system — put on music.

Everybody got up at once. Was I really the only one who would rather do almost anything than dance? The activity seemed patently inappropriate to me — this wasn't a nursery school, for God's sake, and I had to look these people in the eye every day — but I figured I'd play along and just keep to the sidelines.

Two lines formed, with a path down the middle; a formation we have all seen a

hundred times, I know, but I had grown up fairly sheltered, so to me it was entirely alien. In a chilling example of group-think, people consented to dance down the aisle between the two lines. At the end stood Jasmine (evidently exempt from tortures devised for underlings) allotting each person a rather impersonal embrace. What insane morale-builder was this?

Thinking myself clever, I had claimed a mid-line position, trying to be inconspicuous. I hadn't fully worked out that when the top person in line danced, the next inexorably replaced him, dancing in turn, until everyone had run the state-mandated gauntlet. The gifted Kayla slinkied down the aisle; then crazy Darrell.

Presently, after only five of my comrades had gavotted away, I found myself at the top of the line: shocked; terrified.

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But, I realised, *I wanted that hug*, chaste though it might be. Conceivably my daring would impress her, sending me to the front of the line in her estimation. I knew she liked guys who were easy-going, able to laugh at themselves, and uninhibited (within reason). She had said as much.

There was nothing for it. I plowed through the cloven throng, imitating the good dancers as best I could, and my heart nearly stopped as I felt myself pulled into those peerless arms.

*If every day is going to be this kind of crazy roller-coaster ride*, I remember thinking — though obviously not in so many words — *I may just not be cut out for kindergarten*.