



# *Out of the Park*

The Story of Tim and Arielle

Year: 2002, 2006

By Tim and Arielle Haughee

## 2002: Tim

This date didn't go as planned. Her demeanor was flat, the conversation forced and lethargic. I pulled into Arielle's apartment complex to drop her off and made a last-ditch effort to coax a smile from her. Where was the fun girl from two years ago?

I had been hopeful for this night as our date approached. I was a sophomore in college at the University of Florida and enjoyed making friends and meeting girls as an independent young man. I met Arielle several years prior at a summer job back home in Orlando and remembered her to be quite attractive, with a spirited sense of humor to boot.

At nineteen years old, I wasn't necessarily ready to settle down for a long-term relationship. I had several fairly lengthy ones in high school, always playing the role of the serious boyfriend. But as a college student, I wasn't particularly interested in being a significant

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other. Rather, my goal was quite selfish: I wanted to only worry about myself. In the romantic world, this translated into trying to meet as many cute girls as possible.

I wanted to see if my sweet-talking ways would have any success on Arielle—maybe there was still time. I leaned over on the console and flashed my best smile. “I had fun tonight. I’m glad we got a chance to do this. We were always dating other people when we worked together. It’s the first time we’ve both been single.”

She released a nervous laugh. Laughter was good, that meant I was heading in the right direction. I leaned a little closer. “You look really pretty tonight.”

Her eyes widened.

The sound of the door handle jolted me out of my thoughts of a kiss.

“Thanks for taking me out!” Arielle hopped out of the car faster than a squirrel in traffic.

A swing and a miss.

“No problem,” I said, trying to regain my pride. I paused, figuring out what to say next. Definitely not *let’s do this again sometime*. “Have a nice night.”

She waved and walked a little quicker than was polite up to her door. Jeez. I wasn’t that bad. I pulled out of Arielle’s complex and tried to figure out what went wrong. We always seemed to have a good rapport. Shouldn’t this night have been a breeze? Why did it seem like there wasn’t even the remotest bit of a connection between us? My plan for the night was to take her out for a movie and ice cream and see where things went from there.

On our way to the movie theater, we updated each other on our co-workers from our previous summer job. It was a pretty tame subject,

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delivered in straight, informative tones. It was clear this girl was not the same vibrant, energetic one I remembered.

Unfortunately, my plan for seeing a movie backfired. When conversation is flat on a date, seeing a movie together only seems to exacerbate the distance. Two hours of looking straight ahead, with effectively no verbal exchanges between us. Awkward, to say the least.

By the time the movie ended, we weren't sure where to take our conversation.

Instead, we proceeded with our plan to walk across the shopping center to the ice cream shop and grab a few scoops. We sat on the steps outside and ate, not saying much of anything. A meth lab had more chemistry than we did. I couldn't pinpoint one part where things went completely south. The whole thing had been one soggy interaction after another, quite a disappointment.

I waited at a red light and reminded myself the date didn't matter much anyway. I'd already contented myself with being single for at least the next few semesters. I'd go out with other girls, and one thing was for sure, I wouldn't be going out with this girl again.



## Arielle

I stepped inside and locked my front door, leaning my head back on the dingy white metal. Did he want to kiss me? I panicked and leaped out of the car. I waited years to go out with *the* Tim, and nothing happened. No connection, no spark, no sizzle. It was like drinking a glass of room temperature water. And I don't just kiss any guy, especially one I find to be so...ordinary. Even though Tim was incredibly cute and he used to make me laugh, something was off

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about tonight. I could sense he wasn't really into the relationship thing and I didn't want to risk it with a party boy, especially one that could put me to sleep with his conversation.

I knew what that meant.

Sighing, I headed for the phone in my room. My boyfriend and I decided to take a break and see if we wanted to date other people. If Tim, the one I'd always wanted a chance with didn't work out, I only had one alternative if I didn't want to be alone.

Pictures of Paul peeked out from almost every corner of my simple room—a quilted cover on my bed, a small desk, and a few books. Even though I was eighteen and supposed to be having the time of my life finally outside the house, I spent most of my time going to class or hanging out with Paul. I hadn't made many friends in my new college town or figured out what I wanted to do with my life yet. I picked up the closest frame and examined the handsome face and brown eyes.

He wasn't the nicest to me.

Paul refused to drive up to Gainesville, always insisting I come down to Orlando instead. I would often make the trip down several times a week. He also told me things like, "I'm not interested in hearing about your school so don't talk about it," and "You're the only one who wants to marry their high school boyfriend." But he was cute and smart, and I really cared about him. No one was perfect, and I had no idea who I would be if I were alone. I wasn't ready to find out.

This date with Tim didn't work so I would put all my energy into my previous boyfriend. I would be exactly what Paul wanted—calm, quiet, and giving. Even though I tried before, I probably wasn't trying hard enough.

I hit speed dial and went back into the comfort of my familiar relationship.

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### Tim

I dimmed my headlights before pulling into the driveway, hoping my college buddies-turned-roommates didn't notice my obvious early arrival. Unless I was willing to sneak in through a window (I wasn't), there was only one way into this 1950s, ranch-style rental house awkwardly tucked in a small neighborhood between the University's "official" hotel and a Save-a-Lot grocery store. I slowly turned the front door handle and gave a slight push, but the old brass hardware of the doorframe betrayed my attempted inconspicuousness.

"Boy, that was fast," exclaimed a voice from the living room. "How'd it go?"

My buddy, Stoney (only his family calls him Mike), was never one for beating around the bush, especially when he'd been working on the back half of a case of Coors Light.

"Is she here with you? I want to meet her. Bring 'er in," he said as he approached from around the corner.

He peered over my head and out the door with his six-foot-two-inch frame, expecting to see the cute girl I told him about earlier that day.

"Dude, where's the chick? You didn't scare her off, did ya?"

Oy.

A familiar pitter-patter raced in my direction from down the hallway. Finally, a girl who'd give me a kiss without any hesitation or prejudgment. I knelt down and happily accepted some love from Athena, our three-year-old American bulldog. She was followed by Dave, her technical owner, although we all claimed to have at least

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some joint ownership rights.

“Hey, buddy. Back so soon?”

Dave was the subtle one.

“Yeah,” I said with a shrug. “You win some, you lose some I guess. Tonight just wasn’t my night, fellas.”

“Dang, dude,” Stoney said. “Well, don’t worry about it. Come on in and grab an ice cold beer.”

Stoney always had a way of cheering people up.

“I didn’t hear the story,” Dave said. He followed us into the kitchen with Athena in tow. “How’d you know this girl again?”



### 2000: Tim

I had just arrived and clocked-in for my afternoon shift as a guest services representative at Wet 'N Wild, the water park located in the heart of Orlando's tourist district. The park was a popular employer for local high school students who wanted an easy job in a fun environment. My senior year was coming up, so I returned to Wet 'N Wild for another summer, hopeful my earnings would assist me in buying the Mitsubishi Eclipse I recently set my eyes on.

My fellow co-worker, Anthony, seemed particularly giddy today as I entered the small guest services office located just past the ticket booths.

“Dude, have you met the new chick yet? She’s pretty cute. Spunky too. Just finished up her training.”

The twinkle in his eye affirmed his interest. Of course, his excitement got my antennae up too.

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“Is she still here? And what’s her name?”

“She’s out in ticket booth three,” Anthony replied. “Her name is Arielle. But don’t get any ideas, I saw her first!”

“Slow down there, buddy,” I retorted. “No one’s claiming your territory just yet.”

Despite my quasi-assurance to Anthony, I was intrigued at meeting this fresh, and apparently cute, new face.

After getting set up and logging in, I realized I should figure out an excuse to visit ticket booth three. Looking around the office, I noticed the box of new admission tickets sitting on the counter. A sly little grin overtook my face.

Better see if booth three is low on tickets, I thought.

I grabbed a stack and headed out of the office.

“Hey, where ya headed?” I heard Anthony say as the door shut behind me.



## Arielle

I leaned on the counter in the tiny ticket booth, scanning the pages of a paperback. Even though this place was the size of a closet, I felt comfortable, cozy even. A little space all to myself. My favorite part of the afternoon shift was the easy pace, about one customer every half hour. Hence the book. I drifted into the world of *Pride and Prejudice* when a tentative knock interrupted Elizabeth Bennet’s musings.

I opened the locked door only to see a giant stack of tickets being held by someone in the same uniform. They lowered to reveal beautiful green eyes, then long sideburns, then a gorgeous mouth. My

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heart fluttered.

He smiled revealing perfect twin dimples.

All rational thought left—what I was doing, where I was, my name—all gone.

The only presence in my mind was this perfect face sent down from the heavens.

It took me a moment to realize he was speaking. I shook my head and this time heard when he mentioned something about tickets.

“Oh, yes, sure,” I responded in all my brilliance.

He stepped in and sat the giant stack next to the full ticket dispenser. I’d never had anyone hand-deliver tickets to my booth. It was my responsibility to take care of the supplies.

“I’m Tim,” he said. He leaned against the counter across from me, only a few feet between us. “I work in Guest Services.”

Now he’s hanging out? I know exactly what’s going on here. Emboldened by my knowledge of his check-out-the-new-girl plan, I pointed to the full ticket dispenser. “Good thing you brought me those extra tickets.”

He laughed. “Hey, a caravan of tourist buses could descend any minute. Then you’d be overrun with—”

“Martians. Millions of them. All here with their six arms poking out of their bathing suits.”

“Exactly. Ready to blast you with their ray guns if you didn’t have enough tickets. So you’re welcome.”

We both laughed. When I looked in his warm green eyes, I was happy I found someone so easy to talk to and as incredibly cute as Tim. A niggling thought itched at the back of my head. The word *boyfriend* drifted to the front of my mind.

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Crap. I had a boyfriend.

I suppressed my fascination and put on a polite smile, telling him I should get back to work. As much as this guy struck me, I was a faithful girlfriend. Maybe something could happen in the future. At least I sure hoped it did.



### 2006: Arielle

A green, slimy, goblin face stared at me from the shelf. Next to it sat a pumpkin with a cat cutout.

“Check this out,” my friend Katie said. She reached on the side of the goblin and pressed down. Green goo slid down its cheeks under a clear layer of plastic.

“Awesome,” I laughed. “But not quite what I’m looking for.” It was still a few weeks before Halloween, but I couldn’t help escaping the stress of my grad school class schedule to immerse myself in my favorite holiday. Though I kept busy, I felt deeply satisfied with my choice of becoming a special education teacher. I knew it was a perfect fit for me and exactly what I wanted.

“Let me guess,” she said and walked over to the skimpy costumes. “You’re looking for something like this?” She held up a scrap of fabric intended to be a nurse’s outfit.

It was tiny. It was sleazy. It was almost perfect.

“Close.”

She laughed. “Yessss! You need to be going out with more guys, and this will definitely reel a few in.”

I smiled at my sweet friend. She’d been encouraging me to try

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dating again. After a major heartbreak from my long-distance boyfriend, then a toxic relationship with the next, I was done being quiet, complacent, and everything I thought men wanted. I was determined to be exactly what I wanted to be: me. I would make jokes, be bold, and laugh often. But was there a guy out there who would like that?

Only one way to know.

I spotted a black and white number on another rack. “This one!”

Katie eyed the striped, tight mini dress. “What’s it supposed to be?”

“Jailbait.”

“Perfect. Now I need a good one.” She pulled a head-to-toe Chewbacca suit off the rack and draped it over her body, lifting a questioning brow.

“Where’s your costume?”

“Har. You go check out while I put this back. I’m starving.”

After a few more laughs and a satisfying lunch, we made our way back to my sunny yellow apartment. I hung the jailbait costume in the closet and smiled as I wondered what fun it would bring. First, I needed a new prospect, and I had a good idea where to start.

“Help me find a date,” I told Katie. We sat on the couch, and I opened my laptop.

This new website “Facebook” was supposedly a great place to meet new people and connect with old friends. It was only for college students unlike MySpace, so I felt safe to explore there. I hadn’t been on Facebook much but I scrolled through, and a dimpled face immediately caught my attention.

“No. Way.”

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“Who’s that?”

“It’s Tim, *the* Tim. That super cute guy I worked with back in high school.”

I clicked on his picture. There he was, still as gorgeous as ever.

“Didn’t you guys have that lame date?” Katie asked.

“Yes...” My eyes wandered back to that face. He had a mischievous sparkle in his eye and a little snarky smirk. Then I did what any single girl would do, I stalked through his information. “He still lives in Gainesville...is in law school...plays guitar...”

“So? You went out with him already and it was a bust.”

“I wasn’t fully myself the first time we went out. I was still stuck on Paul. We used to have fun when we worked together, joked around a lot. There’s something there, and it just needs a second chance. I’m going to say hi.”

“You can’t say hi for no reason. It’ll be weird. You haven’t talked to him in years.”

“Look!” I practically shouted. “It’s his birthday in a few days. I’m going to tell him happy birthday. There. Now I have a reason.”

Before Katie could stop me, I sent a quick message then closed my laptop. “There.”

“You sent it?”

I responded with a smile, and she shook her head, laughing.

I promised myself I was going to be bold. What if Tim didn’t like that? All I could do was wait and see.



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### Tim

A cool breeze blew across the courtyard as I begrudgingly made my way to the law library. It was mid-October, almost my birthday, and the months of constant heat and humidity were finally coming to an end. I was halfway through my first semester of law school—the semester that sets you apart from your peers, the one that matters most—and woefully behind.

I had only been back in Gainesville since early August. Just three weeks before that, I met a girl at the apartment complex where I was living in Orlando and jumped right into a fairly serious relationship. We were so sure everything was “meant to be,” we hardly considered the challenge of long distance. Nearly six weeks after my move to Gainesville, the strain on the nascent relationship was too much. We called it quits. I’d had plenty of time chasing girls and going on dates. I was ready to get serious with someone. I thought this girl wanted it, too.

Nevertheless, I looked on the bright side. While disappointed the relationship fizzled, the constant trips back and forth to Orlando during the weekends put me squarely behind the eight ball. Final exams would be here soon enough, and my classmates were already spending most of their weekends studying. If I was going to make this law school gamble work, I needed to buckle down, and fast. Maybe this newfangled independence was just what I needed to reset my focus.

I found an empty table in the law library’s main study room, which, with its gilded accents and light wood paneling, failed to match the rest of the law school’s dull, unfinished concrete look that served as the hallmark of brutalist architecture. I opened up my school-issued laptop and launched my study outline for *Constitutional Law*.

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Before opening up the associated textbook, I decided to log onto Facebook and see what my friends were up to.

An indicator showed I had a new message.

Very interesting, I thought. Arielle Barritt. Hadn't heard from her in years. I certainly wasn't expecting a message from her.

I clicked on the screen to open it:

*Hey there! I saw from your profile page that you're back up in Gainesville. Me too! Doing my master's in teaching at UF. Anyway, saw your birthday was coming up - happy birthday!*

I almost did a double take. That was out of the blue.

While her message did get my attention, I immediately reminded myself of our date years prior, which went over like a fart in church. I shook my head.

A quick response should do the trick:

*Hello there to you! Yes, I'm recently back in town. Just started law school this semester. It's a bit different, but I'm getting used to it. Glad to know that you're up here too. Thanks for the b-day wishes. We'll have to get together sometime.*

That last sentence was a throwaway. While I appreciated her message, I struck out on the first date and was scared away for good. I couldn't imagine going through that disappointment again.

I hit "send" and closed my laptop.

I procrastinated enough. Time to open up my textbook and read some boring precedential case law from a bygone era. Another exciting weekend.

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A couple weeks later, with football season in full swing, I came out into the living room with my laptop to join the guys in watching some early afternoon football games while I updated my study outline. I'd been in my room for hours and needed a change of scenery. I could use a little more fun in my life.

“Sack him! Sack him! Take him down!!”

Stoney and Dave high-fived as the quarterback was viciously driven to the ground.

Focusing may be a little harder than I thought.

“Tim, you ready for a brewski?” Dave asked. “Got a new case in the fridge if you want one.”

“Not quite yet,” I replied. “Almost done. Twenty minutes and I should be good.”

“Oh, that's not a holding penalty!” Stoney yelled at the TV. “Come on refs, get it together!”

I re-read the same line in my outline several times but still couldn't focus. Ugh. Officially distracted, I opened up Facebook to see what was the latest.

Another new message from Arielle:

*Hey! So...when you taking me out? I believe you said we should get together, sir.*

Well, well, well.

She certainly had my attention now. This version of Arielle seemed different, more like the old one from our work days at Wet 'N Wild. Plus, she still looked pretty dang good.

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She set the line, so I decided to bite:

*Well, hello! You are certainly right. Where are my manners, making a sweet girl wait so long on me? I agree, we should go out. You just tell me when.*

I kept the laptop on while I cracked open my first beer and watched the game with the fellas. Athena jumped up on the couch and curled up next to me.

A few minutes later, I received her reply:

*How about tonight? There's a Halloween party in my complex. My friends and I are going. You should come too!*

I didn't expect we'd get together the same day. Unfortunately, I already made plans, but I wanted keep things moving in a positive direction:

*Shoot! That sounds tempting, but I can't do tonight. We're getting ready to make the trek up to Jacksonville in a few hours for the Gator football game against Georgia. I'm gonna have to miss out. However, next weekend is wide open. What do you think? You pick the time, and I'll handle the rest.*



## Arielle

Red v-neck dress? Backless black top? Denim micro-mini? Ugh. All my outfit choices either said desperate or slutty. And I was neither. I wanted to exude *fun* because that is what I was all about. I glanced at the little black and white striped number hanging in the back and sighed. A missed opportunity. We never did go out on Halloween after

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Katie got the stomach bug. I settled on a form-fitting gray scoop neck and jeans. It would show off just enough while not being too much.

We arranged to go out on a Friday in early November. Dinner and an improv comedy show. This time I wouldn't force myself to tone down or be quiet. I would be completely me and enjoy my time, however it unfolded.

It had been years since I'd seen Tim. People didn't change that much in four years, or did they? He could have turned into someone who only talks about themselves. Or doesn't hold open doors. Or says "Ar-kan-sass." Or eats burritos sideways, biting in the middle. I grabbed my phone.

"Katie! I can't do this!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Tim. He eats burritos sideways."

"What? Is he with you now? Are you guys eating Mexican?"

"No he's not here yet...I just...have a feeling."

Silence. It probably only lasted a few seconds, but it felt like a lifetime. She sighed. "Okay. I think you're really feeling a bit anxious because you had a crappy date years ago and you have no idea who this person is today. Theoretically, he could be worse, right?"

I stopped pacing. "Maybe."

"Relax. You're getting worked up over nothing. Just go out and have fun and if he sucks, call me, and I'll come get you."

I looked down at my gray shirt and jeans. Fun, I reminded myself. It didn't matter what happened in the past or how much I'd been hurt because tonight was just tonight. I thanked Katie and hung up, promising to call her right after.

The door buzzer went off.

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I headed for the stairs, took a deep breath and told myself no matter what waited for me, I got to choose how the night went.

Dimples. That was all my eyes focused on as I approached the gate. My face lit into a smile, and I opened the door. Tim looked exactly the same, gorgeous green eyes, beautiful smile, and most likely knew how to eat Mexican food. Butterflies flitted through my stomach. Nothing would hold me back from enjoying my time with the guy I always wanted to date—no personal insecurities, other relationships, or feelings that something was “off.” This was finally my chance with *the* Tim.

A wave of energy swelled through me.

“Hey, Tim,” I said and gave him a quick hug.

“Hey yourself.” Those dimples got impossibly bigger. He walked me to his car and opened the door. I popped in and could barely contain my ocean of excitement.

I have no idea what words came out of my mouth as he drove but I chatted on...and on...and he smiled and laughed, happily conversing. There was an instant ease that was missing last time, like talking to a best friend.

“You hungry?” he asked when we sat down at our table on the patio of the little bistro. Twinkle lights hung above us and cars zipped past on the street nearby.

“I could eat.” I’d made the mistake years ago of eating barely anything the day of a date and clearing my plate that evening, horrifying the guy with my monstrous appetite. Not tonight. “I’ll have the portobello sandwich,” I told the waitress.

“It’s our wine tasting night. Which flight would you like to try?”

“Wine tasting?” We both said, then laughed.

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Tim picked the red and I settled on the white. We talked about school and our families while we waited, each enjoying the first of three glasses of wine. My sandwich arrived, and the mushroom slid all over the bun, seeping sauce everywhere. No way I could keep eating this disaster. More would end up on my clothes than in my stomach.

The next glass of wine arrived.

“How are you liking the mahi?” I asked.

“Mahi? I ordered the dolphin sandwich.”

I laughed. “Dolphin is mahi. It’s just a nickname they use. You aren’t eating real dolphin.”

He snorted. “I know that. But it’s not mahi.”

“Well, what is it then? It’s totally mahi.”

We each reached for our phones, determined to get fish expert, phone-a-friend proof. His friend swore it was dolphin fish while mine informed me it was in fact mahi. Of course, I was right.

We playfully argued about it all the way to the improv show. I stumbled a bit getting out of the car. That third glass of wine on a very light dinner was not doing me any favors. Luckily, this show was on campus, and we wouldn’t be able to order any more drinks. Plenty of time for me to sober up. Tim held out his arm. I couldn’t tell if it was gentlemanly courtesy or because he saw me almost trip over the flat floor, but I didn’t care. I took it.

This show was my idea, and Tim seemed excited I showed interest in comedy. He held open the wide, wooden door to the campus “pub,” and my spirits fell the instant I scanned the crowd.

Freshmen.

Tables full of geeky eighteen-year-olds straight from their dorms. *Way to pick the entertainment, Arielle.* I couldn’t let this little hiccup

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ruin everything. There was only one thing to do.



### Tim

I'd been to many comedy clubs in the past, including some of the hip, famous ones like The Improv and The Comedy Store located in the heart of the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. This was not one of those clubs.

I slowly turned my head to look over at Arielle, who planned this part of our outing. Her eyes met mine with a hint of mischief.

“Let's go over there.” She nudged me toward an empty balcony area. It didn't hurt that she looked stunning.

The lights dimmed, and the host walked on stage, introducing the show with a terrible Harvey Dangerfield impression. She leaned over, which I certainly appreciated, and whispered, “Table three, red shirt.”

My eyes fell on a taller kid with messy dark hair and long arms. What was I supposed to see?

“Plays backgammon in a hula skirt every Wednesday or eats live cockroaches?” she said.

I felt a smirk grow on my face. “He's got that long torso, great for hula dancing.”

She laughed. “Agree. Table seven, green and yellow hat.”

A new person came on stage, but my attention was in the crowd. The hat belonged to a guy with greasy long blond hair and a stained t-shirt.

“Makes sculptures with his toenail clippings or can play the

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mandolin with his nose.”

“He looks like a hidden talent type of guy. I’m going with the mandolin.”

We kept up the game, making our own little comedy show together. Something was definitely different this time. My first hint was when I picked her up, she seemed so happy to be in the car with me. Then during our little debate about the dolphin sandwich—which I won—I got a glimpse of the old spunky girl from when we first met. Come to think of it, there hadn’t been a dull moment yet. I hadn’t laughed this much in a long time.

About forty-five minutes into the show, we decided we were ready to get back out on the town. While we both got a little tipsy during dinner, our respective alcohol buzzes had worn off. We both agreed that a few more drinks were in order.

“So, where should we go next?” I asked when we were outside.

“How about some dancing?” Arielle had that look of mischief in her eyes again.

I couldn’t say no.

Luckily, we were only a few blocks away from Market Street, the place to go for dancing. The temperature felt like it had dropped another ten degrees since dinner. Arielle shivered as we crossed the street: The perfect excuse. I put my arms around her and rubbed her shoulders.

“You think you’re gonna be able to make it?”

She laughed, and I loved the sound.

We arrived at Market Street, which was already firing on all cylinders even though it was a few hours before last call. After making our way to the bar and snagging a few drinks, Arielle grabbed my

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hand.

“Time to dance!” she yelled over the pulsating music.

It was a good thing I had a few drinks in me and was loosened up. Had I been sober, the date would have come to a crashing halt after she saw my dance moves.

On the dance floor, it was clear that Arielle had no trouble busting a move. No wonder she wanted to show off her skills. I just tried my best to keep up. The jokes and conversation kept on even as we moved.

The more time I spent with her, the more I realized she really was a great girl. Funny and energetic. Sweet and caring. Intelligent and sarcastic. I liked being with her, and she seemed to enjoy my company too. Maybe this one could be for keeps.

After a few more songs, I needed a little break from pretending to be a decent dancer.

I stepped to the side of the dance floor, and Arielle followed. Though we hadn't really had a pause in conversation all night, one had just developed.

Arielle looked up at me with her beautiful brown eyes.

“So, what do you want to do now?”

I knew the answer.

“What do I want to do?”

I leaned down and pressed my lips to hers.



## Arielle

The kiss was soft and sweet. Definitely not what I was expecting

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after dancing the way I did. Maybe he was as sweet as his kiss? We had fun, my main goal for the evening, but could this be something even more? I didn't have a good track record with picking guys, and I wasn't sure how to tell if Tim was a good one.

The DJ announced last call and he took my hand, guiding me toward the door. This date we'd had an instant, easy connection. We talked, we laughed, we kissed, and everything was perfect. What was so different about us this time? Could it be me?

My head spun more than the disco lights hanging from the ceiling. Maybe it was the alcohol. I needed to clear my head so I could think. I soon realized the only solution.

“Taco Bell!”

Tim laughed. “What?”

“Let's get Taco Bell. It's 2 AM. They're open until four.”

We walked down the empty street, hand-in-hand.

“After you, my lady.” He bowed and held open the door to our salvation.

We grabbed a sackful of goodies and headed back toward my apartment where we could turn on a lame sitcom and make fun of it while scarfing down some nachos. The food gave me a bit more level-headedness, and as I looked at Tim, I realized it couldn't just be me. Both of us were different this time.

The laughs, the fun, the easiness continued until our heads nodded down as we sat on the couch. He stretched out and pulled me alongside him, both of us still wearing our shoes. I eased into a comfortable sleep even though we were crushed together on my small, beat up couch.

Sometime in the night, I was awakened by a soft kiss pressed on

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the top of my head.

He was completely passed out and revealed who he truly was, not just a fun party-boy, but a sweet, loving guy who I connected with. I'd been myself, nothing held back, and he enjoyed it and wanted to be around me. I snuggled in closer, knowing that this time it was for real.



### Tim

Our first date was a strike out, but luckily we were able to get back up to bat.

Many elements have to be just right for a baseball player to make that perfect hit. He needs to be the correct distance from the plate with a good stance. He has to hold the bat with his hands in the right place and at the correct angle. He must nail the exact motion of the swing. But most importantly, he needs to time everything exactly right.

Lots of pieces had to fall into place before Arielle and I could be together. We both needed to be in the right mindset and ready for the other person. During our "second first date," everything lined up, stance, swing, and of course, timing. We were ready, and this time, we hit it out of the park.

Learn more about Tim and Arielle and see pictures at [www.orangeblossombooks.com](http://www.orangeblossombooks.com)