

Angus Bethune's moment by Chris Crutcher (adapted)

In an American high school, the popular kids always seem to have the most fun. The coolest boys get the prettiest girls. Angus Bethune is not one of the popular kids, but tonight he gets the chance to be with the girl of his dreams.

I'm a big kid.

And my parents named me Angus.

"Angus is a cow," I said to my mother. "You named me after a cow."

"Your father's uncle was named Angus," she said.

"So my father's uncle was named after a cow too," I said. "What did *he* think of that?"

"Actually," Mom said, "I think he was kind of proud. Angus was a farmer, you know."

"Jesus help me," I said, and went to my room.

As Angus, the fat kid, I have my problems, although it isn't as bad as it sounds. I am very, very quick for a fat kid, and I have great reflexes. When I play football, no one can lose me. And I'm smart and get good grades. But I'd be happy to swap reflexes and good grades for a little beauty.

And that brings me to tonight. Tonight is a big night. See, I was elected Winter Ball King. That means I will be out on the dance floor of Lake Michigan High School with Melissa Lefevre, the girl of my dreams - and only my dreams. She was elected Winter Ball Queen. For a minute we'll be out there alone. Alone with Melissa Lefevre.

Now I don't know how I was elected. I can't even imagine. I mean, it's a joke, I know that. And a good one. More than half the kids at my school voted for me and I don't know why.

The problem is that tonight I have to dance with Melissa. I can't dance.

I fell in love with Melissa in kindergarten. She was a tan, blond girl with long legs and brown eyes that made you ache.

I've never even talked to her. Until tonight. Tonight I'll *have* to talk to her.

All I want is my moment with her.

What can Melissa be thinking? She's probably telling herself that it's like a trip to the dentist. He's going to hurt you, but in an hour, you'll walk out of there. And you'll still be alive.

Of course, Melissa hasn't seen me dance.

Heads turn as I walk into the gym. I try to look cool and sit down at the nearest empty table.

I see Melissa on the dance floor with her boyfriend - a real jerk, Rick Sanford - and I hear the announcement: the King and Queen have to be behind the stage in five minutes.

I'm sweating. I want my moment.

I get up and start walking to the stage when I see Melissa on her boyfriend's arm. They're walking toward me through the crowd on the dance floor. As they get closer, I want to run. What am I doing

here? What was I thinking?

They stand in front of me. "Angus, my man," Rick slurs, and I can see he's drunk. "I'm giving you this pretty thing for a few minutes. So she can compare." Melissa drops his arm and smiles. "Don't listen to him. He's drunk. And rude."

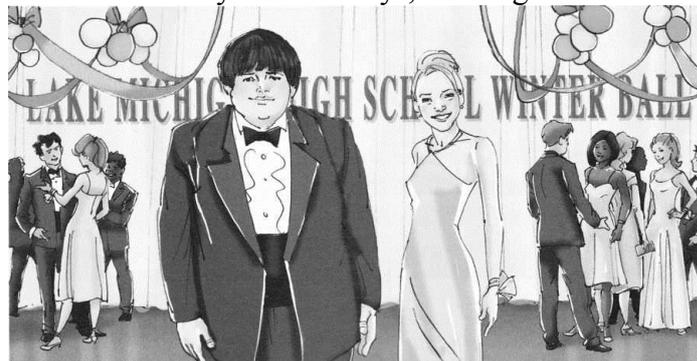
Then she says, "Why don't we go?"

"Yeah," Rick says, "why don't you go, snowball king?"

Melissa whispers, "Shut up. I'm warning you, Rick. Shut up."

"Have fun," Rick says to me. "Your election cost me a lot of money. And don't put your big fat hands on my girl."

Melissa takes my arm and says, "Let's go."



At the side door to the stage I say, "By the way, there's something you should know."

She waits.

"I can't dance."

Melissa smiles. "We'll survive," she says. We're almost ready to start. "What did he mean, my election cost him a lot of money?" I whisper.

"Never mind. He's rich, and he's rude," she says. "I'm embarrassed I'm with him." She pauses and puts her arm in mine. "I'm *not* with him."

The curtains open and the trumpets play. We get our crowns. I feel stupid. King Angus the Fat.

Melissa says, "I chose a slow song. We don't have to move much. Dance close to me. When you feel me move, you move. And don't listen to the music. Just follow."

She takes my arm and we go down the stairs to the dance floor. She smiles, then pulls me close. She says, "Be my shadow."

A part of me goes to heaven. In my wildest dreams I never imagined that Melissa Lefevre would be nice to me in my moment. She whispers, "Relax," into my ear, and I follow her.

"Angus?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you ever get tired of who you are?"

I pull back a second, then pull close again. "Do you know who you're talking to?"



I feel her smile. "Yeah," she says, "I thought so. I know it's not the same, but it's not always so great to look like I do. I pay too."

She's right. I think it's not the same.

"I'm bulimic. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes, I know what that is. It means when you eat too much, you throw up so you don't look like me."

"Close enough. Don't worry, I'm in therapy for it," she says. "A lot of pretty girls are."

"Actually," I say, "I even tried it once, but when I put my finger down my throat, I was still hungry and I almost ate my arm."

Melissa laughs and holds me tighter. "You're the only person I've ever told. I just wanted you to know things aren't always as they seem. Would you do me a favor?"

"Yes."

"Would you leave with me?"

"You mean leave this dance? Leave this dance with you?" I feel her nod.

The music ends; all dancers stop and clap politely. "I want to dance one more," Melissa says. "A fast one."

"I'll wait over by the table."

"No. I want to dance it with you."

"You don't understand," I say. "When I dance rock and roll, people across the country feel earthquakes."

She takes my hand. "Listen. Do what you do on the football field. Don't listen to the music; just follow me the way you follow the guy from the other team."

I try to protest, but then the band starts to play "Bad Moon Rising", and the dance floor is full. Melissa pushes me back, and I watch her body the way I would watch another player on the football field. I'm like a mirror and move with her, from top to bottom. Soon lots of kids are watching us; I'm in a circle of kids, and they're cheering. I'm Angus Bethune, Fat Man Extraordinaire, in the spotlight with Melissa Lefevre.



When the band finishes, everyone is clapping, even Melissa. I tell God he can take me now.

"You bitch!" Rick shouts. "You practiced with this fatty. You've been dancing together. You bitch. You wanted to make me look stupid." He turns to me. "I'm gonna kill you, fat boy," he says. He's looking at my fist.

I say, "Don't even think it. After dancing, fighting is what I do best."

Working with the text Understanding the story

Are these sentences true or false? Explain.

- 1 Angus thinks it was a joke that he was elected Winter Ball King.
- 2 Angus is worried about the ball because he doesn't like Melissa.
- 3 Melissa understands Angus because she has problems too.
- 4 Angus is OK on the dance floor because he and Melissa had practised.

The story

a) What is the story about? Write one sentence about each of the following

- 1 the characters (the people in the story)
- 2 the scene (where the story takes place)

The story takes place in ...

- 3 the time (when the story takes place)
- 4 the plot (what happens)

Melissa and Angus

- a) Were you surprised by the way Melissa acted towards Angus? Why (not)?
- b) Why do you think Melissa told Angus that she's bulimic?