

## Courtney Cox

### Let's Get Textual

When I was 16 years old, there was no bigger dilemma than finding a date to the annual Homecoming dance. At the time I saw myself as a scrawny, insecure band geek who had not yet mastered the art of flirting, so of course my prospects did not look good. While most of my friends danced the night away with their knights in shining braces, I often spent the evenings watching from against the wall, jealously waiting for my life to begin.

I clung to my hopes of attracting attention as the school year began and the date of the dance crept closer and closer. While I shopped for the perfect dress, couples began to form and with each day that passed my chances for companionship began to dwindle. Although it was technically socially acceptable to attend the Homecoming dance without a date, in my group of friends it was a bit taboo because almost everyone tended to pair off. I could almost hear the whispers behind my back, gossiping about how I was the perpetual third wheel, never able to find anyone desperate enough to take me. My busy schedule kept me distracted from this inconvenient truth, but in the back of my mind I made plans to buy a corsage of my own.

On one particular morning, I remember stumbling into school wearing sweatpants and no make-up after losing yet another epic battle between the demands of junior year coursework and going to sleep at a decent hour. This morning began like most others that year, with an overabundance of stress and general apathy towards my daily routines as I walked from class to class. Regardless of my hopes of standing out, I felt like a wallflower, invisible and insignificant in a sea of beauty and confidence. Aside from the slight buzz of excitement about the dance, this day was just as boring and repetitive as all the ones before. I returned home that night expecting nothing out of the ordinary but right as I settled in my room, ready for a soul-wrenching session of homework, I heard my phone vibrate from across the bed.

As I checked my messages, I saw a text from my slightly annoying friend Matt. He was a serial texter, and being the grammar Nazi that I am, his inattention to the rules of the English language never failed to irk me. I

spent a moment guessing at what he wanted, suspecting questions about our AP Stats homework, or an infuriating mass text ‘Hey’. To my horror, I looked down at my phone and saw what I least expected, “Do u wanna go to homecoming w me”

I couldn’t believe this... I was just asked out by a boy for the first time in my life via text message, and to top it all off, he didn’t even bother to add a question mark at the end! This moment should have been one I cherished, one worth calling my friends over. Instead, all I could think of was my anger towards the illiterate youth of America and the lack of chivalry that surrounded me. After I let my emotions simmer, I attempted to analyze this situation rationally. Matt, foolish and immature as he was, had just asked me out on a date. My mind went into overdrive. How was I supposed to tell him no? What if he never spoke to me again? In my desperation I typed out the most cliché rejection possible, “Thanks for asking me, but I really value you as a friend. I’m afraid that if we went to Homecoming together it might mess up our great relationship. :)”

As an extremely tightly wound individual, I remained in panic mode even after Matt answered my text, appearing not to be all too overwrought by my sugarcoated rejection. “K. Do you know if Kara has a date yet” My pulse began to slow just as my phone went off for the second time. I recognized the number as Jonathon’s, a good friend I’d known for years. Jon was the perfect mama’s boy. At sixteen, he still wore the clothes his mother picked out before she tucked him into bed. Despite the earlier text from Matt, I couldn’t believe my eyes when I read, “I’m so sorry that I couldn’t do this in person...I just really care about you, and I want to go to Homecoming together. I’ve liked you for so long and I couldn’t wait any longer to share with you how I feel.”

Suddenly I was forced to question all our years of friendship. For me, there had never been anything more than simple companionship, but looking back, I could understand how Jon could have thought we were evolving into something more. My mind flashed to an incident the month before when Jonathon showed up to a musical I was performing in, one which no one else bothered to attend. This show was very important to me because it was my first in this exclusive theatre group, so of course I was overjoyed as he handed me roses after the curtain call. As sweet as he was, and as comfortable as I felt when I was with him, I knew that our relationship could never move past

friendship. I stared at the phone completely torn.

“Court, I’m sweating bullets here...” he texted, as the minutes clocked by. Jonathon would be a beyond gracious and respectful date, but I knew that after all he had done for me, I owed him the chance to find someone who was legitimately interested in him. Telling this boy who meant so much to me that I was rejecting his offer remains one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. After all, Jonathan would have let me dress him exactly how I chose for the night and knew precisely how and when to use a question mark.

I was so surprised by these two offers that when my phone went off for a third time, the last thought in my mind would have been to suspect another suitor was about to swoop down in an attempt to knock me off my feet. This time the name Jansen flashed across my screen. I rolled my eyes, wishing he would simply leave me alone. Long, greasy hair framed his unintelligent, lazy eyes, which were always peering out at me as if he were a rabid rodent and I his next prey. I sighed, attempting to shake the sinking feelings that overtook my body whenever I thought about Jansen.

“Homecoming?”

“Yes, Jansen, Homecoming is in fact a real event.”

“But do you want to go?”

“Yes.”

“With me?”

“Sorry, I can’t.”

A girl can only take so much. My life had evolved into a sitcom right before my eyes, and frankly, I just wanted to change the channel. Nothing in my power could appease the awkwardness and shame I felt the next day when I had to face the reality of my actions without the buffer of technology. Three years later, I can still remember each emotion I felt on that fateful evening of my first romantic encounters. I remain flabbergasted that in a matter of hours I went from invisible to one of the most sought-after bachelorettes in all of Glenwood High School. My cynicism towards the role of technology in relationships remains for one simple reason: I have yet to be asked out without the aid of a text message.