

From Alex.

Writer's Choice--Song:

*I was 5 and he was 6
We rode on horses made of sticks
He wore black and I wore white
He would always win the fight*

Everyone wanted to be Jack. Cool, had all the girls, teachers were afraid of him... all at an age where girls had cooties and teachers were role models. God, even I wanted to be Jack. Jack was the original, the coolest, perfect in every way. And he certainly had no time for a little kid like me tagging along behind him.

When he could not just brush me off and my hero-crush on him was apparent, he took to getting me to fight with him while his lackeys watched. Little fights, to prove he was still the original, still the coolest, and always the most powerful. Everyone wanted to be Jack, and if it meant being near him, I could take a few hits.

*Seasons came and changed the time
When I grew up, I called him mine
He would always laugh and say
"Remember how we used to play?"*

Elementary school does not last as long as it feels. Everyone grows up, gets new friends, and the biggest bully tends to mellow. Jack was not like that. He grew up, yes. But that never changed the fact that he was still the prototype. Everyone wanted to be like Jack... or with him. Imagine growing up and getting these strange feelings about the one and only Jack, from whom you had taken more punches from than you would ever admit.

"I know you keep watching me, Alex," he said to me one night on the bleachers outside of school, breath sharp with alcohol and fogging up the night above his head with smoke. I choked, said I had not, and I would break anyone who said otherwise. "Liar," he laughed, and smashed his lips against mine in a quick kiss. "Queer," a breath later.

*Music played and people sang
Just for me the church bells rang*

I stopped going to school. I moved away and away until the memory of him was forgotten.

*Now he's gone, I don't know why
And till this day, sometimes I cry
He didn't even say goodbye
He didn't take the time to lie*

Even after years apart, my grandmother, my Baba, feels the need to update me on all of my old friends and classmates, as far back as pre-school. I only listen to make her happy, because I do

not really care anymore about Adele, who I played with in diapers, and how she is having her third child in as many years. Or Scott, who used to shovel paths with me years ago, and how he has finally proposed to that nice girl he has been dating since high school. It is so far away now, I do not mind missing out on their little developments.

“Do you remember that Jack boy you were so fond of in elementary school?” She did not skip a beat, or pause for an answer she knew she was not going to receive. “Poor boy. He was killed yesterday.”

Bang bang, he shot me down
Bang bang, I hit the ground
Bang bang, that awful sound
Bang bang, my baby shot me down.

I looked it up online, a few days later, to see if it was true. Jack Picksie, aged 20, my old friend and bully, was shot in a convenience store robbery. Witnesses said he was crazy, waving his gun around wildly as he was snatching the cash. His family said he had not been the same for quite some time, and that they wished it had never gotten that far.

When I called his mother to offer my condolences, she told me that he had always said Alex Anakerov was the only one to keep him on the straight and narrow.