

First Place Prose – High School

Dancing Under the Stars

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Every stage of the day had its own magic. And I loved every one of them; the misty sunrise mornings; the golden tinted afternoons; the orange soaked sunset hours.

But the night was made for me. It was everything in my heart. Flying down the freeway with the windows rolled down. Smearred car headlights and reflections streaming in endless waves. Wind whipping at my hair, my hand stuck out the window dancing in the dark with a mind of its own. The radio pouring out lyrics perfect to scream along to: Come on world! Here I am! Bright stars pinned to the black sky, a snow globe full of diamond shards. The moon a comforting glow to light the spindly trees. Gas station neon lights blinking and sputtering like dying fireflies. Empty parking lots and abandoned parks - constant, unchangeable places unaffected by time.

My revelations always seemed to come at night, sweeping in like they had been waiting for the sun to set and me to lower my defenses. My revelations were usually unfamiliar, unwelcome thoughts during the daylight hours, but with the night came a different me: one more open and fearless. One night in particular I was feeling especially open and fearless; the stars were burning with a vengeance and the sky had cleared just for me. Despite my revelation's usual tendency to arrive when I was alone, I was not. My best friend was in my company.

We laid side by side on the cold pavement of my driveway, basking in the silver moonlight and talking aimlessly. The thing I think I loved the most about us was our absolute appreciation for each other's company. Whether we were interacting or simply sitting in the general vicinity of one another, we were content. There was something untouchable about finding complete comfort in another person who was not a member of your family. We found each other through what was surely random coincidence and yet we had decided that we loved each other unconditionally.

My face was tired from smiling (as it regularly was when we were together) and my eyelids were heavy. Our laughter petered out and we took in the night. The bugs were loud in their last hurrah before winter came to silence them. The air was frost bitten as it tugged at the sleeves of my sweatshirt, but my friend and I sat so close that our own individual heat warded the other's coldness away.

I sighed and spoke softly, "I wish every night could be like this." I could hear the wanting in my voice as clearly as I'm sure she could see it on my face. She tilted her head towards me and looked at me with eyes painted in washed out blue and silver watercolors. Her light hair resting on her gray sweater reminded me of a duckling's soft downy feathering.

“But then what would make tonight special?”

I waited a moment before responding, “What makes an ordinarily extraordinary night extra extraordinary?”

She shifted and laid her head on my shoulder, “Champagne. Velvet. Chocolates.” Her eyes fluttered closed and she loosed a breath that rolled away like the smoke from a wizard’s pipe.

My turn. “Music. Chandeliers. Extra cheesy pizza.” She smiled with her nose scrunched up in a way that meant she loved us.

“And dancing,” she added. I inhaled the night in all of its cold bewitching glory.

“Why don’t we.” It wasn’t so much a question as it was a suggestion. She scrunched her nose up again and smiled.

“You’re a dork.” Which meant yes.

I hopped up and held my hand out towards her. Looking down at her I was struck with something like sadness. A sort of sadness that came from loving something so much that you thought your heart might just collapse in on itself like a dying star, beautiful in its destruction.

She slid her hand into mine and hauled herself up and onto her feet in a single fluid motion. As she moved closer I could hear the crickets chirping in rhythm with the wind’s whistling and the creatures that only crept out at night all shuffling and picking their way through the leaves and trees. It was comforting to know that there were other living things out on an evening this magical.

Even the air had a sound: anticipation. Like it was holding its breath. She locked her fingers around my neck and I settled my hands on her waist. I smiled in a way that I knew was endearingly crooked; it had taken years to perfect this particular smile. She smiled in a way that was endearingly dreamy; it had taken years to perfect this particular smile.

We swayed harmoniously to the beat of our hearts. My nose was turning numb and her cheeks were rosy from the cold, but we stayed.

We stayed and we danced.

We couldn’t be bothered with the cold because we were too busy finding our own music and its lyrics.

My revelation didn’t come in a well-structured, gramitaculary accurate, nicely phrased sentence. It came as an ever expanding feeling. And even the word feeling can’t quite describe it properly. It was like trying to cup slick opalescent oil in your hands even though you knew it would soon drip from your fingertips. The feeling was huge and fast. It was racing out of my mind as swiftly as it had entered. I desperately scrambled for the idea, trying to grab a fistful of it before it disappeared entirely.

The feeling that we were big and powerful and hungry. Queens of the vast and insurmountable world, and we were going to swallow it whole.

I tightly gripped that little handful of the feeling I had managed to seize, and I tucked it away.

Away into my heart where I could see it coiling around my soul. Keeping it safe and feeding it inspiration.

We danced under the stars and I felt infinite.