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On Dancing Ballerina Bears

by Michelle Mostaed

The summer I was going into eighth grade, I helped my younger sister paint her room. She had developed a fascination with surfing, though we lived in southwest, Ohio. Aqua blue paint coated over her childhood sage walls and blanketed on top of the border of dancing ballerina bears that wore tutus and waved wands. The bears had been cut out of wrapping paper by my mother, attempting to make use of her practical resources. They were placed mid wall so that they danced clear around the four corners of her corner bedroom in our two-story home. The four walls that were once decorated with my mother's taste were now being brushed and slathered with wave colors, the far left wall striped and edged with tangerine tango, gecko green, pomegranate pink and stark white to help offset the bold stripes.

Instead of dancing bears, posters of surfers taking on 30 ft waves hung in their place. Instead of the frilly tutus and wands, "surfer girl crossing" and a large yellow sign that read "Pray for surf," was arranged over her bed. Tiki lights, skin boards, palm tree figures, and a blocks of colorful letters poised on her dresser that spelled R-E-L-A-X. My sister had a vibrant eye for color. I remember standing there with globs of blue paint clinging to my brush as I admired her taste. I secretly wished I had the same boldness to change my soft lavender walls to something as equally electric.

After the final touches, we laid on her hot pink sheets, overwhelmed with the magnificence of color that surrounded us. I noticed the dabs of blue on the rich brown woodwork that had seeped through our hurried tape job as we were eager to get started. Smudges of pink that tickled the ceiling and lavished green all over our arms and legs that lingered after a paint war. But what I hadn't noticed that day, which took me years to notice, was the faint outline of covered up ballerina bears. Their outlines still danced around the four walls of her room, reminding me of what used to be underneath the surface.

Rarely in the years that followed had I layed on her bed again like that day when our job was done and examined the work we did; after a while the new became common and ordinary. Sure I was in there often, to visit, share stories and laughs, to borrow clothes to wear out with friends, and as we grew older-to borrow halter tops and cute dresses to wear out on dates. I was in there frequently to take back my clothes she left on her floor; being the same size had its perks and down sides. I often joked that the hurricane from the surf blew in and caused the crazy torrent of a mess she called a room. Organization was not her strong point like mine and I found myself even cleaning her room for her on occasion as if the space were mine- frustratingly emptying the trash, separating whites and colors into two hampers, organizing papers into piles, and discarding expired coupons that filled empty shopping bags unnecessarily kept in the corner.

When my brother moved out for college, her room and bed became a closet and she drifted out into the sea to sleep in his bed at nights. It wasn't long before we floated our separate directions too- friends, parties, and drinking entangled her like seaweed and the bond we once shared didn't seem to break past the glassy surface. Instead of writing songs and playing school together, she attended football games and Euchre parties. Instead roller skating around our unfinished basement she played beer pong, went clubbing. No longer was I removing makeup smudges or coffee drips from

my clothes, but I was scrubbing out beer and spiced rum. When my parents told her she couldn't go out, she did it anyway, fighting all the way out the door. I remember when the door shut- my dad sat on the living room couch, TV going on mute, staring hard at the thread on the carpet, disappointment billowed in his brown eyes . My mom came up the stairs and into my room, furiously venting about the differences in parenting styles. I listened with only one ear as I folded clothes-the thoughts frustrated me. She wore down my parents until their efforts to barricade her in became useless and they stilled from standing between her and the door or hiding her car keys, my mom faded out to the living room couch alongside my father, neither of them with answers.

For some reason, I never had the words to tell her how much I hated what she was doing, how much I missed her. When I left for college, her partying grew like the tide. I remember the call I got from my mom one Fall Friday night. The law had finally caught up with her underage drinking. She and a friend were taken to jail right in the middle her high school football game in our small town. At trial later that month, the judge ruled that if she were ever caught drinking under age again, she would automatically be penalized with 6 months of jail time, no re-trial.

Though she met with a probation officer once a month, it did not seem to rearrange her social itinerary. This caused my parents force to pick up like the winds before a storm as she continued to go to parties. And once again my mom and dad were offsetting plans she had made, even calling her friends to tell them to stop bothering her. None of it held steady and before long, my parents found themselves lost out at sea in the same boat from years earlier. My dad got a call from a police officer. "Your daughter was driving and I pulled her over, she has a 30 pack of beer, she says it's yours. Is this true?"

"Yes," my dad replies, "yes, it's mine."

On my weekend home for college, I lay in my bed; she came in my room to borrow a pair of sweatpants. "Don't you get hot in those?" I couldn't imagine sleeping in long pants all night.

"Not really." She slipped on the black fitted sweats and looked at her reflection in my pink full length mirror. I watched her roll the bottom of the pants up on each leg.

"Want to sleep with me?" I asked as she turned to lean down and hug me good night.

"Really!?"

Her response surprised me- and for a moment I felt regret, that her drifting was my fault, that if I would have just spent more time with her, things would be different.

"Yea with Mr. snuggles." I laughed and pulled forward the yellow teddy bear she had bought for me as a make-up present in Jr. High after a fight we had.

"Ok, let me make a phone call!" She said

I could hear her voice on the end of the line downstairs-frustrated, unable to convince. Naturally, I had assumed she was getting dressed to sleep in my brother's room that night, but I could hear how she had made plans to watch a movie with a friend, probably spend the night somewhere adrift. I should have realized she was going somewhere, this was the time of night she usually went out anyway, her makeup was fresh, and her long, black hair was down and straightened. I remember how I darkened it for her the month before, covering up her brown roots, so that it was as dark as mine.

I could tell the phone call had ended, she walked up the stairs and halfway to my room, she paused mid hall and her body was tilted toward the stairs ready to leave again, "sorry, I have to go," she with slight hesitation.

Then she left.

I lay awake; I wonder if one day she'll wash up on the shore of what she use to be and we'll go back to some sweet version of the past or if she will keep treading where she is. My sleeping dreams part me from my everyday world, but in the morning, nothing has changed, and she has still not come home yet. I find myself not asking questions, not visiting her facebook profile, not cleaning her room for fear of what I'll find. Last month she used my eye shadow brush and left it in her makeup case in her purse. When I needed it back, instead of rummaging through her purse to get it, I left it there and used my finger-blending the gold into the corner of my eye with my pinky.

Somehow, if I don't know what's dancing underneath her surface, it's as if it doesn't exist. I ignore what she keeps faintly seen. Rarely do I let my hands graze over the walls of her life and accidentally feel the ridges of what is hidden underneath her surface. My chosen naiveté cradles me in its boat, rocking me to sleep at night as I drift into the nostalgia of my once world.

Michelle Mostaed has been previously published in SNReview. She is a recent graduate of Cedarville University in Southwest, Ohio with a Bachelors degree in Comprehensive Communications and minor in Creative Writing. Though she is currently in Real Estate, she writes in her free time and her future plans include studying creative writing and receiving her MFA so she may pursue teaching at the collegiate level. .

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