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## Musings

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# Musings

Alex Watson

It was the final dance of the final year of the beginning of John's life. After wringing his hands and agonizing for almost a week, he had struck up the courage to ask a certain girl he knew, a beautiful muse with whom he had a nascent friendship, to a dance.

She accepted.

The dance itself was a study in ecstasy. John donned the finest tuxedo he could afford, the girl wore an alluring peach dress, and together they danced the night away in the company of each other and friends.

After the last dance number had worn down, after goodbyes had been said, and after the last light at the Eagle's Crown restaurant went out, John drove his date home.

Her house was a modest two-story affair, with a simple brick porch and a well-kept lawn. John escorted her across the damp grass, and led her up to the front door.

John stood there for a moment, indecisive. Passions and inhibitions flooded his mind. *Do it . . .* he told himself. *Kiss her . . . you'll never get another chance!*

"I had a great time," he said.

"Me too." Her face was perfectly neutral—John couldn't see a hint of what she was thinking.

His heart leapt into his throat. *No, I can't. I don't know if she's ready. I don't know if she wants to . . . I just can't!*

"Well, I'll see you, uh . . . later." John said. He regretted the clumsy phrase as soon as it left his mouth.

She smiled. "Yeah. I'll see you around. Have a good night." With a flutter of amber fabric and a click of dress shoes against brick, she was gone.

*Later? Later? How could you . . . how could you do*

*something so stupid?* John thought as he walked away. The utter ridiculousness of what he'd said followed him to the car, like a lingering ghost of the moment that could have been. It trailed him back home, through his mother's inane questions about the night's events, and hovered around his head as he lay, sleepless, on his bed.

Involuntarily, he began to go over the night's terrible scene in his mind, analyzing every aspect of his failure. If only he'd had something to say. If only he'd had the courage to *do* something. If only . . . if only . . . if only.

John thought long and hard, as if hoping that by sheer force of will he could project himself back to that moment, and get it right.

"W-would you mind if I came in?" John said.

"Uh, sure. Why not?" she answered, but her odd expression instantly told John that he'd slipped up. He spent the rest of the evening there, chatting with her parents and playing cards with her father. Yet he was all too conscious of the sideways glances, the furtive whispers, and the uneasiness in the air. When he felt he'd completely overstayed his welcome, John excused himself and slunk away.

*No, not like that.*

John looked into her eyes. "What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and you are the sun. Such beauty is the envy of the heavens."

Her face twisted. "What? What the heck are you *talking* about?"

"Well, I . . . Uh, I was trying to . . . uh . . ."

She gave a disgusted snort. "I can see *that*. Good night!" Before John could make another move, the door had slammed.

No.

John reached out with his hand, and brushed a strand of hair from her face. "You look beautiful in the moonlight." he said. Before she could reply, he quickly bent forward and kissed her lightly on the cheek, savoring the smooth satin of her skin.

She angrily pushed him away. "What are you *doing*?"

As John stammered for a reply, she slapped him across the face, turned on her heel, and walked into the house.

*Not that way.*

John turned to her. "I'm not tired. Are you tired?"

She shook her head. "Not really, I guess."

"Great! Let's go out and do something else. I know a restaurant that's open all night—and they have pool, too!"

A confused look crossed her face. ". . . what?"

"Let's go and have some fun! The night is young!"

"Uhhh . . . no thanks. I . . . I don't want to get my dress dirty." she said.

John wasn't taking 'no' for an answer. "Why not? You'll never wear it again."

"I really just think I should go now." she said firmly. "It's too late to do anything."

*Is it?* John thought.

"Okay, then. Uh . . . umm . . ." *Not again. Don't say it again!!*

". . . later."

*That's not it.*

"What's wrong? Why are you crying?"

To be honest, John didn't really know himself. "I don't know what to do. I love you so much, yet nothing I do seems to work out right. I can't even . . . even . . ."

"You what?"

John choked his words out between involuntary sobs.

"I love you! Don't you have a clue where I'm coming from?"

Why do you think I asked you out tonight?"

"Because we were getting to be friends, I guess." She didn't look angry when she spoke, just slightly concerned and confused.

"Maybe we were. But not now. Think about it: I bet once school is over we'll never see each other again."

"What does that have to do with it?" she asked.

"I don't even know. Maybe it means that I can't bear to be without you."

She shook her head. "John, you're cracking up. Come on in, and I'll call your parents to come and pick you up."

John only sniffed in reply. *What an utter loser I am.* he thought.

But he followed her inside, and was attended to by her mother until his parents, worried into a frenzy, arrived.

*That can't be it.*

John sat down on the swinging bench with a creak.

"Wait a second."

She turned around. "What?"

"I need to ask you something."

Somewhat apprehensively, she walked over to him.

"What?"

"I've known you for some time, and I consider you to be one of my truest friends." John said. "But there's something more. I'm in love with you, and I have been ever since I saw you. But . . . I saw that look in your eyes all night. Not unfriendly, or disgusted. You just looked sort of . . . distant. It's not going to happen, is it? There isn't anything between us, is there? I just need you to tell me, honestly."

She sighed, and sat down next to him. "Well . . . no. There isn't." she said quietly. "You're a sweet guy, but . . . no, there's nothing there." Her voice was tinged with sympathy and regret. "I almost wish there was."

John looked over at her. The bright, silvery moonlight lit up her face and hair from behind, like a kind of celestial backlight. She was as radiantly beautiful as he had ever seen her. "And there never can be." he said ruefully. She only nodded, slowly.

"We've know each other for a while." John said at length. "And it occurs to me that we're not going to see each other much anymore. After tonight, there's just two weeks of school left, zand then summer jobs, and then college. This may well be the last time we can really talk. I'd like to end our friendship on a high note."

She cocked her head. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Have you ever kissed before?" John asked.

She nodded.

"Well, I haven't. So, will you do me a favor? For just a moment, pretend that you've never kissed anyone before. Pretend that we're in love, and that we'll never see each other again." John gently put his hand on her shoulder, and drew her toward him. She didn't resist, didn't cry out. She simply closed her eyes and gave a little half smile.

They kissed. Not a short, impersonal peck on the cheek. Not a vulgar, lingering wrestling match between tongues. Not even the passionate culmination of a wedding vow. Just the simple, pure essence of physical contact. They lingered there for what felt like an eternity, locked in a tight, personal embrace—the most perfect, innocent, and pure expression of love that the cosmos had ever seen. Perhaps because it never really happened at all.

Yes . . .

That was the evening John preferred to remember, the one he described to his children years later. He never really talked to that girl again, but he heard second-hand of her happy marriage. John knew that his cherished memory was a fantasy, but he clung to it nonetheless; an inner monument to mistakes made, painful lessons learned, and redemption.