

Live

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The thick air bore a tempting scent, a mixture of sweat with cigarettes and branded perfumes. Her skin tingled as strangers brushed past her. Unaware of him who had a good hold on her, she swayed to the beat, her heart thumping in sync with the music. The dazzling disco lights blurred her vision, beads of sweat trickled down her tanned forehead before she felt someone grasp her wrist. She had not the slightest idea of who it was but she did not care. She was going to live tonight.

She had every right to rebel. They had presented her with a million reasons for why she should. They had made her realise how faint-hearted she had been all along, how her silence had swallowed her whole, how she was insignificant and a nobody. They set her heart ablaze with passion for they decided she had to live. The faint smell of scorched muscles did reach her nostrils, but she decided she had to live.

It was never easy watching a woman as strong as her mother break down in front of her, bawl her eyes out and curse her fate to have given birth to such a demon. She just stood there, cold and numb, and took solace in silence once again. Her big, glossy eyes were as frightened as they had been the day her mother held her wrist and walked out of their old house together, leaving their father, to start a new life. Her vocal chords were clogged with confusion and guilt. She had only decided to live.

With every tear drop she shed, she made a promise to get back to her old self again. She was not the demon her mother said she was. She really was a good girl, who got good grades, and had good morals that could potentially catapult her to the pinnacle of success. She promised to shed the cloak of pretence that had weighed down on her for too long, and turn over a new leaf. But they managed to creep back into her veins again. Their cumulative whispers were too loud in front of her mother's faint cries. The goodness in her remained cage, and she decided she had to live.

That she would regret her deeds the next morning was no doubt to her. The bags under her eyes would be too heavy, and she would writhe in pain and drown in self-loathing for the next few days. But the scars would eventually fade, guilty tears would soon dry and she would find herself back here, walking hand in hand towards a perilous darkness with a stranger, for the umpteenth time. The booming music slowly died down in the background. The lyrics echoed inside her hollow skull,

"Toy-like people make me boy-like

Toy-like people make me boy-like."

This was what she had always feared. She feared the unknown but this was all she wanted tonight. She wanted to live.



The Last Dance

ARMAN R. KHAN

I look into Suha's eyes as we hold each other close. Unadulterated affection shines in her dark olive eyes. A warmth rises somewhere within me. Such a beautiful person she is, inside and out. So simple and young and naïve, oh dear.

We were there that night, you and I, embracing, sharing breath, gazing into each other's eyes as the music went on... bringing us that much closer. I peered into your eyes, trying to find a clue. But you gave nothing away that night, swaying in my arms to the songs the band was playing. Surrounded by a sea of bright eyes of young lovers, we included, we swayed in almost stillness. All that mattered to me, though, was that you were there, in flesh and in spirit, in my arms.

Goosebumps. Racing hearts. Quickening breath. Every last bit of my being wanted you, and you alone. Electricity coursing through my nerves, lost for words, I leaned in. Your hair smelled like a concoction of strawberries and that earthy smell after the first rains of the season. That sweet yet overpoweringly delicious aroma of Davidoff Echo rose from your collar bone, and mixed with the concoction of your hair, drove me into a fine frenzy. More goosebumps. Drumming hearts.

The spark of the moment was uncanny. Swallowing hard, I let the moment engulf me. That night, nothing mattered, as long as you were there and I was there. No sound. Skipped heartbeats. Lost.

Just lost.

The final bright sparks of a dying flame.

Why did we have to wake up? Why couldn't we just be in that moment, forever and ever? I was at the height of my existence; but you didn't let the dream finish. Halfway through it, you shook me awake. Startled, I looked around. No music. No dancing. No *you*. I felt like a child again, unwillingly having to wake up for school, crying and complaining to go back to sleep. To dreams.

"You look lost," Suha says, pulling me back from my reverie; genuine concern in her eyes.

"I am lost." Though true, I decide not to tell her where I had been lost.

I like Suha. I do, really. But this isn't the first time that I plummeted back into my memories when with her; I am with her in flesh, but with you in spirit.

That warmth inside my chest? I try to convince myself every time that it's for her. Yet, I know it isn't. It's for what I had all those years back, what I long for. It's for you.

And things will never be the same for me with her, or with anybody else, for I still am hungover on your potion, longing to be drunk on you again, over and over.

*"So I'm never gonna dance again,
The way I danced with you."*