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678 Words

THE GRAVEYARD

BY MELODI CODA LAINE

It's a quiet road, this one. Never seen no one this time of night, not walkin' nor drivin', so I ask 'im why he's up so late, why he's out walkin' this here road. He says nothin' for a while. Just keeps his eyes lookin' forward, his steps steady. "Ya lost? I can help ya get home." He knows where he's goin', he says, so I shut my mouth, figure now if he wants to talk, he'll talk.

I look to 'im and can't help but to feel a bit of hatred. Feel like he's stealin' my time from me. My time for peace, silence, reflection. My time when I get to be a part of the night, same as the owls and the moths, leavin' behind only the sound of my soles against the dirt and the print that comes from each step. But now the squash and crunch is doubled, out of sync. It disturbs the night. It disturbs me. I consider crossin' to the other side, but that side slopes too much.

The moon has risen from the horizon by the time he speaks. He asks me 'bout my bein' out here so late. I tell 'im I'm visitin' my mother. He asks me 'bout her and I explain to 'im that she's dead but is always waitin' for me anytime I feel like visitin'. Almost every night, it seems. He informs me that he's goin' to the graveyard, too. To visit his daughter, he says. His daughter was the light of his world, but he was unaware that her providin' 'im light was drainin' her to darkness. She never could return herself from that place.

The sound of speedin' sixteen-wheelers increases as we turn onto the highway. His voice begins to shake, his breaths accelerate. My heart stops.

There's a girl on the other side of the highway. Her back to us. Perched on the railin'. Legs danglin' over. I scream. She don't turn. Her legs continue to swing back and forth, like that of a child who sits on a bench at the park on a sunny day eatin' ice cream with her dad.

One — Two — Three — Four rigs pass before I'm able to cross the highway. I introduce myself, but she don't hear me. I step closer and speak a little louder and finally she reveals her face to me. She's startled. I can see it in her wide eyes, the small crease her furrowed brows make, the slight drop of her jaw, the gasp she lets slip, the same time that she does. I wanted to ask her what her name is and how she got here and why she's here, but she's already out of view, her scream fadin' away into the sound of metal crushin' over and over, the startled screams of men and women, the sirens signalin' the arrival of police and EMTs. I see myself turn home.

He slips a sheet of paper from his back jeans pocket and sits in front of her shrine. I place my hand on the railin' to steady myself, tell 'im that I am so sorry. He assures me it's okay. That I don't need to apologize for somethin' out of my control. Tells me he's here because he's finally forgiven her. That he needed to forgive her before he died.

"I am so sorry," he reads. "I didn't know, but I understand now. I forgive you now. I hope we reunite again, and I hope you've forgiven me the next time we meet. Here's your note. I need it no longer." The two sheets go beneath the roses. He wipes his face of tears, blows his nose in his shirt. It was good to meet me, he says. Says he'll see me at the graveyard. And I want to ask 'im what he means, where he's goin', why he's decided to cut his journey short, but when I look up, there he is gettin' hit by a rig. I scream. I call 911 from the driver's phone. I turn home.