

The First Dance

My clothes fit tonight as though they aren't mine. The sleeves on my shirt are too short, my pants are avoiding the ground, and my shoes are chewing up the sides of my feet. The sun has just set, making Montgomery Public School eerie. At least I've got the familiarity of my surroundings, though. I couldn't count the number of times I've walked across this lawn, or the number of times I've climbed these steps. John lounges near the side of the school talking with Mary and Kelly. James, Earl and Steve anxiously await the arrival of Johanna, I assume. Fortunately, people I know are everywhere -- but they look better than me. My mind ponders the night about to unfold. "Hi Tina. Wanna dance?" "Not really, Lee. You're not very good looking," she will probably reply. "Maybe some other time?" "No, probably not." Mrs. Clarke, with her wide, friendly smile, greets others at the door. She's my favourite, but that's a small comfort. She won't be there pick me up when I get rejected. I pick my way up the sprawling lawn against the wishes of my protesting legs. My fingers tingle with fear, anxiety, nervousness, and unease. The sidewalk seems long and uninviting, but I'll get there. As I near the door, Mrs. Clarke smiles at me. "Have fun, Lee." I guess that's the point, but my fear makes me feel like death.

I thought I would feel better once I got inside. Past the door, though, I don't know if I've gotten better or worse. I see none of my friends. Maybe they, too, have succumbed to the raunchy, oppressive, stuffy and dark surroundings. Crepe-paper

streamers litter the hallways. Toilet paper snakes its way across from the bathrooms. My eyes slowly adjust to the poor lighting. My senses reel from the trademark of a rookie DJ: a smoke machine out of control. The chemical smoke hangs thick, dense, and heavy in the air like a battlefield. I think there is a legal limit to the amount, but the DJ doesn't. As another billow nears me, I close my mouth. I've tasted enough. I peer through the thick haze and find the crowd. They throb to the beat – many only moving to mask their insecurity. Kids hide their fear on the dance floor, trying to look like they know the moves. Jane, Shaun, Michael, and their friends are on my left. To my right are Frank, Chris, Sam, and their group. Ahead of me is another bunch: Muhammed, Scott, James and crew. Trying to revive Disco, they do all of the Classics. “The Swim,” “The Scuba,” “Forked-Fingers-Across-The-Eyes” – I've seen it all before. Every pop and chip party starts off this way. The scene reminds me of a blanket nailed at the corners. Billowing in the wind, the edges are merely rippling. Another herd of kids stand tethered to the wall. Evan, Karen, Bob -- they all want to dance, but know they can't. Instead, they settle for a muted version - a slight bob. As I make my way through it all, I see Joey. I've never liked him, but he doesn't deserve a rejection. “Hey Lee,” he says with a greasy, crooked, half-toothed smile. “You can get high from this smoke!” Joey runs off. I see him putting his head in a fresh jet. I'm not sad to see him go, but I feel sympathetic.

All of a sudden, the scene has a different quality. The oppressive billows of smoke have turned into clouds. Tina glides, slides, and floats towards me – unaware of her impact. My heart pounds, threatening to blow through my ears. It's my first dance, and

my first crush nears. I listen, as my thoughts try and convince me. “Tina sent you a Valentine.” “Who’s saying Tina didn’t do that for everyone?” “She came to your birthday!” “What if her mom made her?” “She smiles at you in the halls.” Ok, I win. I move to intercept her and catch her eyes. I manage to open my mouth and speak. “Hi Tina. Wanna dance?” Tina smiles, agrees, and we embrace.

Tina looks nervous, too.