



Something Beautiful

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and suddenly you're streaming.

Katie Toussaint

I cannot recall the exact song that kicked the adrenaline into effect. But I am with my friend Harry, and we are alternately yelling “Uh, Uh, na na, na na” into each other’s ears. We are sitting at an outdoor concert in the swing of an international arts festival. Before us on the stage, Trombone Shorty and Orleans Avenue are beating drums and congas and wailing through trombones and saxes and guitars like this is the last night on earth to make noise.

I am planted in a red plastic chair near the stage, where Harry has convinced me to sit in the wrong section with him because the view is better. I feel scandalous. But I get used to the idea once I am happily sipping red wine and watching Troy Andrews start to pump his brass instrument with his muscled ebony arms bulging from a wife-beater, his slim waist swaying and thrusting to the tune, and his smooth cheeks puffing in an awesome technique of circular breathing. Whoever said band geeks aren’t attractive—*wrong*. Clutching a flute in the woodwinds portion of ensembles throughout my academic career has finally been justified. I am busy formulating all sorts of fantasies of Troy when Harry intrudes on my space and prods me with his elbow.

“Let’s go up in front of the stage,” he says. I suddenly feel small and unwilling to make myself noticed by a swelling crowd of people I hope I have never seen in my life. God forbid someone recognizes me when I stand up.

“Give me a few minutes,” I say.

But Harry grabs my hand and drags me through our row, bumping over people’s knees and bags and into the grass aisle spreading to the stage like a path of moonlight on the sea. I push my flip-flops into the ground, rooted.

“Harry, there’s a cameraman in the aisle, I don’t think we can go up there.”

Harry continues to ignore me and pulls me toward the glints of light flashing off the instruments and speakers on stage. The photographer crouching in the middle of the aisle sees us coming, swings his camera to the side and watches us stream past.

That’s the thing about spontaneity. It starts with a flash of an idea, switches to a quick shuffle of motion, and suddenly you’re streaming. Everything becomes fluid—the blue streaks of light flowing through the Spanish

moss in the trees, the blares of spangled, metallic sound, the roiling wave of the audience, the spinning of my own self. These elements rise and crest and suddenly I’m a hip-bumping, whirling blur with arms raised and hair flying in the humid air.

Why have I been so unwilling to reach this moment? What is it that has been holding me back? It certainly hasn’t been Harry—he was yanking me forward. Nor has it been a fear of being thrown out of the concert—aside from my illicit seating arrangement, I had been doing nothing wrong and I knew it.

What it comes down to is my fear of what I think the others in the crowd might think of me. But what could I really be to them? That Sweaty Fool Dancing in Front of Everyone? That Awkward Chick Who Is Up There Grooving When No One Else Is?

Why would I ever waste my time caring? Those are just labels carved from my own self-consciousness. No one but Harry is here to see me anyway; the audience dropped cash to see the band. Jamming by the stage, I am at most a minor distraction to their own weird fantasies about Troy Andrews.

I turn my gaze from Harry’s goofy smile to Troy. His lips plush against the microphone, fingers snapping at his side. His voice tumbles a glissando up an octave.

“Can you let your worried mind move? Can you show me something beautiful?”

My whole self is moving, a self I rarely get to see. She is fluid, a nymph of impulse. She knows how to let go and turn a good time into the best time of her life. She feels beautiful because she moves. She dances for the only real reasons worth dancing for: There is someone next to her, and there is music. She has no limits.

It is a gift when someone else’s impulse sparks my own. When I can revisit or unfurl for the first time the most uninhibited side of myself. But why do I wait around to be prompted to let this other self surface? I have more power than I let myself believe. I could have charged down the aisle to the stage before Harry ever suggested it. I can set my own challenges.

The next time I have a moment to let go a little, I need to stop waiting for someone else to sing the lyrics to me. I need to say to myself: “When the world has grown dull, can you show me something beautiful? Beautiful, show me something beautiful.”

Katie Toussaint is an aspiring free spirit who will take all the help she can get before she graduates from the University of Richmond. She enjoys interpretive dance but is much too clumsy to make it a career.