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The Night You Fall in Love

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The Night You Fall in Love

There was a night a week ago when you took her to the diner. The air had just begun to nibble with winter's cold, promising to bite soon. You wanted to get into the warmth as quickly as possible, but she told you to stop in your tracks mere yards from the chrome and glass door. You obeyed your new girlfriend unquestioningly. She was spontaneous and fun and you were not quite sure what to expect. She told you to close your eyes and they slammed shut as if your eyelids were heavy garage doors she had yanked down. At first, you had hoped she would warm you with a hug, but her footsteps lead away from you and you estimated her location to be near the intersection in front of the diner when you ceased to hear her boots meet brick. The warmth of the neon lights had to do for that moment. She returned to your side and told you to open your eyes. "What's up?" you asked.

"You'll find out," she replied. You shrugged, allowing your curiosity to slide off your shoulders so you could enjoy the rest of the night.

Now, a week later, you are about to find out "what was up," but you don't know it yet. You believe you are simply out for a walk. She leads you in the general direction of the diner by a different route. The air is now taking small bites, but offers compensation by showing you the beauty of your own breath, which you can't appreciate because it is taken away by the beauty of her breath. This soft, caring, and energetic creature possesses life. She breathes and you think she breathes solely for you, but you don't deserve it. You walk under the neon lights without a thought of the mystery begun there. It is another set of lights which will act as the bulb of realization above your head. When you see all the Christmas lights in the town center, you remember. "Is this what you were looking for last week?" you inquire.

"Yup," she replies, "but they weren't lit yet." All the lights are white and carefully arranged. The giant pine is obviously fake, betrayed by its own perfection—a flawless triangular beacon. You share an appreciation of the beauty. You love that she can see the world, both the visible and the invisible, through an artistic filter as you can.

Both of your attentions are drawn to a tree in the corner of the square. It is not a pine; it is bare for the winter. How intriguing you think it is that trees wear their blankets in the hot summer and are forced to

stand naked in the cold winter. This tree's bare limbs are wrapped in a hap-hazard manner by several dozen strands of soft blue lights, a few of which are out and one of which decides to turn on and off at inconsistent intervals. You are drawn to its imperfection and its independence—its decision to don a slightly colorful holiday dress rather than the fashionable white. You sit on the bench under it and lean back so that the top of your shoulders and head are supported by the concrete base housing the tree trunk. She sits next to you and lays her head on your chest, her long blond hair occasionally reaching up to tickle your face. Her fuzzy-gloved hand finds your gloved hand inside the pocket of your favorite jacket, the black corduroy one you've had forever. A passing drunk feels it his duty to inform you that "you two look cute as hell," and proceeds to wish he could take a picture of you and put it up with the lights for all to see.

You laugh, but not so uncontrollably as to miss out on the sound of her laugh. You share an unconditional love for people, for life. You look up at the branch which hosts the temperamental light strand—a sleeve of the tree's dress which stubbornly falls off the shoulder every time it's replaced—and as you look the strand lights up. You look back down at the face now on your lap: the lines formed by her habit of smiling, the eyes which at first were shy of yours and now met them with comfort, and the golden hair, which she had straightened especially for you, lying across your legs. "Is it crazy that it's been less than two weeks and I already want to say it?" you ask.

She replies only with a smile, refusing to part her lips perhaps fearing some of the joy will escape if she does. She manages an ecstatic shaking of the head while keeping her eyes on you. "I love you," you say for the first time. You are naked in your winter coat, jeans, and sneakers under the naked tree in its dress.

The next time you drive through the town square at night you will realize that your special tree is not lit. And again and again the next time you drive and the next. You will feel it was as if the tree was lit solely for you and her. Solely for that evening, that moment. Solely for those words.