

Sunset Instead

William Albrecht

I love you.

Scattered light danced across her playful smile for a moment as she turned her face towards me. The trees before her were filled with holes, and the sunset looked even more beautiful as an undefined reflection in her eyes. Apparently too beautiful for me I thought, as she shied her gaze back to the gravel at her feet. I sat on that bench with her, my hands tied invisibly to my lap, waiting for the day when the girl next to me might be mine.

But that girl won't understand what you and I used to have.

"Wow, look at that sunset," I managed. I directed my thoughts away from her, risking a touch as I freed my hands for a moment to make a gesture at the subject of my casual comment. But like a dutiful servant to our friendship, my hand snapped back into place without even a nudge.

But do you love him enough to maintain our reluctant servitude?

"Yeah," she replied, noble, distracted. Hurt. I looked at her again, this time seeing the profile of her face. It was alight with the sun's last burst over the horizon, the back of her cheek perfectly complimenting with shadow.

"You know," she continued, "Not many people appreciate things like this anymore."

"Who knows," I said without a trace of bitterness. "Maybe they never did." I was still looking at her, but I knew she didn't mind the attention. Watching the sun grow faint was all she could do not to enter the trance with which I struggled.

A few more seconds past, but their memory was made short with the happiness they caused me, and before long the park grabbed back my attention, and I silently apologized for my lapse of strength. The grass was losing its color and the contrast of the sky was dimming. We sat there together for a long time, thinking about the fun we had shared that day. These thoughts were made bittersweet, as both of us knew what we could never do.

Soon, I knew, it would begin getting cold. This would be one more reason for her to take my arm, one more reason for her to break free of the invisible bonds that bound us mutually from each other.

I love you too much to put you through that trial. I'll take the sunset instead.

I looked up at my fast-disappearing alternative, and said "It's getting cold; let's get back to the car." Side by side we walked heart in heart but our hands were separate.

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Note: This story was completed in March 2008. It appears in the *BLUE MOON literary & art review* issue 2 (Fall 2008-Spring 2009), which is dedicated to Will.