

Most of the people around me were tweaking; they had to be if they were going to dance that long. I preferred not to. I took my job seriously.

The discotheque was carved into the hollow corpse of an old church, built centuries ago. Back in the early 16th century, I had heard, but some locals said it was older. Some said that it was never built by human hands at all, that it just appeared one day, complete with parishioners and a priest.

Everyone else said that was bullshit and it had only been constructed in the 40's, but started collapsing barely a decade in, because nobody, not a *single* person in the entire country of Westalis, believed in God anymore. I wasn't quite sure about that, it was a big country on a bigger isola, but considering the way things had turned politically, I'd say the whole Elysiastic Archipelago has evaded the eye of God.

Everything about the church now was cobbled together, the spotlights hanging from the ceiling and the electronic music booth by the pulpit were likely stolen, the entire building in disrepair. Pews, some broken in half, were pushed to the very back of the building. Only the stained glass seemed to still be intact, the glow of colored translucent mingling with the spotlights on the floor. I had no clue why anyone would look at this building and think it was prime real estate for a club.

Walls hung open with holes like cavities, places where the rotting wood was falling out in clumps. Wind, rain, and sun permeated the gaps in the tall ceiling. In the winter, the dancers kept warm by continuing to dance. Dance, and dance, and dance, and *dance*. Dubstep, disco, rave, vogue, future bass, deep house, aggro-tech, acidcore, hypnotic techno, experimental hyper-synthpop groove medley, hyper, hyper, *hyper!*

The club's doors never shut for the night. The music never stopped playing. The people never stopped dancing, guests rotating in and out of the hall over the course of years, new hoofers waltzing in every day and dedicated ones not leaving the church for weeks on end.

"I want to be a permanent member." I used my job-interview voice, the one I had trained to be ready by every summer. It was still early spring. It was a bit rusty. Behind me, the glowing dance floor shuffled between different glowing hues as people stomped atop it.

“Hello, good evening, my name is...?” A “choreographer” named Ida prompted from the other side of the punch table. When I asked who to talk to, I was directed to them. They were someone who had harsh, sharp features, someone whose age was difficult to pin down. They could be 30 or 50, I had no clue. Their irritation was timeless and universal, sharp eyes and downturned mouth a constant throughout history.

“Jona.” I replied, embarrassed.

“Miss Jona. You mean part of the staff?” They flicked a lighter against a cigarette hanging from their lip. “Got a resume?”

“Yeah, uh, I didn’t bring it with me.”

They flicked their hand like swatting a bug and blew a pillar of smoke. “We don’t need it. You been here before?”

“Yes, ma’am. Er, sir...?”

“Sir is fine.”

“Sir. Last March.”

“A year ago, hm.” They ticked their tongue. “What makes you think you can do this?”

“I can dance.” I said. “I’m good at it, too.” And I really thought I was.

“We couldn’t give a fat fuck if you’re any *good*,” Ida replied. Long, multicolored nails stretched from their fingers, one pointed sharply towards me. “This isn’t a competition, you’re not winning a prize for doing it. This? This is *work*. If you’re going to be here, you’d better work.”

“Oh.” I paused. I thought any moment they would finally break and laugh and tell me to not be so serious, that they totally got me, that I was here to party. But they continued drumming their nails against the table. “You mean, I’d better work, or I’d better...” I did an inscrutable, hesitant limp movement with my hand. “*Werk?*”

They didn’t answer my question. “You’re going to be staff. You can’t come and go as you please. This is a *commitment*, and a demanding one at that. Do you understand?”

I shut my mouth and nodded. That was all they were looking for.

“Come back Thursday. Wear comfortable shoes.” They lifted the cigarette from their lips.

“Work.”

My only real experience was when I stood on my father’s feet when I was younger and we would sway around the kitchenette. He would hold my little hands in his and take small steps so I wouldn’t fall over. The extent of my skill ended there, in those hazy memories. It wouldn’t be as easy now as it was back then.

I didn’t know what I would be doing that day until I came in and Ida was already there, along with a smattering of other dancers. The spotlights were swaying and flashing across the floor, the DJ barking nonsense out to the audience. It was a party in full swing. They didn’t say hello or break their boogie, a severe and powerful style of voguing that intimidated me. Just demanded that I start dancing.

“Now?”

“Yes, now.”

I watched them for a moment. Thudding, angry movements to songs that were unrelenting, ones that you don’t know how to dance to. *Exuma, the Obeah Man. Forever Turbo Heat Dance*. A cover of *Jeannie, Jeannie, Jeannie* that was less piano and more electric wailing. All foreign warbling in other languages. I joined them, unsure, stomping my feet and punching up into the air to the violent sound. I melded into the crowd as anodic dance buzzed and spotlights flashed until I felt like I was trapped inside a plasma ball.

After some amount of time Ida said I could stop for water. That was the length of an average shift— they were testing my endurance. Could I do that again? *Yes, sir*, I panted, hands on my thighs, *I can*. Then I did it again.

I danced until I could dance no longer, until my knees suddenly buckled in the middle of a mosh that had congregated, and the group of people cleared out a space for me to lay safely. Ida loomed over me, their dispassionate expression unreadable, and handed me a walkie-talkie.

“You’ll come when we call. When you’re done, call for someone else and go home. It’s that easy.”

I would go about my regular life until my walkie warbled, and then I would walk to the church, or take a bus, or hitchhike, whatever I needed to do in order to arrive and get on the floor, either tapping someone out or just taking my own place. We played music so loud that the bass shook dust from the rafters. I would dance, jumping to the beat and mingling with the other guests to pass the time. Rarely did I wear shoes other than my donks because I never knew when I would be expected to dance.

Sometimes young tourists came in the nude, college spring breakers who wanted to visit the must-see destination of Siddarkhen, Westalis' village of dance. It was the only reason people would visit, unless they had an uncle in the neighborhood, because there wasn't much else you "must-see". It was a poor coastal town whose main exports were fish and drug addicts. Out of all the places in town people wanted to be, people wanted to be here.

And why shouldn't they— for more than eight years, people had been continuously dancing in that church. Since before the beginning of the war. It was a party that preceded modern conflict.

The tourists irritated me, bumping and grinding against each other, generating warmth in the early-March cold through friction. Despite all their book-learning, they were clueless to me, fratty and loud or stoned and vacant-eyed or pretentious bohemes. All they wanted was to get drunk and say they had been here. I did little more than stink-eye them.

"What's the story behind this place?" A student approached me one night. She was only wearing a lei— God knows why, though we were near the coast, the foggy environ was far from tropical— and twisted her shoulders from side to side to the beat. A group of her loud, equally naked classmates were cheering with one another, attempting to start a mosh pit. She looked cold.

"Uh," I rolled my eyes to the ceiling and racked my brain for the answer I had only learned recently. "Well, it was a popular party spot after it was condemned, and one night, the party just didn't stop. The DJ kept playing, people kept dancing. And now we continue what our forebears started." I preened at my addition— it felt meaningful and deep, like we were part of a beautiful movement. And given while hustling, no less.

"Is it like a cult?"

“No.” I snapped. I was happy to find a legitimate reason to be upset with her. “It’s not a *cult*.”

She shrank back, goosebumps on her skin. “Sorry. Um. Do you know if they play anything that isn’t all this weird foreign stuff...?” Her arms were drawn in tight to her body, rubbing her biceps.

Sometimes we did. Tonight, Barry Manilow was singing a tune whose words I couldn’t quite discern, even though I knew passable levels of English. The sound of the word “*copacabana*” was near-alien.

“No. We don’t.”

I liked talking to the other people in the church the rest of the time. You could get the opportunity to learn that the person popping and locking next to you is a card-carrying communist. Or the self-proclaimed final member of an indotribe, a principle or ideology or book club or something. Once I spoke to a guy who claimed he was a majority stakeholder in a company that manufactured “pyrotechnic products used for defense applications.” He was unshaven and wearing a stained lycra tracksuit. It was anyone’s guess if that was the truth.

Mid-afternoon, I would see street rats and urchins wriggle through the backdoor and join the floor clumsily. In the early evening, I saw the children of fishermen on the hips of their swaying mothers. Late at night, I watched high-power businessmen from the financial district, La Delta, with their ties around their heads and their shoes in their hands as they pinwheeled their arms. People snorted things off one another’s arms, and I saw plainclothes cops emerge from the crowd to haul them away. I kept dancing in the weeks that passed, threading the needle between men that dodged the draft and women that no longer wanted to keep house.

I became familiar with other dancers, the regulars and the employed. Ida and the other choreographers apparently ran a tight ship— everyone had been whipped into shape already. They all briefed me on everything I needed to know.

“What if there’s only one person?” I asked one night, rolling my fists over one another before braking and reversing their direction. “I mean, does that still count?”

“We never let it come to that.” A mousy woman named Marie-Lise answered me. She had been on the staff for a year and a half. She was only moonlighting as a dancer when she wasn’t working at the nearby commissary. She was pretty good at the foxtrot. “There are people who want to stop the party, y’know. Groups have come in the past trying to break it up, and all that. There are always multiple people on call to keep that from happening.”

“A one-person party? Boring.” A freckled boy named Elliott, no older than 13 attempted and failed a complicated lockstep, cursing through a split lip every time he stumbled. It seemed like he was on staff only because he had nothing else to do. As far as I could tell, he lived only off the snacks people brought and shared.

“But it counts.”

“Yeah, it *counts*, but it would probably suck.” A Scooter song came on in the mix and he whooped.

“If we stop dancing, the world ends.” A stranger— a spring breaker, you could tell, you could *always* tell— bounced on his heels, probably no more than newly 20. The blue lights flashed across his face and reflected across his glasses as he rubbed something behind his ear. He didn’t wait for us to acknowledge he had spoken before he continued. “See, when we move, it generates plasma, and that plasma, it’s like, the fabric of the universe. It counteracts destruction. Disease, war, all that shit, it all gets fixed by plasma. If we don’t make it, fuck, who will?”

Nobody really said anything in response. It felt a little odd to be hearing what felt like a made-up seminar about psychic energy while “*skibidee, skibidanger, I am the rearranger*” played over the speakers. I wasn’t in the mood to entertain this line of thinking.

“The soldiers aren’t dancing. Soldier’s ‘r dropping nuclear bombs all over the fucking place, and you can see how that’s going.” The man sniffed. “World’s gonna end. They’re not dancing.”

I held my tongue and did a kick-ball-chain, looking down at my feet. Inevitably, someone would bring up the war. I didn’t like thinking about it. It was unlikely Siddharken would get bombed, it was a small town, but every now and again we could hear an air raid siren in the distance. Some people would

scatter from the church and run for cover. The staff kept dancing. I thought of my father in a steel aeroplane and goggles, flying into the sun. I was afraid the student could smell the brat on me.

“Fucking hippie. Always have to make this shit political.” Elliott sneered. “Can’t we just fucking dance?”

“It’s not political. It’s pure physics. This is what they fucking teach you when you want to learn about *real shit*, kid. Plasma is real, and I’m making it, right now, it’s the world’s *genius loci*...”

“Dude, just shut up.”

“It’s the *life* of the party! It’s *life*! Think about that word for a second, life–”

I didn’t want to talk about politics, I was plain exhausted of living in a political world and talking about political things. I didn’t believe him. But it didn’t feel safe to stop, either. Scooter inquired on how much the fish was. After a few hours, I woke up my walkie and called for a replacement.

Our biggest concern was when people collapsed. That was something that the spring breakers didn’t get to witness, rarely did they stick around to see the dancers fall to the ground. Not because of an excess of punch or a crash; but because of pure exhaustion. Just drop to the floor and not get back up. Sometimes there would be “medical staff” (volunteers with stretchers to move them from inside to outside) and they would be the ones to take care of that.

It was about 2:30 in the morning or so, and the radio was playing mumble-quiet. No special theme that night. Not even anyone on stage behind the booth, the glowing lights of the dance floor extinguished. Parties always had their lulls, a valley before the next rise in the wave. That was when staff had to be there, some time past midnight on a Tuesday, when nobody wanted to be awake, let alone moving.

The guy I had been dancing with for the last three hours collapsed in a heap, a guy named Hugo who wore a wifebeater and a bomber jacket tied around his hips. He kept touching behind his ears as he sidestepped, rubbing where the cartilage met his skull like he had an itch. We talked as we swayed, passing a wave back and forth to one another as he chattered about his squat house and how a guy who called himself “Fuck The World” was using all their toilet paper.

“...it’s the problem with the state, man, the fuckin’ state. We coulda been the most important isola in the archipelago, but man, Westalis’ people are living in fucking *squat houses*...” He bemoaned as he did a slurred, uncoordinated running man.

“Can we not talk about politics right now?” I winced. Talking about politics was a pain, but talking about incorrect politics was even worse. Westalis never had a chance. “I’m just trying to dance.”

“Sure. Sure, man. I guess this is what I get for deserting...”

He had offered me a canister, a silver disc, that looked like it held hair gel. Said that it was “the most hardcore shit of the modern era”, but he pronounced it “modren” instead of “modern” so that told me everything I needed to know about the drug. I simply took it and pocketed it. Probably a better idea if he didn’t have any more.

And then, a few minutes into a Billy Joel song, he simply fell to the floor. Nary a tapping foot or nodding head. Just stillness. I couldn’t check his pulse because I needed to at least keep tempo; I was on the clock. Someone else would probably be up with a stretcher soon. My pace continued, Billy sang, *It’s just a, it’s just a half a mile away...*

I almost rolled my ankle stepping on an uneven surface. Someone’s wrist under the arch of my foot. My eyes drifted just far enough to see Marie-Lise under me. I yelped and stumbled, still shifting from foot to foot. She had passed out, too. As had the other twelve dancers that were still upright the last I had looked. I swung my head around for anyone else, to call for help, for a gurney. But there was no one, not even a single volunteer leaning against the wall. I was the only dancer.

My heart stopped, but thankfully, my body still moved. There must have been a mistake. Behind the pushed-back pews, was there another person, still keeping to the tune? Someone had to be. Just out of sight. I strained my ears to listen for any other footsteps, squinted through the rotating lights. Did a musical-style stride up the stairs to the stage in order to get a higher point of view. No one.

It dawned on me that I *was* the party. The radio did not care, and moved onto the next song, Graeme Edge Band’s *Everybody Needs Somebody*. Hollow, soft electronic sounds echoed between the wood slats of the near- dead discotheque.



I tugged my walkie from my hip and spoke, shakily. “Hello? Th-this— this is Jona. I need backup—I’m the only one here. The only one. Everyone else is, is, they passed out, no volunteer medical staff, no, no nobody—”

Ida’s voice on the other end was garbled and splintered. “--re a— not g— ... — hey, st—? We— ere in a— hold on— ... — ... —” Silence.

“Hello? Hello?” I shook my walkie, hitting it like I was trying to slap sense into it. No connection. I resorted to crying out names into the darkness. Elliot wasn’t there, Marie-Lise was unmoving on the floor, Ida’s status was unknown. I called for the DJ. I called for my father on some strange instinct. A lump formed in the back of my throat around the word “dad”.

Suddenly being saddled with the responsibility of upholding a years-long legacy is, simply put, stressful. It’s just you. You’re the only one keeping the world spinning, and your arms are already getting tired. Drained from you is the energy to leap, to kick, to mosh. I could only lope, writhe, wriggle like a worm. The shift before this one was beginning to weigh on me. I did not know when, or if, I would ever be relieved of duty.

My hope left me when the radio died in a fizzle. There was nothing to guide my movement anymore. No rhythmic sound. No way to measure the time. More ability to focus on the absence of everything. Of people, of music, of meaning. I shuffled from foot to foot adjusting the antennae to no results. Like an avant-garde act of performance art, I danced to static.

The lights shut off. In the middle of a passionless rendition of *Cotton-Eye-Joe* (I was just falling back on line dances I knew) I whipped around to see if there was someone who shut off the lights, prepared to beg them to at least shimmy with me so I wasn’t alone. But there was no one. We had simply lost power. Finally, I was completely disconnected from the waking world.

I lock-stepped into the blindness, occasionally treading on someone’s shoulder or leg. My body ached as the hours trudged through me. My limbs swayed limply above my head like dead reeds, and when they were too heavy for me to lift, I let them fall like sandbags to my sides. Cold air from the holes in the ceiling licked at my sweat.

Dear God, did it always hurt this much? My dedication was all at once sacred and terrible. I remembered when dance was joyful, when I looked forward to it. I remembered Elliott's words— *what was the point, when you were the only one left*. Bodies were strewn around me. I weaved between them, unable to stop and move them out of the way.

Was this what my father saw in his own last moments? A field of collapsed people who tread the same turf as him? Did he also think the world would end if he quit, did his body ache; was there even joy in what he once did? Maybe he never even got to see what I saw. Maybe he was lucky enough to have a vessel that could move when he couldn't; a biplane that flew effortlessly so long as it had fuel and a pilot.

How many hours had it been? Would I dance for the rest of my life? How long would that life be? A very real fear rose in me, that I would die here. That I could somehow dance myself to death. That before hunger or thirst or lack of sleep could claim me, I would simply dance every last ounce of life from my body. Just let every effort of the people before me go to waste.

I felt the canister of the not-hair-gel in my back pocket, a silver disc.

The idea and its conclusion crossed my mind at the same moment. There was no choice. I had to use whatever was in here. Eight years of tradition, of obligation, rested on my shoulders. This couldn't die with me. Maybe whatever this had been laced with could give me a boost— it sure seemed to energize that guy. Before he dropped, at least.

Whatever. I would drop now if I didn't at least try, what did I have to lose? I pulled it out and dabbed a fingerful behind either ear as I rolled my shoulders. Its smell was like gasoline and tar, kicking me in the nose. I sniffed harshly and coughed, but didn't stop moving my hips.

Was it kicking in? I couldn't tell. I was still exhausted. Never in my life had I used drugs before, this was all new to me. I decided I hadn't used enough and smeared a glob across my head as well, a thick stripe dividing my face in half across the nose. The scent was harsh and made me dizzy, like someone had popped smelling salts deep in my nasal cavity. My legs faltered, but my arms still rolled over one another in a weak cabbage patch. Still going. Still moving. I felt dizzy.

This could have been a bad idea. This was already a bad first drug trip. My own mortality felt as if it were coming at me, fast and hard, like a cannonball over the horizon. I prayed to God while krumping, clasping my hands together as I flung them about me in weak, struggling motions.

A light turned on above me. I squinted up to the ceiling. Was the power back? No, the radio still whispered its nonsensical, singular syllable. I looked into the light for answers, and none were there. When I turned my sight back in front of me, there was a woman on the edge of the glow.

She was lithe, tall, shadowed. A graceful dancer's frame. Not a spring breaker. Maybe. I couldn't quite tell. My vision was going double.

"Hey," I tried to shout, moving my body as if I was trying to punch using nothing but my shoulders. The force of my throat contracting pushed out my words in a dry wheeze. "Hey! You need to dance! I can't, I can't be the only one—"

She didn't dance. She simply walked towards me like she was rollerskating, turning tight circles around me, watching me move. Curious. Inquisitive. I tried to look at her closer, but the exhaustion was getting to me. It looked like he was wearing the type of clothes that were in style almost a decade ago. I tried even harder to focus on her features, hair color, eye color, skin color, anything. They all evaded my sight.

Her hand skirted around my twisting spine, my pained neck. Dragged across my rolling shoulders and then trailed down my arm, to my hand. No words, no expression.

"I don't," Words came from me thin and whispered, like I was speaking with a paper tongue. "I don't know what you're asking me."

She put one hand on my shoulder, one around my back. She would lead. Delicately, she put forward her foot, and somehow, I knew she wanted me to stand on her feet. To teach me.

No sooner than I rested my weight on her toes did she begin waltzing, carrying me as if I were nothing at all. My muscles released like stretched rubber bands, and she cradled me in her arms. I didn't worry about staying upright. My limbs followed her movements as she made them, the onus of keeping the church alive no longer on my shoulders. A swizzle of the leg, an effortless, sensual rumba; she dipped

me low to the floor and I never feared I was going to drop. When I rose again, it was by her hand, and she grinned down at me.

“You’re good at this,” I said, head dangling on my neck.

And she was, she really was, I had seen thousands of people dance, but never like this. We weaved in and out of the bodies on the floor effortlessly— she didn’t even have to look to avoid them. Skating legs bobbed between them, the paths made of dead limbs forming an exquisite trail that we sashayed about. Our movements felt like we were both dancing and fighting some invisible enemy. Like capoeira.

The moment my legs dragged following hers, knees buckling, she tightened her grip and moved slowly instead. Our feet moved in a box shape— the most basic of steps, the most entry-level waltz that anyone could do. I remembered the kitchenette. I remembered looking down at my donks to watch my guided steps.

Finally, I was saved by a song; the air raid siren. I heard the harmonizing whistle of distant bombs falling in triplicate. One-two-three. One-two-three. One-two-three. I looked up and saw biplanes bobbing and weaving between fighter jets and spotlights. I smelled fish. How much was it? The woman was haloed by stained glass light. I looked up to her and she was smiling, like she had infinite energy to dance until the end of time. Like she was strong enough to hold me until every aeroplane landed, until every father returned home.

When the church door opened up, I could squint to see that Ida was already voguing, their arms forming sharp snapping angles. And yet, I didn’t stop moving until the staff passed the threshold of the door, eight of them, all bounding and grooving and krumping to nothing as they entered. My empty arms fell to my sides, and my body fell to the floor in a heap of pained sinew.

My lips stuck to my teeth, cracked like concrete, my throat wheezed. I tried to ask them something, but I couldn’t form the words properly. One demand stayed in my mind: *Keep the party going. Don’t turn the lights off.*

I couldn't remember if I slept. Ida's arms were under me, and I rose to the ceiling, and I thought I was dying. My body finally felt at rest, at a perfect ceasing of motion, and it was a rest I wanted to stay in forever and ever and ever.

My classes always bored me. In auditoriums and lecture halls, I was listless, bouncing my leg in an attempt to keep myself awake. I would yawn my way through my studies as political history burrowed its way into my psyche, when what *really* mattered was hammered into me like stakes— alliances between territories, tenuous peace connections, opportunities to gain the upper hand through bureaucracy and status. Over spring break, some classmates bought train tickets to Westalis. I followed them.

There was a romance to the church that I never felt in school. This life of book learning was shallow, but in another time, I would have felt lucky to be there. Not many people in Westalis could get this kind of education. I should have been grateful to have enough comfort to indulge in frivolity.

But when I looked to the spires, coated in dusting of mid-March snow, I could only think of the people inside, dancing until the soles of their shoes wore out. I was studying to be a politician, to eventually carve my name into local government. It was grueling and would make me successful in the future. I could take care of my mother once I graduated, and become a member of Parliament. But it felt useless. Nothing in the world was changing. Yet they still danced in a rotten church. What sort of purpose did they feel that I didn't?

The thud of the bass was the pulsing, throb-pump heart of the disco, her blood cells all writhing to the rhythm, wearing their donks. A living organism. Transferring plasma. My own life, I realized, was shallow.

I suppose I had deserted that March. It just took me another year to fully defect. Dad would have been disappointed that I was eschewing the opportunity to serve my country. I felt that, somehow, I could serve the world by doing this instead.

My body was still aching, but it was unmoving. A bed cradled me. I drifted back into consciousness until a sound tugged me up to the surface.

“Good morning.” Ida’s flat tone came from my bedside. Their blurry form was sitting in my desk chair. “You never told me you were a student. I’d have told you to get your ass back to class. Good thing I was able to get you back home– train tickets aren’t cheap, you know–”

My home– I was back in my dorm again, a place I hadn’t slept for weeks. How did they find where I went to school? Between their fingers was my student ID from three years ago. My smile for the photo was unsure and I had squinted like hell.

My stomach yowled with hunger, memory flooded me, and I bolted upright. “Did we get bombed?”

“What? No. No, the club is fine.”

“Oh, thank God.” I put a hand over my heart.

“No ‘good morning’ back?” No annoyance in their voice. Just a nudge.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning.”

They set down my ID and tapped a cigarette out of a pack. I was still too intimidated by them to tell them that this was a smoke-free dorm. “Don’t know why you thought... ah. Not the most unexpected move to pull after using *pyrrhilodon*.”

I remembered the smear of paste across my cheeks, my nose, under my eyes. Like war paint. I touched my cheek– it was crusted there, cracking as I moved my face. The tips of my fingers were pinkish-purple.

“Uh– you said *pyrrhilodon*. What was that?”

“You didn’t know what it was, and you took it anyway? Shit. You dumb fucking kid... I thought college students were supposed to be smart.” They ran a hand down their thin face, exasperated. “It’s used to treat radiation sickness. Chemical warfare hand cream, basically. Military-grade. It can make you hallucinate if you use too much.”

“Oh,” I said. I lay back down. I couldn’t stop shaking my foot. “Okay.”

A long, quiet moment. “I’ve... shit, I’ve never seen someone waltz like that.” They rubbed their eyes.

“I was still dancing?” That shocked me. I had just assumed after the cream touched my skin, I was done for. That it had killed my movement dead and I fell to the ground, immediately, that everything I saw was a pure fantasy.

“Yup. You looked, like, zen.”

I looked up to the ceiling, silent.

“I guess you were right. You *can* dance.”

A smile wrestled its way onto my face against my better judgement. “Did I *work*?”

“Yes, ma’am. You *worked*.” They looked at me, their anger-wrinkles softening. I could tell how old they were when their brow wasn’t furrowed. Probably about 44.

After a week, I was back in the church. Ida told me to take more bedrest, or at least go back to class but I refused. There was an itch in me that I couldn’t reach. I knew that once my body had shaken enough, I could jostle it out of me, bring it somewhere in my form that I could touch it. Ida simply chuffed over the payphone and said “heard that,”. I dropped out.

My face was still stained pink and probably would be for a little while. It made me instantly recognizable—I don’t know if I would call myself a hero, but I got enough free drinks to last me a lifetime.

As a thank-you from the church, I got to pick the night’s theme. I chose *Genius Loci*. I didn’t quite know what that meant, but the DJ somehow found some tracks that felt right. Wavy, dreamlike, music to sway to. I kept my walkie on all night, open to a blank channel, just to hear the static in the background.

The church was packed again, so full that it felt as if the walls would burst from the force. Spring break had been over for a long, long time. It didn’t feel right to call them spring breakers anymore. My classmates filled the dance floor. Seeking a reprieve. Releasing themselves through the power of thrash.

Their naked bodies, finally free, if only for a single night. It would be nice if they could do it every night but, unfortunately, the world still needed politicians.

I saw a girl across the dance floor, touching behind her ears, a silver disc in her hand. Her hair was pulled up behind her head, loose strings hanging past her ears. Like a magnet, I was pulled to her. The music was low enough that we could speak. Maybe I wanted to ask her what she thought she was going to see, what she *wanted* to see while using the drug. I ended up asking something else.

“Why do we do this?” I shouted into her ear.

“What?” She shouted back.

“Why do we do this?”

“I don’t know,” she shouted back, squinting through the dark. Her hands raised the ceiling. “What else is there to do?”