

In Loving Memory

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For my English Coursework, we had to write an original piece. This is mine. It got an A, or 17/18. I shouldn't gloat, but I'm so proud, I worked really hard... On this...*

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1 - In Loving Memory

Although the space was generous for such a low-key nightclub, already Dante felt claustrophobic. The scents of perfume and beverages mingled; cigarette smoke casting a misty haze over the heads of rowdy dancers. Not much of a mover himself, Dante sat gloomily in the corner, trying to avoid eye contact with his intoxicated mother.

This was how it had always been. Every New Year's Eve, she would take Dante clubbing, bestowing upon the teenager a common dose of embarrassment, which most Mothers administered as a daily treatment. He heard a shriek of laughter pierce through the pounding music, cringing when a flutter of recognition settled in his stomach.

"Not again..." Dante groaned, releasing a sob of exasperation. Tracing the source of noise would be difficult, so the boy remained stationary in his corner, waiting for a stranger nearby to act as his lifeguard from this nightmare. Recently, the company of others seemed to be the only distraction from this circle of destruction that his Mother was dragging him along.

Dante had never been able to pinpoint a precise time when he realised his Mother had adopted a problem with drinking. Perhaps it had begun gradually, after their Father left; or maybe it was after the woman lost the will to work honestly for the money needed to sustain a household; or maybe she simply one day reached for the bottle, thinking that this obvious cry for help would give her the attention, the help, that she yearned for.

The final conclusion Dante had pictured infuriated him. Why could his Mother feel incapable of confiding in him, her son, the one she had always been beside when times were not their best? Had he not proved himself, on the countless nights he had held up his Mother's hair as she sobbed, her shoulders trembled as her body rejected the alcohol put inside it, the sickening smell of vomit sticking in the air.

Dante gripped the bottom of his seat, exhaling a shaky breath. He felt so dirty. These clothes were dirty, reeking of the cigarette smoke that was slyly attempting to induce a fit of coughing, sliding down his throat to damage his already weakened lungs.

Of course, being a teenager, it wasn't as if Dante did not have his fair share of problems, either. He was in Year eleven, his final year of High School, and was spending it living in the fear that he would not reach his deadlines for coursework, feeling that school life was plaguing him, following him home until the two merged, now seemingly inseparable. After a day of schoolwork, coursework, and perhaps even a little revision of subjects he felt he would never comprehend, he would collapse onto his bed, burying his face into his pillows as he heard his Mother returning from another futile drinking session. And so the boy would get up, and he would often cry when he saw her in this mess, truly feeling hurt and neglected. Yet now, with just five short months to go until the end of his High School education, the pressure would pile on again, suffocating and caging the boy, often costing him his social life, the chances to be with those who he could truly forget about his worries with.

"DANTE, DARLIN', WHERE ARE YER?" Came a boisterous drawl. Dante's grip on the chair was now

whitening his knuckles, the skin being drawn tightly over the thin bone as his Mother emerged from the crowd, drink in one hand...

...And in the other rested someone else's hand – Whose, Dante did not care. He gave the man clinging to his Mother one dirty look before saying through gritted teeth:

“Hello, Adrienne.”

Almost as if she hadn't heard him, Dante's mother carried on.

“Darlin'... This is Stewart. He could be your new daddy!” She hiccupped happily, in a shrieking voice that attracted stares and pathetic comments from those nearby. Oblivious, she continued. “Isn't he gorgeous?” She smiled up at him, eyes glistening from the lights that arced around the room from the DJ's mixers.

Dante's eyes pierced through Stewart's own, extracting a look of bewilderment from the man. “Sure Mum. I believe you when you tell me that he's a very nice man, who is willing to take on the fatherly role. Because of course, this isn't like you've said something similar so many times before. And it's all right, I suppose, because he probably only wants somebody to kiss at New Year, nothing more.”

No matter how many times Dante would say this, and things similar, alcohol, and it's amnesia inducing effects, would make it seem as if he had said nothing at all, as if he had simply observed what was going on, without speaking a single word. Dante's fists clutched at his seat tighter now, the muscles in his hands now aching. This simple truth would haunt him, causing the boy to feel the guilt and blame for what his Mother was doing to herself. Maybe... Maybe if Dante did not live with his Mother, if he had left to live with his Father... Maybe she would not be in this state.

Perhaps his Mother would have regained a hold back on her life. She would have found a new job, or maybe even gone to an evening class to gain extra qualifications. She could have done anything with her life, and instead she was watching it blur past her, with fragmented memories of brightly coloured beverages, the ghostly voice of her son crying out to her, the sights and sounds of a new nightclub that she had been to.

This was truly the most helpless that Dante had ever been in his life. Here he was, watching Adrienne throw away her life, whilst sacrificing parts of his. And yet his Mother did not want to be helped, which led Dante into thinking that perhaps the alcohol had changed her, just like he had heard so many times in the past on documentaries.

With these desperate thoughts in mind, Dante noticed that her glass was empty, and that it had been for some time. In an instant, a disgusting, and yet intriguing idea came to mind.

“Stewart, where are your manners?” Dante implored, eyes widening in fake surprise, his fingers reluctantly releasing their grip on the chair. He felt a rush of blood flow back into the fingertips, and shook them ever so slightly. “If you want to go out with my Mother, then at least treat her right. You can't let a grown woman go thirsty, that's just cruel!”

Stewart started, and glanced down at Adrienne's glass – Of course, it was empty. He turned towards

the bar and shouted at the bartender in order to get himself heard. With a smug smile on his face, Dante heard the man ordering a red cocktail – What it contained, he did not know. He neither cared.

“See? He’s a darling, isn’t he?” His Mother slurred, carrying on as if Dante had replied. “And once you get to know him, you’ll see he’s so much better than your Father ever will be.”

Dante could not fully comprehend why, but when she said that, something inside him snapped. Maybe it was his patience, or maybe even his resolve. Whatever it was, it made him want to lash out, forcefully.

Although Dante was not in contact with his Father, that man had still played a part in his creation. And whether his Mother liked it or not, that would never change. Plus, even if she did have a problem with such a thing, then she would be the one he would bestow blame upon. She didn’t have to marry him, so why bother being so dogy?

Stewart handed Dante’s Mother his drink. Making a split decision, Dante moved forwards fluidly, forcing the drink from her hand, and threw whatever it was in her face.

“You won’t remember this in the morning, don’t worry,” He hissed, his vindictive tone startling those around him into eavesdropping on their conversation.

His Mother stared at him blearily, abhorrent that he had done such a thing. The red liquor dripped from her hair, the hair that she had always taken so much pride in.

“Dante! All I want is a good time…” She whined, clinging onto her son’s forearm with chipped fake nails.

It never occurred to Dante that his arm was the only thing keeping her upright. And with the enormity of the situation, he doubted that he would ever care. He flicked his arm to the side, sending his Mother sprawled out onto the floor.

“And you will do that at my expense?” He snarled, pushing his way past horrified spectators. If it hadn’t been for the rush of blood pounding in his ears, he would have heard those around him chanting the minute countdown behind him.

Not knowing where he would go, or what he would do, Dante made for the exit, pushing his way past Bouncers and dancers alike to get to his destination. Tears pricked in the corners of his eyes, but he refused to let them fall. He would not start his New Year, crying because his Mother was drinking her lonely life away.

He pushed himself through the doorway and drank in the untainted air. Compared with the suffocating feeling of cigarettes, alcohol and people in the Nightclub, the open space was refreshing. Dante glanced upwards, feeling a gentle press of raindrops scatter across his face. This too, felt revitalising.

Reopening the eyes he had been unaware of closing, Dante was finally able to take in his surroundings. The Nightclub was at the back of a religiously grid locked main road, with graffiti and posters of upcoming performances peeling away at the corners set on the dark walls. There was a single street lamp in this side street, seemingly illuminating nothing more than a ten-metre radius, and even at that, the light seemed spread too thinly.

Dante sighed. He could almost relate to that dim, almost useless light. He too, felt stretched in too many directions – Towards his Mother, issues regarding his Father, School, the occasional teenage attraction he felt... They were all smothering him, and one day, Dante knew, he would be unable to cope. It just so happened that tonight, he had thrown a glass of alcohol in his Mother's face.

Whether or not it was the soothing night air, or the distant hum of millions of people shouting the count down, something about that statement struck a chord within Dante. Despite his previous anger, he now felt shame. If that had been one thing he had never expected himself to do, then it would have been somewhere at the top of his list.

Shuffling guiltily under the drizzle, Dante tried reasoning with himself, yet the attempt was in vain. All he could see was his Mother, staring at him in terror, with a blood-like substance running down her face...

He had to find her. Yet in his shame, Dante knew he would be unable to face her just yet. Being a quick thinker, he reached inside his jeans pocket and found his mobile phone. His fingers deftly moved across the small keys, and hesitated before clicking 'Call' when reaching his Mother's number.

However, just as he did that, his phone bleeped feebly. Dante's eyes widened as he heard Auld Lang Syne being sung in unison across the country... It was New Year.

He had no chance of getting through to his Mother now.