Memories of the Elmheart Hotel

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"My eyes gazed from two gaping holes which used to be windows overlooking Lake Ontario. I watched as sailboats played on the wind of the water. A breeze blew through the hotel's frame and the screen porch rocked on its hinges. Neighborhood children ignored the 'No Trespassing" sign posted on the iron gates. Their shouts echoed into the elm trees as they rode their bikes through the overgrown grass. Beer cans were tucked into corners of the sagging porch. Chipped white paint, like ashes from a midnight bonfire, lay scattered along the edges of the building. I sighed and wondered, what had happened to the elegance and beauty which once belonged to the Elmheart Hotel."

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Many years ago, people had spent their vacations in the hotel's narrow pine paneled rooms. The families were well established New York City residents who wanted to escape the heat. Women and children passed the sunny summer days playing on the shallow rocky beach. Mothers took afternoon naps while children splashed in the cool waters. On weekends, the men would join their women and children. They arrived in Rochester by train and would travel on the Charlotte trolley line which stretched along the coast. The final stop was Manitou Beach where the Elmheart Hotel displayed its finery. The hotel's Victorian design proudly boasted towers, balconies, fish scale style shingles, stained glass windows, and arches. The shoreline turned into a celebration as lovers strolled the pier and families spread checker cloth picnic blankets. As night fell, the breezes of the lake blew through open windows, cooling the sleeping bodies in the Elmheart Hotel.

Eventually, the trolley line was discontinued and people found other places to visit. Local children and families became the hotel's only guests. They explored the abandoned rooms and wreaked havoc on the dance hall at the side of the hotel. Beer cans and pieces of tinfoil were scattered among the overgrown grass. Occasionally, a potential buyer would walk the land. However, the price was always too high and controversy over zoning laws arose with the town of Greece. It was during the years of the hotel's decline into decay that I first saw the old structure.

On a warm day in late August, I stepped out of my boyfriend's silver Escort onto a land which had been forgotten. Earlier in the afternoon, Robin had told me there was somewhere he wanted to show me. He grinned when I continued to pester him about where we were going. "You'll see," he said as we traveled twenty minutes out of the city. Robin had been my personal tour guide in Rochester for the past two weeks while I was visiting my family. He had sailed with my parents and the fates threw us together for what would be a whirlwind fairy tale romance. He would hear my tears as I flunked out of school in Missouri and began a new school in Rochester. However, on that warm August day, I couldn't see what was in my future. I only saw the abandoned hotel beckoning me to explore its history.

The heavy wood gates were open and the car slipped easily onto the gravel. As we got out of the car, I could only stare speechless at the hotel in front of me. The white paint was peeling and windows were broken and boarded with plywood. The tall grass was overgrown and scratched my bare legs as we held hands and walked to the dance hall at the side of the hotel. The door was cracked and we slipped through the shadows onto the marble dance floor. A crystal chandelier hung overhead and a few wood benches were thrown haphazardly against the side of the dance hall. A small stage was hidden by faded red curtains in the front of the building. We ran like kids through the great dance hall, our footsteps echoed on the wood floors. "What
a great place this must have been," I said. "Do you realize what it could become if someone fixed it up?" Robin only grinned while an idea began to form in my head.

We walked out into the sunlight and slid the wood latch across the barn doors. As we stood in front of the old hotel, a shadow crossed the upstairs window. I watched the window and said, "Do you think there are ghosts up there? I could have sworn I saw something move in the third story window." Robin grinned and said, "Let's go find out." I cautiously followed him through the broken screen door and tried to control my racing heart. The air was musty and hot as he took my hand and we began the walk up the broken stairs. "Are you sure this is alright?" I asked. "Maybe we should go back outside." He didn't answer and I decided it was better to be with him than make the solitary journey back downstairs.

We reached the top floor and turned right into a bedroom. A broken green chair rested on its side by the door and a single yellow curtain hung from its last thread in the window. I looked out onto the lake as Robin's arms encircled my waist. He pulled me close and his Polo logo drifted into my thoughts. "See, everything is okay," he said. "I'm here and I'll protect you." Years later, I would still hear his words as I sat on the rocks outside the Elmheart Hotel. I was a solitude figure lost among the lake and sheltering elm trees. Robin had protected me during the times we were together. He had shown me a place which would shelter me when he left to live a life without me. I returned many times to the solitude of a hotel which had been forgotten. On summer nights, our family sailboat would glide past the hotel. I would fondly look at the great white house which was hidden by the shadows of the setting sun.

Eventually, the hotel burned in the dark of the night. Its red glares lit the sky and the hotel said its final goodbye to all who had loved the sheltering banks. All that remains are three stone steps which once felt my footsteps as I embarked into a journey of the past. Tonight, the hotel sits in ashes on the shores of Lake Ontario and Robin has become only ashes in my mind. But, somewhere, in a far off memory, I feel his arms circling my waist as the sun sets behind the Elmheart Hotel.