

My Greatest Performance

by Libby Taylor

Some say that dreams can mirror our daily lives. They say that our realities can converge with our fantasies to mimic a haven-like land we can escape to as we rest each night. Others say they have no correlation to real lives, and they are simply a succession of images and ideas floating around in our minds with no real meaning at all. I prefer the former.

Looking back, I can't remember a time in my life when I didn't love the theatre. Ever since I was a young child, I have been obsessed with the ways in which actors could jump into another world, into another life, and walk in the shoes of someone else. I loved the idea of escaping reality and becoming someone important. I was always so entranced by the ways you could move your body to music, or even the sound of nothing at all and the intricate details of performing live in front of an audience. Even the smaller things like the art of the theatre's architecture seemed like portal to a different world. Sitting in the audience watching all of this in front of me, I knew I wanted to be a part of that.

It all started when my primary school took my class on a free trip to the local theatre in my city. Staring around me, I knew that it would be the best day of my life – and it was. Since I saw that first ever show I would spend hours reading about everything related to theatre, researching the lives of the actors and what show would be going on that day. As I grew older, I would walk back there when I knew a show was taking place that evening just to feel the warm buzz of the air that flowed around the evening air. The excitement of what could happen kept me warm in the winter months. I promised myself that I would make it there one day, it was my dream.

When the time came to pick out universities and university courses, I didn't have to think twice about whether I wanted to study theatre in the city I had grown up in all of my life. When I

was offered a place at the university, I knew I was getting so much closer to making my dream a reality. Weeks prior to moving into the accommodation halls, I got all of the books I needed for my course and spent my days reading and reading over everything, happy to learn as much as I could before I was even there. When I did eventually move into the village of student flats, I would walk back to the theatre and stand in front of it to say that I was nearly there and that I would be there soon. I decorated my room with the posters of Broadway shows I had accumulated over the years and plastered them over my cream breeze-block walls.

I made friends with my flatmates quite quickly, quicker than I thought it would take as I assumed it took a while to become close to complete strangers. On the first night we all decided to cook our dinners together and then played a range of games late into the night. In the little amount of time, I had known these people, we had already learnt so much about each other. It was nice to be able to talk to them and learn about where they came from as their backgrounds were quite different to mine. In the lead up to moving to university, my main goal was to just get good grades and graduate to help me get on the stage. Yet since meeting my flatmates who I could now call my friends, I discovered that simply being around people who could make me laugh and make me feel just as important as them was so much more valuable than I ever knew.

I had made particularly good friends with the girl who lived in the room opposite to mine, Mia. She studied English literature and was nearly as obsessed with the theatre as I was. Mia was the first person to come to my door to introduce myself and saw all of my posters and books which led to hours of talking about everything theatre and book-wise. On my fifth day of living at university, Mia invited the whole flat out to drinks in the student bar in town to meet some of her course mates. As we got ready and put on our make-up and curled our hair, I realised that the bar we were

going to was opposite my beloved theatre. The nervousness of meeting new people was dissolved by that familiar excitement.

At eight o'clock sharp a loud knock on my door alerted me that it was time to go and as I left my room and headed towards the smiling faces of my housemates, I knew that tonight would be a good night. The autumn air felt crisp on my skin and the roads were glistening from the rain that had fallen earlier, creating deep puddles along the curbs that splashed onto the path ahead of us as cars drove past. Despite the cool air there was still a warm energy circulating around the university campus, I still wrapped my jacket tighter around my shoulders though.

Eventually we reached the high street that led up to all of the bars, restaurants and the theatre. A strong feeling of belonging enveloped my heart as we saw the heaving bar and pounding music coming from the opening door. More rain began to fall from the star-filled sky as we finally reached the front door and got our IDs ready to show the bouncers. The entire bar was filled with students and we could barely squeeze through the crowds, let alone find Mia's course mates. We walked in a narrow line, Mia leading the way and me following behind. The smell of ale felt sour in my nose, but I didn't care, I was just happy to be around so many people despite the claustrophobia starting to build up. For a split second I remembered that I had barely taken a glance at the theatre, too focused on the buzz of the night and I attempted to turn around to take a quick look, but it was too late, more crowds of people came in blocking the view from the door.

After more struggle to push through the dense amount of people, I was pulled sharply by the arm into a booth filled with people I had never seen before. The table was soaked in alcohol and the beer mats a wet sludge next to the pints of glasses. Mia introduced the group sat around the booth as her course mates and we all began to chat over the loudness of the room. I was sat in the edge of the booth and the crowds gently pushed into my arm every so often and the pools of beer on the

table were starting to drip on my jeans, but I was too focused on trying to give Mia's friends a good impression and maybe become friends with them too. Rounds of drinks came and went and we all started to become more relaxed and friendly with laughter erupting from our table. Mia gave me a sharp elbow in the rib, and I looked at her in confusion as she whispered something about the guy across from me who was apparently staring. I brushed her away in embarrassment and tried to focus on the conversation as well as not going red in blush as I took another sip of my drink.

As the night began to draw longer the rain outside started to hit harder against the windows of the bar. The crowds had also began to clear as the hour of the bar's closure came closer and I started to relax more, not worrying about someone falling into my lap. Our group seemed a lot louder now as we weren't used to so little noise around us, but no one seemed to care. We continued to drink and tell each other embarrassing stories and the weird quirks of our courses. I finally felt as though I was somewhere, I belonged other than the theatre. I had always thought my sole dream was to make it to the stage but now, I knew that deep down another dream I had was simply to be seen, to feel loved, to feel the heat of human connection.

Out of nowhere a harsh wave of water hit me. The freezing water shocked me back into reality as I sat completely drenched wondering how a car could have splashed a puddle on me from inside. I then laughed to myself as I realised I had gotten too immersed in my daydream this time. I brushed the wet hair out of my face and rubbed down my blanket and lifted it to see the water hadn't gotten to my sleeping bag and a few of my items. Huffing, I looked back to the students who had been sat at the window of the bar and tried to place myself back into the group in my head, but it was no use; the cold water was making me too uncomfortable to imagine my dream again. I shuffled further back into the stairway of the theatre as some people walked past me, barely giving a second glance at all of my soaking wet belongings.

As I tried to warm myself back up, I watched the laughing group start to leave the bar and walk away, the girl who I imagined to be Mia leading the way. Tears didn't come anymore but the sadness of my loneliness still beat down against my soul. All of my life I had wanted to make it to this theatre, I didn't care about anything else, and now I was here, sitting outside of its doors where I would eventually be told to go away in the morning. I guess I had accomplished my dream in a way, but in another way I hadn't. My dream now is just to have a friend, to have someone to talk to, to have a life. All I have now is my imagination creating a different reality each day like I could walk in someone else's shoes for the day. All I am now is a girl dreaming of a fantasy so that I can escape my reality.