

The Walk

by Jordyn Yates

I've walked these streets enough times to know that I don't need to think about where I'm going. Past the flickering streetlights, past the empty bus stop with its rusted bench, and past the convenience store that closes too early. I don't have a destination; I just walk. It started a few months ago. Time feels different at night – stretched thin, like it could snap if you pulled too hard. During the day, everything moves so quickly. School bells, crowded hallways, voices layered on top of each other until it all becomes noise. But at night, it's quiet... a quietness that feels honest.

My parents think I'm asleep. I wait until the house settles into stillness, except for the hum of the fridge, the soft tick of the kitchen clock, my dad's low snores drifting down the hallway. That's when I slide out of bed, pull on a hoodie, and climb out of the window. The window sticks, always catching on the frame. I hold my breath every time, as if that somehow makes me invisible. Outside, the air is colder than I expected. It presses against my skin, awakening me in a way that nothing else can.

I've walked in the rain before. Not heavy rain or storms, just that steady kind that soaks into everything it touches. The rain makes the streets shimmer under the streetlights, filling my whole world full of reflections. I like it; it feels less solid, less endless. Sometimes, I think I'm trying to disappear into it. There's a stretch of road about ten minutes from my house where the streetlights die out. One always flickers, another is completely dead, and the rest are spaced far apart. That's my favourite part. It feels as though it's the edge of something, and that if I keep going, I'd step off the edge, away from it all.

Once, I saw someone else out there. Just a shape, standing under one of the working lights. I slowed down, unsure if I should turn back, but it didn't move toward me. The person simply stood there, hands out of sight, looking down, perhaps waiting for something. When I got closer, they glanced up. We said nothing as we passed each other. But for a second, I felt seen in a way that made my chest tighten: not judged, not noticed in the way teachers notice when you're not paying attention. Simply... recognized. Like they knew why I was out there. I never saw anyone else on my walks.

There's a sound the country makes at night that you don't hear during the day. It's not one thing; it's everything combined, only softened. A distant car engine. The faint buzz of electricity in the powerlines. Wind moving through trees and around bends, carrying the whispers of animals. People think that when you're out here alone like this, you must be searching or running away from something. But most of the time, I'm just here, walking. Thinking sometimes, but other times, not thinking at all.

On the longer route, there's a clock tower about twenty minutes from my house. Every hour, it chimes out, loud enough to cut through every other sound. At night, it feels different – sharper, more deliberate. One night, I stopped right beneath it. When it struck the hour, the sound hit me dead on, like a tidal wave. I counted the seconds without meaning to. One, two, three... all the

way up. I can't remember what the time was, only that it felt late, long past the hour when any person had a reason to be up. As the last chime faded, the silence left behind held more weight. I discovered then that the night does not care that you're there. You could walk for hours on end, around the same blocks, stand under every light, and nothing would change. There's something comforting about that.

During school, I feel that everyone expects something from me. Pay attention. Speak up. Fit in. Be something. Out here, there are no expectations. The roads don't question you, the dark doesn't need explanations. They just exist. I tried to explain it to my friend once. Not the walking, but the feeling. I was sitting with her at lunch, picking at my food, when she asked why I always looked tired.

"I can't sleep," I said.

"That's it?" she asked. "You seem to be somewhere else half the time." Maybe I am, I thought. I just shrugged.

"I don't know. It's nothing."

Tonight the air is clear – no rain or wind. The sky is darker, the stars dim. I walk my normal route, hands tucked in my pockets, head down. When I reach the stretch with the broken streetlights, I stop. For a moment, I think about heading back home and climbing through the window, pretending I was never out. Instead, I take a step forward, then a few more. The darkness feels heavier without the lights. My heart races, but not from fear. Uncertainty, maybe, or the feeling that something's different. The road stretches in front of me, strange now. After some time, I stop and turn around. The lights behind me seem farther away than usual. For a second, I feel it again. The pull to keep moving, to disappear into whatever's next, to leave everything behind. Instead, I stand still, caught between the dark and the dim glow behind me. Soon afterwards, I inhale and start walking back home.

When I reach my house, the window sticks the same way. I slide it open, climb inside, and close it quietly behind me. My room feels smaller than I remember, warmer. I lie down and gaze up at the ceiling. The clock chimes again, the sound distant. I don't count this time, I don't need to. I've walked through the night long enough to know it never ends. It simply waits, patient and unchanging, for the next time I stroll back into it. I always do.

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