Logan McGinnis

2/17/20

ENGL 377

Essay#2

Thinking Out Loud

We stand before the magic mirror; twisting, turning, and laughing at our distorted image. The glass is smudged with little greasy grimy fingerprints that make our reflection seem even more bizarre. People shove past us, huffing their annoyance, but we pay them no attention. For the two of us are lost in our little world. However, I don’t know it just quite yet, but that world… My world… Is about to be shaken to its very core.

Moving on, we make our way up to the ticket window, still giggling like a pair of school children. I slide the two one-dollar bills beneath the plastic window and watch as the man across from us comes to life. His motions are robotic, and his eyes glazed over, but none the less, he rips off two red tickets and pushed them back towards us.

In exchange for those tickets, we’re given hand stamps. Mine is blue and in the shape of a smeared smiley face. The location is more aligned across my knuckles rather than the center of my hand, but again I pay it little attention. In the main room, it takes a moment for our eyes to adjust. The lights are dim and flashing making it nearly impossible to see the walkway clearly. Deciding it’d be much safer; we link arms.

The smell of hot dogs and jumbo pretzels filter through the air. Their heavenly aroma is making my mouth water. However, I feel that twinge in my gut, reminding me of my stomach full of butterflies. Despite being the best of friends for nearly two years, I could never seem to rid myself of the initial nervousness.

We stand in yet another line, oblivious to the world around us. We’re just two dumb kids, who don’t have a fucking clue, but for this moment in time, neither one of us care. When it’s finally our turn the man behind the counter motions us forward. We give him our shoes in exchange for roller skates.

I double knot the worn and weathered laces, taking note of their beige rusty color. It never once crosses my mind that maybe they hadn’t always been that way. Perhaps in their prime they’d been a neon orange or maybe even a shade of fresh white, but again, I don’t care. I ensure the skates are tightly secured to my feet, before taking a cautionary step down onto the rink. I hold tightly to the metal railing, feeling the multiple layers of chipped paint. I lift my left foot, carefully testing the durability of my wheels. I feel only a slight resistance and decided it’s good enough. I push forward and make it an entire five or six feet before faceplanting onto the concrete. I quickly take note of all the bruises that will arise by morning but find no serious damage.

\*\*\*

The sounds coming from the arcade are enough to pull us in. The upbeat techno music makes it difficult to feel anything other than excited and giddy. Along with the noises are hundreds of flashing lights, all blinking simultaneously. We maneuver through the jungle of machines, using them to pull ourselves along in our skates. Small parentless children weave in and out like mice, nearly tripping us up several times.

Eventually we spot and abandoned token and decide to try our luck. The face of the coin is worn down and only the faint outline of the words remain. My palms are sweaty, and my eyes determined. I release the coin, watching as it slides down the shoot. We both hold our breath in anticipation. I slam my fist down onto the button and watch as the magenta light stops just one short of the jackpot. As the machine spits out our one ticket we laugh and head back towards the rink. I can’t help but think, even though we missed out on the hundreds of tickets, I still feel like a winner.

We go around making lap after lap, only stopping once for me to wipe the blood off my knee. Finally, we wear ourselves down enough to take a break. We head over to the café and find it’s just as busy as the rink. We both order hot dogs and a bottle of root beer. I nibble at my food watching the craziness all around. Children are zooming in and out, drinking nothing less than their fifth cup of Mt. Dew, while their parent’s watch on in horror.

Refueled by sugar, we once again make our way back out onto the floor. We’ve only gotten about three rotations in before the party lights shut off and are replaced with a slowly revolving strobe light. I can hear the announcer and I start to panic. I quickly and nonchalantly try and make my way to the exit. Of course, I fail miserably and bust my ass on the concrete.

Again, I hear the speaker announce the couple’s skate, but my mind is no longer working properly. I can taste a feint trace of iron saltiness that indicates I’d bitten my tongue but as Ed Sheeran’s voice comes over the loudspeaker the world seems to fade away. Each and every word seems to hit me as if somehow, they’d manifested into a solid being and was now punching me repeatedly in the gut.

“And I’m thinking ‘bout how people fall in love in mysterious ways. Maybe just the touch of a hand. Oh, me I fall in love with you every single day…” Slowly my senses start to come back and it is only in that moment that I’m hit with the sudden realization.

It’s impossible, I can’t be. Can I? I mean I’m only eighteen, I don’t even know what love is at this point. To make the situation even more difficult this just so happens to be my best friend, my girl best friend. I feel my hot dog threatening to resurface just as she reaches my side. I must look awful because she gives me that look of knowing. She extends her hand, which I immediately latch onto and hoist myself up. Instead of letting go she tightens her grip and tugs me out towards the center. We skate hand in hand until the strobe light disappears and children come flooding back into the rink from all sides.

I’m sweating and my whole body is shaking. However, my current state is no longer caused from the strain of trying to stay upright but brought on by sheer terror. She seems to sense my distress and asks if I’m ready to leave. I nod and allow her to drag me back over to the counter where we return our skates and collect our shoes. I slide my feet into my vans not even bothering to untie them.

We make it back out into the lobby where just hours before we’d been staring at ourselves in the mirror. Now there is no crowd, only us and the faint smell of cigarettes. I look into the mirror and can’t help but wonder. Is this new found feeling all a trick to? We make it out into the parking lot where I unlock the car and drop into the driver’s seat. As I back out of the parking lot, I’m hit with the sudden realization that things were going to be different. Whether we ended up together or I took this secret to the grave, nothing would ever be the same.

\*\*\*

I can remember going to the Idyl Wydl as a child, on occasion for one of my high-society classmate’s birthday, but usually just as a school fieldtrip. They’d always separate the lower grades from the higher ensuring safety. I can recall the day I graduated third grade and was finally allowed in the “big kids” group. The skating rink was where all the best of the drama unfolded but more importantly thee place to show off all your skills. Or in my case, the ability to take a hit. Either way, it was a true place of wonder and amazement.

It’s been a full seven years since that very night, and since then the building has become nothing more than an eye sore. I drive by sometimes, taking the long way home and let my mind wonder back to all the what ifs and could have beens, but it does nothing for me now. Like my old school trips, this too is now nothing but a memory. The building is old, abandoned, and ultimately falling apart; in a way just like our relationship did.

It feels as if an entire lifetime has passed and I’m no longer that naïve little girl. That’s not to say I don’t miss her or the old rink, but I’ve grown up and can finally accept those things for what they are and that’s nothing more than memories.