

The Budweiser Sign and the Ghosts of Saturday Night

by Brian Michael Barbeito

It waited and witnessed the seasons complete a grouping and form a year. Then it watched them do it again. Winter, spring, summer, fall. It watched from the inside of course. But it could see. Big sliding glass doors and long and wide windows stayed the course also, way out in front of the sign. Its little cord, metal, a handle on the end, when pulled down, was the trick to starting to life a magic array. Everyone at a given party knew that the right time had begun when they saw the sign blink on. There was a license to dance, to move, to take strange liquids that only the adult world knew about.

People were happy; it was because of the sign. Laughter often broke out, one person whispering to another, sharing some good and humorous gossip. Sometimes a group waited and listened, off to the side, whist someone shared a joke. But mostly, people danced with one another. The man, a self-taught engineer, had made his own dance floor and many feet touched it. Hundreds of shoes through the years. Holidays and Halloweens, St. Patrick's days and birthdays. But mostly it was just because it was a Saturday. Many of these people, only through age and nothing sinister, just the tides of time you know, eventually passed on. Some you remember. Some you forget. Some you can almost place, but not quite.

...what was her name? they used to come around a lot... I would have forgotten about them... she was always talking... was very pretty, the brunette with short hair... he was nice enough, but quiet...didn't say as much, but was there, was there many nights...

A natural joy stayed around, nestled like a summer bird in the nest of Saturday night hours. The dancers were distanced from the week that had taken place. They were also protected, for a few sacred hours at a time, from the week ahead. The sign is still there. I went back and saw it. We looked at each other in quietude. Though a queer thought, I wondered if it remembered me. I reached up, and pulled the cord. I did it respectfully, slowly, as if carefully shaking the hand of a very old man. When you do that, for instance, you receive the present of being able to gently cross paths with another time, another place, another way. Keep your eyes open for such moments. Not all the neon worked when I pulled the string, but parts of the sign blinked on. It was still that real good egg that I had known in the day. An old warrior had stayed the course, and with a wink, drizzled and faint as it was, managed to impart a sort of knowing that goes beyond mere mind-things.

For a second there, all the ghosts of what seemed a thousand Saturday nights lit up with the sign's hues. For a moment anyway. And I didn't feel sad or deep, mistaken or old or young. I didn't feel wise or innocent or anything too profound at all. I did feel calm. I knew a sort of ease, because I had once seen the well-made thing in its prime, and had known the events that it had come to know, such as the dancing Saturday night ones.

Mostly, though, there was a simple gladness at having seen the old neon sign once more.

