

# The Masquerade

by Collin Kelley

*Atlanta, 1990*

The night we almost died,  
crushed at a one-hit wonder concert,  
comes back to me  
when the club announces it's closing.  
An ancient excelsior mill  
turned industrial dance hall,  
I spent three years mapping  
every dark corner, finding secret  
places for sex and drugs,  
dancing and stomping in a sunken  
disco for misdirected youth.

I can't remember who bought  
the tickets for Deee-Lite, maybe Heather,  
Tina's momentary femme fatale,  
but we marched up the creaking stairs  
to Heaven, oversold and invaded  
by suburban yuppies and kids.  
The old floor cracked and gave  
under unfamiliar weight.

When *Groove is in the Heart* began,  
I felt my feet leave the floor,  
pinned between shoulders,  
my glasses slapped into a crush  
that inhaled and exhaled like an accordion.  
I saw Heather go down, sink  
into a sea of shirts and skins.  
A year before her breast reduction,  
Tina would wear scars across her chest

from being pushed over a barricade.

It was drag queen Jeff, who hated me  
for sleeping with his ex, that saved us.  
Lifting Heather over his head, clearing  
a path as Tina and I found use  
for elbows and knees.

The Masquerade — this firetrap  
where I cried over boys, overdosed  
in the overflowing toilets, gave  
secret handshake hand jobs —  
is becoming luxury apartments.  
The hipsters and transplants  
erasing history with their IKEA.  
The night we almost died  
buried under thick-pile, my map  
good for nothing but excelsior.

\* \* \* *Excelsior: soft shavings used for packing fragile goods or  
stuffing furniture*

