

All The Right Steps

by Jennifer Donnell

When I was thirteen I wanted to join the flag team. The team had visited my junior high school and I was impressed by the way they twirled their colorful flags- swirls of red, blue, green, and black. It seemed a great way to start high school, though my mother didn't agree. The team was required to travel on nights and weekends and we already lived forty five minutes from the city. We lived too far away for her to be a chauffeur, she explained, and told me I couldn't try out.

I didn't take my mother's denial of my dream lightly. I wanted it desperately. I cried and pleaded, nagged and begged. On several occasions, I temperamentally got out of the car at a stop sign and walked. Once, my mother said that I was nagging her so much that she felt like driving off a cliff. She didn't, and I lived to nag her the following day and the day after that.

The irony was that I was lucky I didn't join the flag team. Little did I know that the girls on the flag team were considered the school's most 'uncool'. Not that I possessed an extraordinary amount of coolness in my sister's hand-me-downs or fluorescent headbands, but I certainly couldn't spare any of the little coolness I did have.

It's kind of like with you.

Sometimes I wonder why it's been so hard to see you. Out of the billions of people in the world, seeing one person should be relatively easy. I wanted to gracefully parade out at half time shows, just once, and throw my flag higher than the rest. I wanted to see you, smile away the past and laugh.

Before my mother issued a complete ultimatum, she let me attend two of the practice sessions. The team captain, a tall bold brunette,

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took special interest in my twirling. During break, she told me I was the most talented at catching onto the steps. I left with an unbelievable amount of confidence. It feels good to be talented at something you want that much. Still, my mother couldn't risk the unknown, the chance that it might be overwhelming, driving me to and fro.

Most things contain an element of risk.

It's like that time I asked if you had favorite expression and you said, "When your chips are down, watch your step." I thought it was about gambling and wondered what it had to do with walking, but realized it had more to do with you. You were letting me know I couldn't try out, that my chips were down and I better watch my step. You were saying that it didn't matter what kind of flag I waved, as you weren't auditioning for the role I was cast. You were saying you didn't care.

Or, that's what I used to think, when I thought like that.

Now, though I'm glad I didn't join the flag team, I probably would have liked it if I had. Maybe I would have made good memories and been glad I tried something new. I figure, if I wait a little longer, I'll be glad that my white flag doesn't catch your breath a little, doesn't make you wonder what it would be like. I'll be glad that you pretend, trying to make it seem effortless, as if you haven't given me a second look or ever wanted a swan song. The real irony is that you have your own white flag- squashed and hidden, muddied and longing to be free.

I can envision it flying high, twirling against the skyline, catching it effortlessly. I can picture the static between us dissipated, clean, as if my chips were never down and I had all the right steps.

