

On Senior Prom & Being Profoundly Unpleasant

by XXXX

When I was in high school, we had a prom. The juniors were paired with the seniors; and when I was a senior, I recall meeting my date for the first time. You can imagine she was not enthralled. In fact, the entire time, from then until the evening we sat together at the table, I never heard her speak; and the only time she even acknowledged I existed at all was when she shrugged at me when the juniors were asked to hand their tokens to their dates.

It is one of those experiences that are there to remind you that you're not all that, though of course I have a treasure trove of these, and by this time you would think the universe would understand that the message has been received crystal clear.

My senior prom was a strange evening. You'd think that everyone of my social persuasion had a strange evening, too. You'd be wrong. The entire time I was the only one seated that did not have a tongue down my throat or a hand on someone's thigh in a highly inappropriate manner. Even our teachers were going crazy. I tried, of course. I tried dancing, and I did dance with all of my girl friends. They didn't last very long.

What do you do while dancing, exactly? Do you talk? Do you stare at each other? Two of my friends, who had been in love, were fairly comfortable just having their arms around each other; and even through the dance music they slow danced. For me, it's awkward swaying with awkward conversation, and there's a moment when you awkwardly have to let go and laugh and walk away.

At one point the boy I had liked for the longest time took my hands and placed it on his shoulders and put his hands on my waist, but I was too proud and let go. Thinking back, I want to thank him for doing that.

When I was sitting alone, in front of everyone, watching all of them—now I realize how much of a loser I looked, but at the time it was so natural to me—my teacher grabbed me by the hand and led me to my friend, and said: “Mercado, it's your prom. Don't spend it sitting down.”

We danced for a while, and spoke, and after a while I remember she let go, and she said, explicitly, that she didn't want to do it anymore. Her face revealed disgust, not only at me, or perhaps at the fact that my person swayed in front of her like that for a few minutes, but also at herself, as if she wanted to know why she had allowed that to happen at all, as if she wanted to know sternly why I—malproportioned, unattractive, hair in the wrong places—did what I had been doing.

Needless to say, I found myself back on the chair; and this is what I did for the rest of the night. I cannot recall if I felt sorry for myself, or if I wanted at all to dance. Though I do remember wondering what it was like. I would thereon pretend, with great prodigy, that I wanted nothing to do with any of it. Something about intelligence, or with society being too indulgent, or something. Nietzsche undoubtedly entered into this rationalization somewhere. But truthfully I did want to know what it was like.

In the car going home, I saw everyone else go home, and I still have clear images of the way people seemed to have the time of their lives, and feeling very sore about it. Did I fall in love with intellect because I was hideous, or was I hideous because I fell in love with intellect? Who knows. Two facts are clear: I am in love with intellect and I am hideous. The order of causality is not so important.

That morning, my collar wouldn't button up because my polo shirt was too small. I had neglected to see if it fits because I did not want to make a fuss out of preparing for the prom. I therefore could not wear my tie properly and looked somewhat like a homeless person with little or no regard for personal hygiene. My father was furious.

“This prom will only happen once in your life,” he said. “How can you not prepare for it?”

I made some stupid excuse. I cannot recall if I said something like, "I don't care about the prom anyway," but I probably did.

I remember thinking that this is really the only time I will have a prom. I remember thinking that I will probably really miss out on something big and meaningful this time. I remember thinking that even if I did prepare for it, things will probably not go so well because it had nothing to do with my shirt or my tie.

The fact that everyone disliked me at my prom, and that I did not have a good time, and that my friend did not want to dance with me, and that the junior assigned as my date did not want to hold my hand as we walked down the aisle though the teachers harassed us to do so had nothing whatsoever to do with my shirt or my tie.

