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I Was a Tourist That Night

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There is a memory that I have carried with me for many years. It was Reggae Night at a bar on State Street in Madison, Wisconsin, back when I was a college student. I believe we were on the second floor, and that a live band was playing, and that the wooden floorboards were uneven—but sometimes my memory and my imagination intertwine. Perhaps I talked myself into trying to enjoy reggae that evening, though to be

honest, it made me feel like a tourist who was a long ways from home.

I was a young woman who grew up on a dairy farm, who was finding her place on a campus of 40,000 students, and who was experimenting with reggae.

Perhaps I remember this scene, this feeling of being a tourist, because the future swung on a hinge on that night. I was on my first date with the man I would marry in a year. He didn't dance that night, so I was on the dance floor alone with everyone else.

Who was I that night? I was a person who was about to change. My past and my future were about to blend together in a way that I couldn't imagine.

Nearly everyone that night was smoking and drinking. It was a hot, muggy July evening with air that was almost too thick to breathe. In my memory, I was nothing more than a blur.

Everything was happening around me in swirls of smoke that kept a reggae beat. I was a tourist a long ways from home, yet this memory stays with me. How far will I carry it? Does anyone ever really know what the past is preparing us for?