

If I Forget You, Truman Capote

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Grace had stood waiting on the porch for him for almost an hour. When she had seen him down in town that afternoon he had said he would be there at eight. It was almost eight-ten. She sat down in the porch swing. She tried not to think of his coming or even to look down the road in the direction of his house. She knew that if she thought about it, it would never happen. He just wouldn't ever come.

"Grace, are you still out there, hasn't he come yet?"

"No, Mother."

"Well you can't sit out there for the rest of the night, come right back into this house."

She didn't want to go back in, she didn't want to have to sit in that stuffy old living room and watch her father read the news and her mother work the cross word puzzles. She wanted to stay out here in the night where she could breathe and smell and touch it. It seemed so palpable to her that she could feel its texture like fine blue satin.

"Here he comes now, Mother," she lied, "he's coming up the road now, I'm going to run and meet him."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Grace Lee," said her mother's sonorous voice.

"Yes, Mother, yes! I'll be back as soon as I say goodbye."

She tripped down the porch steps and out into the road before her mother could say anything more.

She had made up her mind that she was going to just keep right on walking until she met him, even if she had to walk all the way to his house. This was a big night for her, not exactly a happy one, but it was a beautiful one anyway.

He was going to leave town, after all these years. It would seem so funny after he was gone. She knew nothing would ever be quite the same again. Once in school, when Miss Saaron asked the pupils to write a poem, she had written a poem about him, it was so good that it had been published in the town paper. She had called it "In the Soul of the Night." She recited the first two lines as she sauntered along the moon drenched road.

My loves is a Bright Strong light,
That shuts out the darkness of the Night.

Once he had asked her if she really loved him. She had said, "I love you for now, but we're just kids, this is just puppy love." But she knew she had lied, at least lied to herself, for now, for this brief moment, she knew that she loved him and then only a month ago she was quite sure it was all very childish and silly. But now that he was going away she knew this was not so. Once he had told her, after the poem episode, that she shouldn't take it so seriously, after all she was only sixteen.

"Why, by the time we're twenty, if someone was to mention our names to one another we probably wouldn't even recognize the name." She had felt terrible about that. Yes, he would probably forget her. And now he was going away and she might never see him again. He might become a great engineer just like he wanted to be, and she'd still be sitting down here in a little southern town no one ever heard of. "Maybe he won't forget

me," she told herself. "Maybe he'll come back to me and take me away from here to some big place like New Orleans or Chicago or even New York." It made her wild eyed with happiness just to think of it.

The smell of the pine woods on either side of the road made her think of all the good times they had had picnicking and horseback riding and dancing.

She remembered the time he had asked her to go to the junior prom with him. That was when she had first known him. He was so awfully good looking and she was so proud of herself, no one would have ever thought that little Grace Lee with her green eyes and freckles would ever have walked off with a prize like him. She had been so proud and so excited that she had almost forgotten how to dance. She had been so embarrassed when she mistook the lead and he had stepped on her foot and torn her silk stocking.

And just when she had convinced herself that this was real romance her mother had gone and said that they were just children and after all children just couldn't possibly know what real "affection" was, as she termed it.

Then the girls in town, who were purple with envy, started a "We Don't Like Grace Lee Campaign." "Look at the little fool," they would whisper, "just throwing herself at him." "Why she's no better than a--than a--harlot." "I'd give a pretty penny to know what those two have been up to, but I suppose it would be too shocking for my ears."

Her pace quickened, she got mad just when she thought of it, those smug little prigs. She never would forget the fight she had had with Louise Beavers the time she had caught her reading a letter she had written aloud to a lot of laughing girls in the school wash room. Louise had stolen the letter out of one of Grace's books and she was reading it aloud to them all with great, mocking gestures, and making a joke out of something that wasn't funny at all.

"Oh, well, that's just a lot of trivial nonsense anyway," she thought. The moon shone brightly in the sky, pale, wan little clouds hung around the surface like a fine lace shawl. She stared at it. She would soon be at his house. Just up this hill and down and there she would be. It was a fine little house, it was solid and substantial. It was just the perfect place for him to live, she thought.

Sometimes she thought it was just a lot of sentiment, this puppy love, but now she was certain that it wasn't. He was going to leave. He was going away to live with his aunt in New Orleans. His aunt was an artist, she did not like that very much. She had heard that artists were queer people.

He had not told her until yesterday that he was leaving. He must have been a little afraid too, she thought, and now I'm the one that's afraid. Oh, how happy everyone would be now that he was leaving and she wouldn't have him anymore, she could just see their laughing faces.

She brushed the light blonde hair out of her eyes. There was a cool wind blowing through the tree tops. She was nearing the crest of the hill, and suddenly she knew that he was coming up the other side and that they were going to meet at the top. She grew hot all over so sure was her premonition. She did not want to cry, she wanted to smile. She felt in her pocket for the picture of herself he had asked her to bring. It was a

cheap snapshot that a man had taken of her at a carnival that had passed through the town. It didn't even look much like her. Now that she was almost there she didn't want to go any further. As long as she hadn't actually said goodbye she still had him. She went and sat in the soft evening grass by the side of the road to wait for him.

"All I hope for," she said as she stared up into the dark, moon filled sky, "is that he doesn't forget me, I suppose that's all I have a right to hope for."

The End