

## **The Effects of Fog at Dusk**

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What words can truly possess the unspeakable beauty of a city at night? There is an unmistakable calm in the air. The people of the city acknowledge the pain that the day brought. There is a kind of acceptance that doesn't come in daylight. Some nights are more remarkable than others, memorable in the way they comfort our weary souls.

March 19, 2020. In the midst of a pandemic, Iowa City is there to wrap her wings around her people. Our hearts ache with uncertainty and fear. Social distancing is the new norm. Some of us take frequent walks to make up for our increased time indoors, stopping to chat with a neighbor from across the street. Our eyes flick to the ground, discreetly measuring out a six foot radius between us and anyone nearby. The exchange students wear disposable polypropylene face masks, as it isn't such a foreign thing to them. We don't leave the safety of our controlled home environments without a mini-bottle of hand sanitizer tucked in one pocket. To protect our beautiful town, we quarantine. We shut ourselves in our homes and try to support the local shops from afar. They, too, close their doors and draw heavy metal shades over their exposed windows. Glowing 'Open' signs flicker off, the continuous buzz they emit giving way to utter silence. Cars park, their tires only grating pavement many weeks later. In the streets, silence echoes its crushing weight. The trees sway, fighting to remain beautiful. Little do they know, they are fighting a battle that they can never lose, no matter if they shiver in the cold gusts of wind that crisp their few leaves. Streetlights supply us with pools of yellow to attack the approaching inky darkness. Our sidewalks and thoroughfares glisten with remnants of the day's rain. Stoplights paint watercolors on the ground, dancing and shimmering as our sky's cotton candy vibrance fades to a watery gray.

Iowa City clings to my clothes. The blanket of fog She provides, suspended and enveloping, weaves its way through the fibers of my Hawkeye pullover. I walk, my destination undetermined. My family surrounds me, yet I am alone in every way but physical. She can pull me from the tightly woven fabric of sound and challenge me to embrace the silence that others endure. My Chuck Taylors touch Iowa soil in a way so familiar that I want to make a bed for myself amongst the dewy grass of College Green Park. As we walk, a cupped leaf finally bows to the water gathered at its center. It empties its contents on my shoulder as I brush past. She has provided me with another reminder. I am okay. Through difficult times, I will gather water at my center and my stem may break, but I will forever belong to my city. I can feel the pulse of Her core as we come upon downtown. Her heartbeat remains steady and thumping despite every ounce of stability we have been robbed of.

The air is humid. A taste of rain layers my tongue as I inhale the scent of dirt and earthworms in their scant moment of freedom to flop along unbothered. The damp air stands still. Time stands still. I can't help but stand still either. My mind, my body, is weak under the weight it has been allotted. Iowa City has me floating. I walk through the Ped Mall, its emptiness, its hollowness. The library stands valiant despite its closure, beckoning those who are willing to

stand beside it, to feel the warmth of the books buzzing inside. The lights are still on, shedding luminance to the darkest corners of the playground beside it, which looks on, vulnerable and bare without squealing children clinging to its many metallic, outstretched limbs.

Memories cascade on my shoulders. Memories of better times, of shining faces and laughter that rings empty across the sidewalks as I grasp the severity of my situation. Of our situation. It cannot be forgotten that we are in this together.

A man sits alone on a bench, letting his saxophone speak to the vacancy of downtown. Silent Night swims through shrouded alleyways and past locked storefronts with paper notices pinned to their doors. "During this tough time, we are not able to offer in-house dining. Please consider supporting local and order take-out!" Endless signs flipped to 'Closed' line South Dubuque Street. The airy notes of the Saxophone Man's solemn serenade wrap around me, guide me along as I whisk past Prairie Lights. I stand under its glass arch and don't dare to try and open its heavy door. It may be shut tight at present, but the promise of a sunny summer day to run my fingertips along the rigid spines of every book I could possibly want to crack open fuels me. She provides me with a future. A warm, optimal space at the end of the tunnel that I can run towards without hesitation. I move along, past St. Burch Tavern's striking black on white aesthetic and turn left, walking up Iowa Avenue. Towering ahead of me is the flashy facade of a beloved golden dome that demands the attention of anyone who happens to be caught in its glinty stare. It is a presence that to those who know it, welcomes anyone and everyone up its well-worn stone steps. Behind the grandeur is a story that has weathered all chapters of life. Once gazing over an unpaved dirt road trampled by hooves instead of tires, holding the noble title of State Capitol, then watching on as responsibility shifted to Des Moines. Observing as Her citizens evolved, as technology developed and the University grew in popularity. Smiling down with pride as Iowa City was dubbed the third UNESCO City of Literature. Taking part in graduation celebrations, letting thrilled college students coat its steps with champagne that sticks to the soles of pedestrian shoes for days after. Calling the little ones into its mammoth interior, giving them knowledge of our history. She has provided us with a building to represent us, to show that despite the Old Capitol Museum's grand stature it can remain unthreatening.

While on March 19, Her sprawling green lawns and pedways once teeming with all walks of life are left unattended, they are not as abandoned as one might think. Iowa City has provided such a solid base layer of hospitality that Her people can take over from there. She has taught Her citizens well, well enough to take the baton and run with it. We will be back when our days are longer and when the stress of an imposing virus has receded. She has taught me that nothing is forever, no matter how final the night may seem. She has taught us that another day will come and with it, a sun that will rise and people that will show up in the best way they can. We, as a People, are strong with the lessons that Iowa City has graciously provided us. She has given us the ability to trust in another sunrise and to receive what the previous one has handed. For that, I thank you, Iowa City. I thank you for your lessons and comfort, and for the light you continually hold for us at the end of each tunnel we come across. There is no way to express my gratitude through words alone, but again, I thank you. We are different because of you. It only took me one walk at dusk to figure that out.