

# Good Things

by Julia Smillie

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I am 33 years old, at The Pageant on a Saturday night. I'm exhausted. I feel as though I've been here forever, waiting for the BoDeans to take the stage. I'm already cynical and unfair. The crowd is old. Balding men love the BoDeans. When did this happen? I'm not ready for this realization: that these are the same people who were young, dancing next to me at the BoDeans concerts nearly 15 years ago. They are old because we are all old.

Even the band is old and I'm rocked by this. They're pulling songs from my past, as fresh and vibrant as the early concerts, when I pushed my way up front, hoping for a bead of sweat to fall on me. It seems strange to be here in the present with this music. So strange, I find it hard to stay, my mind abandoning the smoke-filled room full of middle-aged men and peoples' parents bobbing up and down, hands in the air.

Suddenly, I am 19 years old, lying in the dark next to the strange and thrilling body of my first love. I have never felt so alive. *If I could hold you tonight, I might never let go.* We are playing grown-up, toying with emotions far too complicated for our young hearts to contemplate. *If I could hold you tonight, I might never let go.* Places in me are being discovered at a pace that is truly dizzying, filled with love and hope and sex and dreams. With our eyes and our bodies and our raw, pure intentions we are making promises we can't possibly keep, although we don't yet know it. *If I could hold you tonight, I might never, no never let go.* His hand reaches out and entwines mine.

Then, I am 20 years old, lying in the dark alone, listening to the album he gave me. *We got the bottle down for soakin' dreams.* It is bittersweet and painfully ominous. *And hearts that fall in two pretend they don't show.* I can practically see whatever it is that existed between us disappearing into the night. Love is leaving and I'm dealt the crushing blow of powerlessness, the searing pain of lost love. *I guess naïve love songs are savin' grace, when losers win in this losin' race.* It is new and cruel and awful and it hurts, it hurts to be alive.

I am 21 years old, hurtling through the pitch black night, my sister in the passenger seat. *We ain't gotta worry tonight.* We are driving to meet the rest of our family, already on vacation in North Carolina. Midnight has passed long ago and we are delirious with caffeine and chain-smoked cigarettes. *We ain't gotta run away, it's alright.* My car is zipping across a bridge over the ocean, so narrow it seems that we are skimming the very surface of the water. There are no other cars around. We have the radio turned up full blast, the windows down all the way. We are sharing this moment before our lives branch out and take different directions. *They don't let no angels out at night.*

I am 24 years old, lost in a town I shouldn't be in. I have followed me here and the solutions I'd planned have vanished, fallen apart, betrayed me. *Don't you fade away, til the morning light.*

Everything here is transient, negotiable. *You might fade away.* There is not enough beer in town to silence or sedate my head or my heart. *You might fade away.* I can't make myself disappear.

I am 27 years old, so freshly sober I have no business being here, at Mississippi Nights, surrounded by decadence and indulgence, wrist bands and beer mugs taunting me. *Where to run, baby, where to hide.* I'm desperate to believe that I can still live, that the music from before will prove to me I'm still alive. I have pushed my way up front. *Caught in the rain on the losin' side.* I am close enough for eye contact, which comes but only fleetingly. Not long enough that the band can realize what I am asking – not just for recognition. I need saving. *My little angel, pick up the pieces and start again.* I need rescued.

I am 30 years old, a certified grown up. *Sunlight fall, down on the fields. Sunlight fall down over me.* I am at the bottom of my parents' garden on a sweetly warm May night, in an ivory dress I'll later regret, my feet in shoes I'll kick off shortly. *No, no, no, don't pass me over.* The man whose hand sits on the small of my back, moving me gently back and forth to the music, this man is my husband. *No, no, no, don't pass me by.* I think that this will be as good as it gets, this very moment. In the night, at tables around us are just our friends and closest family. My mother is there, joyous, my niece on her lap. She won't live to see her two sons marry. But we know none of that then. Only that this is something we never dreamed of and if you had said, then, that it gets only better, we would have laughed, cynical but still hoping. *See, I can see, good things for you and I.*

A jolt to my chair from an overzealous fan brings me back to the present. The crowd is shouting for an encore, the BoDeans, I imagine, hanging back until it's just the right time to deliver. Their return to the stage coincides with my return to the present and the venue fills with a roar. My husband stands up and offers me his hand. It takes me a moment to realize what he's asking – that he wants me to dance with him. Here, and now. In public. I stand up and his hand slides around, to its familiar resting place on the small of my back. The band sings: *See, I can see, good things for you and I. Yeah, good things for you and I.*