Friday at the Dance

Matt Avedisian
St. John Fisher College
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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"It was 8 o'clock on a Friday night, and into the Holiday Inn trudged Darryl. He really didn't feel up to the task of working this evening, for he had other thoughts on his mind. His landlady had recently raised the rent by a hundred dollars, and Darryl was wondering where the heck he could come up with the extra money. Maybe he should start looking for a second job. Or ask McCloskey for a raise. It wouldn't be an unreasonable demand; he had five good years with the company. He was due for some kind of reward."

Cover Page Footnote

This prose is available in The Angle: http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol1994/iss1/7
See with your heart
Do not let what your eyes detect change the love you feel
See with your mind
Do not let colors cloud your thoughts
See with your soul
Do not let your spirit be squashed by all of the imaginary lines
See their hearts
See people
See their minds
See people
See their souls
Do not judge by that which only your eyes can see
Your eyes are limiting
See others as though you were blind!

Friday at the Dance

It was 8 o'clock on a Friday night, and into the Holiday Inn trudged Darryl. He really didn't feel up to the task of working this evening, for he had other thoughts on his mind. His landlady had recently raised the rent by a hundred dollars, and Darryl was wondering where the heck he could come up with the extra money. Maybe he should start looking for a second job. Or ask McCloskey for a raise. It wouldn't be an unreasonable demand; he had five good years with the company. He was due for some kind of reward.

As he walked down the hall, Darryl met Mr. McCloskey, the night manager.

"Hi, Darryl, there's a semiformal dance for some college kids in the Windsor Room. They're going to be renting some suites after the dance—let's make this place look extra clean so they come back again, okay big guy?" said Mr. McCloskey, his words fading as he walked around the corner.

Yep, same ship different day, Darryl thought to himself.

Oh well, at least he felt needed, even if the work was a drudge.

He then headed for his "office" where he selected his favorite mop and filled that familiar blue bucket three-quarters full of hot water. "Like a bridge over troubled waters...da, da, dee, dee," Darryl often broke into song when no one was around, to keep himself from falling asleep on the job.

Taking his time, he pushed the blue bucket with the mop across the plush carpet. He noticed several young, attractive couples stepping off the elevator near the Windsor Room. The men looked handsome in their starched black suits and flower-print ties, while the women looked sweet in their black, strapless gowns.

... (sigh)... Darryl drifted into nostalgia, reminiscing about Alice, Paula, Maureen, and several young girls he had dated as a young boy. "That could be me dancing and drinking the night away," he thought to himself.

Where had the time gone? Darryl wondered. It seemed like only a month ago he had been studying algebra in Mrs. O'Henry's class and then graduating and getting drafted to fight overseas in Southeast Asia. After burning his uniforms and flushing his medal of honor down the toilet upon returning to the States, a piece of enemy shrapnel embedded under his left temple was his only memento of those murderous two years of his life. From a distance, the shrapnel looked like a king-sized wart, and Darryl often wondered if it was the main reason he hadn't had a date in the last two decades. He would have liked to have had it surgically removed, but Dr. Laraby had said that the procedure would cost about $500. And even then there might be scars. Not to mention a 90 percent chance of blindness in his left eye.

His mind drifting back to his work, Darryl entered the men's room. As always, Darryl started mopping under the stalls. Methodically swishing the mop from side to side, he made sure he cleaned behind each commode twice. While he mopped with his back to the door, one of the young dancers strode in. Darryl instinctively stopped working to let him go by. He hoped this young man wasn't like the other college kids who had purposely left a mess for him to clean up.

Don't jump to conclusions; Darryl loved kids. It was the kids that relieved themselves on the floor or plugged up the sinks that he had a passing desire to choke until their faces turned the color of concord grapes.

After mopping the floor, Darryl began cleaning the sinks, the faucets, and the counter. He wiped the counter with small, circular strokes. He then washed the faucets, rhythmically massaging them with his rough hands. Patiency,
Darryl waited for the dancer to finish. After giving the restroom the once over and making sure that there weren’t any surprises to clean up, he exited and headed for the women’s room.

After making that sharp click with his time card that meant there would be another Dominds sheet pizza and a bottle of Colt 45 on the table this week, Darryl headed back upstairs for a quick peek in the Windsor Room. The dance was about a half hour from ending when he looked in. Though the music sounded like fingernails scraping across a Blackboard, there was something about the dancing that excited him. The visions before him of writhing youth pressed flesh to flesh reminded him of the many times he had taken Alice to high school dances back in the ’60s. For the next half hour Darryl felt 19 again as a smile bloomed on his face.

Julia Napoli absently brushed a coil of ebony-colored hair out of her eyes, too absorbed in the letter before her to remove her gaze from the page. Reading over her childish scrawl, she vaguely remembered writing it and noticed the spots where previous teardrops had made the paper bubble and the ink smear.

When she was seventeen the letter had been what she’d needed. The pain of his absence, instead of decreasing with time, had remained, provoked by all the occasions that came and went without his acknowledgement. Breaking the silence between them, she had written, pouring out all the anger and resentment that had been left unspoken. The bitter, hateful words that stared back at her were obviously her attempt to hurt him in return.

It wasn’t until the last paragraph that she realized the intention of the letter seemed to change. It was detached, the writing stilted, as if it had been difficult for her. No doubt it had been, she thought, wincing as she read it over again. Despite all the pain she had just bluntly expressed, this paragraph alone dared to suggest the faint hope that they had a future.

There had been no reply to that letter. Julia closed the diary and ran her finger over its cover to remove the dust that had accumulated over the past ten years. The copy of the letter to her father had been the last entry she’d made before leaving for college. She remembered thinking how important it was at the time to copy all the words exactly as she’d written them, almost as if she had known that years later she would need to read them again. Now, sitting on a pile of boxes in the musty attic, she realized the hopes and dream of the past had dulled with time but were still there, accompanied by an empty sadness for what would never be.

Dust danced carelessly in the air around her, disturbed from its rest by her methodical search for the diary. The distant memory of its existence had led her to the attic and sent her shuffling through box after box of forgotten love letters, high school yearbooks and football pennants. It contained the final communication between her and her father but offered little explanation for his recent request. The conversation with her grandmother floated back to her and her fingers tightened around the diary as she remembered the older woman’s words: “Your father wants to see you, Julia.”

They rarely discussed her father and Julia had been caught off guard by the unexpected remark. She had pictured her grandmother’s worried frown at the other end of the phone and knew what the sentence had cost her.

Rose had been trying unsuccessfully for years to renew her son’s interest in his only child. After the divorce she had known the restricted visiting rights and the three-hour commute to his former home would be difficult for Michael. But two years later, when Julia was nine, and the infrequent weekend visits stopped, Rose had been shocked. A bitter argument with Michael had ensued and while she had received no explanation for his behavior, she had been forced to accept it. She had never stopped hoping, however, that Michael would have a change of heart and the two could resume their relationship as father and daughter. It was that hope that had made her the willing messenger between them; years ago delivering Julia’s letter and two days ago, Michael’s request.

A muffled, high-pitched giggle broke through her thoughts and Julia traveled the length of the attic to stand in front of the window that faced the backyard. The air on the third floor was dry and hot, as if the house had been trying desperately to trap the warmth of summer. The