Grandma

Bobbie Dillon
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

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Cover Page Footnote

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GRANDMA

by

Bobbie Dillon

"How much longer?" she asked in a quiet, frail voice.

For eighty-four years she had answered the questions, and now she was asking me how much longer she would have to hold on, how much longer her life would last.

It was not asked in fear, or in a desire for the agony her life had become to continue. It was asked in strength and dignity, a quiet and frail dignity to be sure, but with honor and bravery seldom seen.

My grandmother was dying. She had found out less than two months before that she had an inoperable tumor in her esophagus. The tumor was cancerous and without treatment, terminal. The doctors gave her six to eight weeks to live and she had decided to forgo heroic treatment.

Her life was a full and healthy one. Married to the same man for 45 years until his death, she had lived for him. The elephant ankles. I still think of them when I see a woman with that height and grace. She was the one who introduced me to the world of dance and music.

The walk from my car to the night club isn't far, but a bunch of street lights are out and my breath is freezing almost before I exhale. I'm meeting friends here but I'm less than thrilled. It's one of those 'Black Hole,' 18-and-over bars that suck in just about anyone and anything, and I'm walking right into it.

At this age I like to call 'Teasing Twenty.' You know how it is. All your legal friends go out to real bars and ask you along as the designated driver. Or some lecherous man tells you that your eyes set him on fire until he learns that you can't stay down a tall cold one with him.

Anyway that's where we're here--for my sake. So my legal friends can hang out with me. Sure. Me and a hundred-plus other under-agers. Only on the ladder of legality they're on the first rung and I'm on the "WARNING: DO NOT SET OR STAND ON THIS STEPS" spot.

The music sounds loud before I even reach the door. My hopes rise by degrees as I pull it open. The beat pulls me in, strong and steady. I am almost afraid I'll start dancing in line. As far as I know there's no legal dancing age.

The line is long and comprised of about what I expected. A group of gigglers in black spandex and bad perms made worse by bleach and hair spray are flitting with the bouncer. There is a cute boy in ripped jeans and cowboy boots in front of me looking real nervous. I bet myself he is 18 and has chalked his license for 18. My face turns the color of my Cinnamonberry lipstick as I clutch my own license which indubitably states that I am 20.

I can't bear to be so casually thrown into a category that begins with suckling infants and ends with myself. But the cold fact is, we're all under-agers.

The line moves up steadily until I am almost at the point of humiliation--the bouncer's chair. This place is run tight. A man in a rented tux who looks like a model for Mellow Mail is walking down the line checking ID's and handing out "Last-responsible-for-my-own-actions-and-this-club-is-not papers for the under-21's. I feel like I should be sucking my thumb but I bite my nail instead. Cowboy boots in front of me--his sheet.

As I reach the end of the narrow runway I try to inconspicuously hike up my black stockings. I hate the way they stretch over my ankles. I am dressed all in black because I think it makes me look older. Apparently, so does Rent-a-Tux. He asks me how old I am and I don't lie. In fact, I tell him, "Just under 21." And maybe I bet my bicycles.

At any rate the papers pass over me and to the short girl behind me with hair that gives her an easy extra four inches. She is dressed all in black too but I guess she doesn't look older.

Next I move toward the bouncer whose maximum lifting capacity I am convinced far exceeds his I.Q., and his stamps a neon green "OVER" on the back of my right hand.

I finally walk into the club and the sounds and the crowd, and am almost overwhelmed. I smell sweaty bodies and stale beer forever soaked into cheap carpeting. The music is so loud and strong I feel like it is pulsing within my own body.

I learn to adjust my eyes to the lighting and scan the crowd staring flashes from the strobe lights. I spot my friends on the fourth or fifth strobe and wonder why I'm not excited to show them my stamps. I want to stride right up to the bar and order a whiskey sour straight up in a loud voice. But I can't shake the nagging fear that my loud voice will be drowned out by the hearty sound of the bartender's laughter and the ridiculous stars of the legal night life surrounding me.

I feel my imagination running away with me, and I feel like I will certainly be caught in my foolish charade. I slowly convince myself that Rent-a-Tux is an undercover cop who's setting me up.

My friends spot me and call me over and I join them. I am resigned to the fact that my stamp does not give me psychological security and I decide to resort to my old habit: give money to friend 'c' who gives...