Teasing Twenty

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

"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."

Cover Page Footnote
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 forego heroic treatment.

Her life was a full and healthy one. Married to the same man for 45 years until his death, she had raised two sons and had lived to see five grandchildren, twelve great-grandchildren, and one great-great-granddaughter.

Up until four weeks before her death she had lived by herself in the farmhouse she had come to as a young bride in 1925. Although she had never learned to drive, she was very independent, counting only on a ride to town once every two weeks to shop for her groceries.

Grandma had always enjoyed gardening, and the two large flower beds that encircled her country home were always ablaze with a spectrum of perennial color from spring through autumn. She enjoyed reading and watching documentaries and was in constant touch with contemporary issues, always ready for a politically charged conversation peppered with her strong, traditional, yet surprisingly liberal opinions.

Of Irish descent, tea-time was strictly observed at her house. A hold-over from the days when she was a young bride in 1925. Although she had never learned to drive, she was very independent, counting only on a ride to town once every two weeks to shop for her groceries.

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it to bartender "y" who gives drink to friend "x" who passes it on to his illegal friend, me.

It turns out even this is unnecessary, because I run into a really hot guy who is over 21 and doesn't care that I'm not. I can only tear my gaze from his smile long enough to notice his great blue eyes. The strobes are intensifying them until it seems they will leap right off his face. As I sip the drink he buys me I wonder at the miracle of mutual attraction. All this time I was sure it only happened for every single other girl I've ever known.

Suddenly I am jerked backwards and one of my inebriated friends catches me before I fall to the floor and risk death by trampling. He is half dragging, half carrying me to the dance floor, and all I can do is scream to Blue-eyes I'll be back.

I convince my friend to let me walk like a normal person, but when I reach the stairs leading to the dance floor I trip anyway. I have a bad feeling about this.

My fears are confirmed as I survey the dance floor. A hundred or more sweating bodies are meshing together doing dance moves even Patrick Swayze would blush at. As my friend pushes me into the throng I immediately become just another sweaty body, and I imagine that all of my clothes have become see-through. I catch a whiff of Polo cologne so strong I actually feel faint.

My friend has disappeared and as I turn to leave my escape is blocked by a group of three guys, and the one closest to me is wearing the bottle of Polo. His hair is greasy and curly and he flashes a toothy smile beneath a patch of carefully groomed peach fuzz. His breath smells like smoke and the combination is not appealing.

He moves around me in a circle in a dance I'm sure he thinks is exotic, but his grinding hips and flailing arms make him look more like a drowning man than a sexy dancer. The strobes on the dance floor keep illuminating my forced partner like a bad dream, and suddenly I have a headache. I push through the crowd and down the stairs and take a good, deep breath.

I find my friends again and search again between flashes of light—but this time I am searching for Blue Eyes. The back of my neck is damp and I realize the stamp on my hand is virtually "sweated" off. I feel like Cinderella in that when my stamp disappears a sign on my forehead will prominently display: "UNDERAGE DRINKER" for all the club to see. I decide it's time to leave.

On my way out I spot one of Blue Eyes' friends and try to sound casual when I ask for him. I find out that Blue Eyes had a lot of good things to say about me. I also find out that that was before he got thrown through the front window after a little disagreement at the bar. So much for mutual attraction.

I hurry towards the door and Rent-a-Tux smiles at me. I try to smile back but all I can manage is a wild-eyed stare. As I speedwalk to my car I listen for sirens and of course hear none. The upper portion of the "V" and "R" still glow bright green on my hand.

I wait for my car to warm up and wonder what it will be like to go out and just enjoy myself without worrying about what I am and am not old enough to do. I dream of the day when paranoid fears of undercover cops dressed in tuxedos will be a thing of the past, and I can hear "Bud Lite, please?" in my own voice—even if I don't take a single sip.

I notice with horror that now I smell like sweat and smoke and traces of Polo, and as I motor softly down the street, I think of two things: my warm bed waiting for me at home, and what good things Blue Eyes said about me before he made the Black Hole bigger.
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"Pops"

Craig Lamb