

Anniversary

By Hunter Ellis

I check my watch. It is 7:45 p.m. and I am starving. My wife and I have been waiting outside of the restaurant for nearly thirty minutes with no sign of reprieve.

"Do you think we are going to be seated soon?" my wife says.

Before I can open my mouth, a vibrating puck signals us to the hostess stand. While the hostess checks which tables are available I notice a familiar figure sitting at the bar.

"Just this way, Sir," says the hostess.

We sit down and order our drinks. I decide upon a bottle of white wine to start our meal. I want to make this evening special – it is our second anniversary.

"Honey, I think I recognized one of the men at the bar."

She glances over my shoulder.

"He looks identical to my high school principal – the one I hated."

"Are you sure?" she says.

Neither of us says anything more as the waiter arrives at the table and places the wine bottle on the table before us. I inspect the label and tell him everything looks fine.

He pours a glass for me to taste. It is fine. He then pours a second glass for my wife. After we order our entrées the waiter leaves the table, and I begin the previous conversation again.

"I know tonight is supposed to be special. I don't want to kill the mood with my past," I say.

"Honey, maybe you should go and talk to him. Surely, he has changed."

"He sent me to detention so many times for the smallest violations. He is the reason I was so glad to go off to college."

"You are going to be thinking about him all night if you don't go over there and make things right."

"Alright, I'll go to the bathroom and if he doesn't recognize me I will just act like I was mistaken. I'll be right back."

Walking towards the bar, I think of one particular argument that resulted in me walking out of his office. I had been sent to his office for talking to a girl I liked during in my physics class. Our teacher had increasingly grown tired of my disruptions and sent me to Mr. Diamond's office. After explaining my side of the story, he said the following words that I will never forget, "You are nothing but a skirt chasing fuck up that will not succeed in life."

I approach Mr. Diamond's right side and consider how I will greet the man before me. How drunk was my former principal at this point? I have only had a few sips of wine. I decide to go to the restroom and wash my face.

After gathering all of my courage, I walk back towards the bar and notice an empty seat next to Mr. Diamond. The bartender looks over to me from the other end of the bar. I gesture that I am not interested in a drink. He returns to talking to another customer.

"Mr. Diamond. I am a former student of your high school. Do you recognize me?"
I say.

The sixty-five-year-old man slowly turns his head and places his glass on the bar. A moment transpires before he says anything. I begin to worry that I was mistaken.

"Robert Smith, correct?" Mr. Diamond says.

"Yes."

"How are you doing? Are you still up to your mischievous ways?"

"I've been married for two years. My 'skirt chasing' days are behind me."

"It's good that you seem to be doing well," says Mr. Diamond.

"How about yourself? Are you still a principal at Dwight Eisenhower High?"

Mr. Diamond does not immediately answer my question. He picks up his drink and swallows a gulp. I notice that his face is lined with wrinkles.

"I no longer work there. I was fired for some trumped up claims that I'm an alcoholic. I even went to my AA classes but it wasn't enough for the school board."

Mr. Diamond motions towards the bartender. The bartender places another drink in front of him. He continues.

"I don't think I ever told you, but I was in the armed service before I took the position at Dwight. I had a few drinks on the job, sure, but it got much worse as the years went by. It's all because I can't relate to this generation of 'wanderers.' You were one of them. Always more interested in the present than in your future or the future of everyone around you."

"I had no clue."

"Of course not. It's your parents' fault. They baby their children until they are adults and then set them loose into the world. They have no experience of the hardships in life."

I look down at my watch. My wife has been sitting by herself for almost ten minutes.

"I have to get back to my table, Mr. Diamond. I hope you get back on your feet," I say.

He doesn't extend a hand or exchange a similar greeting. He merely turns and takes a sip from his new glass. I take the opportunity to exit.

"How was your conversation?" my wife says.

"He isn't doing well. He was fired for his drinking habits. He told me his drinking is related to his inability to relate to our generation."

"Well, at least it is our anniversary. I don't think of you as a 'fuck up' by any means," my wife says in a whisper.

The waiter arrives and places our entrées on the table. I glance upward while the waiter sprinkles pepper on my dinner to see Mr. Diamond arguing with the bartender. As two of waiters escort Mr. Diamond out of the restaurant, I hear him yell, "Just another pitiful example of how out of touch everyone is these days."

I take a sip from my wine glass and look over to my wife. She smiles back.

"Happy Anniversary, dear!" I say.