Spring 5-1-1991

I Saw My Parents Dance

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol10/iss2/25

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A parrot perched in a silver cage in front of Egan's Nautical Bar squawked at me as I peered through the glass to see if my father was inside.

He waved for me to come in. I sat on the stool beside his mesmerized by a jug of pickled eggs while the bartender polished glass and old Mrs. Egan smoked in the dim at the end of the bar.

Mr. Muldoon on the stool next to mine wore gold-wire spectacles and a red bow tie. Alice wore clips on the pockets of her pink beautician's smock. Big Al had skin like brown leather. I was twelve with freckles.

* * *

When I was twenty Dad invited my mother and me to join him at Egan's to bring the New Year in.

It surprised me that he asked - he always went alone - and that my mother said yes and wore a red dress belted with a rhinestone clasp. I put on new black pumps.
Dad led us like a host
past the backs of boisterous patrons
to greet his friends and Mrs. Egan
at the bar. Mother smiled
when Mrs. Egan took her hand.

We went into a side room
strung with streamers,
put on pointed cardboard hats
and unfurled snail-like paper horns
with laughing breath.

Dad sent me to the jukebox
to play a Wayne King waltz.
They smiled at each other
as I left.

When I came back
they were dancing.

* * *

It's been ten years since
my father died. The parrot
and nautical bar are gone.
I asked my mother if she remembered
dancing with Dad at Egan's.
"Your father was in great form
that night. . ." Her voice trilled
like a girl's.