

day mornings - since Paul had naively let him know that he had won a scholarship that was going to let him attend an Ivy graduate school the next year. The good shifts went to the boys and girls who would be coming back in the fall, indeed some of whom would spend their lives working for The Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, until that poorly run concern faded away.

And so Mr. Coffee could kiss his ass. Well he hadn't said quite that, but Paul's father had told him that he might as well have when Paul vividly relayed the exchange to him over family dinner a few nights later. The elder Martino was quite touchy where matters of employment were concerned. A sorehead, he was constantly on the lookout for ways in which things could go wrong. He believed that they always would. Paul's mother and he had both grown up in "The Bottoms," the shanty town south of Market Street that lay close to the river. When the Ohio River flooded in 1937, both families were washed out and spent weeks living in high school gymnasiums a bit further inland. It had marked their lives forever. Paul was marked too by their constant references to the flood as well as the Great Depression, of which it was a capstone event. But their incessant remembrance of bad times was an oppressive weight on his head and shoulders.

Even though he grew up in an atmosphere of gloom and doom, Paul was optimistic, determined to make something of himself. He was bright and knew it. At St. Brendan he had seen boys from the classes ahead of him, boys whose grades were good but not so good as his, going off to graduate school, law school, medical school, and he knew that he had a shot at the same future – if only his father's constant harping

on failure and the nasty surprises that created it were not harbingers of bad things to come.

The elder Martino was always exaggeratedly deferential with his own employers (of whom there had been many). While he hated the Mr. Coffees of this world for their low eminence, he wanted Paul to show sufficient respect, even if only on the surface, to create however imperfect a shield against the disasters that he was sure were bound to come.

The edifying interchange between Paul and his bosom pal Joe Harrison at the start of our story bears a bit of an explanation here. Paul and Joe were seniors at St. Brendan. Both boys had intellectual pretensions and had done very well, regularly showing up on the Dean's List, despite the jobs that took far too much time away from their studies. This didn't stop them from having a few medicinal brews in the afternoon, and they were evening out the strain this Thursday afternoon at Tino's Highland Inn, the favorite watering hole of St. Brendan students of all ages and both sexes. Paul's father would not like this, but then he would never know about it. The juke box was blasting out "I Want to Hold Your Hand," one of the six Beatles songs in the top ten that week. It was 1965.

"Gus" was Gus Coin, a crippled musician of no particular repute, the sum total of the Music Department at St. Brendan. One of the many required courses at St. B, the "high school on the hill," was a two-hour course in music appreciation, Gus's "Record Review". In addition to essay questions the final exam sported a hellish two-hour quiz in which the untutored children of St. Brendan, most of whom had never attended a

symphony or dialed into crosstown rival Shelby University's classical music station, were forced to identify 40 pieces from the entire history of music from seconds-long snippets that Gus played at the front of the room.

This was bad enough. Another minor irritant was attending a "serious classical music event," Gus's contribution to the local symphony orchestra or other musical ensemble, as the students still needed to pony up the price of tickets.

In typical fashion, Paul and Joe had put off the serious classical musical event until the very last minute. The semester was coming to a close, and the Shelby Symphony Orchestra was otherwise occupied doing its usual holiday service with the local ballet, providing music for the crowd pleasing, hall-filling "Nutcracker." But in the midst of turning to the sports pages, Joe had spotted a "serious musical event" in the local paper. The Shelby University Orchestra was going to play Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik that very night at Gardencourt, an estate willed to the University by an heir to a fried chicken fortune. Joe's girlfriend Shelley worked in the admissions office at the University and had cornered four free tickets, two for her and Joe, and wouldn't Paul want to take his girlfriend Ellen along too? Shelley was being polite, knowing that Paul went nowhere without Ellen, but a girl could hope, couldn't she? Shelley hated Ellen, whom she considered a downright snob.

Well, Paul would like to go and take Ellen, of course, but Paul had never been inside Gardencourt in his life. He avoided events like this because of the acute embarrassment of his relationship with Ellen. She came from a "nice family." Her father had been to college, Xavier University in Cincinnati, where he had played football, and

had a high level job at one of the breweries that still flourished in Shelby. Ellen Garvey lived in the Highlands in the nice house that her mother and father had purchased right after the war. Mrs. Garvey came from a family in the distillery business and it was rumored, although no one really knew, that she “had money.”

What did having money mean? Paul could not have said two intelligent words about that until he had taken the introductory economics sequence the previous year. To him and his parents, he was sure, having money simply meant that you could afford to shop at the local department store and pay your bills each month, that you could take a vacation every summer, and maybe even go to New York to take in a show. Such events were well beyond the grasp of the Martinos.

Of course, Ellen had been to the symphony many times with her parents and her brace of aunts, whom Paul’s mother cordially detested. She was sure they were putting on airs. Ellen had even been away to school, Washington U. in St. Louis, but had come back to Shelby, homesick after a disastrous first year. Despite his family’s misgivings, Paul had taken up with her during their junior year at St. Brendan. They were a constant couple. As far as taking Ellen with him to the concert, there was no choice. He would have to put up with the vague sense of inferiority that would come from doing one more thing for the first time that Ellen had been doing her whole life.

And yet Paul would not miss going to the concert for all the world. He had never been into Gardencourt, but he had seen part of it once. That vision had stuck in his memory ever since a day when he was in his very early teens. He and his cronies were out riding their bikes and decided to explore the fashionable and gracious Highlands.

This was a couple of miles up the Parkway from where they lived in Schnitzleberg, a working class enclave of railroad shacks on brick paved streets back behind the downtown industrial area and the Haymarket.

Their ride took them down tree-lined, well-kept avenues. They found themselves pedaling along a high stone wall, reaching well above their heads. Paul decided it would be a good thing to stop and climb the wall, see what was on the other side. While his friends nervously waited on their bikes, he did just that, climbing hand over hand, impetuously sticking his head up over the parapet. He would never forget the sight. It was a large, deep yard, an expanse with a formal garden down at the far end, beyond a well-tended lawn, dotted with beautiful oaks and maples. Under an ivy-covered stone trellis at one side a woman was talking animatedly to two men. Perhaps it was an afternoon function. The men had on dark blue suits and rep ties and the woman had on a conservative, tailored dress – something Paul instinctively knew he had never before and never would see his mother wearing.

The quiet physical splendor, the repose of this scene affected Paul. He had never experienced anything of its kind and had only seen the like in the movies. Beyond the manicured, prosperous ambiance, he sensed that the lady and gentlemen radiated a self-assurance and self-possession that he had never experienced in himself or in those around him. Even at that young age, he instinctively, instantly knew that he wanted all this for himself. Gardencourt symbolized that yearning for him.

The night of the concert was cold and crisp. Paul picked Ellen up, as he always did, Ellen in a nice wool dress, Paul in his one suit and tie combination. They met Joe

and Shelley in the lobby of Gardencourt and went into the auditorium, what had surely been the ballroom when the whiskey barons still lived there.

The program was obvious, unmemorable to anyone other than Paul. There were a series of short, insignificant pieces, a pause for some awards to orchestra members who were going on to work or performance elsewhere. After too much of that, the piece de resistance, the Mozart. Even the shabby university orchestra could not ruin it. Paul was overcome. The plangent harmonies, the triumphant upbeat swings, the wonderful poetry of the music took him to a place he had never known existed.

At the close of the concert, the four stood around and gawked at the crowd of people Paul didn't know. Paul noticed the maestro, a Shelby University music Prof, short and balding with a too tidy mustache. Paul could not understand what this little man had in him that allowed him to draw such sound out of the orchestra. Certainly the way the concertgoers were fawning on him showed that others felt the same.

Shelley and Joe went their way, and Paul drove Ellen home. It was a weekday night and they wouldn't stay out late. They kissed and groped for a while in the car, as they did every date night, and he walked her to the back door.

Before he could start kissing her again, she let it drop. She couldn't go out this Saturday night. Her friend Debbie Wells wanted her to help her entertain her boyfriend and a guy from out of town. Paul smelled a rat. They argued, but patched it up as Ellen convinced him that this was just a favor she was doing Debbie - she hardly had a choice.

On the way home, Paul dwelt on the conversation for a moment. The logic of it wasn't strong, and it was the first night in two years that Ellen had had "other plans." He feared it wouldn't be the last. What of their plans? He was going to graduate school in the East. Ellen and Debbie had found jobs in Washington. Paul and Ellen would commute back and forth on weekends.

The thought of this fizzled out, and Paul was taken back in memory a month or two to a cold fall afternoon at the University. It was the Saturday of the Graduate Record Exams, the GREs. The city-wide seating was at Shelby University, and the St. Brendan students sat in a tight insecure little knot in the test hall, apart from the University students who were also taking the test.

Ellen sat next to him during the morning session. At noon she, Debbie and most of the other St. Brendan kids were finished and left. Only Paul and a few others were required to sit for more exams in the afternoon. After a quick lunch out of a vending machine, he went outside and sat on a cold concrete bench in a deserted windswept, leaf-blown courtyard. As he waited on the unfamiliar, forlorn concrete deck, he thought about the future. The test was the key. He had to succeed. He knew he had to get away, from Shelby, from St. Brendan, from the University. At that moment he did not know where he would go, but at some level he sensed that it would be alone. Ellen would never separate even geographically from her tight knit family. And Paul would not fight to be part of that.

Looking back on that day and the night of the Night Music, Paul, now retired, widowed and living on a lake many miles away still loves Mozart, but has developed a

taste for Haydn's Paris Symphonies, Dvorak, Beethoven's Concertos, many others. Ellen returned to Shelby after a few months in Washington and married the guy Debbie fixed her up with. Paul wonders about Ellen's life, but realizes that she, whom he has seen only once in 40 years, must have known her road would not be taken. There are nights when he almost forgives her.

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