

I fall out of love, learn not to worry, and get ready to embrace the foreign war...

by James Lloyd Davis

"You people over 21, you're older and smarter."

Bob Dylan

What I really wanted was another beer.

Found one, found three, from people, friends in the stands. Sal, me, Joey and Sal's sister smoked under the bleachers, shared the beers while the game went on and the crowd made crowd noises. Idiots swung toys that made loud clacker sounds, and some guy with one of those new aerosol boat horns blew everyone else away.

I heard we lost, but didn't really care. I wasn't playing that year. I was seventeen, a secret Marxist and very much adrift, unwilling to play football. We played the Academy that night, a quasi-military high school for upscale Protestant Tidewater Virginians, but one of the few schools that would play football against our integrated Catholic High School team. Most would not. The game ended. Someone said we should drive over to The Corner and get a pizza. My head was spinning, but I smiled. I wasn't driving.

"Yes." I threw my arms to the sky, head full of renegade drama. "To The Corner." The Corner was a pizza place we always went after the games.

Headed for the gates that led to the parking lot. The whole stadium was narrowed down to one small gate at the end of the field where we'd parked. Sal's sister was right behind me. Some kid in one of those grey uniforms, cap and all, wool shirt buttoned up the front on two sides like a West Point cadet, pushed her and knocked her down.

I turned, helped her up.

I put my finger to the boy's chest, pushed, said, "Apologize."

Sal grabbed his sister's hand, pulled her away and they all ran to the car. The cadet was shorter than me. He looked up and said, "I'm sorry."

I stood there in the gate, blocking what turned into a small mob of grey cadets with hats, milling forward, pushing into the gateway behind the boy.

He took off his cap and said again, "I'm sorry."

What I really wanted was a fight. What I really wanted was to stand there and beat up on gangs of cadets like a Spartan at Thermopylae, like Horatio at the bridge, like Samson slaying Philistines. What I really wanted was to be a hero. What I really wanted was for Sal's beautiful sister to watch from a safe distance as I beat them all back with an empty National Bohemian beer bottle, since that was all that was at hand.

No jawbone of an ass within reach that night.

The boy was too polite, too patient standing there.

What I really wanted was for Sal's sister to know how reckless I could be, how far I would go, what I was ready to do... just for her.

I stood there blocking the gateway for the longest moment. I lifted my head for effect, listened, but no one challenged me. No one said a word. No one.

I turned and slowly walked to the car, cadets streaming by on either side of me like a uniformed river rushing past a rock in the falls.

"Did you see that?" I yelled.

"Did you see that?" I said again, throwing my thumb back over my shoulder as I dropped into the empty shotgun seat of Sal's old Desoto.

Sal turned, said, "See what?"

I looked around and saw his sister in the back seat with Joey. They were leaning together, whispering, smiling, suddenly intimate as never before.

“Never mind...” I said, shook my head, laughed, and roared,
spread my arms wide and roared again, said, “...to The Corner!”

