

I Used To Dance With My Father

Stephen Garton

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*I don't want to think about the reality that is
taking place beyond what I can see or know.
Unless, of course, I can feel it, because faith is
easy—so easy—when I can feel it.*

Lilac Verdanza,

49b Kristal Daphne Rd,

New Hampshire

18 March, 1979

My dearest Lilac,

I wrote as soon as I could—as soon as I heard the news.

I want to tell you a story.

My story . . .

I used to dance with my father.

Without reserve, denial, fear, ambition or pride, we would dance, sometimes long into the night. His love—the mere thought of it now lingers on the horizons of my mind like an escaping dream that I am struggling to hold on to—was so palpable, so perceptible, so *real*, that I would swim in its intoxicating warmth every day. *Every day*. My wounds, deep and aching; my mind, dry and barren; my encumbrances, numerous and heavy, would all melt away like a fog being burned up in the fiery glow of a radiant sun.

He would sing to me—*oh*, the songs he sang—and I would return the melodies in exuberant thanksgiving, right from the centre of my being they would flow with powerful release, illuminating the darkest parts of my soul.

We would carry these songs, thick in our hearts and lungs, past unexplored fields, overrun with wildflowers; through gaping canyons, rich with undiscovered streams; high up upon the soaring heights of mountain ranges, scraping the very blue sky I had always wanted to touch, and now could, with breathtaking ease.

I am biting back the torrent of emotions that are flowing as I write this letter to you. Know that this is not an easy letter to pen. But, I love you too much not to write.

We—my father and I—would dance and sing and laugh until I thought my heart could not love any deeper, any wider, any fuller. Our joy was like a babbling brook, already bubbling, but gladdened all the more by winter's retreat and spring's arrival.

But nobody understood.

The mockery came, slowly at first, into my world as I matured out of those blessed and protected childhood years. I ignored it well to begin with—how could I not? My heart was so full of belief, of love, of longing for my father that notions of leaving were, quite simply, preposterous. He was my friend, my best friend. But as the words continued to come,

like poisoned arrows they came swiftly from all sides, I started to wonder if they may actually hold some truth—the truth I was so desperate for. The words came in the form of reason, of scorn, of doubt, of unbelief, of mockery.

And I listened.

My father would tell me that I had one ear turned to the world, one to him. And he was right, *so right*. Our time together turned to a strain. My mind wandered to what I would now refer to as the real world. I doubted his love for me, and I highly doubted that the time we spent together was really all that special. A waste, even.

One day he spoke to me and said, “My daughter, my child, my princess . . . you must make a choice.” He was trying to mask the sorrow in his eyes, but I could see it well enough. I recognised it mostly because it matched the sentiment in my own heart. I did not want to decide; I wanted to hide away in the darkness—the places in my soul that were no longer illuminated by those simple, child-like songs of love and gratefulness that used to dispel that same inky blackness.

But I did make a choice.

And ran.

The reunion with my friends—the very ones who had scorned and mocked my relationship with my father—was even more pleasant than I thought it would be. I embraced their lifestyle, their company, the pleasure they had found. And it lasted . . . for a time.

Lilac, I am writing you so that you can know, be truly informed to make your own decision. You are beautiful and innocent—a princess if ever I knew one—but have grown so much. You are grown and must choose now, this day, this *moment*, who you will serve.

But before you make your decision, know this: this new pleasure I embraced that lasted for a period has now turned to dust in my eyes; the passions have turned to ash and loneliness in my heart; the gold, yes, even the gold, has turned to shackles on my wrists.

Yet these times of revelation you would think would set me free—the times where my eyes are opened to the true emptiness and hollow nature of my surroundings—do no such thing, and are few and far between. Even now I doubt; my heart is so calloused, so overrun with a tangled knot of poisonous weeds.

Lilac, writing you now about the situation our heartbroken mother informed me of with this boy you have met, and followed to such an inappropriate extent, is bringing me to a realisation. One lonely realisation:

I miss my daddy, and nothing, *no one* could ever offer what he did.

I hope my tears marring this parchment do not impede your ability to read this, but let me tell you this one thing plain and simple; one thing which I have been longing to say for an excruciatingly infinite period of time—to write down so that it is known to every living creature on this earth . . .

I want to dance with my father.

Love, your sister and friend forever,

Salal Verdanza