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KUDZU Blog Post

A Look into “The Purple Ladies”

I had the pleasure of running across an awesome piece that was written by an FSU student last spring. Within the pages of “The Purple Ladies,” featured in Kudzu Review Issue 72, readers are invited into a literary world ripe with emotion, connection, and complexities of friendship. The short story packs a powerful punch once you delve deeper into the meaning and themes the writer is trying to communicate to the audience. The standout feature in this piece is the writing style. It creates an immersive reading experience that doesn’t leave you, even after the last pages are turned.

The story follows an unnamed narrator who works as a hostess in a restaurant. Every month (or even twice a month!) a group of 12 women come into the restaurant decked out in their finest purple outfits. The narrator has observed the women’s behavior over a couple of years and is tandem with the group’s activities. The purple ladies “open the door, sit at the bench, saunter to the table, talk, water, talk, fish, silence, talk, leave.” The writer illustrates a descriptive and accurate scene, especially for those who have worked in the service industry. The story is compact, only stretching its content to three pages, but the writing is lyrical and poignant. Every sentence makes the story whole. There is no time for fluff. The writer came in knowing exactly what to say without belaboring the point. This deliberate cherry-picking of words breathes life into every moment, allowing the reader to feel all the emotions the narrator empathetically siphons from the women: grief, sorrow, happiness, and acceptance. The descriptive language establishes the setting in a clear, deliberate way and deepens the reader’s understanding of the narrator and “the purple ladies.”

The narrator describes the bond of “the purple ladies” in earnest. She describes what they eat (fish of the day every time), how they sit, and their harmonious laughter; she even describes their various purple clothing items: scarves, necklaces, hats, and “bobbling bangles.” All these miniscule details contribute to the overall story and characterize the ladies in a unique way. As a server myself, I felt like I knew these ladies. They were the older grandmas who always ask for water with lemon, want their silverware re-cleaned, and would cause a scene befitting a child being denied candy whenever their fish arrived without tartar or cocktail sauce.