

Valediction: something said in parting; a farewell utterance.

I have a duty to discharge as valedictorian. But before I fulfill this responsibility, there are a few things I must say to you. I would like you to listen, I will not be long.

I must first speak to you of the present. This is a milestone in our lives. They tell us, although from where we stand, we cannot see milestones. We must wait until we can look back on it. But we should take their word for it, for they know, and we should live these times as sincerely as we can, so that when we do look back, we will remember.

But we can look back now and remember the last four years. They may not have been the happiest four years for some, or the most satisfying for others. But one thing is certain: they will be the most unforgettable for all of us. Our memories of these years will pay dividends forever. But the past is no substitute for the present. We must file our memories away and take them out only when the present can spare us for a few moments.

I look forward to those few moments. I hope that I will be able to conjure up the emotional turmoil that I feel right now. I guess it is safe to say that we are all a little confused at this moment. Even those of us who have decided what is to be their vocation in life have yet to determine just how they will achieve it. For the rest of us, we who have not yet encountered the plans which God had drawn up for us, this is a day full of uncertainty, framed in anxiety, and perhaps touched with fear.

Our uncertainty is nothing to be alarmed of they tell us. But that is hard to accept because, being human, we need a place to anchor ourselves. When we are uncertain, when we drift, we experience a taste of the punishment of Cain, a sort of placelessness, a sense of unbelonging to anything or anyone. But this will pass they say, and from this we should take hope. Like a roulette ball, we will ultimately find our niche. It may be painful and it may take a long time, but if we stick to it, He will not hide it forever.

There is a certain anxiety, a worry, in this search, as well there should be. We are standing before a darkened doorway. We are compelled to cross the threshold because we know that we belong in the next room. But at the same time, the darkness frightens us. We would like to know what is there before we step. It would be comforting, but it is not to be. You see, across the threshold is adulthood, maturity, an awareness of a better life, a fuller existence. And we are not adults, nor are we fully mature, nor do we know of a better life. We can only gather up our courage, throw off the things of a child, and grow. Then, when we open our eyes again, the room will be bright and the doorway will be at our backs, and we will know that we have taken the step. We will never know just when or how it came about, because maturing is not a matter of the will; we will only know that the light is brighter, better suited for seeing what we really are. And that, that knowledge of what we really are, is the beginning.

The fear. There is nothing to be afraid of they say, but I cannot help it, I have never graduated before. We cannot help knowing something of this world we are about to enter. We know that man can destroy entire cities with a single bomb; yet he persists in settling his quarrels by fighting. He can construct an artificial heart and perform other truly wondrous medical feats; yet some still suffer leprosy and smallpox and other archaic diseases. He builds supermarkets and restaurants on every road in the land; yet his neighbor is still hungry. Man has given the good life to many; yet he refuses even the ordinary life to those whom he judges inferior. There are so many good things to live for; yet some refuse to live. They are the ones without a purpose. Sometimes I feel that I have no purpose in this contradictory world. Maybe you feel the same way. I am afraid, as I look into the future, that there is no place there for me. If this is so, if there is no place, then this graduation is empty and meaningless. Honors or trophies or praise or tomorrow are all empty because they hold no meaning. But this graduation is not empty, for even in the most confused, twisted, and incomprehensible world, there is a place for me, for all of us. I believe that we can have those places if we try. I believe that we can change the world if we try. Maybe not greatly or for a long time, but we can try. That is important in life: that we try. We can give the world something that it needs: people who are brave enough or just plain stubborn enough to try to change the wrong things in it.

So never let anyone tell you that your efforts are insignificant, that you are an unimportant creature. No creature with the purpose and the destiny of man can ever be insignificant.

My valedictory speech is finished. There remains only to discharge my duty, to utter the valediction: Goodbye.

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