

Grow Old With Me

• A SHORT STORY BY VAN B. S. HENDERSON II

IT WAS only yesterday, it seems, though actually it was thirty years ago, to be exact, when I met my wife, Janet. It must have been by the grace of God that we were to meet, for there she was, my whole life before me — me, of all persons, who had vowed that I would never allow another woman to enter my life.

I shall never forget the day, the place, or the suit she wore — how could I? I felt as if I had emerged from the darkness of the past into the brightness of the present and the future to come.

The first moment I saw her she became the moment for which I lived, the idol of my very soul, and all the things that lighten the burden of a weary mind.

She Didn't Notice

She failed to notice me, and I was glad, for there would be other moments, and then I would be prepared; for at that instant I would have stood blushing like a high school boy on his first date.

I stood there watching her and drinking in all of her beauty that my soul could stand. Her hair shone with the luster of black velvet; her lips, aided with the life-like touches of scarlet red, and her eyes showed all the potential fury of an angry kitten, yet they possessed the peacefulness of a lazy summer's day.

My heart swelled as though it were going to burst into a million little pieces — its beats came more rapid.

All in these few moments a far away corner of my once cold heart began to glow, kindled by this person.

The nights that followed were spent in utter discomfort, I could hardly sleep. I remember on one or two occasions I went out for a walk in the park — it helped some.

I Couldn't Eat

I even ate less often than in the past; I was a wreck. I had to see that girl again. I found relief in the thought that fate could not be so unkind as to take her away from me before I had the chance to meet her again.

The days counted to weeks, and the weeks into months, still I searched for her — and still I failed in my attempt to find her. I was on the verge of giving up all hope.

I had decided to rest from my futile search, so I bought a ticket to a dance that was being sponsored by a local club. It was with the hope that the occasion would divert my attention that I decided to go.

It was a formal affair. The dance was in honor of "Sadie Hawkin" (an Al Capp creation). Here the girls asked the fellows for dances.

Being bored, I walked towards the dance band, feeling sorry



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for myself, when I stopped suddenly; as if I had walked into an invisible wall.

About forty yards to the right of the band was the girl I had spent months looking for — she looked my way and I immediately found the hostess to introduce us. I offered my arm and she asked to dance "Dogpatch Style." I smiled warmly and told her yes, straining in the effort to keep my feelings from being too obvious.

A Heavenly Dame

As we danced, I put my head close to her lovely hair and gently drew her closer.

She responded as though she could actually read the message that my heart was sending out. We didn't have much to say during the first dance, for, as I was later to learn, each of us was waiting for the other to begin the conversation.

After I got my tongue we talked more at ease (about the dance, the weather, fraternities and sororities, etc.). As she talked I admired her in silence. Her soft colored, blue gown hung casually.

I thought of all the beauties that I had ever seen — she was tops.

Her hair was done in one of the

new styles. She was more beautiful than the first time I saw her.

I walked with her home that night from the dance, and before I left, we knew the history of each other's lives. I was thinking that one day I wouldn't have to say good night to her and leave, for she was going to become my wife.

That night I actually slept, and how I slept — yes and the following day my appetite returned also. I was a new man.

Life was just beginning to unfold its beauty to me, as Long-fellow once wrote:

"It is difficult to know at what moment love begins, But it's not difficult to know love has begun, Life is love.

If love is beautiful, Life can be beautiful."

She Returns My Love

We saw each other quite often after that, and it wasn't long before I was aware of the fact that Janet loved me — yes, my dream was now becoming a reality.

Time passed, as it inevitably will, and each day we found more reasons in each other to strengthen our bonds of love.

Though I thought it would be a simple task to propose to Janet, I found it to be quite to the contrary — it was the most difficult thing I had ever attempted to do.

She understood me by that time, and made the job as easy as she could.

We were married shortly after the night that I proposed to her. Yes, that was thirty years ago tonight.

I could tell you about the thirty years, each event, but it would all add up to one thing — happiness.

Oh, yes, we've had our ups and downs — life is like that — but what's more important is that we've come through them together.

We Weathered Storms

Our ups, like the time, our twins, Bobby and Betty were born; and the time I got a \$10 a week increase in salary, which enabled us to buy more of the things we needed for the twins and the house.

Our downs, like the time the twins were confined to bed with illness for three months and a half, and I had been laid off the job because of the depression.

Janet's face isn't as smooth and soft as it was thirty years ago, neither is mine; her hair no longer appears like black velvet, (me — well, I'm bald now), for grey strands have replaced it.

The one thing that hasn't changed and never will change is the love we have for each other.

We're lucky — Janet and I.

THE END