

# First Date Nostalgia

Lisa Marguerite Bowler | Short Story

Her hair was in perfect, tight curls close to her head—the natural raven black long faded to silver. She was dressed immaculately with her black slacks, white button up blouse and black cardigan. Her ears were adorned with a large cluster of shiny black beads and her left wrist was circled with the slim gold watch her late husband had given her for one of their anniversaries. Her arthritic hands sported sparkling diamond rings and her nails were painted a perfect coral pink. The age lines crossing her face enhanced her elegance while speaking of her years raising a passel of kids and spoiling her numerous grandchildren. Looking at her you would think she had planned an outing, going for lunch or tea with friends perhaps, but this was how she dressed every day regardless of her plans.

I tried to come and see her often, which was not nearly often enough, and we usually sat around and chatted or went out for lunch or dinner. That day we sat in the living room of her little two-bedroom condo, me on the love seat and her in the recliner she bought for herself. Like her, the condo was in perfect order with no dishes left in the galley kitchen sink, the bed made precisely with the frilly pillows she had sewn herself and drew the eye from the open bedroom doorway, and not a speck of dust could be found on any surface. The walls featured family portraits and school photos of her children and her children’s children. The decor was a somewhat mismatched collection of collectables and furniture that formed a perfect reflection of her personality. A formal but comfortable atmosphere interspersed with knickknack gifts from her grandchildren (that were worth more in sentiment than in dollars), crystal vases, and custom made mirrors. It was a space filled with memories. Memories embedded in the items she kept from before her husband had died and the newer objects with memories she made after.

She had made sweet iced tea for us while I caught her up on the goings on in my life and after the short update we sat in companionable silence a moment while she looked at an old picture on the wall of her and her husband. The photo, in an intricate silver frame, had probably been taken before their children were born and she looked as elegant and put together in that picture as she did today.

“Did I ever tell you about our first date?”

“No, I don’t think I’ve heard that story.”

“He was so dashing, your Grandfather. He picked me up from work—I was working at a restaurant then—and took me to dinner and a movie.” I could see the happiness of this memory made her appear to

glow; it was a look I did not often see on her these days. “Two men owned the restaurant and they treated me like their little sister. And let me tell you they were not too keen on the idea of me going on a date with this young man but I was smitten with him already and would not let them change my mind.”

“Why didn’t they want you to go out with him?”

“They were just acting like big brothers, protective you know. It was a little silly really, I was very self-reliant, as I had been living in the city for over a year since I left home and despite having a roommate I was making it on my own. I worked two jobs, I waitressed at their restaurant and I was a seamstress. I even made most of my own clothes.” She looked out the window lost in thought before quietly adding “I even made the blue dress I wore on our date that night.”

“So it was a nice first date then?” I asked trying to bring her back to the conversation.

“It was a very nice first date. He took me to a nice Italian place and the food was delicious. But at the movies my two bosses unexpectedly showed up! They sat a couple of rows behind us to keep an eye on your Grandfather!” We both laughed for a good couple of minutes as she remembered and I imagined.

“Did Grandpa know they were there?”

“He spotted them right off! They had all met when he picked me up at the restaurant and they gave him a stern warning before we left. But he didn’t say anything to them when he saw them, just gave them a respectful nod. He was an older brother himself so I’m sure he understood their motives.”

“What was Grandpa like during the date?”

“He was a perfect gentleman, pulled my chair out at dinner and held doors open for me. I went from smitten to completely in love so quickly.”

We lapsed into a comfortable silence again, each absorbed in our own thoughts. I was trying to picture my Grandparents so young and in love. I wished my Grandfather were still alive so I could ask for his impressions of their first date. I wished I could ask him so many other things that I was too young to think were important before he died. I took a sip of my iced tea trying to push the lump of regret in my throat back down. My Grandmother was sitting in her chair staring out the window again. The happiness that had radiated from her while she was telling me about their first date was gone, replaced now with a quiet melancholy that I was more accustomed to seeing on her. I do not know how long we sat in silence before she turned back to me and then glanced at the picture of her and my Grandfather on the wall over my shoulder and the spark of happiness came back into her eyes. She stood up with her empty glass and grabbed mine.

“Here, I’ll get us both some more iced tea and then I’ll tell you about the first date your Grandfather ever took me on.” I had to clear my eyes of the tears that had formed before I could reply.

“That would be great Grandma.”

“You know I was working two jobs back then? I was a very good seamstress and I worked in a restaurant for two really nice men who treated me like I was their kid sister.” She handed me my iced tea before sitting down herself. Despite having just heard this same story I hoped that the retelling would make her glow again, if only for a little while.

“Your Grandfather picked me up at the restaurant and took me to see a movie and wouldn’t you know it, my two bosses went to the same movie and sat a couple of rows behind us!” We laughed for a minute and I did not fail to notice that she left out the beginning of their date.

“Did he take you out to eat too?”

“Did he?” She had a look of bewilderment on her face at my question and a touch of fear in her eyes at being unable to recall this detail.

“He did? He did! Yes we had dinner before we went to the movie, and he took me to a quaint pizza place. It was a very nice date and,” with a wink and a small glowing smile she continued, “I was so smitten with him you know.”