



DATING AFTER DECADES

By Sandy Bexon

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I circled my lips into a tight O to apply... what suddenly looked to be a too-bright shade of ruby red lipstick. I pulled back from the bathroom mirror to look at the effect and noticed with astonishment that I had Nana's lips now. When did this happen? Was it the traces of ruby colour that accented the tiny wrinkles that all pointed so sharply to my mouth – just like hers had? Ah, I thought, why did I agree to go on this date? They call it a date, I said to myself, but maybe they should call it a prune.

The day had passed with me wondering many things, mostly why I had said yes to this invitation after all the years since I last went on a date. Sure, I had dated for the first while after my divorce 25 years ago, but then the hard years of raising my child took hold. The long days at the office to ensure job security, the extra freelance work to ensure house and food security. Before long the idea of dating simply slipped away, as did the invitations.

But here I was, about to go on a date and pretty sure I was going to have to wipe dark red lipstick away and try a different colour. Or maybe I could look for a really big scarf to drape around my neck and slightly up onto the lower part of my face. But wait... as I stared at my reflection, I began to notice the colour actually looked pretty good. And though there were plenty of crow's feet around my eyes, they still looked clear and bright. I simply looked how I looked, with all of life's patterns outlined on my face, exactly the same way I had looked last week when he asked me out. Okay, I told myself, just move along to the next step. Put one foot in front of the other until you reach the closet and figure out what to wear.

Way back on my first date 50 years ago, us teenagers had sort of dated in packs. We called it 'going around' which is how I would describe many of the intervening years. Going around and around, sometimes in circles. Back then we paired up to fit in, to take this boy-girl thing to the next level and sort of play-act the roles we thought we were supposed to step into. My very first date was to a movie with a guy named Darrel, who seemed to have dumped a bottle of aftershave over his head. My eyes stung as we sat at the theatre together and he kept patting my head like a monkey. I wonder if his memory of this, if he has one, is of a skilled and sensuous stroking of my hair. At 14, though, we were all pretty awkward about the whole thing. Strange to feel that way again right now.

What did I used to do, back when I prepared for a date as a young adult? By then we had perfected our roles and had simply called it going out. Going out in the city to stir things up, to meet even more people, to see where things took us. It was informal and fun. Granted it was also before the AIDS epidemic was about to strike, but in those before-times the world was our oyster.

I told my Bluetooth to play an old sexy song from back in the day. Something lighthearted and sensual that I used to have blaring when I was preparing to go out all that time ago, before

marriage clipped my final flight feathers. That's better, I thought, my body moving in time to the music as I swung open the closet door.

Really, I hadn't thought this through at all. Beiges and blacks hung all around me, matched by sensible shoes on the stand underneath. I had noticed older women through the years as they tried to dress young and ended up looking like caricatures. Try as a person might, you couldn't really disguise your true self. Unless, of course you wore an actual disguise which was something I momentarily considered.

Nope, not tonight. I was being taken out by a nice person who had been introduced to me by mutual friends. That seemed pretty safe. I had swallowed, with great effort, all the trepidation I felt at that moment when he asked the big question. And now I had to summon all my courage to follow through. On the date. We were heading to the opening of an art show at a downtown gallery, followed by dinner. It sounded like a great night out, a very well-considered date.

I reached for a peach sweater and a pair of navy slacks, and opted for high heeled shoes from the stand. Not bad overall, I thought when I looked in the mirror, but wondered if the shoe choice would make me taller than him. Did that kind of thing matter anymore? Come to think of it, I had no idea how tall he was anyway. Did I look up at him when we met last week, or were we looking eye to eye? And what was the look in his eye? Kind? Shifty? How had I not scrutinized him more closely, this man? And it was only last week that we had happened to meet – this whole thing seemed a little soon all of a sudden. A little careless to be accepting a so-called date willy-nilly like this.

Ding!

The doorbell broke into my thoughts. I could hide, I told my reflection. Or... well maybe I could trust my instincts and let myself take a chance. It might be the beginning of something great, or at least a pleasant evening.

And, besides, I thought suddenly as I cast one last glance at myself, I still look pretty hot!