

## **HENRY'S FERRIS WHEEL**

I still remember it, the day Henry proposed. We were so young and so carefree, so in love, that day at the carnival. That moment at the top of the Ferris wheel when he lowered on one knee and pulled out a ring. The moment my life truly began. The ring hadn't been much, because it was during the depression and Henry was buying it just on a salary of a farm hand, but to me it was truly the most beautiful thing I've ever owned.

Sixty five years ago today, we were married, and not once in all of these years had our affection for one another waned in the slightest. As a matter of fact, it did nothing but grow; every time our lips met, the feeling became stronger; we were made to love each other.

Our life had been no easier than anyone else's despite our compatibility. The birth of our four children quickly followed our marriage. Then the war, Henry was called to service, I will never forget the hollowness that was my soul all those months we were apart. When he had returned with shrapnel in his leg, I almost never let him go if I could help it; I wanted to protect him, even though he was really the one protecting me. We had moved a lot because work was hard to

come by, especially for a crippled war veteran, but Henry had never stopped smiling, that smile that had brought us through so much. He remained strong and brave for the children, though at night, he would stagger home from his last factory shift haggard and worn. He never stopped loving us.

I now reflect on how he's changed, His jet black curls had receded and greyed, his once high cheek bones and firm jaw had softened, all of his muscular stockiness seemed to have melted away, leaving him wispy and brittle. His eyes stayed that same hazel though, and when I peered into them they grabbed hold of me like a warm hug, and though undoubtedly, these years have changed his appearance, I still saw that same, strapping young man proposing at the top of a Ferris wheel, I saw him through his kindness, and his laugh, his gentleness, and his eyes, oh, those eyes.

I need not wonder if he thinks of me the same way, because of course, I had aged as well, but like him, I remained the same in spirit, and he loved me just the same as he did that beautiful day at the carnival.

Henry now bounds into the room, with the unchanged liveliness of his eighteen year old self, "Get your coat Edith, we're going out." It is not a question, I do not

object as I climb into the old Ford, but I pester him playfully as to where we are going. He will not answer, but only let his eyes twinkle mischievously.

We do not drive for very long before he pulls into a fair ground parking lot, and instantly I know his plan. He strides up to the ticket man and purchases two tickets. He takes my hand, and warmth magically spreads through my body as though I'd been dipped in warm water. He leads me to a Ferris wheel, its mammoth, much bigger than the ones in the 30's, and is decked in lights, it looks like a huge, round star twinkling as though just for us. It beckons, and Henry gently guides me into a cart, we begin to move. "Oh, Henry," I say, "it's very high, I don't know if I can do this!"

He lets go of my hands and puts his arm around my shoulders, hugging me close to him. I put my head into his neck and let him cradle me. He leans in close and whispers into my ear, "I've got you."

For that moment, we were the only two people in the world. Nobody could disturb us. All the music in the world played for us two. I was his, and he was mine, always.

We spent the rest of the evening riding the Ferris wheel, two times, three times four times. We never got tired of it, eventually, the operator man stopped making us get off at the end of the ride and just let us go round and round. Round and round.

I lost count of how many times we rode that thing, and Henry finally said it was time to go.

“I don’t want to go.” I said like a whining child. I wanted to freeze right there and live in that moment for the rest of time.

But I followed Henry back to our old Ford and we drove home. Our children had called and left a message on the machine. I went to call them back, Henry stopped me, “No, we’ll call them tomorrow; I just want it to be you and I tonight.”

I was quick to agree.

We went to bed in all of our clothes and got under the covers.

“If only you knew how much I love you.” I said.

“Trust me, I know.”

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Now, I wake up alone, a year later, still stretching out to seek Henry's warmth. But he is where no one can reach him. He cannot hear my calls for him, he cannot see the tears streaming down my face, and he cannot feel the pain, the terrible gut-wrenching pain that has overcome me. It feels as though my heart has been torn out, and my brain hit with a sledgehammer. Sometimes, I just feel numb, won't talk, won't move, I only lay in my bed, looking for Henry, yearning his protection from the abysmal grief. It was different from the war though, when I knew he'd come back, it felt now as though I was just biding my time impatiently until he would return, and only in my heart of hearts did I know that he never would. A year later, and I still iron his clothes, I still pour two cups of tea at dusk; still seek his warmth on the other side of the bed.

I ignore my children's phone calls, I refuse to go to the doctor, I no longer see the point in speaking.

I try to think of what Henry would say if he saw me like this. "Chin up." I think immediately. "Smile for me." But he was not there, so there was no one for me to smile for.

I didn't forget though, perhaps I kept forgetting to get dressed before I left the house, maybe it continued to slip my mind to return those month-old library books, but nothing could make me forget this day. Our 66<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I fixed two bowls of oatmeal, and got his paper. Something on the front page caught my eye. A large twinkling wheel accompanied by the caption: 'THE CARNIVAL IS BACK IN TOWN.' Instantly, I knew he'd be there.

I put on my best dress, called for a taxi, and left my children a note in case they came for a visit.

It was there, still there, as though it had never left. The Ferris wheel, as tall and grand as ever. He was there, I could see him, but he was young and fit, like the day he proposed. I felt it, tingling warmth that I had not experienced for months and months.

"Happy anniversary Henry." I whisper. I didn't care about the bewildered look the operator man gave me as he let me on. I was reunited with him; it was as though I knew he'd be here all along. He got on with me and put his arm around me. "I've got you." He said.

“Henry I’ve missed you so,” I said. He did not answer; he didn’t talk at all. We didn’t need to talk though, we were together, and my heart was swelling with joy like it never had before. I knew he wouldn’t make us leave again like he did last year, this time we *would* truly stay in that moment forever.

We rode again and again and again. Then on the top of our tenth time, when it was dark and stars were peering out, he said, “Edith, It’s time to go.”

“Go?” I asked. Why should we have to go? I had nowhere to be.

“Yes, I miss you but we’ll be together soon. And until then I’ll meet you back here, this time next year.”

I suddenly understood, he didn’t want to leave me, he had to. We were all riding a Ferris wheel, and some of us fancied getting off just a little earlier, but at one time, we had all gotten on, and we were all going to get off, it was just a matter of how many times you go around.

“I love you” I murmur to the darkness

I could have sworn I heard him say, "I know."