

THIS IS LOUIS WYMOND

Arriving at age 80 is a shock. Where did the time go? How much time is left? It is neither a good nor a bad feeling—just one of amazement. Looking around at this eightieth celebration, I see my children, their spouses, my grandchildren, a niece and her children—it's fine, special really. But it has a sense of ending. A life well enough lived—both bad and good with some moments of wonderful. But wait! That was July and in October there will be a jolt, a surprise far surpassing turning 80. Love is waiting in the wings.

Picture a golden October day, bright and shiny as only October can be. Picture an eighty-year-old sitting on her couch talking to a young man about a mayoral race we are working on for an upcoming election. The phone rings.

“Nancy?” A man's deep voice.

“What is this about?” My cold response to a telemarketer.

“Nancy, this is Louis Wymond.”

Finally I can speak. “Louis Wymond?”

I turn to Dan. “You'll have to leave now. You'll have to let yourself out. This is an old boyfriend I haven't heard from in over sixty years.”

Dutifully Dan gets up and leaves, and I turn back to the phone. All sorts of memories fill my head, of Louis as a junior and senior, the handsomest boy in our class at Anchorage High School in Kentucky, of my thrill to be his date for proms, for Ann Bullitt Brewer's ballroom dancing class, and occasionally, when he could get the car, for a date to the movies in Louisville. I struggle to get my breath. Everything has changed in some impossible to imagine way. After 64 years of no communication, Louis Wymond is back in my life.

So the courtship begins. By phone. I tell him I am busy, and I am. I am assistant director of a play at our local community theater. Thanksgiving and Christmas are coming up with all the family time that entails. When he asks to come to visit me—from Boise, Idaho, of all places—I suggest some time in January. But the phone calls come—regularly. At first, one each evening after rehearsals, and I hurry home in eager anticipation of hearing his deep voice once more. I begin to leave messages for him in case he calls.



“Hi, Louis, I'm out with friends. I'll be home around nine.” Who cares what anyone else who calls thinks about this message?

Now the phone calls are coming twice a day, one morning, one evening. We talk of our children—we each have four, two girls and two boys, each six grandchildren, three girls and three boys. We tell of our divorces—mine 29 years ago, his not over yet—of our health, his sextuple bypass and diabetes, my tachycardia and atrial fib. As we talk, I continue to have this picture of him at eighteen, dark hair, dark eyes, an endearing crooked smile. For me there was always something mysterious about him, something unreachable. I tell him that I still have the gold identification bracelet that he gave me for my sixteenth birthday, the one with Nancy engraved on one side, Louis and my birthdate on the other.

And then we exchange pictures. I begin to adjust. White hair—a full head I'm glad to see—jowls, but still the same high cheekbones, lighter colored eyes than I remember. If I look very closely, I can see the boy I remembered. Boy? He's 82. What does he see with my pictures? Short hair instead of the pageboy, glasses, a little fuller of face, lines. Since that day after graduation in 1940 when I moved away with my family, we have both lived whole lifetimes. Apart.

The phone calls become more intense and the next thing I know Louis is coming to visit in mid-November. I write worrying about his expectations and mine. “Either of us could call a halt; neither of us seems to want to. Believe me, you are the *only* person I would be so curious to see. It's as if we were being allowed an unusual chance to go back all those years to remember who we were and to experience who we have turned into. My memory of our high school junior/senior relationship is one of sweetness, innocence, and pleasure in one another's company.... This sudden reconnection is an adventure. And I love adventures. Apparently you do, too. And it is wonderful to have, out of the blue, this particular one. Two Leo's meeting after sixty-four years.”

As I drive the two hours from Marietta, Ohio, to Columbus to pick him up, I feel ridiculous. This is folly. How could we possibly be compatible after all this time? Why hadn't I just said no? In the airport I walk to the out-of-the-way place where Southwest comes in. No benches, no waiting room. A red line marks the area past which I can not go, and a dour-looking man sits on a high stool to keep watch.

“Is it all right to stand here? I'm meeting someone I haven't seen in