

William Hart

MOTHER'S CORONARY

My brother and I were in school when Mother had her first coronary. I remember Dad talking to us in the living room that evening. He called the thing by its name, "heart attack," but soft-peddled the event, saying it wasn't serious and that Mom was "going to be just fine." All she needed was "a few days rest in the hospital." Well, she rested at least a week before the doctors decided she was well enough to receive a visit from her two sons. I asked Dad if Katy could go.

We picked her up at her house and when she opened the front door to me and I saw her dressed up for the first time I got one of the nicest surprises of my youth. My quite pretty girlfriend, then fourteen, had become a beauty. She was wearing a dress that was perfect for her, a white satin juniors number hemmed at the knee and cut low enough on top to show the gold locket I'd given her resting against her healthy-looking upper chest. Her sun-bleached dark blond hair, freed from its ponytail, fell to her shoulders, providing a more sophisticated, grown-up look. Pink lipstick and a touch of eye shadow enhanced that look. The dramatic change in her appearance reminded me of Cinderella and I wondered why Katy didn't wear her hair down all the time. Today I can understand. For someone with her practical mindset that probably would have required too much fussing. Yet she'd chosen to fuss on this day, maybe with her older sister's help.

As we entered the hospital room Mother smiled up at us from her pillow. It was her familiar smile—bright, slightly buck toothed and infectious. It meant in this case that she was fine, no damage done, despite her dispirited hospital hair, the drips feeding her arm, and the monitoring machines calibrating her grip on life. As her smile faded I noticed she looked older, quite a bit older. She looked tired too. It hit me then, as it hadn't before, that she'd actually suffered a HEART ATTACK. People died of those! I tried imagining my world without my mom and drew a blank. Maybe I was afraid to imagine such a world.

"I'm glad you came, Katy," my mother said. "You look so pretty."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hart. I hope you get better soon."

"That's sweet of you dear."

Watching them together I was struck by Katy's respect for Mother, which I hadn't noticed earlier though it had likely been there. My girlfriend's humble body language and soft voice would have been appropriate in talking to a saint. Katy probably found in my mom the qualities she missed in her own mom, and while she couldn't become my mother's daughter, she could become her daughter-in-law. I think she wanted that at least as much as she wanted to be with me. She may have dressed up that day to make a good impression on the family she hoped to join.

Late in the visit I began wondering if I'd made a mistake by bringing Katy along. Mother was so fragile I thought she might be uncomfortable sharing her room with such a striking tribute to feminine youth, loveliness and good health at a time when she herself lacked those qualities more

Wilderness House Literary Review 14/3

than she ever had. Besides, the visit was supposed to be about our family supporting Mom, not about Katy and me spending time together. Katy's resemblance to an underage bride, purely a matter of chance, couldn't have helped matters. But if my mother felt in any way put upon, neither Katy nor anyone else was allowed to notice.