

## Sugar and Honey

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They sat on the back porch and enjoyed the scenery. A flock of geese strolled by, one following the other, walking in a synchronized fashion. Before that, they had been entertained by a buck and a doe that seemed to be in conversation the entire way. Phyllis maintained a smile on her face, all the while rocking back and forth in the wooden chair.

“Would you like some more lemonade?” Douglas asked his wife of 50 years. He stopped rocking in his chair and edged closer to her. She had lost the hearing in her right ear and the left was not fairing so well either. “Would you like some lemonade?” he repeated. Phyllis had been battling many illnesses, but the one that began to steal her memories was the one most noticeable. Douglas looked at the smile on her face and sat back in his chair. He raised his feet and allowed the chair to sway back and forth. He found himself reminiscing. He remembered the things that Phyllis no longer could. He remembered falling in love with her smile and smiled at the thought.

They both sat and smiled, perhaps at two different memories, but it was another moment they shared.

The doctors had suggested putting Phyllis in a nursing home, where she could be watched and taken care of 24 hours a day. Douglas’ and Phyllis’ three children agreed. Douglas didn’t see the sense in taking his wife away from the place she had called home for more than half of her life. He vowed to continue to take care of her himself as she had taken care of him for so many years before being stricken with illness.

He left her on the rocking chair, enjoying the hot, sunny day and walked into their home to get two ice- filled glasses of homemade lemonade. He made the pitcher the way she always did, leaving the lemons and the pits in it and adding enough sugar to instantly give someone diabetes. She had already been diagnosed with that disease as well, but Douglas just wanted her to continue to enjoy the day the way she seemed to be doing. She was still smiling when he stepped out onto the porch. He handed her a glass. She stared at him for a few long seconds, searching her mind for recognition.

“Thank you, Honey,” she said to him. She held his gaze.

He almost fell out of the seat he had just taken. He immediately felt the moisture around his eyes. She had never called him by his name when directly speaking to him. She had always called him Honey. He knew she was still there. The disease had stolen the person who he had come to know, but he knew it couldn't take what counted the most. Her love for him, like his love for her, would stand the test of time.

Every now and then she would do or say something that would make her appear to be disease-free. She would recant a story or call out a name or place from her past that would make her seem as though her only issue was with father time. She would often share a story as though she was reliving the moment, with the same vibrancy expected from a teenaged girl.

“You are so very welcome, Sugar.” He called her by the name he had been calling her, ever since the day she called him Honey. He swiped away the moisture building in his eyes and widened his smile.

He watched her tilt the glass towards her lips and watched her throat dance as the cool liquid made its way down. So many thoughts ran in his head. They were all fun and exciting. They all made his heart race. He remembered their first date. He remembered the rain that fell on them. He remembered taking his jacket off and holding it over her head so as not to mess up the hair-do she'd had done especially for their date.

Douglas sat in his rocking chair, next to his wife, Phyllis. His thoughts drifted to a time not long ago when he and Phyllis were just starting their lives together. He remembered her being happy when she learned she was going to be a mother. He remembered being afraid to hold his own child in his hands, for fear he may injure his small, tiny daughter. Hold her like you hold me, Phyllis had said to him. She always had a way of making things easier than they seemed.

Douglas and Phyllis sat on the rocking chair enjoying each other. No words needed to be exchanged. They could sit next to each other, allow their shoulders to touch or their fingers to cross paths and all the conversation needed would be had. Every now and then she would look at him a certain way and that was enough for him.

Phyllis had been the one to cook for Douglas, to dress him and to nurse him back to health whenever he was not feeling well. He wanted to return the favor, now that she was no longer able to take care of herself. He took pleasure in bathing and dressing her, in cooking and feeding her and making sure that she was physically as healthy as she could be. Every morning they would walk to some of her favorite areas on their property, stop at the well and get fresh, clean water and pick flowers from the garden she had created and tended to for so many years. It was Douglas' way of attempting to keep her in tune with her past, which had escaped her.

"Dad, are you sure you don't want the experts to take care of mom, in a nursing home?" his adult kids would constantly ask, especially as the disease further victimized their mother.

Douglas had stopped responding to such questions. He had made up his mind that there was no one better to tend to the needs of his Sugar than him. He had also heard about the treatment that many patients receive at some nursing homes and didn't want to subject his wife to that. He couldn't live with himself thinking that someone else was bathing and dressing Phyllis. She was so independent and always did everything she needed done herself. If she couldn't get something done then she would ask him to do it. She would not agree to being sent to a nursing home.

A few months back, Phyllis had wandered off and was later found on their neighbor's property. Douglas kept a close eye on her ever since. He slept very lightly and would wake up in the middle of the night to make sure she was still in the bed. She reached over with her right hand and rested it on his left. They kept rocking back and forth, smiling and enjoying each other. Both glasses were empty. They listened to the birds sing and watched squirrels play in the trees. The sun was at its highest point and seemed to be striking down directly on them. The ceiling fans above them fought hard to generate a breeze against the hot sun.

Douglas noticed a bead of sweat begin to form on Phyllis's neck. He too was beginning to sweat. He considered getting more lemonade and started to reach for her glass. Unexpectedly, she leaned towards him and kissed him on the lips. He felt the same passion he had when she first did it so many years ago. After they separated, Phyllis reached for his glass and stood up.



“Do you want some more lemonade, Honey?” she asked him, and has she had done for so many years, did not wait for his answer and walked into the kitchen and removed the ice cold pitcher.

“You know I do, Sugar,” he whispered; the smile finding a way to grow across his face.