

Ruth walked into her kitchen. The morning light streamed through the bay window to shine on the worn Formica countertops that refused to hide their yellow no matter how much vinegar Ruth put in the spray bottle. The wallpaper that once had cheerful daisies had faded and those happy blooms had receded into barely decipherable blobs of muted color. She had taken great care in choosing that pattern when a complete remodel of her kitchen became necessary after her oldest son, Gregory, nearly burned the house down while trying to melt some of her old jewelry into gold bars. The near catastrophe and subsequent rebuild had been thirty years ago. Gregory was now in his forties with three kids of his own to pull out of disaster's way. The newest thing in the kitchen was the coffee maker. It had recently been added to the room as a replacement for the trusty unit her youngest daughter had broken in her good hearted attempt to "help out." She never was much for cleaning.

Ruth pulled her favorite mug, declaring her "world's greatest grandma" from the cabinet. She doubted that her oldest grandson, one of nine grandchildren, even remembered the Mother's Day, when he had gleefully given it to her with his own chubby little hands. She filled the mug with the strong coffee she so dearly loved. Good strong black coffee, nothing could beat it.

She settled into her chair at the kitchen table and picked up the morning newspaper; another of the things that hadn't changed much in the fifty plus years she'd been a resident of her little town. Mayor Davidson, Ruth's next door neighbor, wanted to make the Trout Lilly the town flower. Mrs. Kartuchi's Dance Squad was having their annual recital. The High School football team was on a three game winning streak. Billy Cavanaugh was arrested for public drunkenness. That poor boy was never going to get it

together. It was all so predictable. and still so comforting especially at a time when everything in Ruth's life, even her own body, was changing. The constancy of the endless stream of innocuous information made the idea of physical stagnation seem less horrifying.

So much of Ruth's life had changed in the last several years. She had quit her job because she couldn't stand all day in the gift shop. She had discontinued all holidays at her home; simultaneously dreadful and auspicious events, and handed them over to her daughter-in-law. She had also given up on coloring her hair the streaky blonde it had been in her youth. Instead, she let it turn to the silver it wanted to be. She had known as a younger woman that aging was a difficult inevitability, but the accelerated pace that the signs of time had begun to take was daunting all the same.

Ruth continued to scan the classifieds section, taking note of all of the garage sales nearby, when she noticed one small block in the personal ad section:

Wanted: Silver Fox

Older gentleman of advanced, but capable years seeks silver haired lady of amazing grace and beauty. She has sharp wit, quick tongue, and a soft heart. If the lady is interested in spending the rest of her years with me, I ask that she meet me at the kitchen table that we've shared for fifty years. -J

Ruth looked up from her paper and saw her husband James, the man she married fifty years ago, with his face pointed toward his plate of eggs, but a smile twitching at the corner of his mouth.

“Well, you’re a slick one aren’t you?” Ruth said, unable to keep the smile from her face.

“How do you figure that?” James said while doing his best impression of innocent.

“You left the paper on the kitchen table. Didn’t leave me much of choice.” James laughed his full bellied laugh as he stood up from table to carry his plate to the sink. “I wasn’t going to take the chance of losing my best girl, now was I?”

“I could always just go in the other room.” Ruth responded in mock petulance.

“Too late. You met me at the table and a deals a deal.” James walked back to the table and dropped a kiss on top of her head.

“You got me.” Ruth conceded.

“Damn right I did.” James picked up his own “World’s best Grandpa” mug and headed toward the back porch. Ruth watched as slid the heavy glass door back with more effort than it used to take. As James stepped out into the back yard to begin his weekly assault on the lawn, he looked back at Ruth, “Happy anniversary, dear.”

“Happy anniversary, James.” Ruth responded. She watched him until he disappeared into his tool shed. Then she stood from the table; walked back to the sink; pulled out her trusty spray bottle, and went to battle with her countertops again.