

Life Begins At 62½

By George Russ

Miss Madie watched Sheila eat like a horse; fish, mashed potatoes, slaw and green peas. And, at regular intervals, with her mouth full of food, she would ask her to come on 'n have some supper; "I hate eating alone." But Miss Madie was too absorbed with mulling over her love life to even consider eating. Sheila was an excellent cook and the finish product had real eye-appeal, but her taste buds just refused to throb. So, Miss Madie announced that she was leaving; "I guess I'd better go 'n see about Mister Ben."

"No need fretting ovah him. Cora Mae Peaks don't care if ah man is only half alive-she knows how to keep him believing that he can move mountains."

"Cora Mae Peaks!"

"Take it easy, honey, if you fall out before I finish mah fish, you're going to stay out cold until I have finished stuffing mahself th' way you stuff-ah sausage." Sheila half teased. No joke, she didn't like to jump up and down after she sat down to a meal of vittles.

"You ain't trying to put me up with something, are you, Sheila?"

"Nope! ah-hint to th' wise should suffice."

Miss Madie picked up the tote-bag she had brought along as a blind--a cover-up for her real actions. If a neighbor saw her walking up the street with the tote-bag they would assume that she was going to Smith's Grocery Store; "I'll be seeing you, Sheila--take it easy--it's too hot to be stuffing yourself like a horse."

"You'd better take-ah-hot fish with you--they're better than snuff and not nearly as dusty."

"Th' fish looks good, Sheila, but I am going to skedaddle." And she did just that, she sped off, wishing to God that she had not visited Sheila. At least she could have chalked her suspicions down as being the carrying-ons of a jealous woman. After all the bride is the last to know the truth, unless there is a Sheila in the neighborhood. Miss Madie decided that Sheila talked too much and, she was going to take her business someplace else. At the moment, she could not bring to mind anything worse than a gossipy hairdresser. Sheila could have spared her feelings by leaving out the part about Jeff spending the womenfolk's welfare checks.

The jaunt from Sheila's apartment to 2-A winded Miss Madie; she had to sit on the steps to catch her breath. The evening breeze was cool and refreshing and Miss Madie was about to drop off to sleep when the door of Apartment 2-A opened and Cora Mae stepped out on the porch.

Miss Madie stood up suddenly. "Well! as I live and breathe. Will you tell me why you're coming out of my apartment?"

Cora Mae left off smacking her chewing gum, squinted her eyes to look up at the setting sun; "Mister Pratt gets lonesome in there--I just drop what I'm doing when you go off 'n sit-ah-spell with him. That window fan you got really pays off."

"I speck you'd better stay out when I'm not home-mah sister-in-law might not cotton to your being in the house alone with her daddy."

Cora Mae grunted; "I've been thrown out-of-better joints than 2-A."

"That's neither here nor there--you just drop what you're doing 'n visit when I'm home."

"You've been out in the sun too long, Miss Madie--I need ah-man like Ben Pratt the way I need-ah-hole in my head." Cora Mae wiggled her broad hips, cracked down on the chewing gum with her snowy teeth; "Miss Madie, you're not the big bad wolf you want people to think you are. If I were in your shoes, I'd sit tight until father-God sets me free. You're right on Cloud 9 and, what do you do?" Cora Mae stamped her sandaled foot. And with her hands planted akimbo, she smacked on her gum furiously for a moment, then, she asked again; "and what do you do? You go around with a masher-a two-bit hustler." Cora Mae stepped gracefully across the two stone steps, swung boyishly up the steps of Apt. 2-B, opened the door and slid inside her own apartment. She had never felt so relieved as she did at this moment; she had finally gotten her panned up speech off her chest.

Miss Madie was suddenly seized with caustic abhorrence for all women; and, while she sat biting her lips angrily, Deal's Sausage van came to a halt at the curb in front of Apartment 2-A.

"Howdy, Miss Madie--I see you're ready 'n waiting."

Miss Madie snapped out of her forlornness and waved frantically to the grinning man. At this moment, Will Deal's affableness seemed to make all things right for her for the first time today; "come over 'n have ah-seat--there's good sitting ovah here!" She shouted cheerfully, but beneath this facade she felt trapped--she wanted, desperately, to know how she looked.

"Nice weather we're having," Will Deal said as he toddled up the walkway.

"Until you come along, I hadn't noticed th' weather 'n since you been here I ain't had-ah-chance to take notice."

"I thought maybe we could go for ah-spin in th' country."

"Ah-spin in th' country," Miss Madie repeated the words as though she was trying them for size. "Th' last time I went for-ah-ride in th' country I got a marriage proposal."

"Did you 'cept it?"

"Naw! not in so many words."

"Then--I have-ah-monkey's chance?"

"Pshaw! Folks put ah-lot of stock in match making. I don't knock matchmaking 'n getting married or just courting, but my life was much simpler when I just went along for th' ride to 'n from work 'n church. I'm not saying loneliness is the road to happiness--but I can say, with a straight face, that my unhappiness began when I started keeping company with th' menfolk."

"I'm not going to try to fill your head wid pink-saw-dust, but all us men wasn't poured into th' same mold."

"You don't have to convince me about men--I know all men weren't poured in th' same mold, but that don't mean the same amount of dog didn't go into their molds. I have my first time to butt into one that didn't wind up the same way all the others did. Show me one who is nice as pie in th' light of day 'n I'll show you somebody who leaves nothing to chance when night falls."

At this point Cora Mae called to Miss Madie; "your phone is ringing, Miss Madie."

Thanky, Cora Mae, I thought I heard a phone ringing." Miss Madie answered as she sped toward the ringing telephone; "my phone rings so seldom--I forget it's in th' house." Miss Madie said as she entered the front door; she ran to the throbbing phone; Hell'o, Miss Madie speaking--Continued.

Honey Bunches



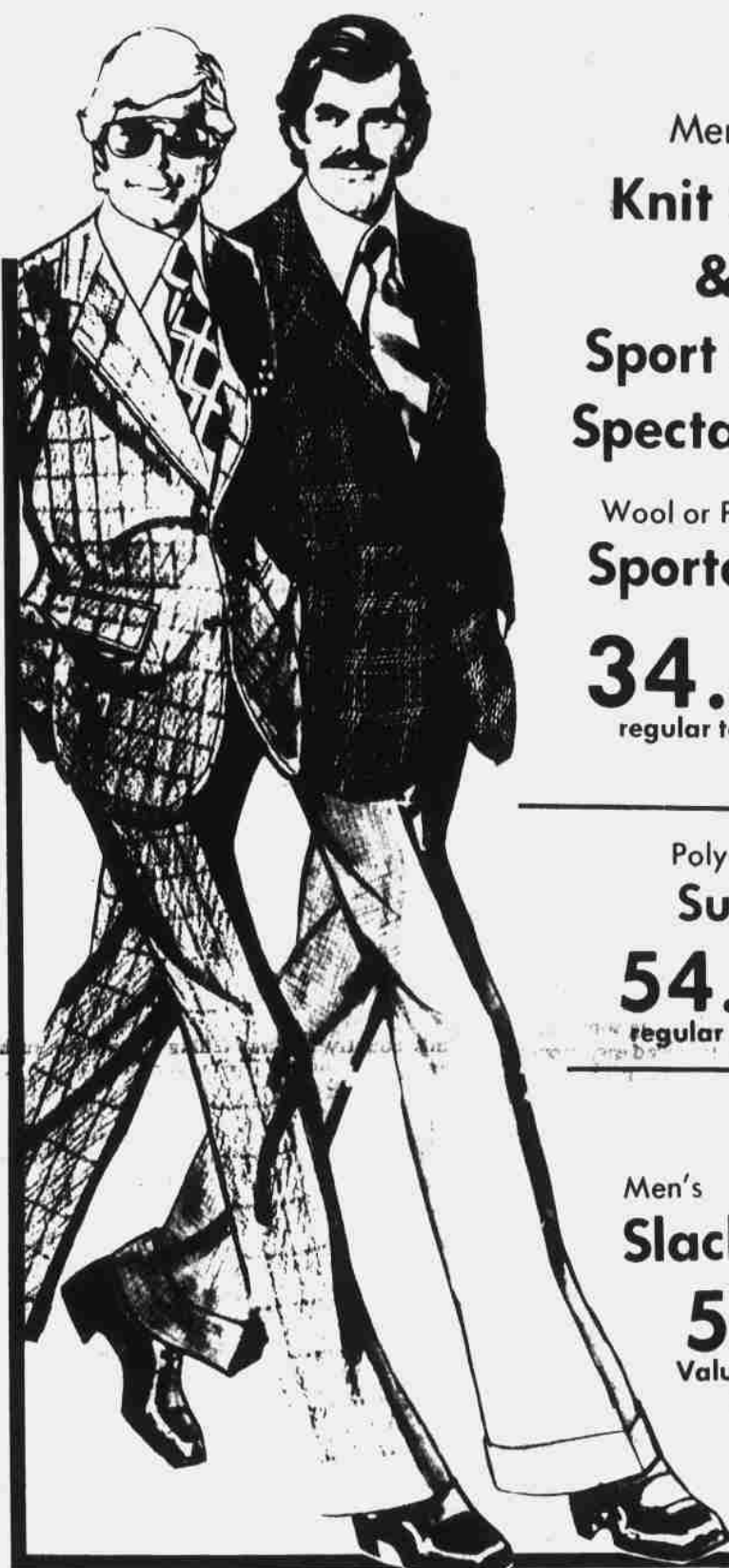
To make your reputation as a creative person, bake a batch of Honey Bunches. Start with a simple sweet yeast dough made with enriched self-rising flour, cut into squares. Pop a dab of honey and peanut butter on the center of each, then pinch the corners together to make pretty pillows. Chopped nuts scattered over the pillows give a crunchy finish.

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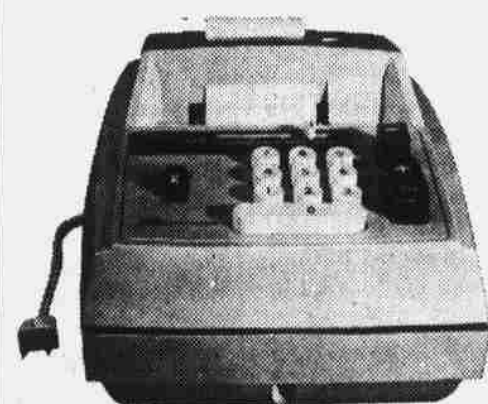
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