

LIFE BEGINS AT 62½

By GEORGE B. RUSS

Miss Madie was more concerned about a perfectly good steak going to waste than she was, remotely, concerned with causes and effects regarding Cora Mae. At the moment, she couldn't think of anything other than Cora Mae's wanton wastefulness. Ah-bit of sweet-oil heated and-ah-bit of cotton to swab her eye would have put her eye back in business. She thought, however, she said aloud: "And you want me to believe you're some kind-ah-winner?" Miss Madie shook her head sadly as she came to a halt inches away from Cora Mae's barefeet.

Cora Mae laughed brightly: "don't get scared, yet, wait until you see th' whiter of my eyes, honey."

Miss Madie scoffed good-naturedly, "go put some shoes on your foots. Your big toes look jest like terrapin heads." "The floor feels good to my feet, lady-bug. And if you ask Miss Cora Mae, she has good reasons to have hot-foots." Cora Mae teased.

Miss Madie kept her eyes fastened to the steak covering one side of her neighbor's face. "It's ah-shame 'fore God for ah-fine steak like that to be messed up." She finally said.

"You could be right, lady-bug, but my eye is worth more to me than all the steaks in the world. Besides, I wouldn't need a steak if I hadn't been sticking my neck out for you."

"For me?" Miss Madie's obvious disbelief was genuine.

"The half hasn't been told," Cora Mae moaned as she removed the two pound steak from her eye. "Have you ever seen a more beautiful shiner?"

"Shiner ain't th' word from th' looks of that eye, you had ah-run in with-ah-mad, flying fist."

"Fist or foot, it was flying when it hit my eye." Cora Mae groaned.

"You have mah sympathy, honey. I'm hungry! where is that breakfast at, you said you was going to whip up?"

"Behind that preposition, sweetie. Why don't you whip something up for us? I have more steaks where this one came from."

"I jest betcha have. Who gave you-ah-much needed black-eye?"

"How do you sound, old woman?" Cora Mae quizzed playfully.

"Hungry, I hope. Where's your coffee?"

"In the flour cannister. I bought three pounds when I got my check 'n I had nothing big enough to put the coffee in so I put the sugar in the flour can and the flour in the coffee can, Miss nosey-rosey."

"Makes me no never you mind so long as you didn't dump th' coffee on top of th' flour." Miss Madie informed her crazy-mixed up friend, as she measured the coffee for the glass coffee Maker; this coffee pot has got to go, I'll be plumb tuckered out by th' time this contraption produces-ah-cup of coffee."

"The coffee will be ready by the time the grits 'n eggs 'n sausage is ready." Cora Mae said.

"You 'n what army?"

"Be a good egg for a change, Madie Perkins." Cora Mae insisted, half coaxing and half demanding.

"I think you have asked for enough to last you for-ah-long time, Miss lass-box."

"Say no more, honey-bunny-boo. More boo than honey. You are right about me asking for more than I bargained for." Cora Mae said while she turned the steak over, then patted it gently as she watched Miss Madie deftly prepare, with loving care, the morning meal. "You are a mess, Miss Madie."

"Yep! you can stand one more greasing. You didn't fool me none wiff your soft talk 'n sniffy nose 'n black-eye."

"Pipe down, lady-bug. You've caused me enough anguish for this generation. I was about to tell you that I got my tail tore up getting you an apartment in Bayborough High Rise. I'll never be the same, but I got your wish."

"Whatcha mean?"

"I mean your brother Curtis has done with my life what a cat does with its offal."

"Offal!" Miss Madie frowned.

"You get the picture, lady-bug, no need for the false modesty. I was in the 8th grade at Kaypot High School. Curtis Perkins was my home room teacher I was a country girl, still wet behind the ears I thought I was being real

nice to teacher bringing him good things to eat cake 'n pie 'n fried chicken anything I though he would like. I'll admit, I was buttering him up for good grades."

Cora Mae sighed deeply. She was uncomfortably aware of talking to Miss Madie about her brother, and the going wasn't easy. Truly enough, no one was standing over her with a gun demanding that she give a round by round description of the years she had been the other woman in Curtis Perkins life, but the urge to bare her soul had become an obsession. She wanted to bring it up and out into the open; relieve her heart and soul of the devastating burden.

Miss Madie was anxious to hear more of the sordid story, however, she did not encourage the young woman. Signifying, she had heard all her life, was worse than stealing. "keep-ah-talking while I whip up some good-ole-she-biscuits." She offered as more talk bait.

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