

# ROMANCE IN THE FORTIES

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- What Happens  
When a Man  
Who Has  
Reached Middle  
Age Thinks He  
Is in Love With  
a Young Girl?

STEPHEN CRESSMORE looked approvingly at his wife, Brenda, across his birthday cake. He thought: How old she looks! Lines around her eyes. Frowns at the corners of her mouth. Her cheeks sag. The next moment he reproached himself for the unkind inventory.

He decided that the blinking yellow candles on the cake accentuated facial defects, that his wife was actually quite comely for her age. She was 46. And he? This was his forty-eighth anniversary. Almost a half century of living. Forty-eight years! Twenty-five of them spent with Brenda. The span of his marital existence stretched out before him like a roll of tape. Brenda nagging him about his health. His rubbers. His diet. Forcing lettuce and codded eggs on him, as though he were a child. Insisting that he spend a month in the country each Summer. Urging rhubarb and sulphur in Spring. The gymnasium in Winter.

Niggling. Eternally niggling him about something. She had kept him in good physical trim that was true, he thought, but she had played too strongly the role of mother. He had never known a sweetheart during all their years of married life.

Well, he knew one now. Joyce Sherrill. Her caressing voice seemed to sound in his ears now:

"Stevie, you're so clumsy with a cocktail shaker. Let me fix the drinks. You just sit there and charm me with your smile."

The dating! She could make even a reproach sound endearing. He had met her four months ago at a party given in the northwestern part of the city.

trivial reminders, felt slowly drawn into a web—the web of husbandly and fatherly duties. He groaned aloud. He felt trapped. Caught. Shared. A prisoner forevermore. The deadly monotony of it all! The octopus of marital duties and responsibilities was wriggling its tentacles toward him.

"What's the matter, Stephen? Lella, run get Daddy some bicarbonate of soda."

drank casually. Kissed casually. They were so casual with their "darlings" and their "dearests," their "sweets," and all their other pet names. They drank and smoked and jollied without cessation. Half of the time he did not understand their conversation; it was so studded with

she really love him deeply? She must, or she would not be casting her lot with him like this.

He looked around the big living room for her, but she was nowhere in sight. The party had become noisy. Little

"Yes, I agree with you that men of the theatre are temperamental, and usually too egotistical to make good husbands. But I cannot understand how you can think of Cressmore as stable. He's a married man, you say, with a wife and children. A stable married man doesn't break up his home in order to marry another woman. And, Joyce—

