

Auld Lang Syne

—*Stephanie Prichard*
English, Grad.

LENI'S frail body barely made an impression in the plush cushions of the couch. She looked like some kind of strange, exotic bird that had flown long and hard before giving up on its journey to rest. Her orange hair was cut short on the sides like a man's, but on top it was a gay crest of feathers drooping softly onto her head. Her skin cascaded in leathery wrinkles over her face, swelling under her faded green eyes, sagging at her cheeks, and freezing into a pool of loose flesh above her scrawny neck. A bright red cupid's bow was painted over her thin lips, which wrinkled and puckered as she spoke. "But I quit writing stories for magazines a long time ago," she concluded with a wistful sigh.

"Oh, what magazines did you write for, Aunt Leni?" She was really my mother's aunt, but we kids always called her "Aunt Leni."

"*True Romance* . . . magazines like that. They were better in those days, you know." She bobbed her head in affirmation of her statement.

"Gee, I'd like to see them sometime," I said, my interest finally aroused.

She fluttered her bony hands at me, as if to wave me away. "Oh, no! No, I don't even have them any more. . . ." She rose from the couch and toddled toward the kitchen. "I'll just see if your grandmother needs any help with the dinner."

I waited for the next scene. Sure enough, my grandmother came rushing out of the door Leni had just entered. "She's getting another snort," she whispered, her lips clamping into a tight line of judgment. "Her fifth one tonight! Not counting the ones she had before she came here, mind you." She sat down in the blue, overstuffed chair and took up her knitting.

But counting the two you gave her, Grandma, dear!

Leni re-entered the room and looked at us anxiously before settling into her nesting place on the couch. She patted the folds of her wild orange and pink mu-mu and cleared her throat. "Did I ever tell you about my trip around the world several years ago?" Before I could answer, she was off and running. "It was simply wonderful! I met this German doctor the second day out—I was seasick and he gave me some pills and took me to sit by the pool—and he fell madly in love with me before the ship reached Europe." She paused to look demurely at her hands in her lap.

"Dinner's ready!" said my grandmother abruptly. "You can sit down at the table while I dish it up."

"Mmmmmmm, smells good," I said, sniffing at the delicious aromas sifting into the dining room.

But Leni wasn't to be put off. After sampling the wine, she continued with her story. "Manfred—that was his name—and I did everything together. Dancing, sight-seeing, shopping. . . ."

I nodded and smiled in the right places, feeling much better now that I had some food to concentrate on.

". . . And by the time we reached Italy, Manny had asked me to marry him." Leni smiled at me and picked at her food, giving time for the awesome news to sink in.

A sharp kick in the shins made me jump, and I looked at my grandmother, who glanced pointedly at me. *Yes, Grandma, Leni was in her sixties and he was forty-five. . . .*

"So he took me to Germany to meet his mother, and she was so happy that at last her son was going to get married and give her some grandchildren. . . ."

Another blow to my shins. Grandma didn't even bother to look up this time. She just jerked her head slightly and smiled at her plate.

Leni riveted her eyes to mine and frowned. "It would have been a good marriage—he was rich and very highly looked upon—but," she shrugged her shoulders, "I didn't love him! Oh, I *liked* him, but I couldn't marry a man I didn't love."

Another kick in the shins. I shifted my legs and shook my head sadly at Leni before stuffing a piece of meat into my mouth.

Leni lifted her empty glass in her gnarled hand. "Anybody want a refill?" she asked, scraping back her chair.

"She'll get another snort of whiskey too!" whispered my grandmother as Leni disappeared into the kitchen. "Children—ha!" she snorted. "She was probably older than his mother! Why, she was sixty-two at the time!" Her voice shifted to a louder tone as she heard Leni returning. "Do you really have to go home tomorrow, dear? Two days is such a short visit."

"I'm afraid I do." I said, wishing the sun was rising now instead of setting.

Leni sat down at the table and stirred her food. The smell of whiskey was strong at this close range, but it was having no visible effect upon her. She patted the sagging strands of her orange hair and took a sip of wine. "After I left Germany, he kept writing to me, pleading me to marry him, but in Spain I met this man, José. . . ."

Burlesque

—*Mike Messenger*
English, Fr.

She goes nude in autumn
stripping stitch by stitch
 more teasingly slow
 more pleasingly graceful
than Gypsy's bump or Sally's grind.

She left her dainty vesture
waiting at my feet
 to be gathered up
 to be set aflame
in my back yard passion blaze.