

Picture Perfect Love

Aggie gently swiped her work-worn hand across the tintype picture removing any remaining traces of dust from the surface. The faded image of herself and her husband, Hiram, peered back at her. She laughed at the memory of Hiram smiling for the picture while her own face remained stern and impassive. She did not want to have her picture taken that day, but Hi had insisted.

"C'mon, Aggie. It will be for our anniversary," he had said, but she knew the truth of the matter.

Hi was enthralled with any new gadgetry that passed his way, and the traveling photographer presented the most recent temptation. Hi spent a good hour with the young man going over his camera and photographic supplies before he even let the fellow position them for a proper picture.

Aggie sat quietly snapping beans as she watched Hi question the young man about every aspect of photography. The photographer was willing to explain for he sensed a good sale in Hiram Ford. Sure enough, when Hi's curiosity had been satisfied, he and Aggie sat for a picture.

"How will you get it to us?" Hi asked.

"I'll mail it to you, Mr. Ford. It's included in the cost of the picture and makes things easier for me since I do travel a lot."

Aggie remembered Hi nodded in agreement while she thought they had just thrown away good money and been conned in the process. However, several weeks later Hi came shuffling up the walk to their house waving a slim package in his hand.

"Aggie—it's here! The photograph that fella took is here!"

Then together they sat at the kitchen table while Hi carefully sliced open the package with his penknife. He pulled out an oval tintype wrapped in paper and presented it to her. She smiled shrewdly expecting the picture to be blurry or faint, but even Aggie gasped at the clarity of their likenesses on the metal plate.

"Goodness, Hi," she said. "I believe that young fella knew what he was doing."

Hi laughed and smacked the table in sheer pleasure. Then he leaned over and delivered a sloppy kiss to Aggie's soft and wrinkled cheek.

"You're still my best girl, Aggie," he exclaimed. "I'm gonna show this to George Pearson first thing."

"Oh, no you're not," Aggie said as she snatched the picture from Hi's hand. "This is going right on the mantel where it belongs."

She proceeded to dust a place on the already spotless mantel then ever so carefully placed the picture on top of a doily draped over the edge. Hi didn't fail to notice that the tintype bore center stage. Again, he smiled with childlike glee.

That had been five years ago. Aggie held the tintype to her lips and gently kissed Hi's face. She and her beloved Hi had a total of forty years together before the Lord called him home. She doesn't regret a moment of their joyous life together. Even now it's as if Hi was with her in the room.

"All you alright, Mother?" asked her oldest son, Robert.

"Yes, dear. I'm just finishing packing up a few things to take with me."

"I'm so glad you've finally decided to come live with us. This house is so big and really too much for you to care for now that you're alone."

"Oh, darling, I've never been alone in this house. Never."

Robert tilted his head to ponder his mother's comment, but he didn't press her.

"I'm just going to put a box of Dad's things on the truck then we can head into town."

"What things?" Aggie asked.

"Dad's gadgets and trinkets. It's mostly things he liked to tinker with. You know how much he loved to take anything apart just to see how it worked."

Aggie did recall. Hi had a tool shed devoted to the dissection of various small appliances and tools. She called it his laboratory and dubbed him a mad scientist. Hi would smile at her teasing and work on in happy oblivion.

Finally, it was time for Aggie to leave. She wrapped the tintype in the doily on which it sat and held it safely against her breast. Robert lovingly placed a shawl around her shoulders then guided her to the truck. He lifted her to the seat and tucked a blanket over her legs. They both paused for a last look at the farmhouse where Aggie and Hi had lived their entire married life.

"Do you suppose the young couple who bought the farm will be in love as much as your father and I?" Aggie asked.

"I suppose they'll love the place, Mother. They seemed to like it well enough," Robert said.

"No, no. Do you think they will be in love with each other the way your father and I were?" Aggie corrected.

Robert blushed at the thought. "Well," he mused, "if they're lucky they will be."

Aggie smiled at her son's wise remark. "Did I ever tell you about the time a traveling photographer came into the yard and wanted to take our picture? Oh, your father put up a fuss, but I insisted it would be a good keepsake for our anniversary."

Together mother and son laughed at her version of a picture perfect love.