

Some Things Never Change

by Phillip W. Weiss

On a bright sunny day in New York City a young man named Henry was taking a walk in Union Square Park. Henry was single, lived in the neighborhood and was employed as a public-school teacher. Henry had lots of friends, followed sports and played the field when it came to meeting women. Well, on this bright sunny day in Union Square Park, Henry came upon a young woman seated on a bench reading a book. She was alone on the bench. There was something about her that Henry liked. Henry walked to the bench and sat down. The young woman continued to read. Then, gathering all the courage he could muster because he didn't want to feel like he was disturbing her, Henry said, "Excuse me. I noticed you were reading a book." The young woman closed the book, turned to look at Henry, and said, "How perceptive of you," then opened the book and continued reading. Her cold and dismissive reaction was nothing new for Henry, who knew all about brush offs, having been rejected by women hundreds of times. Normally, after a brush off, Henry would walk away, and try his luck somewhere else, but not now. There was something about this young lady he liked, and despite the uncertainty of situation, including the possibility of a second brush off that would have been a bruising assault on his manly yet fragile ego, he stayed. The minutes ticked by. Henry sat at one end of the bench, and she sat on the other. Henry was determined to break this stalemate. He noticed the

title of the book she was reading. It was the Hunchback of Notre Dame by Victor Hugo. Henry said, "I notice you are reading the Hunchback of Notre Dame. I've been to Notre Dame cathedral," Henry lied. The closest Henry had ever been to Paris was Patchogue on Long Island while on his way to Fire Island to party, get drunk and meet ladies. His remark seemed to catch her interest. She said, "Really? I've always wanted to go there. I heard it is beautiful." Encouraged by her remark, Henry regaled her about his adventures in Paris and described in sharp detail the nooks and crannies that made the Notre Dane cathedral so special. "By the way, my name is Henry," he said. "What's your name?" "Oh, I'm Kathleen, but my friends ball me Cathy," she replied. "It's a pleasure to meet you," Henry said, trying to sound as nonchalant as possible. The conversation continued. Henry learned that Cathy was employed as an assistant manager at a local department store and had recently moved to New York from a small town in Nebraska where she was born and raised. Then the conversation started losing momentum. Henry could maintain a certain level of charm just for so long. Henry, asked Cathy, "Where do you live?" Cathy said she lived in an apartment building located on East Eighteenth Street near Second Avenue. Henry became excited. "I live in the same building," he said. Greatly encouraged by that news, Henry suggested that maybe they could go for a drink. Cathy smiled and said thank you, but she was waiting for a friend, and then added, "maybe some other time." "Well, okay, maybe some other time," Henry echoed, not knowing whether to take her reply as a polite brush off or a legitimate invitation. "Maybe I'll see you around,"

he said. He stood up, said goodbye and left the bench. Cathy picked up her book and continued reading. Henry thought to himself, "Struck out again. What a waste of time. I'll call Stevie and see what he's doing tonight." A week went by. Henry had already practically forgotten his encounter with Cathy. Then as he was entering the building, he ran into Cathy as she was leaving. Pleasantly surprised, they exchanged pleasantries and agreed to meet later for drinks. The meeting went well, one thing led to another, a relationship developed, plans were made, and one year later they were married. It was a moment of bliss. They flew to Acapulco for their honeymoon where they stayed in one of the finest resort hotels in the area. The first night of their honeymoon was one of unrestrained passion and joy. It was a moment to be remembered. In the morning, basking in the afterglow of a night of heated passion, Cathy asked Henry to please go the store and get her some items for the beach. Henry was surprised. This was the first time Cathy had ever asked him to do an errand for her. During their engagement, she was at Henry's beck and call. Now, the roles were reversed. Henry felt somewhat bothered by this switch but not wanting to ruin the moment, said "No problem, sweetheart." He got out of bed, got dressed, and left. Cathy went back to sleep. She knew that Henry was never in Paris. Forty years, two children, two mortgages, five automobiles, six joint bank accounts, twenty-five credit cards, and two million travel miles later, Henry and Cathy were in their apartment located in an upscale high rise not far from the now dilapidated apartment building where they met so many years before. She was resting in bed while he was on the

phone talking to his friend, Mel. Henry was telling Mel what he thought about the New York Mets. Just as he was about to unload his thoughts about the latest Mets loss, Cathy called out to Henry that she needed some stuff and to please go to the store for her. Henry said into the phone, “Mel, I got to go now. My wife wants me to go to the store That’s right, I do the errands. That’s my role. I’ve been doing it for forty years. What can I tell you?” Henry hung up, put the phone in his pouch, put aside his thoughts about the Mets, went into the bedroom and said to Cathy, “No problem, sweetheart. What can I get you?”

Some things never change.