

An Unexpected Love Returns
#19 – Genre: Literary Fiction/Romance, 993 words
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Sylvia stumbled to the door and peeked through the round spy hole. It was Mrs. Vargas.

“Have you seen Michael?” her gray head twitched nervously as Mary’s favorite neighbor stood on the porch in a lacy pink top and chevron patterned yoga pants.

“No, I haven’t,” replied Sylvia, shuddering at the thought of the Aussie.

“Well, if you see him, tell him that I am still waiting for him to take a walk with me before dark.”

Sylvia retreated to the safety of the sofa as Mrs. Vargas scampered over to talk to Mary’s westside neighbor watering her freshly planted petunias.

Three days later Sylvia was again stretched out on Mary’s sofa when the doorbell unexpectedly rang. The postman, UPS, and FedEx had already delivered packages; could this be yet another?

Looking through the spy hole Sylvia was intrigued to see a tall, slender figure in a military uniform. His chestnut brown hair was graying at the temples, his jaw clean-shaven and his mouth turned up at the corners in an optimistic manner. His square chin had an air of authority and his dark-rimmed glasses gave him a James Bond look of confidence.

The man patiently waited for the door to open as Sylvia slowly turned the door knob, then waited for him to explain who he was.

“My name is John Daniels and I am looking for a woman who disappeared from my life when we were both eighteen.”

Sylvia was stunned at the man’s abrupt honesty. He pulled out his wallet to show her a photo of a shy young girl, about sixteen, wearing cutoff jeans and a pink and green horizontal stripe V-neck t-shirt. Sylvia knew in an instant it was Mary!

She invited him inside to sit on the gray flannel Eames lounge chair with matching ottoman. She could see in his circling eyes that he appreciated the quiet decorating style that Mary’s house exhibited.

Soon he was relating how he had been kept aware of Mary despite her purging him from her life when he joined the Army.

“All these years my mom kept me informed about Mary because she and Mary’s mom were friends. I lost that connection when my mom died six years ago and Mary’s mom passed away three years later. Two months ago I was hospitalized in Shanghai and almost died of COVID-19. In my sickbed, I had plenty of time to think about the things that are most important in life. I realized I had failed to find complete happiness because I let the love of my life get away.” John leaned back for a moment.

“When will Mary be back?” A cloud of anticipation engulfed him.

“I don’t know, but leave me your phone number in case she is willing to talk with you,” Sylvia replied.

John took a sealed envelope from his pocket and handed it to Sylvia.

“Please give her this. Perhaps the written word will convince her to see me. I tried phoning her so many times and she never answered. This has my phone number and a few random thoughts,” he added.

After he left, Sylvia sat back down on the sofa and waited for Mary to return, after the long three day wait.

Just as the 10 p.m. news ended, Mary rang the doorbell before unlocking the door to let herself in. She looked exhausted from a tiring day at work. However, she managed a bright smile as soon as she saw Sylvia, giving her an enthusiastic hug.

Mary entered the kitchen and offered Sylvia a glass of milk before she poured her own. Taking the milk, Sylvia slipped the envelope into Mary’s hand. As soon as Mary saw the handwriting, she put the envelope into her pocket with a shaking hand and an anxious look that Sylvia knew spelled privacy. Sylvia took her glass of milk upstairs while Mary encouraged her to get a good night’s sleep before continuing eagerly down the hall.

Once in her own room, Mary quietly locked the door and held the envelope close to her heart. She found a letter opener in her nightstand and slowly slit open the rumpled rectangle. She wanted to savor every moment, knowing this could well be one of the most important moments in her life.

“My dearest Mary,” the letter began. “How many years have I longed to tell you that joining the Army at the end of high school was a smart choice for me, except I lost you in the process?”

Turning to the second page she read, “My career is at a turning point now, and I hope I might stand a chance of seeing you again in the next few days. Your father gave me the courage to try.”

Half the night Mary tossed in bed, reliving her happy and carefree teen years with the handsomest boy in school. She remembered their first kiss at age 15 as they sat on a log outside the barn and talked about the tough new history teacher. He seemed driven to finish the whole textbook by spring break and assigned book reports of college-level history and philosophy books the rest of the year.

She remembered the August John broke his foot and could not start the football line-up that fall. She remembered the gorgeous orchid he bought her for the junior prom, using money he earned by working in his dad’s hardware store.

Everything had been wonderful until he gave his life to the Army without even consulting her! But just having his letter under her pillow made her feel protected even though she had so many fears about the Michael/Elly/Jing Liu triangle. She had to make sure no harm came to Mrs. Vargas and certainly none to Sylvia!

At 3 a.m. she reached for her phone and was about to call John, when loud barking erupted from Gidget and Zues, her Rat Terriers, and a blood curdling scream came from Sylvia’s room!

Virginia Haynie Gause, a retired UTRGV librarian has found the self-isolation period imposed by COVID-19 to be a period of renewed hope as people reset their personal values, having had time to rethink “the meaning of life.” She used the shelter-in-place period to take all the Nikon School free online courses and to co-host with her husband a Zoom session on Chinese tea from their home to a class of Edinburg middle school students.

She is in the planning process of launching a series of short video interviews with local artists as she attempts to modernize her arts and culture community calendar in the post-COVID-19 era.

She is so glad to have joined Roda Hilenski Grubb’s “Let’s Write a Story!” series and is excited about the impact the project is having in the Rio Grande Valley and elsewhere!