

Strawberry Preserves

By Pamela Morgan

Setting

Bus stop bench, present day

Cast of Characters

Phyliss - female identified, 80s

Val - male identified, 80s

Synopsis

Val hopes that a memory of strawberry preserves can preserve his loved one's memory.

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Phyliss is standing by a bus stop, looking very confused when Val approaches. She notices him and calls out.

PHYLISS

Excuse me, but do you happen to know where I am?

VAL

You're at 43rd and Kedzie. Did you walk here?

PHYLISS

Of course I didn't walk here. Someone is coming to pick me up soon. I think.

VAL

Oh, can I wait with you then?

PHYLISS

That doesn't sound very appropriate.

VAL

Do we care? At our age?

PHYLISS

Our age?

VAL

My age, then, sorry. How about I sit here and keep you company until your "someone" comes along?

Phyliss doesn't respond, she sits on the bench, smooths her skirt, and avoids looking at Val altogether. He sits down a safe distance from her on the park bench. He opens up the bag he carried and pulls out a couple of sandwiches.

Hungry? Would you like a sandwich?

PHYLISS

I'm sure that I don't.

VAL

I know, peanut butter and strawberry preserves sandwiches are pretty inappropriate...

PHYLISS

On Wonderbread?

VAL

Is there any other kind?

PHYLISS

My husband used to say, the whiter the bread, the sooner you're dead.

As she reaches for a sandwich, she stares at Val a moment, almost recognizing him. She takes the sandwich but doesn't eat it.

Have we...met before?

VAL

I'm Val. I live a few blocks down, 39th and California. Do you live nearby?

PHYLISS

I...think I do. I'm Phyliss.

VAL

Maybe you've seen me around then. A pleasure to meet you, Phyliss.

PHYLISS

My husband and I had peanut butter and homemade strawberry preserve sandwiches for our first date. On a picnic with our parish. My mother was horrified that I asked a boy out, she said he'd get the wrong impression if a lady does that.

VAL

And did he? Get the wrong impression?

PHYLISS

I certainly hope he did! We married a few months later. He always told me he married me for my strawberry preserves.

VAL

I bet its more than just the strawberry preserves.

PHYLISS

Four children and more than sixty years, it better be!

She takes a bite of the sandwich.

Oh, wow, this tastes just like my preserves!

VAL

Family recipe, I'm glad you approve. Did I miss anything?

PHYLISS

Well, I always cut the crusts off.

VAL

I never understood cutting the crusts off.

PHYLISS

They're daintier to eat without the crusts.

VAL

Who cares about a dainty sandwich? With preserves this good, who wants dainty!

PHYLISS

A lady doesn't want strawberry preserves all over her hands. Look at this mess?

Phyliss turns her hand over to show jelly on her hands. Val starts rummaging through the bag for a napkin but she surprises him by wiping it on his cheek. He looks at her shocked a moment. She bursts out laughing. He wipes it off and then dabs it on her nose. They laugh as they dodge each others preserve attacks, finally settling down nestled side by side.

I hope you brought some napkins, Val. I look terrible!

VAL

You have never looked so delicious.

Phyliss giggles a little. They sit comfortably together for a quiet moment.

PHYLISS
(abruptly)

I need to get home.

She rises suddenly, panic on her face. Val rises with her.

VAL

What's the big rush? Your ride isn't here yet.

PHYLISS

My ride? No. I'm taking a walk.

She starts down the street one way. Stops. Turns, confused. Starts down the street the other way. Val tries to take her arm to stop her.

VAL

Let me help you.

PHYLISS
(scared, loudly)

Let go of me!

She attempts to swat him with her purse. He drops her arm and steps back.

VAL

I didn't mean to frighten you, Phyliss. I'm only trying to help.

Clutching her purse, glaring at him, she stares for a moment then looks around completely confused.

We're just a few blocks from the house, we can finish our lunch and walk home together.

PHYLISS

Our...lunch?

VAL

Yeah, peanut butter and strawberry preserves sandwiches. You've got a little on your cheek.

He reaches forward with a napkin, slowly. She stands still and lets him. For a moment, Phyliss comes back to herself, she smiles up at him.

PHYLISS

You've got some on your nose.

VAL

Will you clean it?

She nods, takes the napkin and cleans the jelly.

VAL

(with intense feeling)

You are the love of my life, Phyliss, I hope you know.

They smile lovingly, she nods. He offers his arm. She takes it.

Feel like a walk home?

PHYLISS

Oh, it's a beautiful day for a walk.

They start to walk off as they talk.

Do you know my husband? We've been married for over 60 years.

VAL

Sixty years!

PHYLISS

He jokes all the time that he only married me for my homemade preserves, but I happen to know I'm the love of his life. He tells me every day.

VAL

I sure hope he does, Phyliss...I sure hope he does...

END OF PLAY