

The Good Death

By Sue Mayfield Geiger

It's as if they had floated down from a pillow of clouds. Just appeared from out of nowhere and started a life together. Sometimes it seemed that way. It was destiny. They were meant to be together. The universe had a hand in it. Often times, people luck out. Fate can be kind, even though other aspects of life are seemingly cruel, one's true destiny can lie in moments waiting to happen. And when moments collide they can meld lovingly or fester like a wound.

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"If I could give one night back to you," she asked, "which one would it be?"

"Are you my wife?" he replied.

"Yes," she stated. "I'm Louise."

"Then it would have to be that night in 1938 when I was stationed at Ft. Crockett in Galveston. The night at Mennard Park where we had all those dances. You walked in with two other ladies. You were dressed in something white and silky with a flower in your hair. I was selling tickets," he recalled.

She remembered that night because he talked about it often. It was one of the few long-term stories held deep in Alfred's memory. One that would never budge.

He continued. "You asked me if there were any tall guys to dance with, so I started pointing out some of my buddies. But, every time I'd point one out, you'd shake your head no. Finally, I said, 'What about me?' And you said, 'Okay.'"

Louise smiled and took his hand. He gave hers a squeeze.

She had almost married a Navy guy - the one who proposed, then had to go off to New Jersey for two months. When he came back, she'd met and fallen in love with Alfred. If she hadn't been looking for tall guys, she probably would have married the sailor.

But, she married the soldier instead. And now, 60 years later, the soldier was dying. His mind mostly decayed from dementia, but he never forgot the story of how they'd met.

And she was losing him. He was slipping away, crossing over, whatever you want to call it. Whatever it was, it didn't seem real. She knew they weren't going to live forever, but who is ever really ready to go?

Alfred often agonized over the fact that he never amounted to anything. "Oh, but you did," Louise would say. "You were a hard worker and wonderful provider."

"No, I should have made more money. I probably could have been famous."

Famous for what? she thought. What does fame have to do with it? Death doesn't sort out who's famous and who's not. Would he have a better chance at staying alive if he were famous?

Being famous doesn't make death any better or worse. We all leave this earth in the same way. Does it matter if you die famous or not famous? No, thought Louise. They were happy, in love, had a good life, and Alfred had a good death with his family at his side.

It is fortunate when we can leave in peace and love, all cleansed and ready.

He was, you know. He was.