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Still, the fact remains that woman regards youth as her trump card in the gamble of life and the one thing that she stakes all of her chances of winning upon. That is why the coming of her first gray hair is of a tragedy to her and every inch that is added to her belt measure is bedewed with her tears.

Now, there are two pathetic things about this frantic struggle that women make to keep young. The first is that it can't be done. The second is that in trying to appear young, when she is no longer youthful, a woman misses the joy of youth that she cannot bring back, and the peace and happiness of age that she refuses to accept. She literally falls between the stools.

The more fool she, for middle age is the golden period of a woman's life, if only she has intelligence enough to know it. Not youth nor beauty is so much to be envied as the state of the woman who has emacipated herself from the fear of age and who is frankly, honestly and unashamedly fifty years old and wants everybody to know it.

It is a time of privileges, of surcease from struggling, of freedom; a time when one's age justifies one in doing all those things she wants to do and excuses her from not doing the things she doesn't want to do. It is a time to be wished for, longed for, bragged about, instead of being dodged and lied about for twenty years; and way women do not

hug the blessing of being fifty to their souls instead of making a piteous effort to stay thirty-five, passes comprehension.

Just as a mere illustration of the joys it offers, take the matter of physical comfort; for we are so material that we can never be really happy until all is well with our bodies. The woman of fifty, if she is wise, passes into a state of physical ease that no younger woman ever knows, for she can please herself about her clothes, instead of trying to please some man, which is the chief end of woman up to the time that she abandons the idea of masculine conquest.

In spite of all the legends about Ninon de Lenclos and other aged charmers of the past, we all know that no woman is really a fascinator after forty, and no woman of fifty sets men staring, unless it is because she makes herself a figure of fun with her pads and her paint, her dyed hair and her straight-front. Wherefore, then, should the middle-aged woman torture herself by the vain endeavor to do the things that in her soul she knows to be impossible? Women dress to attract men—and no man ever gives a second look at the appearance of a woman of fifty.

The logic of the situation is irresistible. Be comfortable. Take off the things that crib, cabin, and confine. Let out your stays and get a good free breath once more. Come down off the stilted-

heeled shoes that are the modern incarnation of the rack. Eschew the torturing straight-front that makes a fat lady of fifty feel as if she had been squeezed into a cast-iron stove. Eat as much as you like, and oh—blessed thought—what you like, once more.

To many hundreds of thousands of suffering middle-aged women it would be a heaven on earth just to have another square meal and to wear a gown that didn't choke the very life out of them—and shoes that didn't make every step an agony. The key to this paradise is in their own hands. They have only to accept their age and to realize that no living man knows, or cares, whether they are twenty-four inches in the waist or thirty-six whether they wear a two and a half A, or a five E, shoe.

Furthermore, the husband hunt is over for a woman of fifty. She has either got one or isn't going to get one and, at any rate, she has got to have some other bait than her looks to succeed as a fisher of men, so she might as well take the comforts to which her age entitles her.

Then, no woman really comes into freedom until she is frankly middle-aged. We must preserve the proprieties and affect the ignorance and innocence of girlhood and continue to blush, as long as we pretend to be sixteen.

It is only after we pitch our "bloom of youth" jar out of the window and let our Titian locks go back to their natural grizzled state, that we can admit to understanding problem plays and novels and travel from one end of the world to the other unchaperoned by anything but our faces. Also, and best of all, being frankly fifty enables us to indulge in that choicest of all mundane pleasures, friendship with a congenial and understanding man, who dares to be as charming as he can because he doesn't suspect us of trying to marry him.

Nor will the woman who is experiencing the joy of fifty lack for friends, male and female, for she is at her best socially. She is worth talking to and listening to, for she is like Lady Kew's daughter, whom Thackeray describes as being forty years old, and having heard all there is to tell. Can't you see her, fat and comfortable, shrewd and worldly, humorous and entertaining, and all because she accepts her age and makes the most of it?

The only way for any middle-aged woman to get the cakes and ale that are her due at her fiftieth birthday party is for her to welcome her age and not foolishly try to bar the door against it. This is particularly true of married women, and there is no other sight in the world so humorous and so pathetic as that of elder wives torturing themselves trying to keep young, hoping thereby to retain their husbands' love.

Why cannot these poor, silly geese realize that by the time a man has been married to a woman for thirty years he either loves her for something a thousandfold better than a peaches and cream complexion and a lissome form, or else he doesn't love her at all? If a man's affection is a matter of his wife's possessing mere physical beauty, no living woman of fifty can hold a candle to the least pulchritudinous girl in the back row of the chorus and she might as well save herself the wear and tear on her constitution by trying to rival the natural beauty of youth with the handmade beauty of age.

An inch more or less, up or down, or crossways, in his wife's waist-line will not raise, nor lower, the temperature of a middle-aged business man's love one single degree. And if a man doesn't love his wife when they come to middle age, she can no more kindle the flame of affection in his breast with any imitation of youth than she can make a fire out of snow on a cake of ice.

It is one of the blessed immunities of fifty, though, that one's heart has gotten over the brittleness of youth and has become a tough proposition that will stand as many kicks as a football. In youth, love makes up the sum of a woman's existence; but by the time she has reached middle age she has discovered that there are a great many other things in the world beside sentiment, and that one can live and have a very good time even if one is not terribly understood and has missed her real soul mate.

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