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life begins
at forty

by

rebecca blackley

Molly Parker sighed contentedly as she laid down Professor Pitkin's much discussed work which she had been reading with an unusual amount of concentration. She would soon be forty herself. But she didn't mind it now. Only the other day she'd been dreading it too. Told herself that at last she would definitely have to pass into the hopeless mediocrity of middle age. It was true that she was no longer in the bloom of youth, but forty! Why had it seemed so much more elderly than thirty-nine? But Pitkin said life begins at forty. That it was then that the prime of life was reached. He was right.

She'd been getting terribly lax lately—had tried to excuse herself by saying that it didn't matter. After all, she was getting along in years, and she had a right to take it easy. But that must all be changed—this last with sudden resolution, as she hoisted herself out of the cozy depth of her capacious chaise longue. She gazed around her room—it was very like her, she suddenly thought with rare honesty—pretty in a faded, pastel way. Nothing really definite about it—a noncommittal sort of room. But that was all over now—must be.

It hadn't taken much training—being Will's wife. She'd been babied by her father and brothers before her marriage, and Will had simply carried it on. Why not? He'd always made a good salary, and there was no necessity for his wife to struggle with household intricacies. And after all, girls in her day hadn't been blue-stockinged—it hadn't been genteel!

"I'll try and rely more upon myself," she said aloud with a determined look which sat incongruously upon her sweet and rather confiding face. I'll not even tell Sonny or Baby about it. Let me see, my birthday isn't for two more months. Why anything can happen in two months. If I start now, I'll be a new woman by then."

And with this declaration, Molly proceeded to throw aside the bonds of dependence. She did many things that would have seemed Herculean in their difficulty a few weeks before. But after all, she was nearly forty, and surely she could think for herself. Of course it wasn't a lot of fun. A woman who has let a man play God in her life finds it pretty hard to get out of the habit after so long a time, but as is usually the case with meek souls, once having made up her mind nothing could budge her.

Time is a wonderful element, and a month can work miracles. This was especially true in Molly's case. Outwardly the same, sweet, helpless wife and mother, she concealed a daily life of utmost duplicity. She had budgeted her time with a Machiavellian ingenuity. Will caught the eight o'clock train to the city. She never breakfasted with him any more, so that was no problem. Junior was in an Eastern prep school—dear Junior—always in some sort of a scrape, but really a loveable boy—his professors just didn't understand him—that was all. And Baby always slept until twelve—poor dear, it was a shame that she had to stay out late, but youth will be youth, and she shouldn't have to miss any good times. At any rate, she was off directly when she did get up, and out all afternoon, so Molly really had the entire day to herself until Will came home on the five-thirty train.

This was her program; up at eight. Breakfast of orange juice, butterless whole-wheat toast, and black coffee. A strenuous twenty-minute bout with Will's rowing machine—it was never
used—hadn’t been, in fact since the
time he had practically crippled him-
self with over-indulgence just before
his big squash match at the Club. Mol-
lly herself had suffered the tortures of
the damned with it the first few days,
but she was fired with enthusiasm. A
whole inch gone from her hips already!
She could actually see the great im-
provement.

Then a cold shower (Molly’s love of
hot baths was almost sybaritic) a
hasty toilette, and off for a brisk walk
by nine. At ten, she went to Monsieur
Gaston’s Salon, where that perfectly
divine masseuse—the sympathetic one
—gave her one of Gaston’s special fa-
cials for the mature woman. They
made her feel like a new person. Down
to that horrid little Swedish place for
lunch. She loathed it with a deadly
hate, but they made a special feature
of non-fattening meals.

It sometimes seemed to her that
nothing she liked was good for her.
That terribly rude diet specialist she
had consulted had told her that she
was flabby and needed more whole-
some food. The idea! Why she’d al-
ways eaten very wisely—only two
lumps of sugar in her coffee when she
really wanted four, and never a second
helping of candied sweet potatoes
when she loved them so! And the aw-
ful things he wanted her to eat—spin-
ach and carrots and dried fruits! She
would simply die!

But she tried valiantly to live up to
her diet chart, and on this particular
day ordered butterless spinach with
hard boiled egg, lettuce with a mineral
dressing, stewed apricots, and black
coffee. She felt extremely virtuous,
and looked with pained disgust at a
perfectly loathsome young creature
who was blithely devouring an indi-
gestible mixture of ice cream, choco-
late syrup, marshmallow, nuts, cher-
rries, and whipped cream, apparently
unaware of the appalling amount of
calories she was consuming with such
nonchalance and gusto. Molly longed
to scream at her the enormity of her
offense, but the words stuck in her
throat. Her eyes were glued on the
Sweetheart Special which was disap-
ppearing so rapidly. An evil demon
whispered devilish suggestion in her
ear, and at length she had to leave
precipitately, not even waiting for her
own lunch.

An hour later, with a look of frustra-
tion on her face, she parked her shin-
ing blue coupé directly across the
street from the imposing graystone
façade of Professor Ivan’s Recreational
Center for Ladies. She crossed the
street reluctantly, but gaining new
resolution, walked up the steps and
inside. Ivan himself greeted her.

“Good afternoon, Ivan,” she said
with false animation, “and what are
we to do today?”

“Ah, Mrs. Parker! We have such
an interesting program for you today!
You did so well with that bicycle ex-
ercise yesterday. I think you are
ready for the treadmill. Is that not a
big surprise—no?”

“It’s a big surprise, yes,” said Molly
with trepidation. “And what may the
treadmill be, may I ask? Surely not
that endless rubber track Mrs. Perry
was working on yesterday?”

“But yes, Mrs. Parker! But I give
it only to my most advanced pupils,
and I think you are ready for it. Come,
dress now! Hurry! I myself will in-
struct you today!”

Molly groaned inwardly as she went
to change into her scanty costume.
Everyone knew Ivan was a slave-
driver. She had liked Pierre, his young
assistant—so kind, and always
quick to notice fatigue. Ivan, now, would
work her mercilessly. What difference
did it make if she were worn out, and
her sore muscles screamed their pro-
test? Will would fall in love with her
all over again, and they’d have a sec-
ond honeymoon. At present, she was
wearing her old clothes so that the
difference wouldn’t be so apparent.
She had some stunning new gowns
waiting her approval when she should
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have lost ten more pounds, and she could do that easily in the remaining month. She went heroically into the brilliantly-lighted gym. Ivan was waiting there for her—an implacable figure.

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Molly was glad that her birthday fell on a Sunday this year. Will always had a late breakfast—played nine holes of golf early in the morning and came home for a ten-thirty meal. Sometimes she resented it, but after all, the poor boy worked hard—he was entitled to his golf once a week. That was one nice custom, they had though. The entire family ate together Sunday morning. True, baby did come down in her pajamas, and yawned throughout the meal—poor lamb, she did need her sleep—but one day in the week wouldn't hurt her to eat with her daddy and mother.

Molly surveyed herself appreciatively in the mirror. Yes, Ivan had done wonders for her—why she was actually inches smaller in the hips. She still felt a little dubious about the dress—she hadn't worn coral for years—and a knitted dress for even longer. But the saleswoman had told her—such a sweet girl she was, too—that it suited her perfectly—yes, it did look nice on her! But it was with a feeling of stage fright that she went downstairs and into the sunny breakfast room.

She was the last one. Will was eating a waffle and reading the sports section of the paper with absorption. Baby was toying with a strip of bacon.

"Honey," he said, "aren't you rather glad to be forty? Just think, we're beginning to get along in years now. We needn't mind that nonsense about trying to look like kids any more. We can afford to relax and just be ourselves as we are today. No more worries about our waistlines. I'm glad to see that you haven't any of those foolish notions about dieting. What if you are a little on the plump side? I love you as you are."

Molly listened to him in stunned silence. Pictures raced through her mind as he spoke. Sweetheart
Specials — spinach — black coffee—
stewed fruit — the treadmill — the
whole awful round. Kid gloves and a
check. Why Will was right! She
wasn't young any more. She was
middle-aged and tired. She hated
diets and exercise—that was for
younger bodies than hers. Will's voice
broke into her train of thought:
“I guess I'll change for church, dear.
I'll be ready in about half an hour. Are
you going to change?”

“I’ll be up in a minute dear. I have
some things to tell Grace.

Will left the breakfast room, and
Molly soon heard him go up the stairs
whistling in high good humor. She
went guiltily towards the kitchen, and
peeked her head through the swinging
door.

“Grace,” she whispered happily,
“make me some waffles, will you?
And bring me some sugar and cream
for my coffee. I’m forty today, you
know.”

“Very good, Madame,” said Grace.

mr. pomroy

by

louise dauner

It wasn't a particularly nice after-
noon. In the park, the sooty statues,
the soggly dripping fountains, the
worn sagging benches all contributed
to the note of fall depression.

Mr. Pomroy sank deeper into his
red leather morris chair. Covertly,
his bright blue eyes glanced from his
new mystery book to note the moving
hands of the massive, gold-embossed
clock in the corner. They traveled
slowly but inevitably, toward the hour
of three.

At precisely the same moment, Mrs.
Pomroy raised her head from her
book, to peer majestically through her
lorgnette, at the clock, then in the
direction of her husband.

“James!” said Mrs. Pomroy.

“Yes, my dear.” With a faint but
unmistakable sigh.

“It's time for Flossie's afternoon
walk.”

Abruptly, Mr. Pomroy rose. “Why
doesn't she go once in a while?” he
thought resentfully. “Always telling
someone else what to do!”

Mr. Pomroy didn't know it, but his
polite submissiveness had almost
reached the breaking point. That he,
James Pomroy, successful retired
business man, should have degener-
ated into, or been relegated to, the
office of Exerciser-in-Chief to a fuzzy
white poodle dog!

Mr. Pomroy gave an extra and quite
superfluous tweak to the conservative
dark blue silk four-in-hand that re-
posed on his immaculate wing collar.
He flipped a non-existent speck of
dust from his left coat lapel, and set-
tled his soft black hat firmly on his
head. He loved that hat; its flappy
nonchalance made him feel just a little
rakish and devilish. (But all the time,
deep down in his heart, he knew that
he was only a staid and conventional
old man.) And then he picked up the
leash that curtailed Flossie's im-
patient cavortings.

“Have a nice walk, dear,” said Mrs.
Pomroy indulgently, as he went out.

As the front door closed, with just
the suggestion of a slam, Mrs. Pomroy
returned complacently to her book.
First, however, with quiet appreci-
ation she observed the imposing ele-
gance of her black velvet tea-gown;
the unimpeachable smoothness of one
white, fleshy boneless hand. This
pose would make quite a nice oil por-
trait, she reflected. She must get in
touch with that new artist—Peacock—
wasn't that his name? She heard he
was very good.

Mr. Pomroy betook himself dully
along the regular route to the park.
He was in a dangerous mood. More