

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

WADE H. NICHOLS, EDITOR

959 8TH AVENUE

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10019

EVERY MANUSCRIPT SUBMITTED TO THIS OFFICE IS READ BY ONE OR MORE EDITORS IN THE HOPE THAT IT WILL PROVE SUITABLE FOR USE IN GOOD HOUSEKEEPING. ITS RETURN DOES NOT NECESSARILY IMPLY CRITICISM OF ITS MERIT BUT MEANS ONLY THAT IT DOES NOT MEET OUR NEEDS. WE REGRET THAT THE LARGE NUMBER OF MANUSCRIPTS RECEIVED MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO OFFER INDIVIDUAL COMMENT.

THE EDITORS

Joseph Ishikawa
715 Church Street
Beloit, Wisconsin 53511

Short Story
Approximately 3500 words

SECOND MEETING

"Hello, may I speak to Christopher, please?"

The woman's voice at the other end of the phone was vaguely familiar, but I couldn't place it. Tentatively, I asked, "Junior or Senior?"

"Senior, I suppose," came the reply.

"This is he."

There was a slight pause, "Chris, you may not remember me, but this is Georgia Miller. . .used to be Georgia Stevens."

The vagueness vanished. "Georgia! Of course I remember you; I just couldn't place your voice. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine; couldn't be better. How are you?"

"I'm fine too. Where are you calling from?"

"You mean, 'From where are you calling?' You always used to correct my grammar, remember? I'm in town; got in about fifteen minutes ago."

"What brings you here? You should've written."

"Well, I didn't know whether or not you were still here until I looked you up in the phone book just now. After all, it's been twenty years, and I couldn't just write out of the blue. Besides, I knew you'd gotten married, and I

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
2-2-2

didn't think your wife would appreciate your receiving a letter from a strange woman."

"You're not exactly a strange woman. Connie has heard me speak of you and would be glad to meet you," I said without conviction. "But you haven't said why you were here."

"Julia, our oldest girl is graduating from high school this year, and I brought her here to look over the College. Bill and I thought it might be fun for her to go to our school."

"Oh? Is Bill here with you?"

"No, he couldn't get away from the bank. I don't think I would've called you if he'd come; after all, you two didn't get along very well."

"I guess that's right. How long are you going to be here, Georgia?"

"Not more than a couple of days. We've an appointment to see the Admissions people in the morning, and of course Julia wants to see the campus. It was dark when we came in; so we didn't get to see the campus, but I suppose it has changed a lot."

"Well, I've been here all the time; so I haven't noticed that it's changed so much. There are a couple of new dorms and some other new buildings; of course, we had to get a new science building to keep up with everyone else. Some of the buildings have been switched around; the old gym is now a student center, and we have a new gym. Main Hall is now nothing but administrative offices, and I suppose that

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
3-3-3

you'll go there to see the Admissions people; Rod Brewer's the man to see; he's fairly new, but a sharp boy who can tell you anything you need to know. I'll tell you what! I don't have a 10:00 o'clock tomorrow; how about getting together then?"

"No, I'm afraid that's when Julia has her appointment at the Admissions Office. . . Could we get together for lunch?"

"Well, that's an idea. You'd be welcome to come over here except for the fact that Connie is having her bridge club for lunch tomorrow, and I was going to eat at the faculty dining room. Why don't I pick you up at Main Hall, and we can run out to Vic's to eat. Vic's gone, but his son-in-law runs the place; it hasn't changed much."

"Are you sure your wife wouldn't mind? When I suggested lunch, I thought she would join us."

"Nonsense, why would she mind?" I replied, "If she weren't the hostess for the Bridge Club, she'd get someone else to fill in at her table and would insist on your coming here, but it'll be fun to take you and your daughter out to Vic's."

"I think Julia has been invited to eat in the Dining Hall, but I'll meet you at Main Hall." After another pause, she asked, "How have you been, Chris?"

"I said I was fine," I answered; then knowing that she was not asking about my health, I added, "Well, I guess

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
4-4-4

I've lost a little hair and gained a little weight; as a matter of fact I'm so potty you may not recognize me. How have you been?"

"Oh, I've got my hair, but I've put on some weight too; of course you used to think I was a little skinny," she reminded me.

"I did not," I said, "You were fine," unconsciously using an overworked adjective from our undergraduate days.

"Well, I'll see you tomorrow at noon then," I finished.

"Okay," she agreed, ". . .and, Chris. . .Never mind, I'll see you tomorrow then." She hung up.

"Well, well, what was that long conversation about?" asked Connie coming into the room with a load of clothes she was mending.

"Oh, an old girlfriend," I said gaily and I hoped with irony.

"Humph, that Georgia Stevens I've heard so much about, I suppose," she sniffed.

Since we hadn't discussed Georgia in years, Connie's clairvoyance floored me. "Wait a minute," I protested, "what makes you think that Georgia is the only girlfriend I ever had; it could have been any number of middle-aged women. . . Well, as a matter of fact, it was Georgia Stevens only it's been Georgia Miller for the last twenty years. She came up to see about enrolling her daughter at the College."

"Are you going to see her?" asked Connie.

"Well, seeing that you're having your bridge gang

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
5-5-5

in, I invited her out to lunch tomorrow. With her daughter," I added defensively wondering why I threw in the lie. "I'll bring them over to meet you later."

"Oh, come on, Chris, you don't have to get so flustered. I trust you, even with an old hot flame like Georgia Stevens. Besides, she's probably gotten gray and frumpy; so you can quit making up romantic dreams between now and tomorrow noon."

"As a matter of fact, she did say she'd gotten fat," I exaggerated, giving my wife a squeeze, "You've certainly managed to keep a trim figure in spite of having had our three kids and all."

Connie raised an eyebrow. "How come you were discussing her figure?" she asked drily. "Her husband probably makes a lot more money than a professor, and she can afford to eat enough to get fat," she teased.

For a fact, Connie had kept her trim figure. She hadn't been a wildly beautiful girl like Georgia had been, but she had a dry wit and an animated manner and a nice smile that made her otherwise plain face attractive. I married her four years after the big break-up with Georgia, and while I hadn't quite forgotten Georgia, I didn't exactly marry Connie on the rebound either. Marriage and motherhood seemed to be good for Connie; if she had been plain when we were married, she was beautiful now. Coupled with her outward animation was an inner serenity that gave her a glow that I finally came to

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
6-6-6

recognize as beauty. I suppose I realized this when I marvelled at the beauty of our two girls and then the handsome boy who followed; they had inherited her looks, and so finally through them, I really saw her. This happened when they were youngsters, and now Anne and Meg were 15 and 13 while young Chris was a sturdy 10.

I reflected that marriage and fatherhood had been good to me too even though it wasn't reflected in improved looks. At that, I did manage to stay in shape by jogging around the indoor track at the College and swimming at the pool three or four times a week during the winter and playing tennis and golf in moderation in spring and fall.

I was wondering what the years had done for Georgia; I couldn't imagine her other than being the stunning, magnetic young woman of twenty years ago when no one could be near her without being drawn to her.

"Darling," I said to Connie, "I've got to admit that I'm kind of excited about seeing Georgia again."

"Oh, I can see that," she said with irony.

"What I mean is," I explained, "What if she hasn't gotten gray and frumpy and fat?"

Connie swung away from me. "Well, I suppose that's up to you," she replied with some impatience. "We're none of us college kids any more, but I don't see what the color of her hair or her measurements from top to bottom or the sparkle of her personality or anything has to do with the situation;

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
7-7-7

you're a husband of some seventeen years' standing, a father of fifteen years' service, a full professor of psychology, and she is the mother of at least one child, the wife, I suppose of a prosperous businessman --," she left the sentence unfinished and shrugged her shoulders.

"Good Lord," I said with some surprise, "I didn't realize you'd be so upset by this." She had been so calm about the phone call.

"I'm not upset," she snapped with a peevishness that gave the lie to the statement. "It's only that you're at the silly age you psychologists love to write about, and you're all but giggly ever since the phone call. And you're worried that she may not have gotten 'gray and frumpy and fat!' If she doesn't mean anything to you, it wouldn't matter if she hadn't."

"Of course she doesn't mean anything to me," I protested on the defensive again, "but we were engaged once, and I haven't seen her in twenty years. I'm curious, and I am kind of excited about it." I didn't sound very convincing. "Maybe I'd better call the hotel and call off the luncheon," I added.

"And wonder forever what you missed? Nothing doing!" cried Connie. "Besides, I've never met your precious Georgia, but I'm not going to have her think that I'm playing the heavy. You're not only going to have lunch with her, but you're going to invite her and her daughter over for dinner."

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
8-8-8

"On top of your big bridge deal?" I asked in amazement, adding, "Darling, you're beautiful!"

"Oh @- shit!" she said, moving off to the kitchen.

This drew me up short as she'd never used the word before.

The next morning was a mess; I met my 8:00 and 9:00 o'clock classes, but might just as well have stayed home for all I got across. At 10:00 I went home to help Connie get ready for her bridge party, but she sent me away "to your precious Georgia" it sounded like, but I couldn't tell because she muttered it under her breath. I had never seen her this way, and if I could have been more detached and professional, I might have found the phenomenon an interesting case study. As it was, I thought petulantly to myself that if she were going to play the part of the injured wife, why I might just give her some cause to assume the role if Georgia was still the knock-out she used to be.

I tried doing some bookwork in the office, but gave it up to bum around the library; the time was just dragging along. I finally went outside and found myself at the old observatory, now shut down. I realized that it was a mistake. I'd passed it probably several thousand times, but not for several years had I thought of it as the spot where Georgia and I became engaged and the spot where we had broken up. For the first time in nearly twenty years

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
9-9-9

I remembered again.

We had met one night at a Union dance. I'd seen her before, a glimpse now and then of a sparkling, dark-haired girl through countless male heads and shoulders surrounding her. This night she had the same escort of a swarm of anonymous men, but suddenly she was alone, abandoned by her entourage who had run off to join a fight outside. I was priggish enough to be uninterested in the occasional melees that took place at these affairs, and I was available when she sauntered over to ask me for a light. She took my wrist to steady it as I held the match for her. After taking a drag and releasing a cloud of smoke, she made some caustic remark about the barbaric behavior of men.

"They're probably just defending the honor of their house," I volunteered.

She looked at me sharply, "You're Johnson aren't you?" adding, "I'm Georgia Stevens. And you're a barb?" She was referring to the fact that I didn't belong to a fraternity.

"I wasn't being sarcastic," I said; "They really do believe they're defending the honor of their house; I don't have anything against the Greeks. I can't afford to join a frat, and I don't have the time anyway. By the way, don't you think it strange that you were talking about the barbaric behavior of men who happened to be Greeks with a barb who prefers to abstain from barbarism. . . Hope you don't

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
10-10-10

mind the barbed comment."

She made a face acknowledging the pun and then looked at me thoughtfully. "Dance with me Mr. Johnson," she said.

"Chris," I said, steering her onto the dance floor.

That was the way it began. When the anonymous men came back, she gaily and good-naturedly waved them off and announced that I was taking her home. I hadn't known it, but I didn't have a date, and it seemed a good idea.

We were sophomores then; the following semester I enrolled in a lot of courses with her. Since she was a literature major, this meant that the following year I had to take twenty hours each semester in order to catch up on the requirements I'd missed going to her classes, and we decided that it was more practical to get engaged and stay out of each others' classes.

Our trouble began a few months before graduation. I'd been offered a good job in the personnel department of one of the big aircraft plants on the Coast. She wanted me to take it. I wanted to go on to graduate school. She pointed out that I could make as much money at the aircraft plant right away as I could with an advanced degree elsewhere. I said I wanted to teach. She pointed out that I could make more money right away at the aircraft plant than I could ever make teaching. I said I didn't care for industrial psychology, that I wanted to teach. She said I

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
11-11-11

didn't love her. I said I did so. She said that if I did, I'd take the job. I said I'd hate myself if I did and maybe her too eventually. She said see, I didn't really love her.

And it was over just like that.

Bill Miller had been on the fringes for most of the time Georgia and I had been going together and had dated her a few times before we became engaged. He was available when we broke up, and he and Georgia were married the day after graduation. He had a vice-presidency in his father's bank waiting for him. Fortunately, I'd had my comprehensives before the blast, and my grades had been good enough to carry me through the blue funk I was in the rest of the year.

"Chris?" I was brought back to the present by Georgia's voice. Turning, I almost let out an involuntary "wow!"

"Georgia, how well you look; it's good to see you," I said holding the hand she extended in both of mine.

"The least you could have said was that you mistook me for my daughter," she teased.

"No, no, the kids are -- well, kids; you're a woman and a mighty attractive one." I was sincere and if anything understating the case. She was everything she had been with the added attraction of maturity; if she had put on weight, it filled her figure to perfection. While there was just a touch of gray in her hair, her face was without blemish. It was

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
12-12-12

difficult to realize that she was four years older than
Connie.

"Thank you, Chris," she acknowledged my greeting,
confident of the impression she had made. "You're looking
well too; I'm glad your pot and loss of hair were exaggerated.
You ought to see Bill," she said, breaking off in laughter.
Sobering, "I see you were drawn here too."

"I didn't realize it, but I guess I was," I
admitted. "At least it saves us the bother of looking for
identifying carnations or red roses among the mob in front
of Main; besides, some of the wolves in administration would
probably have tried to pick you up."

"Oh, they already have," she said airily, "That
Mr. Brewer offered to take me to lunch while Julia was at
the Dining hall."

"Why, that dog! Parents are usually invited to
join their children in Commons!"

"Well, I am flattered then; I thought he was
just doing a kindness to an old lady." The smile vanished,
"We have a few minutes before noon; could we sit on the
bench for a bit?"

So we sat down on the bench where years before we
had pledged eternal love and then angrily vowed never to see
each other again. And while hundreds of undergraduates
scurried to Commons, she described her lackluster marriage.

Bill provided for her well, had given her two

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
13-13-13

wonderful daughters but otherwise didn't care for any of the things she cared for; he didn't have any intellectual or cultural interests -- in fact didn't seem to be particularly interested in the bank. He was now president, but his dad had hung onto the presidency so long that Bill lost what interested he had in it at the beginning, and his Dad still controlled the business as chairman of the board. Bill would probably sell out when his dad died and left the bank to him. He was interested only in sports cars and horse racing, watching television and drinking at the club. He was good to her and to the girls; he didn't fool around with other women, and his drinking hadn't become a problem yet. But the marriage was a bore. "I find myself thinking about you a lot, Chris," she ended. "Do you ever think of me?"

"I don't want to be ungallant," I said, "but I hadn't thought about you for years until you called last night. You were on my mind almost constantly after we broke up, but when Connie and I got married, I knew that our marriage wouldn't be worth a darn if you were a part of it even in my mind; so I shut you out. Oh, I've told her about you, and we used to talk about you now and then, and that seemed to clear the air. Do you know that I come by the observatory every day, and this is the first time in years that I associated it with us?"

"Oh, Chris, what am I going to do? I had some wild idea that if you were still here, we could patch things up." She laughed weakly, "It's really insane to think about; I thought our girls were big enough not to be hurt, but I

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
14-14-14

hadn't even thought that you might have children and that they might be hurt. . .or even that you would leave your wife." She was on the verge of tears.

"We've three kids. . .Connie, if I hurt you by telling you that I hadn't thought about you in years, you can find comfort in the fact that since you called, I've been like a teen-ager getting ready for his first date; I was really excited about seeing you again, and now that I find you more gorgeous than I'd ever imagined and hearing about your unhappy marriage, I suppose I'm nuts for not suggested we check into the nearest motel."

Georgia hid her face in her hands. "I didn't mean to throw myself at you so shamelessly; I planned to be subtle, cunning and discreet, and I was going to lure you away before you knew it." She looked up and managed a weak smile.

"Oh, come on, you're not a fallen woman," I continued. "You know, given these circumstances, I might've been able to fantasize running off with you, but I've found out in the last few minutes that I couldn't do it and why I couldn't."

"Last night, when I told Connie you called, we discussed the possibility that you'd gotten gray and frumpy and fat, and then I got worried that maybe you hadn't, I suppose because I couldn't imagine you as anything other than beautiful. Connie got disgusted that this would make any difference in how I felt about you. I didn't realize what

Ishikawa
SECOND ENCOUNTER
15-15-15

she meant by this until I saw you again just now. You're more beautiful than the girl I lusted for twenty years ago, but I'm not the same person I was then although I didn't realize it until now. I suppose the crucible of our marriage has changed me; I think that Connie and I have had a good marriage so that the appearance of an old flame doesn't kindle the old fires any more even though the old flame is brighter than ever. So you see, Connie was right; it didn't matter finding you still beautiful."

"Thanks a lot," she said, biting her lip.

"Look, Connie, I'm no better at marriage counseling than I would have been as an industrial psychologist, and I suppose it's a professional mark against me that I'm not expert at both, but I don't think your marriage is doomed. Bill used to be a stuffed shirt, but I was probably a prig; if you had married me, your feelings toward me might be exactly the same as they are toward Bill now. The main reason I think that Connie and I have a good marriage is that she's come part way with me, and I've gone part way with her; she's yielded some, and I've yielded some, and where neither of us has yielded, we've tried to respect the other's differences. We're still two people and both richer for trying to understand the other. Why don't you bone up on sports cars? Even go to the horse races -- if only to keep him from throwing good money after bad nags; he'll be more receptive to what you're interested in, and in weaning him away from his vices, you may find that you've weaned him away from some of yours. End

Ishikawa
SECOND ENCOUNTER
16-16-16

of lecture. Let's go to Vic's."

We had a subdued dinner although we tried to laugh it up some. Just before the dessert came, I remembered, "Connie wants you and Julia to come to dinner."

"Oh, no! How do you suppose I could face her having toyed with the idea of stealing her husband? You know I'm not the kind to throw herself at a man, but that's just what I was doing to you. Why don't you just tell her that Julia and I had to go home this afternoon?"

"If you really have to go, we shouldn't keep you, but you didn't really try to hard to steal her husband; it would have been a greater struggle for me if you had tried, and it wouldn't have been much of a bargain for you if you had succeeded. If Julia comes to school here, you'll just be postponing meeting Connie. You won't have to be embarrassed because she has no idea how you've been scheming," I laughed.

"Don't underestimate wives; just because you and Connie seem to have reached such a wonderful meeting of minds doesn't mean that she isn't perceptive," she said.

"You don't have to be sarcastic just because I gave you my elementary lecture; I told you I'm no good at marriage counseling. But you ought to meet Connie; if Julia comes to school here, we'll want to see you and Bill both whenever you come to visit her."

"All right, Julia and I will come over this evening.

Ishikawa
SECOND MEETING
17-17-17

In the first place, I don't want to be a coward about it, and in the second place, I would like to meet this paragon of a wife."

I took Georgia back to Main and met my afternoon class which went much better than the morning sessions did. I had a committee meeting late in the afternoon; I was late in getting home, but was gratified to see that Connie had regained her good spirits.

Georgia and Julia came a few minutes later. Georgia presented her daughter, a lovely, wholesome girl of 17, and I introduced them to Connie. I don't know how Connie did it, but I could see that she read the whole story at a glance, and I realized how vulnerable I'd be if I tried to keep secrets from her.

But I was to learn what a remarkable woman she was when she introduced Connie and Julia to your youngsters. "Children," she said, "These are friends of your fa -- our friends," she amended.