

part i

Love

is an Everyday  
Thing

# A Kiss on the Nose

Submitted by Kay Haugaard



When we're young and thinking about romance, we expect skyrocket-ets and excitement: big things! Long-term love survives not on the big things, but on the little thing, as Kay Haugaard's delightful story reminds us.

After Bob gave me his usual morning goodbye kiss, I dodged my face quickly to the side to avoid the inevitable attempt to kiss me on the nose, but he didn't even try to catch me. Before I realized that my maneuver had been unnecessary, I was watching the back of his brown, curly head and tweed jacket as he walked out the kitchen door.

Staring at his lanky, hurrying figure I felt puzzlement and neglect. Had he forgotten or just lost interest in silly games?

He rushed along without bothering to look back. On the mornings when he had "won," he would look back at me with a playfully triumphant chuckle while I rubbed my nose in mock annoyance and disgust. It was our little game.

The first time he did it, it had startled me. His brown eyes had danced with little-boy mischief as he quoted Snoopy, "A kiss on the nose turneth away wrath."

Rubbing my nose and grimacing, I had responded, "A kiss on the nose inspireth wrath." So a game was born; a contest to see who could be the quicker—he with his kiss or me with my hair-trigger withdrawal and avoidance? I now realized it had also become a final love pat. I felt strangely incomplete.

But, the lightness and sweetness of the air that morning turned my mind away from petty matters. It was a petty matter, wasn't it?

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I sat down at the breakfast table to have another cup of tea and look at the paper before I got busy reading my stack of student compositions. Lacy, green-gold shadows played through the bare branches of the ash tree onto the dazzlingly sunny, white stucco patio wall outside the dining-room window. A small bubble of euphoria formed inside me without my even willing it.

The newspaper reminded me it was February 14. Valentine's Day. I wondered whether Bob would remember. Why had I even thought of that? That was another petty matter. What difference does a paper valentine make? It's the actual love that is significant.

I unfolded the paper to read about the origins of Valentine's Day. Sure enough, just as the "Lifestyles" section article said, it was the day the birds started to build their nests.

In a niche in the patio wall, a pair of gray house finches took turns fluttering up with brown strands of grass. They bustled in and out of the enclosure, arranging the strands, accompanied by continuous chirping.

It wasn't so much a song as happy, optimistic chatter. They seemed to be saying, "Where should I put this? Would you like this in the kitchen or the living room? Where should we put your collection of china dogs and that velvet hanging your mother gave us?" I felt certain they were talking about the minutiae of their daily lives: "A daub of mud here looks good. Needs a bit more dog hair fluff here to be really cozy, don't you think? What color to do the nursery?" The tiny things that hold together a nest; a life, the grand design.

Each little piece of grass, or beak full of brown, sticky mud was like an atom of love. I identified warmly with the new couple. What fun to move in and start a life together.