

A DATE WITH CONNIE

By John S. Halbert

Connie sat on the front row right in front of the teacher. All along during the school year I had been watching her from my desk on the second aisle from the right that gave me a clear view of the trim, pretty girl with the light-brown hair who was originally from Canada. The girl had an engaging manner that made her popular with everyone in the class; boys and girls alike, and I was filled with admiration for her. Not being as outgoing as she was (that would come later), it seemed that everytime I spoke to her at recess, which was not very often and the only practical time I could approach her, I found myself all tongue-tied; mumbling inane stuff that seemed to amuse her and her friends more than anything else,. As much as I wanted to impress her, I just wasn't getting anywhere.

Until the day of the rainstorm. It was a Thursday, near the end of the school year. As the students were arriving that morning, all of a sudden a downburst happened that caught some of the people, myself included, in the schoolyard short of the front door. As I was running toward the doorway, book satchel flapping against my leg, getting wetter by the second, I heard a yelp behind me. Turning about, I spotted Connie on the ground, her school things in disarray beside her. In her haste, she had tripped on something projecting from the ground. "John!" she called out to me.

At once, I turned about and in the pelting rain, pulled her to her feet and snatched up her book-bag and her little purse. "Come on!" I shouted. The girl grabbed my arm as we lurched the fifty or so feet to the front door. Inside the doorway, as we stopped to catch our breaths, Connie brushed back her matted, dripping hair and gave me the smile of a lifetime. "Oh, thank you!" she said, between gasps.

Before I could compose a suitable gallant reply, a teacher ran up with a dry towel. "I'll take care of you!" the woman said, edging me aside and pulling the disheveled Connie toward the teacher's lounge. As the two stepped away, the wet-but-still-adorable (to me) girl glanced back over her shoulder with another smile.

By the time of recess in the afternoon, the rain was over; everyone had dried-out and it was now a sunshiny, humid day. While I was telling some of the other fellows about what had happened that morning in the rain with the girl, there came a tapping on my shoulder. Turning about, there was Connie, blinking at me!

"Ah, talk to you later, guys," I said.

Connie and I stepped away by ourselves. She looked into my eyes. "I just wanted to thank you for what you did, this morning," she said, biting her lower lip.

I blinked back at her. "Ah, sure . . . anytime---" was all I could think of to say.

“Maybe we could get together after school, sometime. Maybe on the weekend, even.”

Was this conversation for real? It sounded as if the girl I had admired all school year was as much as offering to go out with me! “Well, sure.” I thought fast. “Okay, let’s go to the movies!”

“That would be . . . nice,” she said, smiling, still looking straight at me. For the first time I saw that she had hazel eyes.

“Okay, then, I’ll see you at the ‘*Colbert Theater*’ at two o’clock on Saturday.” And, just like that, I had a date with Connie!

But first, there were some logistics to work-out. For one thing, one of my parents would have to drop me off at the theater a little before two o’clock the day-after-tomorrow and arrange to pick me up after the show was over. And I’d have to have to tap my saved-up allowance stash for some extra dough to treat her. But those were matters that could easily be resolved.

Saturday at the appointed time, I was standing on the sidewalk underneath the overhanging, lighted “*Colbert Theater*” marquee when a car pulled up and out hopped Connie. The girl stepped forward with her patented smile and touched my hand. My heart was pounding as I paid for the tickets. Inside the lobby, I bought a jumbo-sized box of popcorn for both of us. (I figured it would give me a good opportunity to touch her hand many times as we both dug into the box at the same time for more popcorn, *heh-heh*.) A couple of Cokes rounded-out the fare.

And so, we had our movie date at the *Colbert Theater*. I don’t remember what was the title of the films, except I’m sure they were good ones---the Saturday double-feature matinées always were. As the picture show went on, she leaned her shoulder against mine and we finished the popcorn and the Cokes in good order. All-in-all, it was a grand and glorious afternoon of entertainment for me, and I’m sure it was for Connie, too, as she seemed to be having a good time. When it was over, our parents picked us up out front and we went our separate ways.

It gave both of us something to talk about the following Monday with our fourth-grade classmates.

As it was at the end of the school year, we didn’t have a chance for a repeat date, as she moved back to Canada right after that.

One day, eight years later, just before graduation from high school, a pretty-much-grown-up Connie visited our school and we talked and laughed about that “date” we had had back in the fourth-grade that time. Then she was gone and I never again saw her.

Many years later, her cousin told me she was living in a commune somewhere in Arkansas.