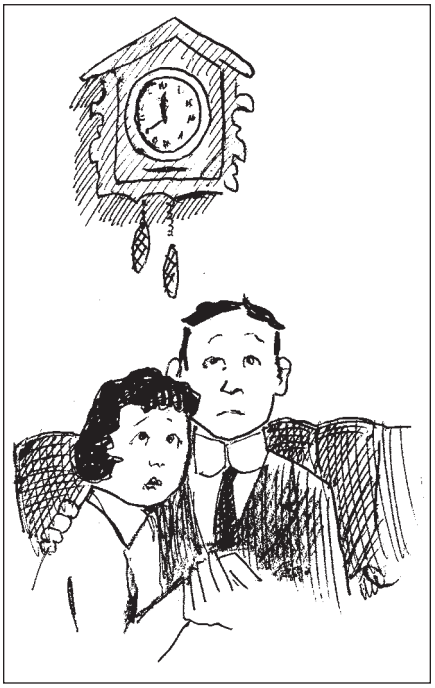
Apple of Papa's Eye

By Audrey Corn

Sometimes I wished Papa loved me a little less. I grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., in the 1940s. Parents were stricter back then, and Papa insisted upon cross-examining every young man I dated.

Papa's interrogations embarrassed me, but they were far worse for the boys. Most young men didn't ask me out a second time.

Then along came Jerry Millis. I liked Jerry a lot and I didn't want Papa to frighten him off like the others.



I'd heard Mama say, "Forewarned is forearmed." I decided to forewarn Jerry Millis. When he invited me to the picture show, I told him, straight-out, about Papa. "My father is very old-fashioned," I said. "He'll ask you a million questions."

Jerry was nearly 19 and more self-confident than the high school boys I usually dated. He smiled at me. "Give me 10 minutes with Pops and I'll have him eating out of my hand," Jerry promised.

I nodded. I wanted to believe in miracles.

Saturday night rolled around and there was Jerry, knocking at my front door. I ushered him into the parlor to meet my parents. Mama, bless her heart, smiled sweetly and said hello.

Papa looked at Jerry's black-and-white checked jacket, striped bow tie, and pegged trousers, and he said nothing. Papa did not approve of modern "fashion." I made the introductions.

Jerry grabbed Papa's hand and pumped it up and down. "Pleased to meetcha," Jerry said.

Then he turned to me and winked. "Ready to leave, Toots?" Jerry asked.

Toots. Papa's frown deepened. I could practically hear him thinking *What kind of name is "Toots"?* As for Jerry's plan to leave, Papa hadn't even *started* his interrogation. "Sit down," Papa said.

The "invitation" was an order.

I followed Jerry to the sofa, but Papa waved me away. "I'll entertain your young man while you *leave the room* to get your coat," Papa said.

Stubbornness runs in our family. "I have my coat," I said. I sat down on the sofa.

Papa fired question after question at Jerry. I thought the interview would never end. Finally, Jerry looked at his watch. "Holy moly!" He jumped up and grabbed my hand. "We gotta get out of here or we'll miss the show!"

Papa's angry look said it all. He had been dismissed by this young whippersnapper. Jerry saw Papa's face and tried to make amends. "Does Toots have a curfew, sir?" Jerry asked.

Curfew. *Sir*. I felt a flicker of hope. First impressions were crucial, but surely last impressions counted, too.

"Curfew?" Papa said. He studied his big gold watch. "Toots'"—Papa spat out the word—"Toots' curfew is exactly 8 o'clock on the dot."

"Papa! It's already past 8 o'clock!" I wailed

"Yes, so it is," Papa agreed. He held out his hand. "It's been a real pleasure meeting you, Jack."

"Jerry," I corrected. "*Jerry* Millis."

Papa opened the front door and ushered Jerry out. I grabbed my coat and hurried after Jerry.

Papa put his hand on my arm. "We agreed that it's past your curfew, *Toots*. You're staying right here," Papa said.

Jerry shot me a confused look.

"A real pleasure meeting you," Papa repeated, and he shut the front door.

I was never so mortified in my whole entire life. I knew that my father wanted to protect me, but it wasn't easy growing up the apple of Papa's eye, back in the Good Old Days. ❖

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