

Happy Birthday to a Friend

"Ah," the poet asks, "what is so rare as a day in spring?"

"Ah, indeed," Steady Eddy responds, "the answer to the question is: That very spring day in the month of December."

Yesterday was that kind of day, an Indian Spring day, Steady calls it, when you're tempted to watch the sky for geese going North and the geese are almost tempted to go.

A sneaky kind of day, sunny and blue and so warm with little breezes you start expecting crocus on the southern slope.

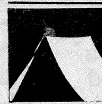
A gift from God, this day.

Helen's birthday.

I brewed up a cup of Red Zinger tea and took it out in the backyard, the backyard battened down for heavy weather.

Alongside the house, the Blue Canoe was beddy-bye, bottomup and settled down for a long winter's nap.

Under the naked oaks, the Koenig feeder was full to the gun-



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By George Vukelich

whales with plump sunflower seeds designed to keep the wintering cardinals likewise.

The picnic table was swept clean, the only placesetting was some stones from Sister Bay.

And yet winter wasn't today.

Today was sleepy sunlight and sweet wind and Helen's birthday.

I remembered the summer day she gathered them and there was Vince picking up others on the short hop and making the long throw to first out in the bay.

I remembered the early morning Vince came into this world and his sisters before him.

I remembered the time when I thought marrying a minister's daughter, a Preacher's Kid, was a pretty straight, unrevolutionary thing to do. Later events, however, have proved that I've

been hanging out with the most political person since Madam LaFarge.

"Some persons" Steady points out, "tend to their knitting that way."

In a day and age when you can clock most marriages with an egg timer, it's a pleasure to recall that we've been married forever and she says I'm still her friend.

It's also a pleasure to recall that she's taught me all there is to know about a relationship:

Number One: Marriage is something you go through with Somebody.

Number Two: Home is a place, where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. She says Robert Frost said that first, but he said it for everybody.

On her birthday, you can't get

her another Pete Seeger album because she must have every one he's ever recorded.

You can't get her another friend either, because everyone she meets becomes one.

Out here in the winter springtime, I wish I could give her this

day.

She would promptly share it with her friends, Steady says. "Just give her all the days you got left," he advises, "only save a couple for catfishing."

So be it. Happy Birthday. Friend.