

The Orange Room

It was early into the war, late 1941. A young man from New York had been dating a young woman from New York “unofficially” all through high school. He’d graduated three years earlier; she just the year before. The dating continued, but it was harder now because he was in the army. One day he said to her, “Hey, Mary. Let’s go out to dinner Friday night. I’m taking you to the Orange Room.” Of course, she accepted.

The Orange Room. Wow! Mary ran home to tell her family the great news.

“Mom. Frances. Walter,” she called. “Freddie’s taking me to the Orange Room for dinner Friday night.”

“The Orange Room?” her mother yelled. “What will you wear? Oh, my goodness. We’ve got to get busy!”

“The Orange Room,” her sister Frances mused. “I wonder what hotel that’s in. Oh, my God, Mary Alice. I think that’s the restaurant at the Waldorf Astoria!”

“The Orange Room,” her brother Walter pondered seriously. “Oh, my God, Mary. He’s going to ask you to get married!”

“The Orange Room!” they all screamed together, jumping up and down at the joyous news.

Nobody in the family was particularly good at sewing, and money was very scarce since there was no real wage earner after Mary’s father had died. Her mom made just enough to live on at the Sunshine Biscuit factory in Sunnyside, but as far as clothes went, it was hand-me-down all the way.

“Don’t worry,” her mother told her. “I’ll see if I can’t get a nice dress from Aunt Ida. She’s around your size.”

“Don’t worry,” Frances and Walter told her. “We’ll help you buy some nice shoes with the money we’ve got saved.”

The neighbors helped out, too. The lady next door came in with two pretty shawls, one cream colored, the other orange. "They're both beautiful," she said, "but seeing as your going to the Orange Room, the orange one might be overdoing it a little." They all settled on the cream.

The lady upstairs was a beautician, and she came down to do Mary's hair on the afternoon of the big date. As she put on the finishing touches, Walter watched out the window so he could see when Freddie was coming.

"He's here!" Walter shouted. It was exactly seven o'clock. Freddie was right on time. "And that's a good sign in a husband," the beautician wisely noted.

Mary did look exquisite, even if they all said so themselves. Freddie could have spent more time on his appearance, but they all knew there had been trouble with his father, and Freddie had lived with a foster family for awhile.

"Wow! You look like a million dollars, Mary," he said when she came out to meet him. "Oh, those guys at the Orange Room are gonna be green with envy," he bragged.

And off they went, five heads crowded at the window to watch them walk down the street toward the subway station.

They took the Flushing Line into Manhattan. Freddie was looking very proud to have this beautiful young lady at his side. Mary had a nervous look on her face, as would be natural. After all, the next time she was on this train, she'd be engaged.

They got off the train at Grand Central Station and went upstairs. They walked toward the 43rd Street exit when all of a sudden Freddie stopped and announced, "Here we are."

Mary looked up at the sign over the food stall they'd stopped in front of. The sign read, "Nedicks. Home of the 5 Cent Hot Dog and World Famous Orange Soda."

The Orange Room.

"You want one dog or two?" Freddie asked.