

PERSONALS

Dan spotted her ad in the Sunday personals: Winsome, willowy widow, (59) one blue eye, one green, seeks attractive, smart, sensitive guy, emotionally and physically fit for long term relationship (age 50 to 65). Smart, attractive, sensitive and fit, Dan answered the ad. A brief e-mail exchange - he was sixty one, married and divorced three times by the time he was thirty nine, an energy consultant, originally from Kalamazoo, she, a high school English teacher, ex-New Yorker.

The new e-mail pals made a plan to meet for Saturday breakfast in a North Hollywood coffee shop. A Marina del Rey man, Dan had business to attend to in her neck of the woods.

Lily wondered what to wear for a breakfast date. After thirty mostly lovely years of marriage and two years of grieving and coping, she felt somewhat readier to "get out there" as her concerned friends so tactfully put it. A size eight pair of black pants, squeezed onto her size twelve frame, a becoming royal blue sweater, her honey blond hair, compliments of Enzo of Encino, casually coiffed yesterday, flying in all directions today. What the hell, I've got to start somewhere, she thought, lurching her way on the 101 to to meet the first Mr. Wrong of many - she was sure of that!

At exactly 8:45 AM, Lily reluctantly appeared at Bettes Coffee Parlour (his choice), finding blue jacket, salt and pepper hair, 5` 10", at a corner booth, popping in spoonfuls of syrup-smothered pancakes as if this were his last meal before execution.

"Hi Dan, Lily". (No last names - you could never be too careful in this town.) Wary, shy, unpracticed, she was surprised to notice that she found him attractive - tall, nicely built, shining, cornflower blue eyes and a luxuriant mop that was indeed salt and peppery, so unlike the endearingly bald pate (except for a few friar-like fringes) on her dear Herbie`s head. (His ad might read: sexy at sixty one.) In spite of herself, Lily wondered if she would get a chance to run her fingers through ... but wait, the still smiling blue eyes belied a rebuke. His mouth, tight and stretched as a newly tuned snare drum, ^{said,} "You are late, so I ordered. I`m on a schedule, and I didn`t think you were going to show."

Dan shook her hand brusquely, as if to say, guessed Lily, another wasted encounter. And, she felt his swift, dismissive appraisal: not willowy AT ALL!, multi-colored eyes no big deal, looked older than he had hoped, messy, mustard tinted hair. ("Oh well", Lily thought, already spinning a story to report to her friends, "you winsome and you lose some").

Not a good beginning. Punctual to a fault, Lily sizzled back, his good looks fading by the second, "We agreed on 8:45."

were first married – I was dating her brother and we were invited for lasagna and beer at their Beacon Hill railroad flat. I remember,” she plunged on, breathless now, unable to stop her need to wow this boor, “that they talked about the challenge of two writers, living and working in the same space without driving each other mad. Obviously, their plan was flawed”, she admitted.

“I’ll bet you are a “left-wing liberal”, Dan challenged, changing the subject, eyes still endearing, mouth, now a contemptuous knot.

“You bet”, countered Lily, furiously attacking the elusive, slippery egg whites, stuck in her throat like little worms, crushed together, waiting in line impatiently for their dinner. “How could you tell”? Was it her abstract copper pendant, her Mexican earrings?

“It’s the poetry – aren’t all poets lefties?”, Dan sang out, really enjoying himself now. Lily could just imagine him mocking her wallet: ACLU, Greenpeace, NOW, Amnesty International..... Trouble.

The waitress brought refills, black coffee for Dan, a very green tea bag for Lily. “And you,” Lily asked tightly, knowing the answer already, “What are your views” and because she really was curious, added, “What’s an energy consultant, anyhow?” She really could use some energy now! The waitress brought the bill, much to the relief of both sides of the table.

Dan took a deep breath. It was clear to Lily that he was anxious to wrap this latest fiasco up.

"Politically, I'm a conservative, you might say far to the right, Very pro-Bush, anti-government meddling, pro-gun control - I feel very strongly about the rights of private citizens to be able to protect themselves, anti-abortion....."

Hyperventilating, Lily quickly interrupted with a shallow-breathy "I figured that. Tell me about your work". Why not be at least minimally gracious? This excruciating ordeal was almost over.

Between the last sips of cold coffee, Dan finally ^{spoke} told his tale:

"After years as a successful investment counsellor, I lost everything and had to start from scratch - this was after my third marriage had fallen apart. I was very depressed, very broke and very confused as to what to do with my life. For years I drifted in and out of schemes and jobs that fell apart until ten years ago, when a friend introduced me to a company that wanted to promote energy products that save the environment and cost the consumer less money."

Lily was astonished by this bit of information. It didn't fit the profile.

"My friend literally saved my life," Dan continued, "I'm good at this work. It's lucrative, and in three months I plan to retire, travel, enjoy life." And more...

"Look Lily, you are a nice woman, attractive, intelligent."

Is he composing a new ad for me? Lily wondered. How generous.

"I've been at this game for years and I know that someday I will find a woman that is ideal for me. The mutual attraction will be INSTANT - sparks will fly. We won't need to say, 'let's see each other again.' The overpowering attraction will be self-evident."

"Well," gasped Lily, as Dan tossed his Visa card on the table with a devil-may-care-flourish, "Good luck in your quest for the Holy Girl." Get out the violins... oh, puleeze.

The two sets of disappointed shoulders left the coffee shop, resignedly making their way to the parking lot. VOOM! A young skate boarder, zigging and zagging his way down the crowded street, swerving to get out of the way of this old, morose couple, lost his footing and fell in a surprised heap - splat - in front of Dan who dropped to his knees and asked, so gently, "Hey, buddy, are you okay?" The ever smiling blue eyes, now soft and comforting, knew that real nine-year-olds don't cry - or try not to, anyway. Slowly, tenderly, he helped the child off the sidewalk, replacing the boy's Dodgers' baseball cap, backwards of course, on his curly head, retrieved the skate board from the curb and whispered, "Bye, pal" Dan steered Lily, took her arm, actually, across the street to the parking lot.

"You see, I'm a grandpa," he explained. "I have three grandchildren, all boys, from three different wives. I love playing with them, getting down on the floor with them.. playing games. They tell me - you don't act like a grandpa, you act like a daddy!! They mean everything to me."

They reached their destination, Dan, springily, Lily, with dazed, tentative steps.

"I had a nice time", said Dan.

"Thank you for breakfast", said Lily.

With unexpectedly outstretched arms, Dan reached over and gave Lily a long, sweet, warm, solid hug. For a moment, she forgot everything but the promise of salt and pepper in her valiant, lonely life.

"Bye, leftie"

"Bye, rightie."

A mismatch made in heaven.

Wonderful!
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