

Love Matches - Going up in Smoke?

Era: Circa 1994

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"Lois, I don't care how you come at it," Abdo Rahman told me emphatically. "Taking holidays is like digging a pit in your own doorway. Sure as shooting, you fall in it yourself."

Abdo and his wife, Sharée, had just returned from a trip to Alaska. This was Monday, his first day back at work.

Three of us - Abdo, Leil and I - were sitting in my office shooting verbal spitballs - which wasn't doing anything for my work load. And I loved it.

"Ah come on, Abdo," Leil chided him. "How can a person get motivated to do the good things in life, you know - practice magic or fall in love - without a holiday, at least once in a while."

"I'll lend you my mother-in-law. She'll motivate you to practice magic or whatever else - especially if you're into the black arts. But I have to confess, she won't do a thing for your love life."

"So, you took her with you," I said to Abdo, recognizing the implications of his comments.

"Sharée insisted and I didn't think it would be too bad. We DO have the camper. I figured the Great One could ride in the back with Pop - Sharée and I - we could have the front to ourselves."

"It didn't work out that way?" Leil guessed.

"Not really. Well it wasn't too bad until we got to Grand Prairie. Then Pop decided he was tired of riding in the back. Wanted to trade places with Sharée. I didn't mind that so much except I figured Sharée's mother was going to want a turn."

"I suppose. Equal opportunity," Leil suggested. "...a lady after my own heart."

Abdo gave her a look to kill. "We stopped in Fort St. John to get gas and everybody did their thing. I wasn't sure what seating arrangements they were making. I was sort of resigned to whatever happened."

"And?" I queried sympathetically.

"It didn't go too well, I can tell you. Sharée was busy moving some of the food into the back of the camper so she could start getting lunch ready. And her mom headed for the washroom. Unfortunately, the Great One didn't fall down the toilet. I know she didn't, because she crossed my rear-view mirror a few minutes later - heading back to the van."

"Didn't she break it?" I teased Abdo.

When Abdo didn't get it, I added, "The mirror, I mean. You know - just by appearing in it?"

"Bad joke, Lois," Leil stepped in, "...but a great trick, breaking mirrors. Ever seen it, Abdo?"

Wisely, he ignored our lame attempts at humour. "So, I waited another fifteen minutes," he continued, "while everybody flopped around. Boy, I hate getting gas. FINALLY, somebody slammed the back door of the camper, then Sharée knocked on the rear window. That's how she tells me everything is okay. I took off, almost overjoyed because her mom had decided to stay in the back."

"That doesn't sound so bad," I told Abdo.

"No I suppose not. The problem is - round about Wonowon, this RCMP cruiser pulls me over to the side of the road. I'm not very pleased of course at the idea of getting a ticket. Busy wondering how many dollars this is going to cost me. So, the Mountie gets out and walks around the camper... I roll down my window and he says, 'D'you think maybe you left something important when you stopped to get gas back in Fort St. John.'

"Like what?' I asked.

"Well,' the Mountie looks at me with his head tilted, sort of suspicious-like, 'there's a woman back there... says she's your mother-in-law. She said her daughter's husband would probably be

driving.' Then the guy winks at me. Can you imagine? I was horror-struck. I left my mother-in-law at the service station and she had to phone the police and get them to chase me. Meanwhile, Sharée thought her mother was up front with me and I thought she was in the back with Pop and Sharée."

"Doesn't sound like the end of the world to me," Leil said.

"Sharée doesn't believe me though. She thinks I did it on purpose." Abdo considered this for a minute. "...which I might have - if I had 'a thought of it."

Lois laughed. "You can't think of everything. Don't kick your self," I said. "It was your holiday. You were resting. Besides, you didn't plan it. This way you don't need to feel guilty."

"Yeh but if I'd planned it, I'd have at least gotten some pleasure out of it. How 'bout it Leil? You're the magician. If I had a genie, I'd make two wishes. First, I'd wish Sharée's mom would win a trip around the world and second, I'd wish Sharée was talking to me again. Yeh! Isn't love wonderful?"

"I have a feeling you don't mean that," I told Abdo. "Your enthusiasm is nothing like the enthusiasm I feel when I go shopping."

"Lois, love is a disaster - a pit on my doorstep."

"Well, I disagree," Leil countered. "Not for me. I don't feel like I'm alive when I'm not in love. And I'm in love again - right now... didn't even have to go on holidays to find the guy."

"You'll be sorry," Abdo informed her. "If the guy isn't a pill, his mother will be. The idea that falling in love is good... it's a North American myth. I should have listened to my father when he tried to arrange a marriage for me."

"No thanks," Leil bristled. "At least if I make a mistake I have no one to blame but myself. And this is no mistake."

"How do you know?"

"I've known the guy for two weeks now and he treats me like - like a Greek Goddess. Of course I won't let him near me, but it sure is exciting when he tries."

"I bought a new sweater the other day," I told Leil, trying to change the topic. I figured Abdo might get uncomfortable with the sexual innuendoes.

"A sweater...? Are you embarrassed Lois. Sweaters are not romantic. Lingerie - that's the way to go."

"I suppose... never thought of that. Do you think I should buy a negligee for work?"

She waved my comment aside then her eyes developed a dreamy mist-like look. "It sure is great to wake up in the morning and find him singing outside my window."

"I don't believe it," I said.

"Believe it," Leil laughed.

"That won't last long," Abdo informed her. "I can assure you."

"Fine... if it doesn't, I'll dump him. But it will."

"How do you know that?"

"He's a sex therapist. The guy knows where it's at."

Two days later, I ran into Leil just as we were leaving work. I stopped at her car, a bright red Karmann Ghia, as old as Hayden and tremendously sporty.

"How's it going Leil?"

She was dressed in her cape with the bright red lining. The wind whipped it behind her as we talked.

"Really good... well - not quite as good as a couple of days ago."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"Just a minor ruffle in my love life... It's Robin."

"Is that the guy you've been seeing?"

"Yeh," she sighed. "Remember I told you he's been serenading me every morning?"

"Uh huh."

"Well, one of my neighbors phoned the police this morning. They came around and sent him home. I don't know whether to be mad at my neighbour or not."

"Well, as Abdo said, 'the singing isn't likely to last long'. I'm glad the police didn't charge him or something... could affect his career. Does this guy work for one of the hospitals or is he in private practice?"

Leil brightened with the opportunity to extol Robin's virtues. "Oh, no, he works for himself. Actually, he's been a little short of work lately, so he's come up with a new gimmick... really ingenious."

"What's that?"

"Well, the zoo has this very repressed elephant. It's a bull. The animal grew up in a circus and he was reprimanded every time he got too frisky with the cow elephants."

"So you mean Robin is giving sex therapy to the elephant?"

"Yeh... isn't that neat? There are years and years of repression to undo... years and years. But Robin knows what to do."

"Wow." This guy was unbelievable.

"Robin is a really clever man... brilliant. I guess the people in the circus threatened the bull with a stick all the time, so Robin decided he should start the therapy by tickling the elephant. You know... with a stick. Convince him that sticks are something pleasurable."

"That might be tough if the elephant was beaten... but what the heck. He can practice on you."

Leil laughed, "What an idea," and hopped into her car. "Have to give it a try." The Karmann Ghia was gone from the lot before I had my door unlocked... which is understandable. I'm past my sexual prime.

Abdo brought a drawing to me about twenty to four the next day. "Here you are," he informed me. "This is the one Hayden wants to issue to the shop by lunch tomorrow."

I took one look at it. "Fat chance. If he wants to issue this one by noon he can count on issuing a revision the day after, and he can count on some of the materials being ordered wrong."

"We both know that," Abdo consoled me. "Humour the man."

"If it means I can bleed all over your drawing, I'll go for it. I have a great red pen."

Abdo ignored my attempt at medieval levity. "Guess what!" he enthused. "Sharée told me to drop dead this morning."

"Is that an improvement?"

"Well, I thought so."

"Yes, I suppose."

"Say, have you talked to Leil today?"

"No."

"She's all excited about her friend's latest project. She thinks he could be a millionaire soon."

"Why? What did she say?"

"Robin? Is that his name? I guess Robin is all keen about..." Abdo started to laugh.

"About what?"

Uncontrollably.

"Go on. What is it?"

Several seconds later Abdo was still laughing. The tears rolled down his cheeks and he doubled over at the waist. I handed him a Kleenex. Eventually he used it.

"He's designing a consent form for couples to sign before they have intimate relations." He started laughing again. "You know. I mean nobody wants to end up in court. So he figures a contract will solve the problem"

"I don't believe it."

"Believe it. That's what Leil said... only in Canada. I'm glad I moved here. This country is "24 hours a day" entertainment. According to Leil, he's going to market booklets of these forms, sixteen in a package - the whole deal. Bind them in black leather and sell them - \$9.99 each."

I shook my head. "That's what Leil told you?"

"She did."

"She tell you about the elephant?"

"Yep." He started to laugh again.

"What does SHE think of this?"

"She loves it. She's dancing up a storm."

"Do you think trying to sell something like that would work?" I asked. "I mean people will just say 'I was drunk' or 'I didn't know what I was signing.'"

"Well, you have to admit he might have SOMETHING. I mean, if people figure they have to have a contract - he saves them the hassle of paying the legal fees and haggling over the wording. By the time a person did all that, the thrill of the sex would be long gone. Besides, these books might have novelty value. Sort of like a Pet Rock or a Rubik's cube. I think I'll give the guy points for trying."

"I'm going to talk to Leil. I don't think this comes under the heading Romantic."

Abdo headed for my office door. "Leil thinks its okay. Maybe I'll get hold of the guy. D'you think he'd like me to do the art work for the forms? Can you think of some good phallic symbols?"

"You going for a cup of coffee," Abdo asked as I passed him in the hall the following Monday.

"Yep."

"I'll come with you." He changed the direction he was heading.

"How are things with Sharée?" I asked.

"Oh great. She let me bring her a cup of tea in bed this morning and I'm going to take her out to lunch. I think I'm in love again."

"That's wonderful." I slapped him on the back.

"That's not what I wanted to talk to you about, though. You'll never believe what I saw in the paper last night."

"What's that?" There was no coffee as usual, so I pulled the filter holder out of the machine, emptied the grounds in the garbage and rinsed the holder under the tap.

"Apparently some guy has been calling on women in their apartments in the middle of the afternoon. Tells them he's delivering a message – they invite him in – he delivers the message - then he strips."

"Sounds like he's from one of those strip-a-gram services or whatever they're called."

"Nope - according to the paper, the guy's a real wimp - has arms like toothpicks, it says. I guess the women phoned the police because they said he didn't look the part. Otherwise they might have gone for it - great face and a really romantic voice, they're saying, but no body. Even the strip-a-gram service has disowned him. The paper quoted the manager from the service. She said, 'No way. Our men have fabulous physiques.'"

"So is the guy in jail now?"

"Nope. The police arrested him but they couldn't find anything to charge him with so they let him go."

"Do you think the fellow needs therapy? Maybe we should tell Leil's boyfriend. He's supposed to be short of work right now."

"I was thinking the same thing but I wanted to tell you about it first."

I stuck the empty pot under my newly filled filter and pushed the button to release the water. "Let's go see her right now. We'll get our coffee soon as this is finished."

Leil was at her board when we rounded the corner, dark hair caressing the green surface, her powers of concentration levelled against a three phase separator.

"Say Leil," I interrupted her, "Abdo was just telling me about an article he saw in the paper."

Leil's smile pierced me. Her lips were their usual potent red and the fire in her eyes was brighter than usual that morning.

"Oh. The Herald!" She seemed decidedly enthusiastic. "You probably mean the guy doing the stripping?"

"Yeh, we thought maybe Robin should be treating the guy."

She laughed, "Actually, I suppose he is treating him - already. Thanks for your concern guys but it's kinda wasted. You see the person doing the stripping IS Robin. Given that he's short of work lately, he decided to make some charitable donations - you know - volunteer his professional services? So a couple of days ago he started on this. He only strips for people who need treatment for sexual repression - sort of like the elephant except he gets paid for treating the elephant. I'm very proud of him."

"Robin is the stripper?"

"I really must meet this guy," Abdo enthused.

"On top of that he figured it might be a good marketing ploy for his intimate-relations contract-forms."

"So where do you fit into this Leil?" I asked.

"I think it's great." She was obviously enthusiastic. "But well..." She paused momentarily. "I've decided this is all very exciting and everything but my career as a children's magician is going to be in some jeopardy if Robin keeps on like this. I really admire his self-sacrificing, all this charitable work and everything, but when he's getting picked up by the police... I don't know. Most parents wouldn't want me to be involved in something like that. And my career has to come first. So I told him he just has to give up the charity work."

She paused and grinned from ear to ear. "Besides, I told him he's so off the wall, he's getting predictable. That's no good if you want an exciting relationship. Sometimes even sex therapists need a little advice."

"So how did he take to your telling him what to do?"

"He didn't mind at all. He says he's really a one woman kind of guy. Especially when the woman is like me and thinks he's the ultimate romantic." She winked at me.

What bliss. I went back to my office just a trifle jealous.



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