

LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

*Whoever said love is blind?
Lovers notice every
pimple, every pound.*

Whoever said love is blind was a moron. Not only is love *not* blind, it actually seems to have better visual perception than my mother, who could see through my clothes that I was wearing a torn slip held together by a safety pin. Lovers sometimes notice the most niggling things—like the fact that you've put on a measly five pounds here and there—and then they often don't have either the good sense or manners to keep their findings to themselves. Some of them actually think it's their duty, their mission in life, to inform you that your clothes are dirty (or simply wrong for a particular occasion), your face is broken out, or you are getting fat, or bald, or both, ignoring the fact that unless you are chronically comatose you probably know about the problem yourself and are hoping nobody else will notice it.

My own feeling is that if I wanted to hear about the defects in my appearance, I'd go back home and live with my parents, who are at least professionals in this area. My mother should be the one to tell me about my posture being so stooped that I resemble one of the seven dwarfs, not the man who is supposed to love me. Yet I can't seem to get this across to him, or to explain that I don't want to hear, as we walk out of the apartment ten minutes late for a restaurant reservation, words to the effect that the back of my dress is filthy from the neck to the hemline.

I suppose things could be worse. I know one woman whose lover is a human Detecto Scale. He knows to the ounce if she's put on weight, just by looking at her. And he used to insist on providing her with this information, even though my friend suggested that if he must show off his talent, he should find a job guessing weights at a carnival. She finally got him to shut up by counting the number of hairs on his brush every morning and informing him how many he lost that day.

My own lover is subtler than my friend's in that he doesn't comment directly on my weight so much as on the fit of my clothes. But it comes to the same thing. "Are the pockets of that skirt supposed to be stretched so far apart?" he asks as I struggle into the garment that I am in the process of convincing myself has, due no doubt to the cold weather, shrunk while hanging inside my closet.

At least he doesn't think he is the sole arbiter of fashion around our house. This seems to be the case with Margery, who, her roommate Mel complains, is prone to ask ominous questions such as, "Are you really going to wear *that*?" as he is getting dressed to go to a party. What's more, he says, when he tries to pin her down about what the question means (Does it mean he looks like a derelict? Did the invitation call for black tie?), all he gets from

her is a vague, "Oh, I just think you look better in your other jacket." Which other jacket she means, however, is a mystery, and as Mel tries on one after the other to the chorus of Margery's "No, not that one," he becomes, he reports, more and more homicidal.

Mel should compare notes with my neighbor, Ted, who says he has never yet been able to choose a tie in the morning to suit his wife. "Everyday, as I put one around my neck, I see Susan in the mirror behind me getting this sneer on her face. Love is certainly not blind at our house, but one day it might have a black eye."

Of course, as soon as we want our eagle-eyed partners to notice something *wonderful* about us, we find they have mysteriously gone blind. "Well," I finally say at ten o'clock at night, after we have spent three hours in each other's company, "I guess I could have saved the seventy-five dollars it cost me to get my hair done today." "Oh," he looks up, apologetic, "I thought it looked nice, but I just supposed you'd washed it." (As if this were a monthly event.) "Washing it doesn't make it curly," I answer, admirably refraining from throwing at him the chair I am sitting on. "Seventy-five-dollar permanents make it curly." "It looks very nice," he says, leaning over to brush crumbs the size of microorganisms off the front of my shirt. (These, he sees.)

My friend Peter has no sympathy for my predicament, since Sarah, his roommate, notices every hair on his head with the precision of a computer. He complains that he is apt to come back from getting a haircut, only to hear: "Couldn't they have taken a little less off the top?" This, when they haven't taken *anything* off the top. Peter feels that the fact he hasn't pulled out all of Sarah's hair, in its entirety, puts him in line for sainthood right behind Sister Teresa.

I remind him that those of us who feel put upon by our partners should remember that their zealous efforts in the guardianship of our appearances can be an asset. Witness the plight of my friend Susan, who is likely to come home from a party where she has been particularly flirtatious and amusing, only to find, as she looks in the mirror to brush her teeth, that she has a large clump of mascara hanging from one eyelash and several bits of string bean from dinner wedged unappetizingly between her front teeth. "Why didn't you tell me I looked like this?" she accuses her husband from the bathroom doorway. Looking up from his paper, Ted replies absently that he never noticed she had anything wrong with her, that, in fact, Susan always looks perfect to him.

"I could kill him," she says grimly, "for that."