

CAN THIS BE

LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

When his body says cha-cha, mine says waltz. And vice versa.

It's 7:40 A.M. and he is singing his lungs out in front of the bathroom mirror—something about it being just once in a lifetime that a man knows a moment—while you are cringing under the covers wishing it were any moment but this one. Or, it's 11:30 P.M. and you are settling down for your fifth happily anticipated TV viewing of *The Way We Were*, while he, pillow over head, is cursing himself for not having bought the optional ear-plug attachment when you got the set. If either of these scenarios rings a bell you are probably suffering from a common couple complaint: When a night person and a day person try to live together in familial harmony, they can, if they're not careful, wind up in The Twilight Zone.

Where body rhythms are concerned, my lover and I definitely fall at opposite ends of the spectrum: When his body says cha-cha, mine says waltz, and vice versa. He's up with the sun, like the

rooster, the meadowlark and other annoying animals; I really only come to life after dark, like Dracula. This has led, among other things, to some vital failures of communication. At least I call them failures of communication. He doesn't use such no-fault terminology when he calls up some evening at 6 P.M. asking why I'm not someplace it seems I'm supposed to be, but didn't know I was supposed to be. "I told you before I left this morning that I'd meet you at 6," he says sternly over the phone. I try to explain to him that at 7:30 in the morning, it's possible I might not hear the "1812 Overture" played in our bedroom by the entire state philharmonic using real cannons, let alone a few words about where and when I am supposed to meet him in the evening. Somehow he doesn't see this as a good enough explanation of why he is standing in front of a movie theater by himself with two paid-for tickets in his hand.

My friend Eva is in the opposite boat, having recently married a man who becomes gregarious and lively at just about the same hour she becomes incoherent. Eva laments, "He always wants to talk

just as I'm trying to fall asleep, at which point everything I say is designed to end the conversation. He'll start rambling on about how fascinating it is that anthropologists differ by millions of years in their estimations of when the first humans appeared on Earth, and do I think that bipedalism could have started before the formation of the human brain? 'Who cares?' I answer succinctly. This doesn't always sit well with him."

Another woman I know lives with a man who, she swears, has a whole other life after she goes to sleep. "I get up in the morning, and I find traces of it," she says, "like the remains of a bowl of shredded wheat (the only thing he knows how to make himself) and an assortment of books and magazines in the living room that weren't there when I went to bed. Maybe there'll be several newly shined pairs of shoes in the kitchen, or a bunch of trimmings from our plants." But she's learned to take it in stride: "I figure he's just a nocturnal animal," she says, "like a gerbil."

How did all of us time-warped couples get together in the first place? One thing I know, none of us met at after-hours discos or early morning exercise classes. My lover and I were introduced at a cocktail party, before my peak and his decline (speaking in twenty-four-hour terms, that is). He looked wide-awake enough to me at the time, or perhaps I mistook a flagging energy level for sexy langour, drooping lids for bedroom eyes. Anyway, before I found out the difference it was already too late; I was hooked, a night crawler tied to a day tripper, for better or worse.

What's more, I am now convinced that there is a method to all this madly inappropriate coupling. I think what we have at work here, behind an ostensibly heedless disregard for compatibility, is an unconscious wisdom. The fact that two people have varying body schedules gives them a complementarity that couples who are always awake or asleep at the same time can't possibly have. Look at it this way: If there were an air raid, no matter what time of day or night one of you would hear the siren and be able to drag the other out of bed and down to the bomb shelter. And you have things to share with each other that you wouldn't otherwise have. For instance, when I see my partner in the evening, I can tell him what the late-night weather forecast was the night before, and he can tell me what the day's weather actually was. Also, having incompatible body clocks can give both members of a couple private time, keeping them from getting sick of each other sooner than they otherwise might. Sometimes days go by when my lover and I don't see each other at all, and it's always nice to bump into him again.

So the next time the person you thought you loved yanks the curtains open on a bright new day, nearly blinding you in the process, or turns on a late-night rerun of *Kojak*, sirens at full blast, yanking you back from the edges of oblivion with such force you feel the stirrings of angina, I suggest thinking about these positive aspects to the night-person/day-person dilemma. They could keep you out of prison.

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