

LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

Self-help for couples who wonder where the romance went.

Is your relationship as romantic today as it was when you and your partner first met? If the answer is no—if these days the two of you seem less like lovers than a pair of crotchety roommates—then it's time to look at the various components of your life together, pinpoint the problem areas, and remedy them.

Your surroundings: In romance, atmosphere is all, which is why many people hold hands in candlelit restaurants while relatively few are moved to do so in laundromats. Take a look around your apartment. Does your bedside table hold a bud vase with a single rose and a copy of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*? Or do you see a packet of corn pads and a toenail clipper? Is there a chaise lounge in the corner of the room, or an exercise mat? Does it smell like a leafy glade, or a tube of Ben Gay?

Move along to the kitchen. Do your eyes light on a bowl of fresh strawberries and a bottle of red wine set out to breathe? Or is the first thing you see a box of Bran Buds and a large bottle of Maalox? Does the note on the refrigerator read, "See you later, dar-

ling," or "We're out of prune juice"?

Pass into the living room. Does the coffee table hold two half-empty glasses of after-dinner liqueur and the book you were reading before his amorous advances interrupted you, or do you see, instead, a Monopoly board with a lot of little red hotels on your property?

Read all these bits of evidence carefully, for they are actually signposts along the road back to romance.

Your activities: What you and your partner do together has a direct bearing on how romantic you feel about each other. See if the following sounds like a list of your recent joint activities: enrollment in a lecture series given by the author of *Controlling Your Blood Pressure Through Diet*; attendance at a theme dance called "Linoleum Luau," given by the floor-covering company that employs your partner; spending an evening brushing ticks out of your dog's fur. If all this sounds familiar, try to plan something more romantic for the very near future. You have a wide range of choices, since almost anything you do—even attending a performance of an all-male Himalayan dance troop—is likely to be more romantic than your recent activities.

Your associates: Romance is catching, which means that it would be much more beneficial for you and your partner to spend an evening with Romeo and Juliet, say, than with Archie and Edith Bunker. Keeping this in mind, take a look at your recent social calendar. Was your last dinner out eaten alongside your parents, his parents, and his great-uncle Herman, whose false teeth were taken away with the rolls? Was the most recent trip you took together the one you made to the dentist? Did the last couple you had over for the evening consist of your health insurance salesman and the skeleton he uses to demonstrate the effects of smoking on bone tissue? Then perhaps you should make a pact to see only happy couples your own age for a while. If you find this cuts down on your social life too much, forget about the "happy" requirement.

Your appearance: Look in the mirror. Be honest. Does your appearance invite your partner's romantic attentions, or does it invite his suggestion that you help him give his car a lube job? And what about him? Does he look fit as a fiddle—or a kettle drum?

Was the last time you put on fresh makeup in the evening the night the Avon lady called? Was the last time he took a shower before bed the night the two of you gave the car a lube job? If so, you should remind one another that you might not watch so much television if each of you made an effort to look more appealing than, say, Lou Grant.

Your conversation: Talk, rather than music, is often the food of love, so take a look at what you and your partner are dishing up for each other. Is the first thing you hear in the morning something along the lines of, "Good morning, Luscious Lips," or is the day more likely to begin with the words, "I feel bloated"? At night, do you yell in from the bathroom "Honey, I'm coming," or "Did you see my moustache bleach anywhere?" Is the talk over dinner likely to concern your plans for spending the weekend alone at a friend's cabin, or what to do about the dog's breath and how to tell a colleague at work he has a similar problem?

A word to the wise is sufficient.

Your attitude: Keep in mind that you can't bully romance back into a relationship. Does he say he imagines that slaves chained to their oars in Roman galleys had a more varied sex life than he does? Every time you see a couple holding hands or nuzzling each other's ears, do you poke him in the ribs with the force of a wrecking ball and announce in tones suitable for alerting a large crowd to the possibility of fire, "See that, clodhopper!" If so, then remember the old poem:

You can as easily get a camel
Through the eye of a needle
As get romance back
With a whine and a wheedle!

Good luck.

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