

# LOVE?

by Bette-Jane Raphael

## How many wrong numbers did you get before you connected with Mr. Right?

Every once in a while, after a particularly nasty fight with my lover ("Now I'm going to tell you something about yourself *you're not going to like* . . ."), I think about the possibility of looking around for another man with whom to share my life—somebody kind, sensitive and rich, with a touching need to get married. I never go as far as packing my bags, however, because just as I reach for my suitcase there flashes before my eyes a parade of all the wrong numbers I got before I connected with Mr. Right, better known at times like these as Mr. "I'm Always Right."

In college for instance, there was The Crusader. David marched for peace, for civil rights and for free marijuana for the poor. In fact, he marched for practically everything, a practice that confused my mother in particular, who kept asking me if he was a Shriner. David's idea of a romantic evening together was collating mimeographed bulletins alerting the general public to the news that it was better to make love than war. However, if that

was indeed his credo, I never saw much evidence of it, since all that marching left David with little time, and less energy, for me.

The summer after graduation I went to Europe and met Sven, The Scandinavian God. Sven had the blond hair I'd dreamed of for myself all through high school, and a body that made me want to send my own to Goodwill. Unfortunately, he maintained his physique through the grisly habit of throwing himself, every morning, into the nearest Fjord-like body of water and swimming for half an hour; worse, he had the lunatic notion that I join him. He ate only fresh fruits and vegetables and once, when I ordered a hamburger, he told me he spit on American food, which I said was fine with me as long as he made sure I was upwind. Eventually I had to admit to myself that Sven treated his body as if it were a temple, and I treated mine more like a rumpus room. We were simply in different places.

That fall I met Michael, otherwise known as Mr. Macho. You can spot one of these characters immediately, because he always offers to show you his gun collection, and because when you walk next to him on the

street he has the habit of holding you by the neck, like a freshly caught rabbit. Michael's favorite piece of property was not me, however, but his motorcycle. When Michael bought a foxtail for his bike, I gave up on the relationship. I knew I wanted a man who would drape me, not a Yamaha, in fur.

Next came Richard, who wanted to take me back to nature, even if he had to drag me by my hair. For months Richard tried to persuade me how wonderful it was to lie on one's back gazing up at the sky, while I stubbornly maintained my affinity for lying on the sofa and gazing at "Star Trek." I finally convinced him that I was simply not physically designed for mountain climbing, or even hiking; that the way I was shaped produced a gravitational pull downward and backward. He needed a lean, muscular woman, and when we parted I suggested he call Nadia Comaneci.

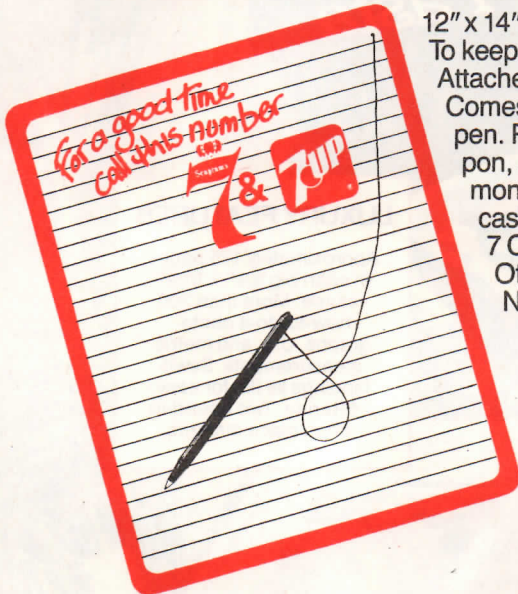
I must have been dizzy from too much fresh air when, right after Richard, I met Jeremy, The Poet. Actually he wasn't a poet but an actor, and, more specifically, an out-of-work actor. But he had a poetic soul and would sit on the floor of my apartment every night telling me his philosophy of life, which seemed to be a cross between Plato and Gay Talese. He slept during the daytime when other people, including me, worked. He thought the pursuit of money was disgusting, and told me so as he ate the steaks I bought and cooked for us. Eventually I had to face the humiliating realization that money did not make me nauseous. On the other hand, I wasn't too sure I could say the same about Jeremy, and so we parted.

On the rebound from Jeremy's otherworldliness, I bumped into William, The Solid Citizen. William had been born wearing a three-piece suit. He had his own business, went to sleep every night at ten o'clock, had Shredded Wheat for breakfast and never jaywalked. Needless to say, my mother adored him. She would invite us for roast beef dinners every week, and she made it clear that if I wasn't coming with William, I needn't bother to show up myself. Unfortunately, William's stolidness brought out the gypsy in my soul, which I displayed chiefly by refusing Shredded Wheat in favor of Fruit Loops. We parted precipitously, leaving my mother with a freezer full of rib roast.

There followed a whirlwind romance with Craig, also known as The Charmer. Craig didn't have a job because he was, as he often told me, "finding himself." I noticed that he always went looking in a new jacket. The problem with Craig was that he had more clothes, more cosmetics, and more admirers than I did. At every party we went to, more women surrounded him than the clam dip. In the end I had to give up Craig because I couldn't shake the old-fashioned sexist desire to be prettier than my date.

Other wrong numbers along the way included Stan, The Ladies' Man, who juggled me and several other women as if we were so many Indian clubs, and Cheapie Charlie, who took me to restaurants I would have paid him to get me out of. When I think about all these characters and contrast them with the man who is, even as I write, standing in the kitchen cleaning our can opener with the kind of mental concentration usually reserved for microsurgery, I have to admit—I'm satisfied.

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