



My Father, The Matchmaker

by Melissa Rosen

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When I agreed to go on my first and only blind date, it wasn't because I was looking for a possible love match, a prospect for commitment or another potential amorous distraction. My father made me do it and he never apologized.

"I've got a wonderful opportunity for you," he proclaimed without even saying hello.

"Why are you calling me? It's after midnight," I said into my cell as I stepped out of the East Village pool hall where I'd been partying with friends.

"Today, one of my clients, Fay Masterson, saw your picture on my desk and she wants..."

"The one from fourth grade when I looked like a middle aged, Native American trucker."

"Well, she thought you looked beautiful and she wants..."

"I don't care what she wants, if she thinks that looks good, she must be a nut job. Why didn't you and Mom tell me to wear sunscreen and let me wear plaid shirts over turtle necks and only eat Burger King?"

I sat down on the garbage strewn curb slick from January frost and proceeded to carry on my typical twenty-something lament of blaming my parents for all my problems. I usually did this behind their back, adding extra beatings and peppering the verbal abuse with more foul language, but tonight I'd had four Irish car bombs and a couple vodka tonics.

"And who let's their kid get a weave? I don't care if I wanted it, you shouldn't have let me wear fake hair like that to graduation." My tongue slid around my words as I continued to ramble about my parents' role in the foibles of my underage appearance while father yawned audibly and repeatedly.

"She's drinking again!" His whispered battle cry to my mother could be heard echoing through their Chicago brownstone.

"Okay, okay, never mind, Dad. What does this Fay want?" Rather than risk my mother's wrath, I decided to stop the diatribe.

"She wants to fix you up with her son, Randy. I gave her your number and told her you'd be thrilled to..."

"No way!"

"He's taking you out tomorrow night."

"I'm not going."

"It's *Mamma Mia*. He already bought the tickets."

"I'm not going."

"He works for an investment firm in New York. Twenty-six. Warm, funny, a real man about town it seems...extremely handsome."

"You've met him?" I was a sucker for good lookers.

"No, but his mother is stunning and his father... Well, I never saw him until the funeral, but it was open casket and he was a handsome, handsome corpse."

"Dad, I've got plans tomorrow night."

"Break them. You can't date degenerates your whole life." He was referring to the cop I'd gone out with on the rebound. If he knew about the male stripper, former gang banger/sandwich maker or various other lunatics I'd spent quality time with, I can't imagine what he'd have said.

"Maybe, this will snap you out of it," he offered, referring to my depression.

In the past year, I'd experienced the bitter end of a seven year relationship, the loss of my grandmother, one false arrest, a serious head injury, a fifteen pound weight gain, and moving to New York two days and two blocks away from 9/11. Now I was paying nine hundred dollars a month to share a one-bedroom apartment in a housing project on the Lower East Side with four other roommates and working as an administrator in a bone marrow transplant clinic where I saw death and despair everyday. He couldn't understand why I was a little melancholy.

“Some *Dancing Queen* might just do the job. Trust me, you’ll have a great time...and you’ll be doing me a favor,” he purred.

“Fine. I trust you, Dad,” I said turning off my phone and heading back inside for a nightcap. I should have known better than to put my faith in a man who I’d witnessed order Hungarian goulash and a bowl of chili for dinner at a filthy, strip mall diner on the Canadian border. A man who one year invited a Charles Manson look-and-act-alike he’d encountered at the bus stop to our Thanksgiving celebration. But once again, I blame drinking for my behavior.

The next day, Randy called me just as I was finishing my lunch break. He had a measured, deep voice and pleasant phone manner. I was slightly smitten. He suggested we meet at a sexy hotel bar by Times Square before the show. Impressed by his choice, I briefly imagined the passionate course of our love affair and what our future children might look like.

“But how will I recognize you?” I asked dreamily.

“I’ll be the best looking guy in the place. Not to mention, best dressed. What about you?” he deadpanned.

“A red, patent-leather cat suit, a navy bolero and a checkered ascot,” I countered, as my fantasy died. I knew I was in deep trouble. Anyone deemed even mildly appealing by mainstream society has the decency to feign modesty when it comes to their looks. I prepared myself for an evening with a man who was not only disturbingly vain, but most likely heinously ugly.

That night, after waiting at the bar for forty-five minutes I was ready to leave and deal with my father's displeasure. Five more minutes and I'd have every excuse to ditch Randy. Yes, he'd called and said the Six train had broken down and he couldn't catch a cab and he'd be here momentarily. But that was half an hour ago, and I was now stuck buying my own drinks and making conversation with elderly, bulbous-nosed horse trainers in town from Ireland. From their repeated references to their hotel room and abilities to pay in cash, I could safely bet they were under the assumption that I was a lady of the night looking for business.

However, when I turned to the tap on my shoulder a second later, I kicked myself for not taken the Irishmen up on their foul suggestions. Standing before me was Randy. He was a

cross between Ross Perot and George Bush Sr. with a splash of Mr. Rogers. He was already totally salt and pepper and his teeth screamed of childhood neglect. Fay must have been some mother. He was wearing a stripped dress shirt without an undershirt so his nipples and the stains marring his armpit region were clearly visible in the black-lit bar. He spit when he talked and his body odor was the type of smell usually wafting from puppy mills. To top it all off, he was looking at me as if he had never been so disappointed in his whole life.

After he downed an amaretto stone sour, a drink that none of my girlfriends would even touch because they deemed it too frilly, he signaled with a head nod that we were late and must be going. As he walked ten paces ahead of me towards the direction of the theater, I tried not to cry. My stilettos were killing me.

“Motherfucker, hurry!” he screamed without looking back.

Rather than acknowledge the fact that he had just swore at me, I commented on his lack of winter apparel. Maybe I hadn't heard him correctly. “You don't believe in a jacket?”

“Coats are itchy. Slut, bitch, we're gonna be late. Shit, damn...” he continued mumbling. And I continued to keep my distance as we entered the theater. I was truly frightened, but I sat in our front row seats just as the curtain was opening, unsure of what to do. My blind date was a bipolar narcissist with an apparent case of Tourette's Syndrome. Maybe with homicidal tendencies. But once again, I blame drinking for preventing me from coming up with a getaway plan of any kind. Besides if something bad happened to me, my parents would finally feel bad for all they the damage they had done to me. And anyway, what could happen with a full house?

I got my answer soon enough as Randy proceeded to sing along to every ABBA number. He grabbed my hand, swinging it in the air with his and ignoring the protests from those behind us who couldn't see. I ripped it away, but as the cast sang *Waterloo*, he not only proceeded to wail along, but rose from his seat and began dancing with a syncopation that I had only previously witnessed in a seizure victim. Theater security had to threaten him with expulsion four times before he would actually take to his seat.

With the fog of alcohol lifting, I started to calculate how I would sneak from the bathroom at intermission and flee this psycho and his maniacal moves. Unfortunately, Randy was waiting right outside the ladies room exit, smoking a cigarette

in front of the standard NO SMOKING sign and wearing a *Mamma Mia!* t-shirt he had just purchased from the souvenir kiosk.

“Here. I got you one, too,” he said throwing the shirt in my face.

“Thanks,” I replied. I should have just hid in the stall.

“Put it on,” he commanded.

“Thank you. I'll wear it later.”

“No. Put it on...just to see if it fits. You'll probably need a bigger size.”

“I'll try it on later,” I said sternly as he ushered me back to our seats for the second act.

“Come on! Try it on! Come on! Try it on! Come on! Try it on!” His pitch rose with every repetition.

Turning bright red as he forced the shirt over my head, I acquiesced, rather than create more of a scene.

“There we go!” he exclaimed giving me a round of applause as the show was starting.

I smiled, biting the insides of my cheeks.

“I want to make love to you,” he sprayed in my ear.

It was the first time in my life I experienced a true gag reflect from something a person said.

When the bows were completed, I told Randy that I was feeling horribly ill.

“You wanna play doctor?” he said suggestively.

I ignored him and this time I stormed ahead, limping in my heels, to the outside of the building. While I got into my taxi, Randy was thankfully distracted by a surprise celebrity sighting: Donald Trump was waiting for his limo and embracing the hot model who'd escorted him this evening. Through the closed window, as the cab pulled away from the sidewalk and over the automated recording advising me to put on my seat belt, I heard him.

“I had better seats than you at the Tyson fight, shithead, and I had better seats than you tonight,” Randy shouted, pointing his hand at The Donald with offensive flair.

I gave the taxi driver a fifty percent tip when we reached my apartment building. I'd never been so thrilled to see my six floor walk-up on the Lower East Side. There was Budweiser and Smirnoff hanging out in my refrigerator. I ripped off my shoes and ran up the stair to greet them.

Hung over, the next morning, I awoke to my father's six AM wake up call.

“So how'd it go?” he questioned excitedly.

I detailed the evening for him, failing to hold back the tears that I was prone to these days and threatening once again to make my way to the Verrazano Bridge.

“Tourette's Syndrome. You really do have a flair for drama,” he responded.

It wasn't until three years later, when *The Apprentice* became a national phenomenon and Donald Trump was trying to copyright the “You're fired” hand gesture—which seemed awfully similar to the one he'd received from Randy—that I finally got some sort of vindication from my dad through a phone call.

“Remember Fay Masterson? You went out with her son, Randall. Well, I feel awful for her. The stress of living in the Big Apple...guess it got to him, like it got to you. He stabbed a co-worker with a letter opener. Now he's in a mental health facility in the western suburbs of Chicago. I told her you'd go visit him when you're home for Christmas and cheer him up...”

As my father continued, I took the phone away from my ear and cried with laughter. Then I looked out on the California coastline from my new apartment and took a sip of lemonade.