

Dorothy
Parker

The Waltz

Why, *thank you so much. I'd adore to.*

I don't want to dance with him. I don't want to dance with anybody. And even if I did, it wouldn't be him. He'd be well down among the last ten. I've seen the way he dances; it looks like something you do on Saint Walpurgis Night. Just think, not a quarter of an hour ago, here I was sitting, feeling so sorry for the poor girl he was dancing with. And now *I'm* going to be the poor girl. Well, well. Isn't it a small world?

And a peach of a world, too. A true little corker. Its events are so fascinatingly unpredictable, are not they? Here I was, minding my own business, not doing a stitch of harm to any living soul. And then he comes into my life, all smiles and city manners, to sue me for the favor of one memorable ~~mazurka~~. Why, he scarcely knows my name, let alone what it stands for. It stands for Despair, Bewilderment, Futility, Degradation, and Premeditated Murder, but little does he wot. I don't wot his name, either; I haven't any idea what it is. Jukes, would be my guess from the look in his eyes. How do you do, Mr. Jukes? And how is that dear little brother of yours, with the two heads?

Ah, now why did he have to come around me, with his low requests? Why can't he let me lead my own life? I ask so little—just to be left alone in my quiet corner of the table, to do my evening brooding over all my sorrows. And he must come, with his bows and his scrapes and his may-I-have-this-ones. And I had to go and tell him that I'd adore to dance with him. I cannot understand why I wasn't struck right down dead. Yes, and being struck dead would look like a day in the country, compared to struggling out a dance with this boy. But what could I do? Everyone else at the table had got up to dance, except him and me. There was I, trapped. Trapped like a trap in a trap.

What can you say, when a man asks you to dance with him?

I most certainly will *not* dance with you, I'll see you in hell first. Why, thank you, I'd like to awfully, but I'm having labor pains. Oh, yes, *do* let's dance together—it's so nice to meet a man who isn't a scaredy-cat about catching my beri-beri. No. There was nothing for me to do, but say I'd adore to. Well, we might as well get it over with. All right, Cannonball, let's run out on the field. You won the toss; you can lead.

Why, I think it's more of a waltz, really. Isn't it? We might just listen to the music a second. Shall we? Oh, yes, it's a waltz. Mind? Why, I'm simply thrilled. I'd love to waltz with you.

I'd love to waltz with you. I'd love to waltz with you. I'd love to have my tonsils out, I'd love to be in a midnight fire at sea. Well, it's too late now. We're getting under way. *Oh. Oh, dear. Oh, dear, dear, dear. Oh, this is even worse than I thought it would be. I suppose that's the one dependable law of life—everything is always worse than you thought it was going to be. Oh, if I had any real grasp of what this dance would be like, I'd have held out for sitting it out. Well, it will probably amount to the same thing in the end. We'll be sitting it out on the floor in a minute, if he keeps this up.*

I'm so glad I brought it to his attention that this is a waltz they're playing. Heaven knows what might have happened, if he had thought it was something fast; we'd have blown the sides right out of the building. Why does he always want to be somewhere that he isn't? Why can't we stay in one place just long enough to get acclimated? It's this constant rush, rush, rush, that's the curse of American life. That's the reason that we're all of us so—*Ow!* For God's sake, don't *kick*, you idiot; this is only second down. Oh, my shin. My poor, poor shin, that I've had ever since I was a little girl!

Oh, no, no, no. Goodness, no. It didn't hurt the least little bit. And anyway it was my fault. Really it was. Truly. Well, you're just being sweet, to say that. It really was all my fault.

I wonder what I'd better do—kill him this instant, with my naked hands, or wait and let him drop in his traces. Maybe it's best not to make a scene. I guess I'll just lie low, and watch the pace get him. He can't keep this up indefinitely—he's only flesh and blood. Die he must, and die he shall, for what he did to me.

I don't want to be of the over-sensitive type, but you can't tell me that kick was unpremeditated. Freud says there are no accidents. I've led no cloistered life, I've known dancing partners who have spoiled my slippers and torn my dress; but when it comes to kicking, I am Outraged Womanhood. When you kick me in the shin, *smile*.

Maybe he didn't do it maliciously. Maybe it's just his way of showing his high spirits. I suppose I ought to be glad that one of us is having such a good time. I suppose I ought to think myself lucky if he brings me back alive. Maybe it's captious to demand of a practically strange man that he leave your shins as he found them. After all, the poor boy's doing the best he can. Probably he grew up in the hill country, and never had no larnin'. I bet they had to throw him on his back to get shoes on him.

Yes, it's lovely, isn't it? It's simply lovely. It's the loveliest waltz. Isn't it? Oh, I think it's lovely, too.

Why, I'm getting positively drawn to the Triple Threat here. He's my hero. He has the heart of a lion, and the sinews of a buffalo. Look at him—never a thought of the consequences, never afraid of his face, hurling himself into every scrimmage, eyes shining, cheeks ablaze. And shall it be said that I hung back? No, a thousand times no. What's it to me if I have to spend the next couple of years in a plaster cast? Come on, Butch, right through them! Who wants to live forever?

Oh, Oh, dear. Oh, he's all right, thank goodness. For a while I thought they'd have to carry him off the field. Ah, I couldn't bear to have anything happen to him. I love him. I love him better than anybody in the world. Look at the spirit he gets into a dreary, commonplace waltz; how effete the other dancers seem, beside him. He is youth and vigor and courage, he is strength and gaiety and—*Ow!* Get off my instep, you hulking peasant! What do you think I am, anyway—a gangplank? *Ow!*

No, of course it didn't hurt. Why, it didn't a bit. Honestly. And it was all my fault. You see, that little step of yours—well, it's perfectly lovely, but it's just a tiny bit tricky to follow at first. Oh, did you work it up yourself? You really did? Well, aren't you amazing! Oh, now I think I've got it. Oh, I think it's

lovely. I was watching you do it when you were dancing before. It's awfully effective when you look at it.

It's awfully effective when you look at it. I bet I'm awfully effective when you look at me. My hair is hanging along my cheeks, my skirt is swaddling about me, I can feel the cold damp of my brow. I must look like something out of "The Fall of the House of Usher." This sort of thing takes a fearful toll of a woman my age. And he worked up his little step himself, he with his degenerate cunning. And it was just a tiny bit tricky at first, but now I think I've got it. Two stumbles, slip, and a twenty-yard dash; yes. I've got it. I've got several other things, too, including a split shin and a bitter heart. I hate this creature I'm chained to. I hated him the moment I saw his leering, bestial face. And here I've been locked in his noxious embrace for the thirty-five years this waltz has lasted. Is that orchestra never going to stop playing? Or must this obscene travesty of a dance go on until hell burns out?

Oh, they're going to play another encore. Oh, goody. Oh, that's lovely. Tired? I should say I'm not tired. I'd like to go on like this forever.

I should say I'm not tired. I'm dead, that's all I am. Dead, and in what a cause! And the music is never going to stop playing, and we're going on like this, Double-Time Charlie and I, throughout eternity. I suppose I won't care any more, after the first hundred thousand years. I suppose nothing will matter then, not heat nor pain nor broken heart nor cruel, aching weariness. Well. It can't come too soon for me.

I wonder why I didn't tell him I was tired. I wonder why I didn't suggest going back to the table. I could have said let's just listen to the music. Yes, and if he would, that would be the first bit of attention he has given: it all evening. George Jean Nathan said that the lovely rhythms of the waltz should be listened to in stillness and not be accompanied by strange gyrations of the human body. I think that's what he said. I think it was George Jean Nathan. Anyhow, whatever he said and whoever he was and whatever he's doing now, he's better off than I am. That's safe. Anybody who isn't waltzing with this Mrs. O'Leary's cow I've got here is having a good time.

Still if we were back at the table, I'd probably have to talk to him. Look at him—what could you say to a thing like that! Did you go to the circus this year; what's your favorite kind of ice cream, how do you spell cat? I guess I'm as well off here. As well off as if I were in a cement mixer in full action.

I'm past all feeling now. The only way I can tell when he steps on me is that I can hear the splintering of bones. And all the events of my life are passing before my eyes. There was the time I was in a hurricane in the West Indies, there was the day I got my head cut open in the taxi smash, there was the night the drunken lady threw a bronze ash-tray at her own true love and got me instead, there was that summer that the sailboat kept capsizing. Ah, what an easy, peaceful time was mine, until I fell in with Swifty, here. I didn't know what trouble was, before I got drawn into this *danse macabre*. I think my mind is beginning to wander. It almost seems to me as if the orchestra were stopping. It couldn't be, of course; it could never, never be. And yet in my ears there is a silence like the sound of angel voices. . . .

Oh, they've stopped, the mean things. They're not going to play any more. Oh, darn. Oh, do you think they would? Do you really think so, if you gave them twenty dollars? Oh, that would be lovely. And look, do tell them to play this same thing. I'd simply adore to go on waltzing.

Miss Kindergarten America

Miss Kindergarten America of 1984 hitched up her garters and teetered back to her hotel room overlooking the boardwalk. She was a very small beauty queen and it had been a tiring day, the most exciting day of her whole life. She had done it! She had won the title and next year, Mommy promised, she could enter the preliminaries for the Miss Pre-Sub-Teen America pageant. Oh, Mommy was so happy!

As soon as she closed her door, she stepped out of her high heels and ripped off her girdle. Gee, that felt good! Standing all afternoon at the Cocktail press party had been awful.

She undressed and stood at the mirror, looking at her figure. When she had reached the semifinals, she had stopped eating cookies and ice cream and started smoking. Then she had really lost a lot of weight. Daddy called it "baby fat" and said leave it alone, but Mommy said after all, the child is five and it's about time she thought about her shape. (She didn't really like the taste of cigarettes too much, but ever since the sixth graders got their own smoking lounge at school, all the younger kids sneaked a few drags at recess, hiding under the slide. And then it got to be a habit.)

She carefully removed her makeup with Big Idea Moisturizing Cleanser, slapped on some Big Idea Skin Freshener and Big Idea Hormone Night Cream. She considered not setting her hair but knew it was hopeless. Her perm was growing out and this morning Kenneth had teased her hair so much (to make it look natural), she knew it would collapse overnight. Maybe she'd run in for a comb-out after breakfast.

A half hour later all the rollers were in place and she rubbed her aching arms. She laid out her dress for the next day's festivities — a stunning little nothing from Saks, all shape and line. She'd be able to wear it to the PTA first-

by CAROL SCHACTER

grade dancing classes next year, so \$89.95 wasn't really expensive. Even Mommy had said it was a thoughtful investment.

She set her clock-TV for 6:30 and tucked in her doll family for the night. Santa Claus had brought her the whole set last Christmas. It came in a big box with three double beds and a new educational toy, "The Mating Game." There was Grandma Barbie and Grandpa Ken and Daughter Sally and Son-in-Law Rob and their daughter Lolly and her boyfriend Tom. Sally came equipped with snap-on bosoms and snap-on tummies and a yummy wardrobe of maternity clothes so you could pretend she was in all different "months."

She got under the covers and lay on her side, her arms and legs curled up under her chin. The rollers hurt like anything. She thought how nice it would be to go home and see Daddy. She really hadn't spent much time with him since Tabitha Carleton's fifth-birthday coming-out party. Ever since that night, she'd been busy working for the title.

The party had been lots of fun but, gee, what a mess after those third-grade boys crashed it and spiked all the Cokes. All those broken windows and doll furniture thrown all over the beach. . . . But still, it was the publicity that had started her on the road to the crown. Mommy took her straight to the modeling agency in New York, and she hadn't been so busy since she was three and a cheerleader for the Little Punks Tiny Football League. Now here she was, at last. Miss Kindergarten America.

She tried and tried to find a comfortable position but something didn't feel quite right. Something was missing. Then she remembered and ran over to the closet. Oh good! No one had found the bag she had stuffed behind her mink stole. She went back to bed. With her mangy teddy bear, an old plush elephant, and a somewhat soiled rag doll cuddled fiercely in her arms, she fell sound asleep.

Notice of Revocation of Independence

To the citizens of the United States of America:

In the light of your failure to elect a President of the USA and thus to govern yourselves, we hereby give notice of the revocation of your independence, effective today.

Her sovereign Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will resume monarchical duties over all states, commonwealths, and other territories. Except Utah, which she does not fancy. Your new prime minister (The rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP for the 97.85% of you who have until now been unaware that there is a world outside your borders) will appoint a minister for America without the need for further elections. Congress and the Senate will be disbanded. A questionnaire will be circulated next year to determine whether any of you noticed.

To aid in the transition to a British Crown Dependency, the following rules are introduced with immediate effect:

1. You should look up "revocation" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Then look up "aluminium." Check the pronunciation guide. You will be amazed at just how wrongly you have been pronouncing it. Generally, you should raise your vocabulary to acceptable levels. Look up "vocabulary." Using the same twenty seven words interspersed with filler noises such as "like" and "you know" is an unacceptable and inefficient form of communication. Look up "interspersed."
2. There is no such thing as "US English." We will let Microsoft know on your behalf.
3. You should learn to distinguish the English and Australian accents. It really isn't that hard.
4. Hollywood will be required occasionally to cast English actors as the good guys.
5. You should relearn your original national anthem, "God Save the Queen," but only after fully carrying out task 1. We would not want you to get confused and give up half way through.
6. You should stop playing American "football." There is only one kind of football. What you refer to as American "football" is not a very good game. The 2.15% of you who are aware that there is a world outside your borders may have noticed that no one else plays "American" football. You will no longer be allowed to play it, and should instead play proper football. Initially, it would be best if you played with the girls. It is a difficult game. Those of you brave enough will, in time, be allowed to play rugby (which is similar to American "football" but does not involve stopping for a rest every twenty seconds of wearing full kevlar body armour like nancies). We are hoping to get together a rugby sevens side by 2005.
7. You should declare war on Quebec and France, using nuclear weapons if they give you any merde. The 98.85% of you, who were not aware that there is a world outside your borders, should count yourselves lucky. The Russians have never been the bad guys. "Merde" is French for "shit."
8. July 4th is no longer a public holiday. November 8th will be a new national holiday, but only in England. It will be called "Indecisive Day."
9. All American cars are hereby banned. They are crap and it is for your own good. When we show you German cars, you will understand what we mean.
10. Please tell us who killed JFK. It's been driving us crazy.

the dog and the wolf

by AESOP

*Mid 6th century 550 b.c.
before Plato*

A gaunt wolf was almost dead with hunger when he happened to meet a house dog who was passing by. "Ah, Cousin," said the dog, "I knew how it would be; your irregular life will soon be the ruin of you. Why do you not work steadily as I do, and get your food regularly given to you?"

"I would have no objection," said the wolf, "if I could only get a place."

"I will easily arrange that for you," said the dog. "Come with me to my master and you shall share my work."

So the wolf and the dog went toward the town together. On the way there the wolf noticed that the hair on a certain part of the dog's neck was very much worn away, so he asked him how that had come about.

"Oh, it is nothing," said the dog. "That is only the place where the collar is put on at night to keep me chained up; it chafes a bit, but one soon gets used to it."

"Is that all?" said the wolf. "Then good-bye to you, Master Dog. I would rather starve free than be a fat slave."

THE GROWN-UP PROBLEM

by ART BUCHWALD

There has been so much discussion about teen-age problems that the grown-up problem is practically being ignored. And yet if you pick up a newspaper, you realize grown-ups are responsible for some of the most serious problems this country has ever faced.

For example, 60 percent of all crime in the United States is committed by grown-ups.

The birth rate among grown-up women is four times that of teen-agers.

The divorce rate is double.

The purchasing power of grown-ups almost exceeds that of teen-agers.

Grown-ups are responsible for more daytime accidents than any other age group.

The source of these statistics is sociology professor Heinrich Applebaum, B.A., M.S., LL.D., Y.E.H., Y.E.H., Y.E.H., who told me in an exclusive interview that his studies showed grown-ups were drifting farther away from society all the time.

"The average grown-up," Professor Applebaum said, "feels his children don't understand him. The more time he spends with them, the less they communicate with him. So the adult feels isolated, insecure, and misunderstood. In defense he seeks out other grown-ups who feel the same way he does. Pretty soon they form gangs, go to the theater together, hold cocktail parties and dances, and before you know it you have a complete breakdown of the family."

"Why do you think grown-ups are constantly rebelling against their children, Professor?"

"I guess it's an age-old old-age problem. You have parents wanting to break away and yet not having the nerve to cut the ties completely. Grown-ups

are afraid to stand up to their children, so they rebel against society instead."

"Do you think teen-agers could in some way be responsible for the behavior of their parents?"

"I definitely do," the Professor said. "Grown-ups try to emulate teen-agers. They want to do exactly what teen-agers do, which is to drink, smoke, and drive fast cars. If teen-agers didn't do these things, their parents wouldn't. For every bad adult in America, I'm sure you'll find a bad teen-ager somewhere in the background."

"Where do you think the trouble starts?"

"In the home. Teen-agers are too rough on their parents. They're always criticizing them for listening to Frank Sinatra records and reading *Holiday* magazine. Teen-agers don't have any patience with their mothers and fathers. They can't understand why their parents like Doris Day and Rock Hudson movies or what they see in Cary Grant. If teen-agers spent more time with grown-ups and tried to understand them, I don't think you'd have half the trouble that you have in the United States today."

"Do you mean teen-agers should spend more time at home with their parents?"

"Of course. Grown-ups need security. They want to know where their children are. They want the feeling they belong. Only teen-agers can give grown-ups this feeling."

"Professor, have you found any homes where grown-ups are leading healthy, normal, secure lives, thanks to the attention they've received from their loving teen-age children?"

"We haven't yet. But we've been looking only a year. These surveys take time."

Posted on Sun, Nov. 23, 2003

We've got the dirt on guy brains

DAVE BARRY

I like to think that I am a modest person. (I also like to think that I look like Brad Pitt naked, but that is not the issue here.)

There comes a time, however, when a person must toot his own personal horn, and for me, that time is now. A new book has confirmed a theory that I first proposed in 1987, in a column explaining why men are physically unqualified to do housework. The problem, I argued, is that men -- because of a tragic genetic flaw -- cannot see dirt until there is enough of it to support agriculture. This puts men at a huge disadvantage against women, who can detect a single dirt molecule 20 feet away.

This is why a man and a woman can both be looking at the same bathroom commode, and the man -- hindered by Male Genetic Dirt Blindness (MGDB) -- will perceive the commode surface as being clean enough for heart surgery or even meat slicing; whereas the woman can't even see the commode, only a teeming, commode-shaped swarm of bacteria. A woman can spend two hours cleaning a toothbrush holder and still not be totally satisfied; whereas if you ask a man to clean the entire New York City subway system, he'll go down there with a bottle of Windex and a single paper towel, then emerge 25 minutes later, weary but satisfied with a job well done.

When I wrote about Male Genetic Dirt Blindness, many irate readers complained that I was engaging in sexist stereotyping, as well as making lame excuses for the fact that men are lazy pigs. All of these irate readers belonged to a gender that I will not identify here, other than to say: Guess what, ladies? There is now scientific proof that I was right.

This proof appears in a new book titled *What Could He Be Thinking? How a Man's Mind Really Works*. I have not personally read this book, because, as a journalist, I am too busy writing about it. But according to an article by Reuters, the book states that a man's brain "takes in less sensory detail than a woman's, so he doesn't see or even feel the dust and household mess in the same way." Got that? We can't see or feel the mess! We're like: ``What snow tires in the dining room? Oh, *those* snow tires in the dining room."

And this is only one of the differences between men's and women's brains. Another difference involves a brain part called the "cingulate gyrus," which is the sector where emotions are located. The Reuters article does not describe the cingulate gyrus, but presumably in women it is a structure the size of a mature cantaloupe, containing a vast quantity of complex, endlessly recalibrated emotional data involving hundreds, perhaps thousands of human relationships; whereas in men it is basically a cashew filled with NFL highlights.

In any event, it turns out that women's brains secrete more of the chemicals "oxytocin" and "serotonin," which, according to biologists, cause humans to feel they have an inadequate supply of shoes. No, seriously, these chemicals cause humans to want to bond with other humans, which is why women like to share their feelings. Some women (and here I am referring to my wife) can share as many as three days' worth of feelings about an event that took eight seconds to actually happen. We men, on the other hand, are reluctant to share our

when we look like we're thinking, we just have this low-level humming sound in our brains. That's why, in male-female conversations, the male part often consists entirely of him going "hmmmm." This frustrates the woman, who wants to know what he's really thinking. In fact, what he's thinking is, literally, ``hmmmm."

So anyway, according to the Reuters article, when a man, instead of sharing feelings with his mate, chooses to lie on the sofa, holding the remote control and monitoring 750 television programs simultaneously by changing the channel every one-half second (pausing slightly longer for programs that feature touchdowns, fighting, shooting, car crashes or bosoms) his mate should *not* come to the mistaken conclusion that he is an insensitive jerk. In fact, he is responding to scientific biological brain chemicals that require him to behave this way for scientific reasons, as detailed in the scientific book *What Could He Be Thinking? How a Man's Mind Really Works*, which I frankly cannot recommend highly enough.

In conclusion, no way was that pass interference.

www.miamiherald.com
accessed October 10, 2004

BREAKING THE ICE

Dave Barry

As a mature adult, I feel an obligation to help the younger generation, just as the mother fish guards her unhatched eggs, keeping her lonely vigil¹ day after day, never leaving her post, not even to go to the bathroom, until her tiny babies emerge and she is able, at last, to eat them. "She may be your mom, but she's still a fish" is a wisdom nugget that I would pass along to any fish eggs reading this column.

But today I want to talk about dating. This subject was raised in a letter to me from a young person named Eric Knott, who writes:

I have got a big problem. There's this girl in my English class who is *really* good-looking. However, I don't think she knows I exist. I want to ask her out, but I'm afraid she will say no, and I will be the freak of the week. What should I do?

Eric, you have sent your question to the right mature adult, because as a young person I spent a lot of time thinking about this very problem. Starting in about eighth grade, my time was divided as follows:

Academic Pursuits: 2 percent.

Zits: 16 percent.

Trying to Figure Out How to Ask Girls Out: 82 percent.

The most sensible way to ask a girl out is to walk directly up to her on foot and say, "So, you want to go out? Or what?" I never did this. I knew, as Eric Knott knows, that there was always the possibility that the girl would say no, thereby leaving me with no viable² option but to leave Harold

C. Crittenden Junior High School forever and go into the woods and become a bark-eating hermit whose only companions would be the gentle and understanding woodland creatures.

"Hey, ZITFACE!" the woodland creatures would shriek in cute little Chip 'n' Dale voices while raining acorns down upon my head. "You wanna DATE? HAHAAHAHAHAHA."

So the first rule of dating is: Never risk direct contact with the girl in question. Your role model should be the nuclear submarine, gliding silently beneath the ocean surface, tracking an enemy target that does not even begin to suspect that the submarine would like to date it. I spent the vast majority of 1960 keeping a girl named Judy under surveillance,³ maintaining a minimum distance of 50 lockers to avoid the danger that I might somehow get into a conversation with her, which could have led to disaster:

JUDY: Hi.

ME: Hi.

JUDY: Just in case you have ever thought about having a date with me, the answer is no.

WOODLAND CREATURES: HAHAAHAHAHAHA.

The only problem with the nuclear-submarine technique is that it's difficult to get a date with a girl who has never, technically, been asked. This is why you need Phil Grant. Phil was a friend of mine who had the ability to talk to

1. **vigil** (vij'əl), *n.* a staying awake for some purpose; a watching.
2. **viable** (vi'ə bəl), *adj.* usable; workable.
3. **surveillance** (sər vā'ləns), *n.* watch kept over a person.

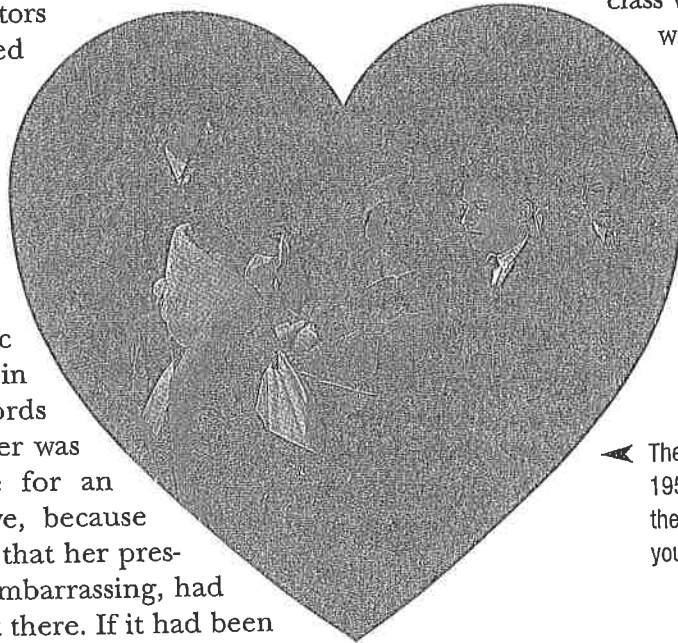
girls. It was a mysterious superhuman power he had, comparable to X-ray vision. So, after several thousand hours of intense discussion and planning with me, Phil approached a girl he knew named Nancy, who approached a girl named Sandy, who was a direct personal friend of Judy's and who passed the word back to Phil via Nancy that Judy would be willing to go on a date with me. This procedure protected me from direct humiliation, similar to the way President Reagan was protected from direct involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal⁴ by a complex White House chain of command that at one point, investigators now believe, included his horse.

Thus it was that, finally, Judy and I went on an actual date, to see a movie in White Plains, New York. If I were to sum up the romantic ambiance⁵ of this date in four words, those words would be: "My mother was driving." This made for an extremely quiet drive, because my mother, realizing that her presence was hideously embarrassing, had to pretend she wasn't there. If it had been legal, I think she would have got out and sprinted alongside the car, steering through the window. Judy and I, sitting in the backseat about 75 feet apart, were also silent, unable to communicate without the assistance of Phil, Nancy, and Sandy.

After what seemed like several years we got to the movie theater, where my mother went off to sit in the Parents and Lepers Section. The movie was called *North to Alaska*, but I can tell

you nothing else about it because I spent the whole time wondering whether it would be necessary to amputate my right arm, which was not getting any blood flow as a result of being perched for two hours like a petrified snake on the back of Judy's seat exactly one molecule away from physical contact.

So it was definitely a fun first date, featuring all the relaxed spontaneity⁶ of a real-estate closing, and in later years I did regain some feeling in my arm. My point, Eric Knott, is that the key to successful dating is *self-confidence*. I bet that good-looking girl in your English class would LOVE to go out with you. But YOU have to make the first move. So just do it! Pick up that phone! Call Phil Grant.



◀ These teenagers of the late 1950s or early 60s are enjoying themselves at a dance. Is this your idea of a good time?

4. **Iran-contra scandal.** In 1986, when Ronald Reagan was President, it was revealed that the U.S. government was selling weapons to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages, and was using the money raised from the arms sales to help the Contras fight against the government in Nicaragua.
5. **ambiance** (am/bē əns), *n.* surroundings; atmosphere.
6. **spontaneity** (spon/tə nē/ə tē), *n.* condition of acting out of natural impulse or desire without being forced and without planning beforehand.

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY

Love and Sacrifice

The Art of Love

Popular Culture Connection

Throughout the ages, writers have been inspired by the tale of *Romeo and Juliet*. Humorist Merrill Markoe presents a very modern interpretation of that timeless tragedy.

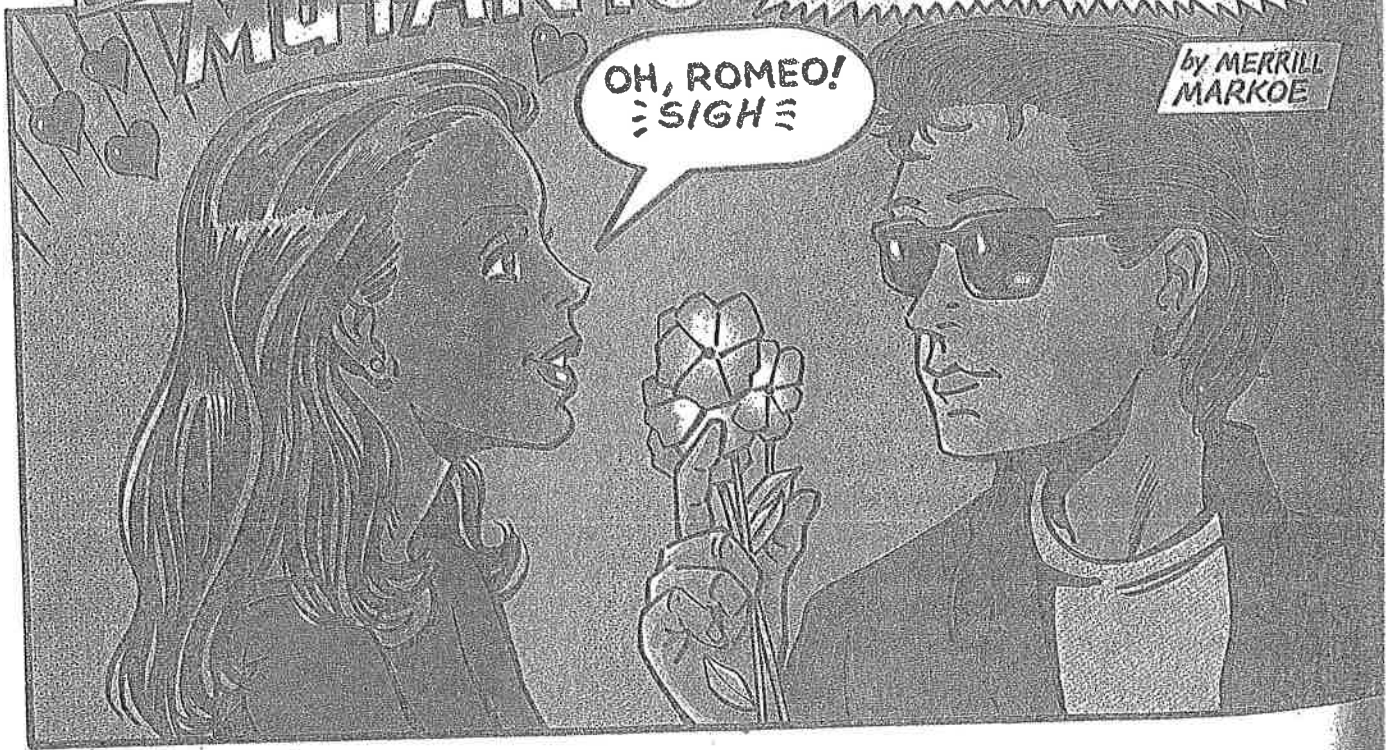
This year, in honor of Valentine's Day, I decided to reread a true classic—*Romeo and Juliet*.

If you have not had the occasion to do so lately, please allow me to reacquaint you with the details of this timeless model of romantic love.

When we first meet the teenage Romeo, it is a Sunday night and he has decided to crash a ball just to catch a glimpse of Rosaline, a girl with whom he is desperately in love. Instead, he meets the thirteen-year-old Juliet. And even though only seconds before he was deeply in love with Rosaline, now he knows instantly that this thirteen-year-old girl is the greatest love of his life. Really. She is. He's not kidding this time.

DERANGED LOVE ♥ MUTANTS!

THE STORY OF ROMEO AND JULIET!



by MERRILL
MARKOE

Juliet has never been in love before. And yes, their two families hate each other. But so what? My parents never liked anyone I went out with either. The important thing is that by Monday afternoon, so beautiful is their love, they go ahead and get married.

Just one day later.

In lieu of a honeymoon, Romeo kills Juliet's cousin and Juliet goes back home to spend the night at her parents' house. Of course her parents do not know about the marriage yet, but they are so beside themselves with grief about the murdered cousin that Juliet's father decides there is no time like the present to arrange for Juliet to marry an older man.

Well, she is thirteen and not getting any younger. Soon, she'll be thirteen and a half. However, because he's an adult and not a hot-headed teenager, he really doesn't want to rush things. So he sets the wedding date for Thursday.

Naturally, the already-married Juliet realizes she must defy her father's wishes. She is no longer a co-dependent. She has boundaries and as a fully individualized adult, she must stand up to him and tell him her intentions. She takes the most sensible course of action under the circumstances. She pretends to be dead.

This also bodes very well for the future of her marriage to Romeo since we now know that the core of any "love-at-first-sight" attraction is usually "repetition compulsion"—wherein a person reenacts the identical behavior and problems first seen in the parent-child relationship.

Thank God both Romeo and Juliet killed themselves before we were able to chart their marriage any farther into the future when it

most certainly would have descended into scenarios like this:

(Romeo enters parlor)

"Juliet! Juliet! My Light! I'm home! Juliet? Juliet? Juliet? Oh no. Honey. Not dead again. Don't tell me you're dead again. Please don't be playing dead again. You were just dead on Monday. I can't call 911 twice in one week. It's too embarrassing. Juliet? Juliet?"

Well, there you have this year's Valentine's Day poster couple. A thirteen-year-old girl who likes to pretend to be dead married to a teenage murderer who has no trouble falling in love with two different girls on the same Sunday night.

Which leaves us with this slightly comforting fact:

There is no reason to lament today's lack of viable romantic models. Things are no worse now than they ever were. The only difference is that back then no one watched Oprah or read psychology books. So they didn't mind calling deranged neurotic behavior "the greatest love story ever told."

Happy Valentine's Day.

Responding

1. Explain whether you agree or disagree with Markoe's analysis of Romeo and Juliet's relationship.

2. Markoe says of modern romance, "Things are no worse now than they ever were." What do you think?

2. Markoe's essay is a satire that pokes fun at a classic work of literature. Think of another classic you have heard or read and write a brief piece that satirizes it.