

## “50 WAYS TO MEET YOUR LOVER”

I'll never forget how I met her. It was at a Paul Simon concert, you know, the guy who did the “50 Ways to Leave Your Lover” song. Remember how it went? Well, the guy's coming up with ways to leave his girlfriend. In the chorus he's suggesting things like, “Slip out the back, Jack” and Hop on the bus, Gus. Don't need to discuss much. Set yourself free.”

It's a neat song.

Anyway, everyone was screaming and applauding when he finished it. He smiled graciously and thanked us all, and there was kind of a silence as he prepared to sing another selection. I was a little stoned, and for some reason, still into the song he'd just finished, I yelled out, “Tell HER to leave, Steve.”

The place was packed, but we'd all crowded close to the stage. Everyone heard me, including him. He gave me a smile. “Not bad. Any more?”

Weed made me creative. “Go home to Mommy, Tommy,” I yelled.

He laughed. “Gotta give me one more.”

“Tell her you're gay, Ray.”

Everyone really laughed at that one, including the 10% there who were gay.

He gave me a thumbs-up and resumed the concert.

He did some more songs and a few encores and then departed the stage. One of the band

members stayed behind and sorted me out. “He wants to say ‘Hello’ to you backstage. Okay?” He queried.

I was about to say “Hell, yes,” when a tall brunette appeared at my side.

“I’m his girlfriend, Carol Flick. Can I come, too?”

“Sure, Carol. What’s your name, man?”

“Kevin.”

“I’m Tony, the bass player. Come on.”

She took my hand as we followed Tony to the band’s dressing room.

“You don’t mind, do you? I’m a big fan. Want to get his autograph.”

I shook my head. “I think he’ll be glad he invited me when he sees you.”

We met the man, and, to my surprise, he’d written down the three additional ways I suggested to leave your lover. “Any more?” He asked.

I made up a few more, each worse than the other. He dutifully wrote them down.

“I’m thinking about making this a regular part of my show,” he explained. “Maybe let the audience call out some suggestions before I sing the song and then incorporate the good ones into the song when I sing it.”

I thought that would be a fun idea and told him so.

Carol had a bright red autograph book, and she got his autograph and all of the band members. Everyone wrote her a nice sentiment. Guys tend to do things like that for attractive girls. Can't imagine why.

We spent about 15 minutes with them, and then we were politely ushered out. Carol was beaming. She stroked her autograph book affectionately. She swished her hand over the pages, making them ripple. "Almost full. Have to get a new book soon."

"Well, now I know what to get you for your birthday."

"Thanks for letting me tag along."

"I just did what any decent boyfriend would do."

She laughed. "Well, I gotta run, son."

"And set yourself free."

She gave me a quick cheek peck. "See you around campus, Kev."

Her comment kind of floored me, but she was gone before I could ask her what she meant by it. She was wearing jeans, and I watched with anatomical interest as she raced towards her girlfriends, who were impatiently waiting for her.

####

It had occurred to me to ask for her phone number, but rejection and I were not friends. I

always seemed to aspire to women beyond my grasp and could never come to grips with being turned down. So a beautiful girl had to practically plant herself in front of me in order for a relationship to develop. That didn't happen very often.

This was all taking place in Vallejo, California. I was a student at Vallejo Junior College. I was a freshman, although only barely, as I'd only been in school for a few weeks. There were about a thousand students. I knew maybe 20 of them and had seen perhaps a hundred. I was aware the school had a very competitive sports program and a trophy case that was going to burst if they kept winning championships. Rumor had it that the school always had drop-dead gorgeous cheerleaders to go along with their world-class athletes.

There was no tuition, other than you had to be a resident of Solano County, The game plan of many of us who were a little cash-strapped was to get an associate degree and hopefully get good enough grades to grab a scholarship to a four-year college. There were a few scholarships available for the prestigious California colleges, such as Stanford, UC Berkeley, UCLA, and USC, but I knew my chances of securing a free-ride to one of these schools were slim. Any four-year college would do for me, so long as it was accredited. I just wanted a degree.

I already had my private pilot's license, and one of the things I was seriously considering was a career in the Air Force. That sounded like a plan, but I knew a plan was simply something to begin with and later deviate from. I decided to let things fall into place as they might, my only de riguer being to take as many four-year prep courses as possible in junior college and maintain a 4.0 grade average. That and join as many school organizations and clubs as possible. Officials bestowing grants, so I'd been told, liked to see extracurricular activities on a resume. I was reasonably gregarious by nature so that wasn't a problem for me.

So I settled in with my game plan. All was going well and uneventfully, until... Until a strong arm jerked me aside as I was ambling from my Freshman English class to my Business 101 class.

“Some boyfriend you are, Kev. Why haven’t you called me?”

It was the lovely Miss Flick. “I didn’t have your phone number, Carol.”

“Where’s your initiative? You knew my name. Look it up in the phone book.”

“Your name’s in the phone book?”

“Well, not mine, but my Dad’s.”

“How would I know it’s you?”

“Flick’s not exactly a household name, Kev. There’re only four Flicks in the Vallejo phone book. Am I not worth four phone calls, although it’s only two if you do it alphabetically? My dad’s name is Barry. He’s right after Adam Flick.”

“You’re worth a dozen phone calls.”

“Only a dozen? That’s not very flattering.”

She’d evidently seen me on campus and remembered me. Why on earth would she remember me? I posed the question to her.

“How little guys know girls. Have you not noticed I’m tall for a girl? Five-ten, to be

exact.”

“I did notice that.”

“And how tall are You, Kev?”

“Six-three.”

“And what conclusion do you draw from that?”

I paused, or at least to the point she was beginning to dub me idiot, and then hastily answered, “That tall girls like tall guys?”

“Brilliant,” she said, expelling her breath impatiently and handing me a piece of paper.

“Your phone number?”

No, you’re still going to have to work for that. It’s my birthday.”

She turned and merged into the swarm of students hurrying to class.

I looked at the paper she had given me. Her birthday was only two days away. The next day was Saturday, most of which I spent roaming from stationary store to stationary store looking for a replica of her bright red autograph book. I found it at the very last store. It was pricey, but leather-bound and probably worth it. I thought it was a little early in our relationship to let her know “cheap” was my middle name.

When I returned home from shopping, I decided to attend to the next detail in the agenda

she had laid out for me in her treasure hunt, the treasure, of course, being her. I found the number for Barry Flick and dialed it. “Sorry,” a voice said, “No Carol Flick here.”

She was going to make me work for it. I checked the listings. There was an Adam and a Barry, as she had said, followed by a Robert and then a Walter. Would I have the patience to dial the three remaining? Yes, I would, but I loved mind games, too. So I called Walter first. She answered the phone.

“Is this the Carol Flick who is the daughter of Barry flick?”

“I’m sorry, you must have the wrong number. This is the Carol Flick who is the daughter of Walter Flick.”

“Well, perhaps you can help me. The Carol Flick I’m looking for is tall, very thin, has bleached blonde hair and is missing several front teeth. She is also very shy and talks with a lisp. Would you happen to know her?”

“Do you have my birthday present?”

“Yes.”

“How many stores did you have to go to? I’m assuming you took note of my book and endeavored to duplicate it. You were fairly stoned, though, so I’m prepared to forgive you if it’s not an exact match.”

“It took me four stores, but I think I have an exact match, except that I bought it in blue to match your beautiful eyes.”

“My eyes are brown!”

“Really?”

“Yes, and if you did buy the blue, take it back and get the red one.”

“I laughed. “I got the red. But the plastic one was cheaper, so I got it.”

“Take it back.”

“Easy, Tiger. I got the leather. When may I present it to you?”

“I’m having a birthday party tomorrow. You’re invited.”

“Same address as in the phone book, or is the party at Barry’s?”

“This address.”

“What time?”

“I’ll tell you tonight.”

“Tonight?”

“Yes, you’re taking me to the movies.”

“I’ll have to hit my mom up for a loan. An unexpected purchase today depleted my coin.”



“Hit her up for some extra. I like popcorn and a soda during the movie and a hamburger and a milk shake afterwards.”

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My mom was accommodating, both with the money and her car.

I met Carol’s parents that night. I shook hands with her father.

Nice to meet you, Mr. Flick.”

“Call me Walter. Mr. Flick’s my father.”

“Walter? I thought it was Barry.”

He and his wife gave me a strange look, although I got a laugh out of Carol. Could I be making a little headway, I wondered? I sure wanted to. And I knew her eyes weren’t blue. They were brown and long-lashed. Her body was perfect, and her smile knocked me off my feet.

I bought her a tub of popcorn and a coke at the movie. When I reached for some popcorn, she jerked it away. “Buy your own.”

“Okay, I will. But that means you don’t get a hamburger and milk shake after the movie. I’m on a tight budget.”

She feigned petulance and placed the tub between us.

That’s the way she was. She loved to mini-shock me by saying things I’d never expected

her to say. I thought she was funny and tried to respond to her in kind. Each time we engaged in this confrontational repartee, as opposed to conversational repartee, we came closer and closer to laughing. Finally, we started laughing outright when one of us came up with a clever retort. First dates are often awkward, and I told her we should think about patenting our protocol for first-date behavior.

“What better way to get acquainted than to laugh?” I asked.

“Makes sense, Vince.”

That got a big laugh out of both of us. See what I mean?

I went to a Walmart the next day and bought the cheapest autograph book they had. It was blue. I wrapped it and gave it to her mother to put on the table of presents. I also gave her the red one and instructed her to give it to Carol only after her jaw had drooped and she was staring daggers at me. I explained what was in each package.

She smiled and looked at me in a new light. “You two are so much alike.”

“Bad news.”

“Why?”

“I want her to be attracted to me, but only opposites attract.”

“Take it from me, Kevin. That’s bullshit.”

Carol had mentioned to me the night before that the refreshments for her birthday party

were to be cake and unspiked eggnog. She had held my eyes a few seconds more than necessary after saying the eggnog would be unspiked. My mom always had a supply of booze in our house, so I had transferred a portion of her Jack Daniels to a flask I always took with me to football games - and now birthday parties.

I didn't know any of the other attendees, but being reasonably gregarious, I mingled amicably. Carol and I had gone to different high schools, and I couldn't help but note that football players and cheerleaders were over-represented at her party. They weren't terribly impressed by my having been on the chess and debate teams. I did hit it off pretty well with one of the cheerleaders, also tall, but the traditional blonde. I got her telephone number in case things didn't pan out with Carol. Bear in mind, I was a seven, maybe a border-line eight, chasing a bona-fide ten. Although not one to look a gift-mare in the mouth, no foul is called when you plan for alternate courses of action.

Memo to self. If tall girls like tall guys, why had I wasted my high school years chasing beautiful girls of only average height?

Carol was attentive to me, but she, after all, was the star of the show and had to share herself with her many fans. In any event she approached me halfway through the party with two tall glasses of eggnog, each about two-thirds filled. She gestured for me to follow her into the hall where no one could see us.

She thrust the two glasses forward. "Spike these," she commanded.

"How'd you know I brought booze?" I asked, as I filled the glasses from my flask.

"Please," she said. "Don't insult me. "I couldn't have made it any more clear."

“You bring something to stir it with? From long experience, I know whiskey stays at the top of a glass of eggnog.”

She stuck a long finger into my drink and stirred it. “Now stir mine.”

I put my finger in her drink and stirred it. “I’m worried, now,” I said.

“Why? I know my finger’s clean. I’m the one taking the risk. I don’t know about yours.”

“Didn’t mean that. But I think that stirring each other’s drink makes us blood brothers.”

“I’m a girl, Earl.”

We heard her mother shouting for her.

“Time to open your presents, Carol,” she sang.

We both took long drinks from the eggnog, and I then followed Carol into the dining room, where all the presents had been laid out on the table. Her mother officiated the openings, calling out the name of the gift-giver as she passed each present to her beautiful daughter. Carol did pretty well, especially from her parents. Her mother saved my bomb for last.

“And this is from Kevin.”

Carol opened the present. It couldn’t have worked out better. Her beautiful jaw drooped many inches and her gorgeous long-lashed brown eyes glared poisoned-tipped daggers at me.

“What is it?” Mr. Walter Flick asked.

“An autograph book,” Carol answered. “A very cheap one.”

I tried, I really did, to keep a straight face, but, when her mother and I exchanged looks, we both burst out laughing. Her mom quickly handed her the not so cheap book.

Carol opened it and did everything but bite the leather to make sure it was an exact duplicate. She then looked at me again with those big browns, only this time with a hint of amusement in them. “How could you do that to your blood brother, Kevin?”

Her mother had to explain the gift sleight of hand to the onlookers. Ironically, this incurred a little rankle, as some other gifts had been on the cheap side, too. Undoubtedly from football players.

I was the very last guest to leave. I made move to leave several times, but a look from Carol returned me to my chair each time. I was the perfect gentleman. I bagged up all the wrapping paper, helped Carol carry her presents up to her bedroom, even helped her mom clear the dishes.

They sensed potential in me as maybe a possible boyfriend for Carol, so they grilled me as to how we met. I told them about the concert and their daughter horning in on my back-stage invite, that I was a pilot possibly considering a career in the Air Force if I could wrangle a scholarship to a four-year school, and that my mom was a single parent and a high-school English teacher.

“Clean record,” I announced. “Not even a speeding ticket.” Weed didn’t come up.

When her mother stated it had been a long day, I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, concluded it was time for me to make my exit. Carol evidently agreed, as she led me to the door after I had hugged her mother and shook hands with Walter. Carol followed me out onto the porch and shut the door behind her .

“I want my birthday kiss, now, Kev.”

I took her hands and kissed her.

“Now, I want my good-night kiss.”

She put her arms around me and gave me a much longer kiss.

“How about a drive-in theater kiss for closers?”

“Duh, Kev, they don’t have drive-ins anymore.”

“Well, let’s just pretend they do.”

“What is a drive-in theater kiss anyway?”

I gave her a heavy-duty drive-in theater kiss.

“So that’s a drive-in theater kiss,” she mused, running her tongue over her lips. “It has advantages. I won’t have to brush my teeth tonight thanks to you.”

“You’d already brushed them anyway. I could taste the tooth paste.”

“So? I knew you wanted to kiss me.”

“I’d never kissed a cheerleader before.”

“How did you know I was a cheerleader?”

“Annette told me.”

“Give,” she commanded, holding her hand out.

“Give what?”

“Her phone number.”

“I...”

“It’s on a slip of paper in the breast pocket of your sport coat.”

“Only if I can have another drive-in theater kiss.”

I handed her the slip of paper with Annette’s phone number and claimed my ransom.

“Phew,” she said, fanning herself with a hand. “There’s got to be one somewhere.”

“One what?”

“Drive-in theater.”

####

She jerked me aside again at school the next day. I had brown-bagged for lunch.

“Is that our lunch?”

“You a big eater?”

“Not really.”

“Then yes.”

She was very picky about where we would sit down to eat.

“What’s the difference?”

“Sea gulls. You pick the wrong spot and, and they’ll flavor your food.”

We found an area not frequented by sea-gulls, and I split my lunch with her. As we ate, I filled her in on my game plan for securing a scholarship.

“You think they really care about clubs and all that?”

“I have it on good authority.”

She nodded. “Let me know what you sign up for. I might join you.”

“What school are you shooting for?”



“Stanford.”

“Aiming high.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I’ll probably apply there, too, but I’m not optimistic.”

“I’m trying out for cheerleader today. Want to come watch me?”

“You bet. I’ll even cheer for you.”

“It’s at three o’clock.”

“Where?”

“Think, Kev. Where would cheer-leading try-outs be?”

“Possibly the football field?”

“Your deductive powers are amazing.”

I watched her try out. She spied me among the several dozen gawking males who had come to watch the several dozen girls clad in shorts and tee-shirts. She waived at me a few times. One of my fellow-gawkers noticed.

“Your girlfriend?”

“Possibly.”

“She’s a lock. Guarantee you they’ll pick her.”

“I’m prejudice, but I agree.”

She gestured for me to join her when the try-outs were over.

“How’d you do?”

“They told me I’m on the short list.”

“You’re too tall to be on a short list.”

She laughed. “I’ve got some great news.”

“What?”

“One of the girls told me there’s a drive-in theater over in Fairfield. It’s only open on week-ends. Want to go Friday?”

“Sure. What’s playing?”

“Come on, Kev. Who cares?”

Thereafter I packed lunch for two and spent every Friday night making out in my mom’s

car at one of the few remaining drive-in theaters in the Western world. After night-three of heavy breathing at the drive-in, she brought up the subject of sex.

“Do you have protection, Kev?”

“That would be very presumptuous of me.”

“Answer the question, or the subject’s off the table.”

“Yes,” I speed-answered.

So, we had sex every Friday night at the drive-in, Like an old-married couple, we even watched the movies once in a while. The old horror films were hilarious.

She took charge of our classroom-room agenda the next semester, assuring we both had off Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Her mom and Walter both worked, and Carol had decided she was tired of making love in the confines of the back seat of a Camry.

“I’ve got a queen-sized bed, Kev. Now I can see your fabulous body.”

“And run screaming from your house.”

No more drive-in theaters.

I worshipped her. Smart, witty, beautiful, and never the first argument.

One of Carol’s nosey neighbors felt it her duty to tell Mrs. Flick that Carol came home every Tuesday and Thursday accompanied by a boy who stayed several hours.

“Oh, that’s just Kevin,” her mom said, waving it away.

All’s well until it’s not. We got our associates degrees. She graduated Magna Cum Laude, I only Cum Laude. She got a free ride to Stanford; I did not. Cal Berkley, UCLA, and USC also passed on me. I did get a scholarship to Caltech, which was perfect for me, as it had lots of courses geared towards a career in aviation. The schools were light years apart, though, both in distance and prestige.

We never discussed marriage, but I know we both thought about it and came to the same conclusion. We were 19 and wanted careers, and we knew that a long-distance marriage just wouldn’t work. We also realized that most long-distance love affairs were doomed to failure as well.

We exchanged letters almost daily at the beginning, then weekly, then monthly, and then only on event days, then nothing. It was as if we had both just died.

Then one day I got a letter from her.

It was short. “Got a new boy, Roy.”

Even though I cried, I had to laugh.

Message received. “That’s how it goes, Rose,” I wrote back. “So set yourself free.”

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I never made it to the Air force. I got my instrument rating and my commercial and instructor licenses while at Caltech. I taught students how to fly on weekends, which not

only gave me pocket money, but added substantial hours to my log book. When I graduated Caltech I had enough hours to land a co-pilot job with a shuttle airline. I didn't make much money, but they flew some of the jets they flew on the majors. After about five years, I landed a co-pilot job with Delta. Don't worry. I'd weaned myself off weed years before.

I don't know why, but Carol's mom stayed in touch with me over the years. We weren't pen pals or anything, just an occasional note from her wishing me well and casually mentioning how Carol was progressing. She'd gone to med school, graduated with highest honors again, and was going on to be a pediatrician. She mentioned Carol was engaged, but later told me she'd broken it off. There was another engagement a few years later, but she backed out of that one, too.

"She's too busy to handle marriage," Mrs. Walter Flick wrote. "Guess I'll just have to resign myself to never being a grandmother."

"It's not easy becoming a pediatrician, or an airline pilot either, for that matter," I wrote back. "I'm not only still not married, but I haven't even come close to getting engaged. I guess I'm just too much into flying to settle down."

That didn't mean I was living the life of a monk or a Spartan. I had my fair share of girls. Maybe yours, too. Some had long-lashed brown eyes and were even prettier than Carol, and the sex was just as good. No, scratch that. The sex was good, but it was never as good as it was with Carol. When I made love to her, it was almost a spiritual experience. Go ahead, laugh. Having sex is great, but making love to someone you really love takes you to a whole different place. And her sense of humor. The way she made me laugh, the way she would laugh at my jokes, how we kidded one another. I could go on for pages. It'd been ten years since I'd seen her, and no one had measured up to her.

If she was so great, why had I let her go?

Simple. Neither of us was in a position to make momentous commitments at age 19. We hadn't had enough life experiences to do so intelligently. My life, or at least my professional life was just beginning. I wanted to be a pilot. Could I have become an airline pilot if I had married her? Could she have gone on to become a pediatrician if she had married me? Pretty damned doubtful on both our parts.

So, in all objectivity, I think we'd both made the right decision.

I nonetheless devoured any news about her and, who knew, maybe Mrs. Flick even passed on some of the tidbits about me to her. Maybe they would be of interest to Carol, maybe not. I fantasized that someday I might meet her again and...

...And bullshit. The thing about us pilots is that we're pragmatists. It is what it is. Overthinking often leads to problems. My goal as a pilot was to have a full career and never once have to declare an emergency. I knew of pilots who had done just that.

I gave up thinking about it when the airline transferred me to Seattle, which was their Pacific overseas hub. I was now a captain flying 747's. At only 30, I was one of their youngest captains, especially for their overseas runs. I had just received a birthday card from Mrs. Flick telling me Carol was now a full-fledged pediatrician and considering where she wanted to set up practice. She apparently had a ton of offers. I mentioned to Mrs. Flick I was off to Seattle. It looked like a permanent stop for me. I was going to settle down and grow some roots. Maybe even buy a house.

Not to brag, but I was six-three and took good care of myself. I was a gym rat. I looked

sharp in my uniform. I even grew a mustache. The stewardesses told me it made me look handsome and dashing. I very much wanted to believe them.

It was a dark and stormy night in Seattle. Really, it was. I had just returned from a Singapore run, and although the air controllers would've preferred to divert me to Salem, my fuel was getting a little low. A clear spot in the storm opened up, and they authorized me to quickly land. It was still windy, although the ceiling and visibility were temporarily within operational parameters. I flew the big jet in with heavy right rudder, straightening the nose when I got close to the very wet runway. It was a perfect touchdown. I tried never to compliment myself. I was just doing what they paid me big bucks to do. If I couldn't routinely handle that kind of maneuver I had no business in the cockpit.

The passengers hadn't even realized there was anything difficult or unusual about the landing. The ultimate compliment. So, despite my policy of endeavoring never to gloat, I guess I was standing a little extra tall that night. As I walked through the airport to my car, I noticed a tall, dark-haired woman out of the corner of my eye. She was walking towards me.

Suddenly a strong arm jerked me aside.

Carol was standing there belted up in one of those Bogie raincoats, a mandatory part of your wardrobe if you're going to live in Seattle. Her hair was a little wet, but still a luxurious black, with maybe a tinge of gray here and there. Her brown, long-lashed eyes looked larger than ever, and I swear they were almost sparkling with pleasure at seeing me. It wasn't pleasure at seeing an old friend. Trust me, it was much more than that. And I have no doubt but that my own not-so-large browns were signaling the same message to her. I'd just landed a plane with 250 people in it in a rainstorm with a 30-mph crosswind, and my pulse hadn't gone up one beat. Now, looking again at this beautiful creature I'd

never stopped loving, it was going up like an Atlas rocket.

“I’m ready to marry, Larry,” she announced.

“Want a drive-in kiss, Miss?”

“I’d love one, Hon.”

Don’t need to discuss much. 50 ways to meet your lover.

THE END.



