

**AT
LAST!
A SAFE
DIET PILL
THE NEWEST
RESEARCH**

**BEAUTY
ADVENTURE
DRESS
FOR A
MAN?
WHAT
WORKS,
WHAT
DOESN'T**

ELLEBEAUTYADVENTURE

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STRIKE A MATCH

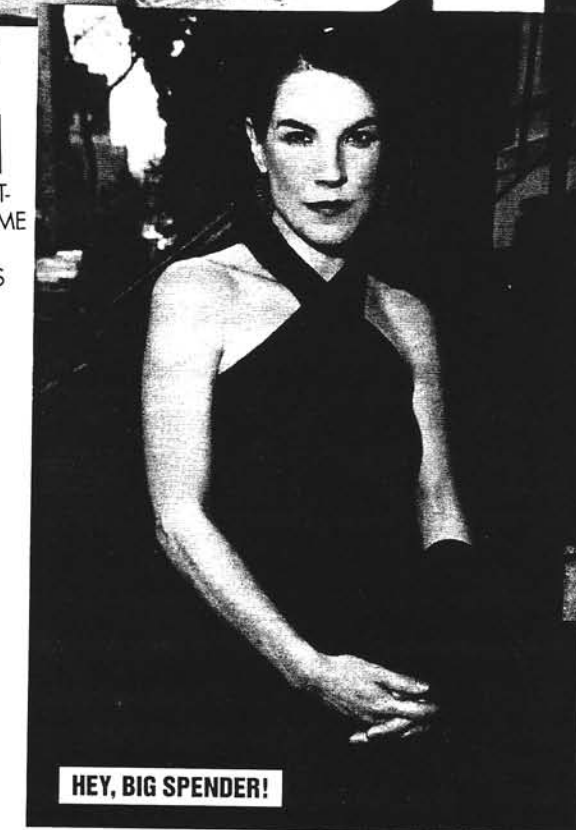
WITH VALENTINE'S DAY APPROACHING, OUR SASSY-BUT-SINGLE BEAUTY ADVENTRESS KNEW SHE NEEDED SOME NEW ROMANTIC TACTICS TO FIND MR. RIGHT. CAN A SWAT TEAM OF DATING AND FASHION PROFESSIONALS UPDATE HER LOOK AND HER LITTLE BLACK BOOK ALL AT ONCE? BY HOLLY MILLEA

Because it's February and nearing that dreaded time of the month (Valentine's Day), I'm suffering from major PMS (Pressure to Meet Someone). I'm craving chocolates in a heart-shape box; crying at the sight of old couples canoodling; and screaming at construction workers who don't throw me a wolf whistle: "What am I, buddy? Your frickin' mother? Show some respect!" Seeing red, I post my exes' photos and e-mail addresses on gay websites. (Is that illegal? Another question: At what age does a woman hit menopause?)

Fearful of becoming a *Law & Order* episode, I confess my PMS-induced criminal activity to my editor Rachael, who, being my best friend, is now blackmailing me. (As a kid, Rachael realized that if the Catholic Church could make people pay for their sins, she could too.) For her silence, I must pay a penance, "a taste of your own medicine," she says, grinning Grinchily in the glow of her computer, logging on to Match.com. She forces me to pick my "User Name"—Match's equivalent to a trucker handle. I go with my gut feeling: underduress.

Next, Rachael fills in "About Me" on my behalf: "I'm affectionate, I love laughing, and I love to deconstruct human nature over long lunches. I like to waste time!" She giggles and pauses, her fingers hovering over the keys. Taking on a dreamy expression she continues typing, reciting, "I'm looking for somebody kind, fun, and funny. I don't mind being alone, but I'm looking for someone who's actually better than being alone." Very good, I must say.

Under "For Fun," I dictate: eat, watch movies, read, shoplift. "Favorite Hot Spots": laundry room. "Last Read": *Roger's Thesaurus*. "Daily Diet": steak, popcorn, Reese's Pieces. My "Portrait" checklist reveals a 45-year-old, 5'2", slender, brown-



HEY, BIG SPENDER!

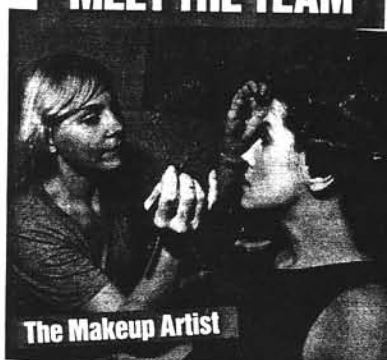
haired, green-eyed, social-drinking, nonsmoking, Liberal, Irish, Gemini journalist who lives to exercise...free speech.

I'm tempted to add: I appear very lifelike, operate on AA batteries, and come with my own recharger.

Finally, we post six pictures, including three that Match ultimately rejects: one of me at age four, before Botox; one of me with my father, who's a ringer for Marlon Brando; and one of Marlon Brando illustrating this genetic phenomenon. Rachael puts the \$29.93 monthly charge on her credit card and presses SEND, declaring, "Let the dating games begin!" Oh, God.

Rachael being Rachael, she's already hired a dream team of beauty experts, thus turning my penance into a Beauty Adventure. "Different dates with different men need different

MEET THE TEAM



The Makeup Artist

Carmindy says: "The littlest bit of makeup can unleash a wave of self-esteem."



The Fashion Stylist

Francesca Mills says: "You can transform your look with scarves, hats—even false eyelashes are an accessory."



The Hairstylist

Noah Hatton says: "You have the ideal—a four-finger forehead. Mine is a five-finger."

Love over lunch: The team gave Holly flirty hair, eyelashes, and accessories for a day date.



HOT FOR TEACHER

looks," she says. Why different? Why not just look like me? "Yesterday's you—hip, happy, younger than your years, working the wardrobe—would be great," she says. "But where is that girl? You've stopped wearing makeup, don't bother parting your hair...." I still go to the gym and floss every day. "And what's with the sweatpants all the time? I asked you to dress up for dinner the other night and all you did was put on a bra!" Hey, it was La Perla! "You've gone from looking 'maybe 33' to 'pushing 50' overnight. Seriously, you're like one of those kids with progeria." Progeria? "That weird, rapid-aging disease." She sighs. "Sweetie," Rachael puts her hand on mine, the sun's reflection bouncing off her big-ass diamond wedding ring, burning a hole through my retina into my right frontal lobe, erasing my college education. "You're depressing everyone." She sniffs the air: "Do you smell something burning?"

Before I leave, Rachael hands me a copy of the FBI report on my dating history and orders, "Learn from the past." I open it on the subway and begin reading. First kiss: December, third grade, Brian. I seduced him. "Brian, I'm going to kiss you and you're going to kiss me, okay?" Summer of third grade, playing croquet with neighbor boy; he asked if I wanted to see his penis. I did, and told him it looked like a cocktail shrimp. Spring, fifth grade, Sacred Heart Catholic School, first true love David, received "go steady" ring, tons of French kissing in church confessional off-hours. I still regret not marrying him. Junior high, caught with boyfriend/quarterback Rocky having phone sex on pink Princess telephone, which stepmother then confiscated. Seventeen, parents away, lost my virginity to childhood friend/housekeeper's son, panicked, went to emergency room, received a birth control lecture and was given a pack of oral contraceptives and told to take seven pills at a time, three days in a row—the '70s equivalent of the "morning-after pill."

My past 10 years are summed up on the last page in four stark sentences: "2005: loved Mark. 2004: loved William. 2003: loved Allan. 1998: loved Paul." Wow. My love obituary. I stare at the names, remembering. I fell in love with Mark when my mother was hospitalized. Billy, when my grandmother passed away. Allan, my father's open-heart surgery. Paul, the night Princess Diana died. Uh-oh. Can I only fall in love under the influence of a cortisol brain rush induced by traumatic circumstances?

I get home to find six Match e-mails and three "winks" waiting for me. (For the uninitiated, a wink is a way of flirting to test your interest level.) But my excitement is quickly squelched. One man sent a photo of himself with a paper bag over his head. Another stood shirtless in a kitchen, posed with his mouth wide open, holding up 20 pounds of raw hamburger shaped like a human head. Then there's the stiff shaking hands with Colin Powell. The cutest one had his arm around a woman whose head he'd cut out



Date With a Do-gooder



of the picture. Some men sent photos they weren't even in: a tree, the ocean, a boat, a fully stocked wine cellar (which, I admit, was tempting).

Three weeks, 56 e-mails, and 38 winks later, I've got two dates set up. Rachael's demanding four, so I solicit the services of world-renowned yenta Lisa Ronis of Lisa Ronis Personal Matchmaking (lisaronismatchmaking.com) to rustle up the others. For a \$7,500 (or more) fee, Ronis, a curvy, dark-haired beauty with huge brown eyes, takes on the crème de la crème of Manhattan lonely hearts looking for true love or a good imitation involving close proximation. There is one scary catch—all the dates are blind. No photos. No window-shopping. Ronis operates on her intuition alone—you don't get to see what you're getting until you get there. Get it?

We meet where the elite eat when they're done shopping till dropping: Fred's at Barneys. Ronis "interviews" me over lunch, noting my likes, dislikes, allergies, metal fillings, credit rating, criminal record.... She then pulls out a black leather agenda—her Fellow Pages directory—and runs a red painted nail down the roster of doctors, lawyers, architects, curators. "Oh, he could be great for you," she says, tap, tapping. "Jack. Urologist, 52, Yale grad, divorced, twin six-year-old girls," she says. Cute! "...lives in Gramercy Park, loves museums, opera, ballet, line dancing..." Line dancing? "...petite women. Oh, and Theodore would be a good match, too: 40, never married, loves films, lives in SoHo, really funny, not snobby at all, collects art—owns a Schiele, Monet, Manet..." A Millea? Ronis smiles. "No, there's only one of you. So whatever you do, don't sell yourself short."

Which brings us to her tutorial on how to sell high. For starters: "It is important to love yourself first before you can be in a loving relationship." (Not a problem. I loved myself twice this morning.) "Only date available men." Available as in emotionally, not married, and not a first cousin. "Never try to change a guy. If a man doesn't call for a second date within two weeks—do not call him. Rip up his card, move on!" But do feel free to put a curse on him.

Ronis goes over her Tens of Commandments and takes me browsing through Barneys on our way out. "Be sure to wear something feminine—but never too sexy," she says, checking out the Miu Miu rack. "That will send the wrong message." Sexy is not in my wardrobe vocabulary. Moment of Truth? I've never been a "dater" because I know if you date someone long enough, you're going to have sex. And just the thought of someone rubbing up against my organs panics me. The fact that my body even has holes freaks me out! I long to be hermetically sealed. I live in constant surprise that I've ever had sex at all. And that I loved it. But I digress....

With four dates on the books, I call in ELLE's beauty/fashion SWAT team to take me from nondating to potential mating. My first date is a Sunday breakfast and stroll through Central Park with a Match man named Jerry who works for Greenpeace

and “loves hiking.” Going through my clothes, stylist Francesca Mills picks out cropped black jeans and an orange Tse cashmere sweater and matching scarf. When it comes to my hair, Noah Hatton, from NYC’s Cutler salon, who’s worked with the likes of Halle Berry and Gary Oldman, says, “With a bob you risk looking preppy. Frankly, I think you’re too fun for a blunt cut. You have the kind of hair that looks better a little dirty or screwed up.” He fashions me a messy bun.

Carmindy, my beautiful, blond, heart-faced makeup artist, has only one name, because while you might know another Carmin or a Mindy, you don’t know another Carmindy. For this date she teaches me “the 5-Minute Face.” “It’s a technique I created,” says the creator, whose book, *The 5-Minute Face*, comes out in May. “It’s fast and focuses on enhancing your natural beauty.” Herewith, the Twenty-Second CliffsNotes: Moisturize, apply foundation; put concealer under eyes; powder face—“I only recommend one: M.A.C Blot Powder/Pressed,” she says. “It’s light as air, adds no color, and sets the makeup”—brush light shimmer under the eyebrows, inside the corners of the eyes, and the top of cheekbones; swirl on blush; smudge chocolate brown eyeliner along upper lashes; sweep one coat of mascara on your upper lashes only; and slip on your favorite lip balm. Done. Hiking anyone?

My look goes from breakfast to lunch with the wave of a curling iron for my Match date with Chevy, a high school English teacher who speaks four languages, lives in Hoboken, New Jersey, and “loves jokes.” I practice my knock-knock repertoire on Noah, who practices laughing for when he hears one he finds funny. “This hair is really fun and sexy,” he says, fluffing his finished confection. “But it still projects ‘I have a head on my shoulders.’” Amping up the flirty factor, Carmindy extends my eyeliner past the outer edge of my lids and coats my lashes with mascara.

Francesca appears from my back closet with a chocolate suede minidress I haven’t worn in years. “You can update this by pairing it with this year’s little black leggings,” she says, seeing my skepticism. “And this cool vintage beaded necklace you have will tie it all together.” With everything on, I feel like mutton dressed as lamb. The outfit might be too hip and trendy for me. “No!” the team screams. Greg Morris, the supercute British photographer, snaps away. “This is a great look,” he says in his David Bailey accent. “It looks like your personality—fun and young, unafraid, really out-there.” On a good day.

My least favorite look is the one I need to wear for a dinner date with Theodore, the investment banker: Straight, side-parted hair, black slacks, black top, black Jil Sander pumps,



fur-collar pinstripe charcoal jacket. As Carmindy brightens my lipstick, I hear the distinct siren call of my sweatpants.

For the finale—a Broadway show followed by drinks at the St. Regis with the urologist—Noah center parts my hair (“less preppy,” he says) and Carmindy loads me up with false eyelashes and smoky eyes. “The key to doing this well is using less eye shadow,” she says. “Too much and you look like you’ve been beaten up. Smudge it on little by little—a gradation of color.” Her favorite shades to do this with are M.A.C Shale and Benefit It’s Not You, It’s Me, “a taupy, purple, universal shade—it looks good on everyone.” Because my eyes are now so intense, Carmindy covers my mouth in the palest pink semigloss. “You should only emphasize eyes or lips; never both.” She holds up a mirror. Wow!

“Wow is right!” Francesca says, ordering me into a metallic bronze Cynthia Rowley shirtjacket purchased circa 1997. Everything old is new again. Including me!

That would be a happy ending to this Beauty Adventure. But inquiring minds want to know if a match was struck. Let’s preempt the anticlimax by saying straight-up—return my wedding gift. Before I dish, I want to emphasize that all the men were great in a lot of ways. (In fact, I “flipped” a couple to my friends.) But none among them was a keeper for me. One showed up 15 years older and 10 pounds heavier than in his photo. I didn’t recognize him. (I now forgive the man who headlined his Match.com profile with: “Please, No More Lying Overweight Women.”) Another date

complained about his ex-wife and the cost of private schools, and when the check arrived asked, “Shall we split this?” (Ronis rule No. 1: The man pays for the first date, always.) One guy got clipped for mentioning anal sex in a faux-political context, but was clearly testing my interest. My response: “I don’t believe in having any kind of sex before death.” And then there was the gentleman who took cell-phone calls (make that yell-phone calls) during dinner, and now won’t stop calling me.

But there is a happy ending after all. Thanks to online dating, no one in the world has to be alone. You just have to be open to the romantic possibilities. As my gay friend Michael theorizes, love is a numbers game. “Keep playing and your number will come up!” And the only number it takes to win is one. I’ve updated my Match pictures, I’m now an eHarmonizer, and my matchmaker has me going on two dates next week. “Collect men,” Ronis tells me. “If a date doesn’t work, keep him as a friend. One man leads you to another, who will lead you to another... and you’ll lead them to your single friends in return.”

For instance, to Michael. “Oh my God, you’re never going to believe this!” he says, calling from Los Angeles on his car phone. “Last night I went on adam4adam.com,” a gay dating site, “and all of your ex-boyfriends were on it. They’re totally gay now! Cross your fingers—I sent them each a wink!” □