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On a sparkling, crisp Monday morning, in New York City, a young man by the name of Tommy Landis walked into a corner deli. “Tommy! What’s up!” the turbaned Sikh asked him, from behind the counter.

“Hi! I’ll have the usual.” Tommy grabbed a newspaper from the row laid out below the magazines rack. “Anything else?” asked the Indian behind the counter, while placing his coffee in a brown bag. Tommy put the newspaper on the counter and said, “Just that.”

“Okay, my friend.”

As Tommy paid what he owed, he motioned at the coffee. “I’ve been coming here now for how long?” he asked with a half of a smile, as he staring at the man.

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“About a year, right?” the man said as he laid his change on the counter.

“Don’t I always ask for two bags because...?” Tommy smiled

The man stared at him and replied as if he were Tommy: “The coffee will leak to the bottom of the bag and make a hole, and when the coffee falls out of the bag, I have no coffee for the morning. Therefore, my morning is ruined.”

Tommy laughed.

“Yes, yes I should remember, after a year.” said the Indian, smiling as he pulled up another brown bag and placed the coffee into it.

“No, problem!” said Tommy, as he grabbed the newspaper from the counter and headed of the deli on his way to the subway to go to work.

On the subway, he took a seat, placed the cup of coffee between his feet and opened the morning paper. Then he noticed the woman sitting right across from him, her long dark hair that shining under the florescent lights. He looked back at the paper, perusing personals. The scent of perfume distracted him. He looked furtively over the edge of his paper. It was her, that achingly beautiful brunette. Caught staring, he looked back at his paper and tried to read, thinking of what he must look like to her. A Woody Allen-type guy; that’s what he must look like to her, black-framed glasses and a tuft of hair on his head.

Anxious of being caught staring again, still, irresistibly, he watched her. Caught again, he looked away, then back. She was annoyed now. He hid behind his paper, reaching down for his coffee.

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Taking a sip, the paper began to fall away. He put down his coffee, caught the page of the paper, straightened it and tried to read the personals.

Again, he found himself staring. She stared back as if to say, go to hell. Dejectedly he retreated behind his paper. The train entered onto the Manhattan Bridge, crossing the Hudson River, Manhattan-bound. When the train stopped at his destination, he got off. Outside of the subway station, he crossed Sixth Avenue toward his job as a messenger in an office building near Radio City Music Hall. He works delivering mail and packages, pushing a cart through several floors. Arriving in the busy basement-level mail center, he walked to his locker to get ready. He noticed a couple of guys sorting out the mail, and Maria, working at her desk, with old man Louie, the supervisor, standing at her side. Tommy put on his work smock and began loading mail from the counter into his cart. Louie came over, an unlit cigar dangling at the corner of his mouth.

“What’s up, Louie?”

“Nothing much Tommy. Just working my ass off!”

They laughed, while they finished loading the cart.

“Alright, Tommy! You’re all set!” With that Tommy was off to the elevator, making his rounds and the day went by fast. When he went back to the basement at the end of his shift, he went to his locker and Maria was there. She smiled said, “Hey, Tommy.”

“Hey!” Tommy responded, sitting on a bench and unbuttoning his smock.

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“Tommy, you know what?” She got up and knelt in front of him. She looked into his eyes and removed his glasses. “You would look a thousand times better if you would consider wearing contacts.”

“You saying I don’t look good?”

“No.” She said. “All I’m saying is that you would look a lot better with contact lenses.” She placed his glasses back on and looked at him. “You know? You are very handsome. Sexy. You know, a sexy Woody Allen. And he’s sexy, well, sort of...”

Louie walked by, chuckling and she stood up, embarrassed.

She played it off, turned to her locker opened it and started brushing her shoulder length black hair. He only vaguely understood what was going on. Was this a pass at him? He couldn’t deny that she was attractive but he didn’t feel like that about her. He grabbed his Daily News and looked at the front page.

“So? What do you think?” she asked.

He looked up at her.

She stopped brushing and turned back to him. “About the contacts?”

“Oh,” he shrugged. He looked back at his paper and opened it. “I’ll think about it.”

“You should. You’re pretty sexy either way, though.”

Louie walked by, “You kids getting the hell outta here any time soon?”

Tommy stood, closing his paper. “Oh yeah, I got tons of shit to do.”

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Maria already had her coat on and finished buttoning it up as he grabbed his jacket. He put it on and suddenly Maria was zipping it up. She touched his shoulders and asked, “So what kind of things you have to do?”

“I can’t really talk about the things that are going on in my life right now, so, I’ll see you tomorrow, alright Maria?”

“Okay.” She took her hands from his shoulders and he left.

“Bye, Louie!”

Louis stopped by Maria and replied, “Yeah, yeah.”

He showed her a smile and said. “Boy, you sure can pick ‘em, huh kid?”

Embarrassed, she said bashfully, “You be quiet.”

Looking through the paper, Tommy thought of looking through the personals again but decided against it. He began reading other parts of the paper, avoiding anything to do with relationships in general, as the train crossed over the Manhattan Bridge, over-looking the tall silhouettes of the skyline at sunset.

Approaching Bensonhurst, he finished the paper and set it on the seat beside him. He stood up in the near-empty car and approached the doors, anticipating his stop. Then he looked back at the paper he left on the seat. He walked over and retrieved it as the train pulled into the station.

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Approaching his apartment building, he saw his landlord, Mr. Hill, putting garbage bags into cans in the alley next to it. "Hey, Tommy!" Mr. Hill shouted, throwing a lid on one of the garbage cans.

"Mr. Hill, how are you doing?" Tommy asked, leaning with one hand against the brick wall.

"Just coming in from work?" Mr. Hill asked, wiping his hands with a cloth he pulled from the back pocket of his jeans.

Tommy wore a half of a smile. "Yeah." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a wad of cash.

Mr. Hill looked around. "You know you have to be careful around here, when you pull out a lot of money like that." Mr. Hill pulled a cigar from his breast pocket.

"Ah, don't worry about it. The moment someone tries to take my money, I'll chop him up, and then I'll feed him to the dog."

They laughed while Mr. Hill lit his cigar.

"By the way, how is your pit bull doing?" Tommy asked, with a mysterious look.

Mr. Hill showed a half-smile.

Tommy handed him the rent he owed. "See ya later, Mr. Hill."

Tommy entered his apartment, threw his newspaper on the sofa and plopped on the couch at the end nearest the window. The answering machine was blinking on the side table. He pressed the button and listened: "Hi, Tommy!" It was his sister, Michelle. "Do you remember when I told you that I was going to Los Angeles? I'll be out

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here for two weeks. I'll send you a post card. I love you, good-bye."

Then from his mother: "Hi, Tommy. Why don't you ever call me? I'm starting to forget I have a son. See ya later, bye. Call me!" Tommy was in the kitchen, looking into the refrigerator and popped open a can of Coke, before letting the door close. Back in the living room, he plops on the sofa, though careful not to spill his drink. He sets it down on the side table and pulls the newspaper from under him. He scans through it for anything he may not have read yet, then loses interest. He leans his head back and closes his eyes.

"I'm so bored, and so fucking lonely! I'm almost thirty-five years old, and I have no kids. A couple might be nice, I think..." Tommy smiled at this idea, and then frowned again. "Hell, I'm not even engaged, or married." He lifted his head, looked toward the window and added grimly, "I don't even have a goddamn girlfriend." He let his head fall back again, slowly shut his eyes and fell asleep.

An hour later, he awoke. He saw the paper and thought again of the personals. He grabbed it and turned to the first page of the personals, looked at the nine-hundred number at the top, wondering how expensive it would be to call and respond to an ad.

"Two dollars, and ninety-nine cents a minute," he read aloud. He grabbed a pen and perused the ads, circling several, then choosing only one to respond to. "Here we go!" he said to himself. His final choice: "Single white female, five-foot-

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five, slender, long blonde hair, down to her back, and blue eyes. Marriage-minded, no kids, totally responsive, non-smoker, and I like going out at times, and sometimes staying at home, renting a DVD. Looking for a single male, five-foot-six, or taller, slim, to a medium build, must be a non-smoker, a social drinker, twenty-five years old, or older. My box number is 00123.” He picked up the phone, and dialed the nine hundred number to leave her a message.

The next day, after work, he listened to the one message left on his answering machine. “Hi. My name is, Crystal. I received your response to my ad in my voice mailbox, along with your phone number, and I thought that I would give you a call. I could see you’re not home yet, so, I’ll call you back. Bye”

Tommy’s face lit up with excitement and relief. “Yes!!” he shouted, as he went to the kitchen whistling a happy tune. Thirty minutes later, in the middle of cooking his dinner, macaroni with tomato sauce, the phone rang. He darted to the side table of the sofa to answer it. “Hello?”

”Hello? My name is, Crystal. May I speak with Tommy, please?”

“This is, Tommy,” he responded nervously. There was a moment of silence. “Oh, yes, Crystal. I received your message, when I arrived home from work. How are you?” he asked her, as he removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

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“Hi, Tommy! I’m alright. My name is Crystal Farnsworth and I received your message in my voicemail box from the personals and I thought you had an interesting voice.” She laughed lightly.

“Oh, yeah?” said Tommy, as he sat on the sofa. “I remember listening to your message and you have an angelic voice.”

“Oh, thank you...”

“So, Crystal, why don’t you tell me something about yourself?” Tommy asked, then darted off the sofa and back into the kitchen, to turn off the fire under his dinner.

“Well, I work as an administrator in a hospital. Not very exciting stuff, really. Paperwork, mostly...” Awkwardly, she continued, “So, how about you?”

He plopped on the couch. “I work for a brokerage company.”

“Oh, a broker, that sounds good.”

“Oh, well, in the mailroom, the messenger center.”

“Oh, well that’s good too.” She seemed a touch disappointed.

Tommy began almost spluttering, “Oh, it pays the bills and I like it. I deliver all kinds of deliveries. I work in a big building on Sixth Avenue, close to Radio City Music Hall. It’s a very interesting area, and I’ve been there for several years now.” He cringed at how defensive he must sound to her and fell silent.

“Soooo, Tommy, what do you look like?” Crystal asked, obviously not impressed with him so far.

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“Well, I’m five-foot-six, exact. My hair is short, and I do have blue eyes. I wear these black framed glasses. I have a slender build...” He felt his throat go dry and grabbed for his soda on the side table. He gulped and said, “Sooooo, Crystal? What do you look like?”

“I’m five-foot-four. I have long, real long blonde hair. My hair reaches all the way down my back. I have blue eyes...” As she continued describing herself, Tommy was wide-eyed, amazed, as though he was dreaming to be speaking to such a woman. It was a moment before he noticed that she had finished.

“So, Tommy, what do you think?” she asked, sitting on her recliner in her Upper Eastside Manhattan apartment, waiting for an answer from Tommy in Bensonhurst.

“What do I think? Well, I tell ya.” said Tommy, and he smiled: “I think we’re going to get along wonderfully.”

“Tommy, do you look like any celebrities?” Crystal asked, trying to get a visual of what he might look like. Tommy hesitated for a moment, remembering what Maria said about him looking like Woody Allen. He didn’t know what to say. “Well,” he said, finally, “let’s just say that when we meet, I’ll let you be the judge.”

“Alright, Tommy. Do you have any hobbies?”

“I love to bowl, play tennis, music, movies, and trying different foods from all around the world. I would like to travel one day. I love to write poetry, fishing, swimming, and watching and playing sports.”

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“That’s a lot of stuff. I’m not sure I could compete,” she said with a laugh.

Tommy smiled, “I’m sure you do fine. Tell me what you are into.”

“Okay, well tennis, you like that right?”

“Oh, yeah.” He was lying. He never played it or watched it in his life, just dreamed of it in a fantasy of himself as rich and “sophisticated.”

She said, “And I like traveling, knitting, and cooking, I guess.”

“Sounds great to me. As far as days off, I’m off on the weekends. So why don’t we meet for coffee, at this coffeehouse on forty-ninth street, in Hell’s Kitchen.

“Oh, yeah. I know where it is,” she responded.

“Yes, they have sofas and recliners, it’s like you never left your apartment.” said Tommy.

“Sure, I have to admit, I am a coffee addict.”

“Oh, yeah? I’m definitely one too.” She was silent. “Crystal?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I have to go, my sister just got home.”

“Oh, Okay. I’ll see you there on Friday night, say around, seven?”

“Friday night, around seven would be fine,” said Crystal.

“Crystal, is it alright with you if we meet in casual clothes, since we’re just meeting each other?”

“That would be fine with me. So, I’ll see you there.”

“Alright, Crystal. See you there, bye.”

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Tommy hung up, put the phone on the table, and walked into the kitchen stirred his macaroni dinner, losing his appetite as he thought about Crystal and their date on Friday.

On Friday evening, Tommy is happily finishing up at the messenger center.

“We’re in a cheerful mood today,” said Maria, as she moved up behind him, with her hands on his waist.

He turned and awkwardly moved away from her hands. “Hi, Maria. Yes, I’m in a cheerful mood today.”

“So, what’s going on?” Maria asked, as she leaned on the counter.

“Well, let’s just say, it’s going to be an eventful evening.”

“Care to share?”

He smiled mysteriously. “Maybe later.” Then he walked away and she watched him, fed on his every move, wanting to follow him, find out what that smile was all about.

At the coffeehouse, Tommy arrived fifteen minutes early. He looked around the place, at the trinkets and the giant coffee mugs, with the company’s logos on them. A blonde haired, blue-eyed woman entered behind him. She wandered about the place and then thought she saw Tommy. She walked up behind him. He turned around. They stared at each other, silent for a moment.

“Are you Tommy Landis?” Crystal asked, awkwardly.

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“Yes, and you must be Crystal,” he responded, and they laughed nervously. They shook hands and Tommy gave her a single, long-stemmed rose. Crystal smiled. They turned to the counter to order. He paid and they retreated to a table.

Settled in, she smelled the rose and he smiled. “You really didn’t have to do this,” she said, referring to the rose. She put it aside, as they added sugar to their coffees.

She took a sip. “So, Tommy. What made you decide to look into the personnel ads?”

Tommy looked down at the table, nervously, with a half-smile, “Well, it was just another technique to meet people. Like going out to clubs, or going out to singles events. This was just one of those ways of meeting others.”

“This is one of those techniques?” she wondered aloud.

“Well, yes. As I mentioned earlier, the club scene, singles parties, parks, music events, and things like that would draw people together. Now, you and I, well, we chose, like millions of others in the world, to do the personnel ads. How about you? Why did you place the personnel ad in the paper?”

“Well, like you say, it was a way to meet others and it’s pretty interesting. And plus, at the time when I wasn’t involved with the ads, I knew someone who was. And she’s been doing this for a while and I thought, why not?” She smiled.

“How long have you been doing this?” he asked, taking his first sip.

“I’ve been doing this for about six months, now.... So you like to travel?”

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“Well, I haven’t been able to do much.” The truth was he’d never been farther than New York City and New Jersey. “I’d like to go to the Caribbean, you know?”

“Oh? You haven’t been?”

“No.”

“Well, I’ve been so many times...it’s kind of old. I was thinking of Istanbul or Morocco, you know, some place really out there.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he said encouragingly, though not really sure where those places were or whether he’d like to go there. He let her talk, about her sister and roommate, Darlene and her boyfriend the boxer; about her work at the hospital about tennis, always keeping her going with an encouraging word or two. When she asked about him, he always found a way to defect the conversation back onto her. She was sophisticated, maybe too sophisticated for him but he loved the sound of her voice and to think of how her sophistication would add to his life.

After an hour, the coffeehouse became crowded and she said finally, “Tommy, it’s been nice meeting you but I have some things I have to take care of at home.”

“Well, I definitely had a great time with you and would there be a chance of us maybe taking in dinner and a movie, say, tomorrow night?” he asked, while helping her put on her coat.

She smiled as she thought about it.

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“Sounds great to me but, as far as the time, get back to me on that or better yet, I’ll call you, and we’ll discuss the time, alright? Let me give you my phone number, and if I don’t call you by eleven, or twelve in the afternoon, call me, all right?”

“Sounds good to me.”

She found a napkin and wrote down her number.

He took it and looked at it. “Great!” he said with a smile.

She smiled back and headed to the door.

“Bye, Crystal,” he said and waved. She returned the gesture before leaving.

Tommy walked over, pushed the door open and leaned out, watching her head toward the subway, never taking his eyes off of her.

“I can’t believe how beautiful she looks,” he thought to himself, as he continued watching her disappearing down the block. He stared until she was gone.

The next day, Tommy awoke with the sun, stood up from his sofa and looked down into the alley between his building and the next. He looked at the clock on the side table and it was eight-thirty. He went into the kitchen and turned on the coffeemaker. Back in the living room, he plopped on the sofa to fantasize about Crystal. They were on the white sands of the Caribbean, making love, the waves roaring, a soft breeze cooling the sweat of their skin in the mingling of passion.

The phone rang, startling him from this fantasy. He came to his senses and answered it: “Hello?”

“Hello, Tommy.”

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“Oh, hi, Mom. How’s everything?” he asked.

“Okay, alright, I guess. How are you doing, son?” his mother asked, her whiny voice grating on him.

“Okay... I met this girl...”

“Here we go!”

“Mom!”

“Son, I was only kidding,” she said with a laugh.

“I know, but that kind of gets on my nerves.”

“I’m sorry, Tommy. Tell me about this girl.”

“Well, this girl...”

“Another one...” she interrupted again, launching into another one of her harangues about his past with the opposite sex. Frustrated, he removed his glasses, put them on the side table and pinched his nose. “Mom!”

“Well, you go through more girls...”

“It’s not my fault that things don’t work out!”

“Tommy, I didn’t call to fight, or argue with you. You know that I love you, son.”

He decided it was better to let it go. “I love you too, Mom.” Better to change the subject. “Anything new I should know in the family?” he asked, heading into the kitchen.

“No, nothing much around here happening. Oh, wait, the family is having a barbeque, next Saturday. You want to come over for the barbeque?”

“Alright. Well, you know I love barbeques.” Tommy responded, smiling.

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“Alright, Tommy. Everyone in the family will be bringing something so, what are you going to bring?”

He thought about it. “How about my world famous potato salad?” he asked, while reaching for a carton of orange juice from the refrigerator.

“Alright, son. I’ll put you down for potato salad and Tommy? When you come over, don’t fight with everyone in the goddamn family, alright?”

“Yes, Mom. Just tell everyone to leave me alone.” Tommy put his glasses back on.

“Are you being antisocial, Tommy?” his mother asked, annoyed with his sarcastic voice.

“No. I interact with everyone fine but someone always manages to press my buttons...”

“Well, Tommy, I don’t think that will happen. Let’s just have a good time, alright?”

“Yes, Mom.” said Tommy, just hoping to get off the phone with her at this point.

“Okay, son, I love you, and I’ll see you soon.”

“I love you too, Mom. See you soon.” He hung up the phone and plopped back onto the sofa. He closed his eyes and let himself drift off again into his Caribbean fantasy of Crystal.

Tommy awoke. He looked over at the clock and it was noon. He got up. Still in his sweat suit, he paced the living room, anxiously remembering that Crystal was supposed to call. He glanced at the clock once again and it was five after twelve. He picked up the phone. Her number was on a napkin right beside it on the side table. He dialed and waited.

A female voice answered, “Hello?”

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“Hello, Crystal? It’s Tommy.”

“Oh, you want Crystal. Hold on,” replied the voice and he decided it must be Darlene, Crystal’s sister and roommate.

“Sure. No problem.” said Tommy. Waiting, anticipating the sound of Crystal’s voice, he listened closely. “Crystal! There’s a phone call for you!” he heard Darlene yell. Then he tried to picture everything in their apartment just from the tiny sounds in the open line, footsteps, quiet voices...the soft approach of that queen of his dreams, Crystal. Then, at long last he heard her voice: “Tommy?” she said.

He sank into the sofa. “Hi, Crystal.”

“Hi, Tommy. How are you?” she asked as Darlene giggled in the background.

“I’m doing great.” he responded, smiling, listening to Darlene giggle again.

“Great. Can you pick me up tonight, at around six?” Crystal asked, and Tommy’s face lit up.

“Sure,” he replied, “six would be perfect. We can go out to dinner and maybe take in a movie, afterward, if you want. Times Square, maybe?”

“Alright, that sounds great. I guess, while we’re at the restaurant, we could decide on what movie we’re going to watch, right?” she asked.

“Yeah. I have this newspaper, so we could look at it on the way to restaurant.

“Okay, I’ll give you my address. Alright, do you have a paper and pencil?”

“Okay,” said Tommy. He found a pen and the napkin with her number on it. “Okay, what’s your address?”

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Crystal gave her address.

“Alright. Upper Eastside, Ninety-Second Street. Okay, I know where you are. Do you want my address?”

“Ahhh, sure,” Crystal responded, not sure why she would need it. “Oh, where is that in Brooklyn?” He heard her distractedly searching for paper and pen. “Okay, what is it?”

“I live in Bensonhurst, in Brooklyn, over towards Coney Island.” he explained.

“Okay, yeah we talked about that. I have a friend, who lives in that area, remember?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah.” He frowned, wondering who this “friend” was and if it might be another man. He put the thought aside and gave her his address. He said, “So, I’ll see you tonight.”

“Alright, Tommy. See you tonight. Bye.”

“Goodbye,” Tommy replied and waited for her to hang up before putting the phone down. “Yes! Yes! Yes! I did it! I actually found the love goddess of my life!” he shouted, bounced up from the sofa and headed into the bedroom to get ready for his big date.

After hanging up, Crystal folded her arms on the kitchen table and bowed her head into them. Seeing this, Darlene asked, “What’s going on?”

Crystal lifted her head. “Well...”

“What is it?” Darlene sat across from her.

“Well, the thing is, this guy I’m going out with tonight. His name is Tommy Landis and I met him through the personal ads. Yesterday we met for coffee. You know, to feel it out.”

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“I know, like he could be a weirdo or something. But you are going out with him again, so he can’t be that bad.”

“Yeah,” said Crystal half-heartedly.

“So, what’s he look like?”

“Well, that’s part of it. He looks kind of like Woody Allen.”

Darlene laughed, “Really?”

“Yes... But he’s a really nice guy...”

“Okay.” Darlene pushed her glasses up on her face with a finger. “So is there any attraction there?”

“That’s just the thing...but he’s such a nice guy. I mean he’s kind of cute but...”

“But like Woody Allen.”

They laughed. Darlene said, “So why are you going out with him tonight?”

Crystal shrugged helplessly. “Because he’s a nice guy...but we have nothing in common.”

Darlene said with an ironic smile, “Maybe opposites attract?”

“Well who the hell told you that lie?”

They laughed. Darlene said, “So what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know...”

“Well, just tell him. Get it over with. It’ll only hurt him worse if you keep leading him on.”

“I’m not leading him on.”

Darlene removed her glasses, cleaning them with the tail of her shirt. “Well you are going out with him when you know there’s no future in it.”

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Crystal bowed her head back onto her arms and moaned, "I know."

"The longer you wait, the more he's going to think you two are a thing." Darlene put her glasses back on.

Crystal raised her head. "Darlene, he's already crazy about me. I saw the look on his face, when we met at the coffeehouse. Not once did he take his eyes off of me. I never saw any man act this way after meeting me. To be honest with you, it's a bit scary."

"Then you've got to cut him loose, the sooner the better."

"I know, I know. It's just...I want to find the right time."

Tommy walked into Mac's flower shop. He walked up to the counter, a man with a plan, drumming his fists on the counter with excitement.

A man came to the counter. "Hey, Mac," said Tommy to him. "How's business?"

"Oh, alright, what's happening with you?"

"Well, I tell you," Tommy almost sang, "I got this date with this beautiful blonde goddess tonight."

"Oh, yeah?" Mac managed to not sound too disbelieving. It was hard for him to imagine the Tommy he knew with such a woman.

"Yep, and I'll need I'll take three long-stem roses. One white, one yellow, and one pink."

"No red?"

"No, see, I figure that I'm going to be different. Women like the element of surprise."

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Mac shrugged, "Okay." He knew that it was actually sending a more mixed signal but Tommy seemed like he had a plan and it was not his business to say otherwise.

Tommy was irked Mac's seeming to doubt him but he kept quiet.

Mac wrapped the roses and handed them over. He rang it up and Tommy paid. As Tommy left, Mac said, "I wish you luck tonight."

Tommy held up the roses and said, "Thanks, Mac." Outside he felt a creeping doubt but quickly crushed it away. He straightened up. He was a man with a plan going on a date with a beautiful blonde goddess and nothing would stand in his way.

The buzzer rang in Crystal's apartment.

Darlene answered. "Who is it?"

"Hi. It's Tommy. For Crystal?"

"Okay." Darlene buzzed him in, then went to the bathroom where Crystal was getting ready. "He's here."

Crystal turned to her. "How do I look?" She was in a pink FUBU sweatshirt and sexy jeans.

"How do you look? Are you kidding me?"

"Well, I don't want to look like crap."

"You look beautiful," said Darlene. "Just cut him loose."

"I know, I know.... At dinner I'll insist on going dutch, then I'll explain."

Darlene looked over her glasses, parentally: "Just tell him."

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“I will, I will, just leave me alone.” Crystal turned back to the mirror.

Tommy, arrived at Crystal’s apartment in jeans, a black Notre Dame sweatshirt and denim jacket. He squared his shoulders, held out the roses and was just about to knock when the door flew open.

“Hi, I’m Darlene, Crystal’s sister.”

“Hi, I’m Tommy, her date.”

They laughed and shook hands. “Yeah, I figured,” Darlene added, then said, “Come on in.” Tommy stepped in, Darlene closed the door behind him and led him through the kitchen into the living room, where he saw Crystal.

“Hi, Tommy,” she said.

“Hi, Crystal.” He walked over and handed her the roses, one white, one yellow and one pink. “These are for you.”

She took them, with a genuine smile and, “Oh, thank you,” She shared a glance with Darlene and said, “Isn’t it nice?”

“Oh, yeah,” she agreed. Not red roses, but mixed, more friendship: maybe he wasn’t as crazy about Crystal as they had thought.

Tommy had a more straight-forward interpretation, that his plan of being different had worked beautifully.

Crystal grabbed a cute little black jacket and Tommy helped her put it on. Then they left the apartment, saying goodbye to Darlene. At the elevator, Tommy said, “You look great tonight, Crystal.”

“Thank you.”

There was awkward silence all the way to the subway, which put doubt back into Tommy's mind. He obsessed on his every move and whether the roses had been a mistake after all. It was only when they were waiting for the subway that he was released from his misery, when she asked, "So, where are going to eat?"

Grateful to have the silence finally broken, he said, "I thought about us going to this barbeque place on Forty-Third Street. Do you like barbeque, or would you rather us go someplace else?" He put his hands in his pockets and looked expectantly at her.

"No, actually, barbeque would be fine." She smiled and looked away, thinking to just get it over with now.

He said, "I was also thinking about which movie we could see after dinner..." She was kicking herself for not calling before he left Brooklyn, or before that, to explain things up front and be done with it. Going through a dinner would be miserable and just lead him on. And a movie? No, it was time to come clean, she turned to him just as their train rolled into the station. She got on and thought she would tell him before the train got too far along. Then she could get off and switch to another train and be done with it. The doors closed and there was an announcement: "This train will be bypassing all stations to Grand Central, Forty-Second Street..." The doors opened to let off the passengers who would want to wait for a local. She wanted to run, but froze. Again the announcement came, freedom waiting before her. If she stayed

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on she was at least committed to the dinner. But how could she just hit let him down and run? She cringed as the doors closed. She resigned herself to at least making the dinner as pleasant as possible.

He said, “So what do you think about a movie?”

“Oh,” she smiled, “Let’s decide after dinner, okay?”