

Heartbreak Waiting To Happen

by Cherise Wolas

I should have created a first-date questionnaire heartaches ago. My critical queries in unequivocal black would seek, in advance, answers aforethought. I think, often, about Max, Evan, Robert, and Henry, and what I could have and should have avoided.

With Max: lengthy instructional tutorials about what he should do with my parts.

He said, "Sweetheart, just show me."

I showed him.

I showed him again.

I showed him again and again.

Then I showed him everything, all over again.

That last time in bed, he was overly eager when he said, "Sweetheart, I think I've finally got it. Is *this* right?"

With Evan: an argumentative year about my degree of relationship committal.

I thought his move-in indicated my serious intent. Evan did not.

"It took three months before you allowed my clothes into our bedroom closet." When he said the word *our*, his pianist fingers punctuated, quote-marking the air.

I said, "For the last nine months you have been fully ensconced in my closets and drawers."

He said, "Sweetheart, that *my* you just uttered, that *my* is the trouble right there."

Before I could think of how best to disassemble, he said, "I'm right, you still think of the apartment as yours!"

He was right.

I did.

And it was.

With Robert: fraught words about why did I *not* desire a child half made from his sperm.

Dating just a month when I laid myself bare, I had been forthright. Divorced with three kids, his youngest just days from legal maturity, I knew Robert soon would be child-support free.

That night, when I was ready to say what I wanted to say, he clinked his glass against mine, and said, "Sweetheart, happy one month anniversary."

I delicately clinked back.

I had not realized this was our month-one anniversary, not sure what a month together actually meant. We sipped from our glasses. Then I said what I intended to say.

"I haven't yet decided where we are going, but if we become serious, a child, just one, has to be part of our picture."

I told him if further fathering was a no-go, I *would* understand, we *could* remain friends, we *should* finish our drinks, and forever after remain fully clothed.

I said, "No guilt, it's early days yet. We can kiss goodbye and part. There is no reason to prolong the inevitable and abort our respective searches for soulmates."

"A goodbye kiss and a parting, no, never," Robert said.

Then he kissed my palms, it was prior to a mutual exchange of *I love you*, and he said, "Having a child with you would be magical. And, selfishly, I want a do-over, be the parent I should have been before."

That night, finally, our fucking was tremendous.

Many months later when I was ready, my womb wobbled and proved problematic. When I said no to the hormones, we researched adoption. Robert was fully aboard.

It was he who heard about the baby fair announced on the radio. It was he who insisted we attend. "There's no time like the present," he said, "Not when our future is clear."

We went to the hosting hotel. The ballroom was crammed. Couples with tightly clasped hands and upside-down crescent-moon

smiles wandered the aisles, dipping in and out of booths shilling adoptions, domestic and foreign, IVF, implantation, and more.

We attended a lecture, talked to beaming adopters back for round two. They trilled, "Listen you two, the baby is yours the minute you hold that bundle of joy."

Romantic and randy, we skipped, clasped together, from the ballroom. Over champagne, we toasted our adoption decision and kissed deeply, bubbles tickling our noses. A tad tipsy, we took a final turn around the baby ballroom. We were feeling cockily satisfied when that last waltzing saunter did us in.

The surrogacy booth beckoned to Robert: his sperm, fertilizing another's egg, carried by a third-party womb. The champagne bubbles evaporated into the ether.

"Why won't you consider this," Robert demanded later that night. "I wish it could be your egg, but it's great, don't you think, sweetheart, at least this way my sperm, my genes, will forever be part of our child."

I sat very quietly, thinking. Pregnant minutes passed. Finally I said, "Surrogacy costs something like a hundred thousand."

Money was suddenly not an issue.

I said, "If you didn't have three pre-existing children, of course I would consider it. But you already have fruit from your loins. For me, it's critical that we stand likewise related, either both, or neither, to an eventual child."

Because it was true, I couldn't help but add, "A kid that's half yours and half some other woman's, isn't what I had in mind."

He had known my position on the matter. I had made myself clear at our one-month mark, the marker he had remembered and I had not.

But Robert, being Robert, could not let it go.

He should have let it go. I said, "Let it go." I said *let it go*, again and again.

But *letting it go* was not in Robert's DNA. Robert's DNA was the crux of my troubles.

Robert pressed me mercilessly that night, and for such a long time, that I finally said what I never would have said had he left the subject alone.

I said, "Robert, I don't believe your sperm possesses those indefinable qualities that would make a child remarkable. I'd rather chance the unknown."

With Henry: a late stage admission about his predilection for cross-dressing.

Divulged over drinks at a trendy downtown bistro, he tried to lessen the blow. He said, "Since coupled with you, sweetheart, my urge has vanished, the pressure stemmed in some way."

"But in fairness," he said, "With the full disclosure our love requires, I cannot promise that I will never dip into your things. You have *very* nice things, you know."

I did know. I saw all of my very nice things laid out in my drawers.

Henry's admission, and his timing thereof, came as a shock. His sudden, unexpected forthrightness followed celebratory sips of an unusual Bordeaux after an intricate discussion about my engagement ring.

Before his disclosure, Henry had detailed his browsing at jewelers out of his price range and about his late nights, online, learning about cuts, clarity, carats, and cost. The 4-Cs of the sparklers had excited him tremendously.

He desperately wanted my input. "I want you to be deliriously happy, sweetheart, with the rock that you wear."

It was then, after we sipped again at the bloody Bordeaux, that he wrapped his hefty, calloused hands around mine and explained about his love of wearing stilettos, how soft the swish of silky dresses felt against his sinewy skin, the rush he got clasping delicate bras around his broad back.

Later, alone in my bed, I imagined him slipping on the engagement rings he truly intended for me. I pictured him admiring his hand with a sparkler attached, the light catching the rock's glint, catapulting diamond rays into his eyes.

In the shower I think about my questionnaire.

With Jonathan, at eight, I have another first date.

I wonder about Jonathan's reaction were I to request his thoughtful completion of the first-date questionnaire, prior to the ordering of cocktails and our initial exchange of false information.

Although intended for me, the questionnaire should and could perform double-duty. His answers would determine whether I ought to cull, cut, and discard him in advance. I think of the time saved and the hearts spared if prior to its birth we learned whether our potential love's destiny was to die.

* * *To MD, thanks for letting me steal a title from one of your songs.

