

I Fall in Love Too Fast

by Con Chapman

That's my problem, he thought to himself as he turned off the music to his headphones. He had been listening to Chet Baker and in a moment his state of mind had turned from mellow moodiness to irritation. The romantic background that the sounds had provided on his morning walk to work now struck him as . . . inappropriate. He needed to get his mind in a frame to be alert, even anxious, not placid and pacific. He dealt with money, and no one wanted a complacent, dreamy-eyed romantic making investment decisions.



But it was true, he thought. He fell in love too easily. Until he learned to do otherwise, he would lack the focus he'd need to close the deal with someone really nice, someone he'd want to settle down with.

Take his first week at work. He'd been smitten with a brown-haired go-getter who walked the same diagonal he did over to Winter Street, then down Summer Street to the financial district. She came out of her apartment building a few minutes behind him; he'd see her down the block. She carried an insulated mug with ducks on it, and by the time they'd crossed over Beacon Street she would already be steaming ahead of him. He had tried to slow down at first to see if she'd break stride to his gait, but she wouldn't. She was obviously into her career and didn't have time for a dalliance,

not even one that would be so convenient. They lived on the same block and worked in the same building.



Maybe there was some sort of taboo about dating someone you'd run into too much if you broke up, he'd thought by way of way of trying to understand the folkways of the bluestocking tribe. When he decided to give up on her he found it was quite easy because he happened to strike up—or almost strike up—a conversation with another woman.

Brown hair pulled back with a head band, pretty, a few inches shorter than the first one, but tall enough so that he wouldn't have to worry about a son being too short. His sister had dated a real cool, good-looking guy in college who had an air of sadness about him when there was a lull in the action, all because he was so short. He didn't think of himself as shallow—it wasn't like he was buying a horse for breeding purposes—but it was something you had to consider before you got involved with somebody.

It had been a Wednesday, both the papers had a food section that day—restaurant reviews, recipes, that sort of thing. The gap-toothed news hawker who stood at the mouth of Winter Street would yell out “Foozection! Foozection!” as you passed by him that morning each week.

He'd been walking alongside the second woman and when the man shouted out his garbled cry she broke out laughing. He turned to look at her and she said "Did that man just say booze and sex?"



He had laughed too—the woman had quite an imagination, or sense of humor if she'd deliberately contorted the words into something funny.

"No, he said 'Food section.' It's Wednesday, the newspapers have food sections on Wednesday."

"Ohh," she'd said. "I get it." He had turned his head back down Winter towards the water, where rays of sun were pouring up the street from the Atlantic. By the time he'd turned his head back to smile at her she was already two steps ahead of him. He didn't know if she was unhappy that he hadn't tried harder to carry on a conversation, but he hadn't anything in mind to say to her. It was too late now, he thought; she'd think he was weird if he accelerated to catch up with her—wouldn't she?

From that day on he tried to time his walk to arrive when she had come up out of the Park Street station, especially on Wednesday. Maybe they would recreate the first encounter and they'd look at

each other in recognition and laugh. Then it would be easy to think of something say—“Say, I've heard that one before” or “Isn't this where we came in?” if he was going to try and pull off something really witty. But she never showed up again and, rather than staking out the intersection from the coffee shop with the window that looked out on the brick pavement, he'd fallen in love—again—too fast.



This time it was a sales clerk at the women's clothing store where he was buying his sister a birthday present. It was a sweater, it wasn't really her style, but the store was just around the corner from his office so it was convenient, even if it wasn't right. He was like a drunk who looks for his car keys under the street light, he was thinking to himself when another clerk came up from behind him singing a song she'd obviously made up for the occasion. “It's a great big beautiful world,” she began, “full of great, big beautiful girls.”

“Why are you singing that?” the first woman asked, losing her commercial composure.

“I don't know,” the singer said. “Just popped into my mind when a six 6 tried to squeeze into a size 2.”

They kept their voices low, like two school girls passing notes in the back of a classroom. He was in love with them both, but especially the one who'd come up with the sarcastic sales jingle. Now there was a woman you'd want to spend the rest of your life

with, he thought. Someone so witty, there'd never be a dull moment.



“Would you like me to gift wrap this for you?” the first woman asked, and before he had a chance to answer her, the second woman had returned to the sales floor to re-shelve two pairs of now-stretched pants, humming her little song.

“Uh, yeah, it's for my sister,” he said nervously, as if he needed an excuse.

“Well, you're a good brother,” the woman said. She was heavier than her friend the spontaneous songstress, who had just stepped out of his life, probably forever.

