

# I Was a Gigolo for a Fruit Fly Database

by Con Chapman

*Through his wife's connections, he started managing a fruit-fly database.*

*So You Want to Live Forever, Charlotte Allen*

As I take my seat at the end of the Ritz bar, Heinz the veteran bartender gives me the hairy eyeball.

"The usual, my good man," I say with affected *bonhomie*.

"So . . . that would be a Perrier with lime that you nurse until you can find a woman to buy drinks for you?"

I give him my best contemptuous sneer, the one that says I-may-be-a-gigolo-but-then-again-I-don't-have-steam-from-a-dishwasher-in-my-face-at-the-end-of-the-night. That's quite a mouthful, and my sneer is winded by the time it finishes.



*"Besides what you just laid on the counter, you don't have two nickels to rub together, do you?"*

"Why yes, I suppose you could say that. If you were being rather impertinent." I've told Heinz before that I don't have to take his guff. I've been thrown out of nicer joints than his *plenty* of times.

He gives me a nasty little grin, like he knows my precise bank balance, which isn't balanced at all. In fact, if I don't find a woman to make me a kept man *tonight* there'll be an overdraft in my account tomorrow.

All I need is a break; to meet a woman who has access to a fruit fly database, either personally or through a trust established by her fruit-fly collecting grandfather, set up to keep her comfortably in *drosophila melanogaster* until the end of her days.



*Fruit fly: Available in strawberry, lemon-lime or "wildberry."*

"I can see right through your internal monologue," Heinz says. "You have two chances of talking a wealthy widow into assisting you; slim and none, and slim just left town, so no you can't run a tab."

I plunk a ten-dollar bill down on the bar and flash him a grim little smirk. "Haven't you ever read any Jane Austen?" I ask, luring him into a trap.

"My elder sister did that for me."

"Then you must not know the opening line of 'Pride and Prejudice.'"

"How's that go?"

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single woman in possession of a fruit fly database must be in want of an husband."

"What's with the 'an' before 'husband'?"

"That's the way they roll in England," I say, as I take a teensy-weensy sip of my sparkling water, hoping to s-t-r-e-t-c-h it to closing time in case I don't score. I glance around the room and, after a few obvious mis-strokes, my eyes light upon a woman with silver-bluish hair, piled in waves across her head like surf crashing upon an abandoned beach.

"Who's the woman who just walked in?" I ask Heinz, hoping he'll throw me a bone.



*"Adds and subtracts in a jiffy!"*

"Millicent Triffid, heiress to the Triffid Calculating Machine fortune." So there's a spark of romance in the old man yet.

"Is she . . . interested in . . . fruit flies?"

"It depends. On the man who offers to breed them with her."

"Does she . . . accept free drinks proffered by men?"

"On the make? Unfortunately, yes. I sometimes have to pry her off a twenty-something at last call with the Jaws of Life."

My kind of gal! "Why don't you . . . see what she'll have?" I ask him cautiously.

"You better hope it's a wine cooler, pal," Heinz says, "'cause if she orders an Old Fashioned, I know you're s.o.o.l."

"You're so . . . indelicate sometimes."

He moves with effortless grace and noiseless step to her table, where he breaks the news to her: the somewhat youngish man at the

bar would like to buy her a drink! Her eyes brighten like a child's at Christmas, and she graciously accepts my offer.

"What does she want?" I ask Heinz when he returns to the bar.

"A Singapore Sling," he says without remorse. I open my wallet slowly, eyelids squinting in the dim light as if it's high noon inside. I hope against hope against hope that I've got the cash to cover the first one (she'll surely buy the second) when I discover a Best in Boston coupon; \$1 Off Lower Priced Froofo Drink—I'd tucked into a side slot for just such an occasion and had forgotten all about it!



"Two Singapore Slings, barkeep, and bring them to Ms. Triffid's table."

I amble over, my cup running over with geniality.

"Heinz here has been kind enough to tell me your name, Ms. Triffid," I say with a beaming boyish smile. "I'm Dupree Godbois III, amateur scientist."

"Oh how nice to meet you!" she says with genuine enthusiasm. For some reason an image of a poodle humping a couch enters my mind without a warrant.

My hope, as you might imagine, is to end up like Alfred Kinsey; the man had more gall wasps than he could ever dream of, so many that he eventually got bored and started studying sex.



*Kinsey: "You say 'A lot'—how many times a day is that?"*

"So," I begin. "Heard any good fruit fly jokes lately?" I ask innocently.

"Oh I did, I did," she says, rubbing her chin—from which sprout a few unattended hairs—in an effort to recall some jocundity that tickled her fancy. "I know: Why did the Little Moron throw the fruit fly out the window?"

"I dunno—why?"

"He wanted to see a fruit fly—fly!"

I laugh, of course—it's only fair to me and my future to suck up to her like I'm snorting a golf ball through a garden hose, to borrow a line from former President Clinton.

"You're a stitch!" I say to Millicent. "You know . . . I've been looking around for a good fruit fly database. You wouldn't happen to know of any, would you?"

She pauses and looks off into the distance. "You know, my father was a professor at the University of Chicago."



*"Is that a fruit fly in your pocket, or are you disappointed to see me?"*

Bingo—she's the daughter of Dr. Floyd Triffid, the man who wrote the book on sexually frustrated fruit flies. Triffid bred a generation of males with only one wing, thereby disabling them from doing the courtship dance so essential to finding a female fruit fly to perpetuate your DNA: round three times, dip, swerve, do-si-do, then nail the dismount. With only one wing, the little guys would get hopelessly dizzy, fall to the counter, and leave no heirs.

"I know Dr. Triffid's work well," I say. "I'm a great admirer of his scholarship, even if there are millions of fruit flies who greatly resent him."

Millicent blushes. I didn't mean to tell an off-color joke, but you know how a sip of a Singapore Sling—and try saying *that* five times fast—can loosen your inhibitions.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I didn't mean . . ."

"That's quite all right," she says, the color rushing out of her cheeks and leaving them as white as the sand in a hotel ash tray. "It is impossible to discuss my father's great contribution to the field of genetics without getting somewhat . . . naughty."

"Oh you kid!" I say, and tap her lightly on the knee. It's not light work being a gigolo but, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, any man who marries for money or fruit flies earns it, or them.

“Say, Millicent,” I say. “Do you have a ‘steady’ boyfriend?”

She blushes again, although with her heavily-rouged cheeks it's hard to tell where nature begins and cosmetics end. “Daddy never let me have one when I was growing up,” she says with a touch of sadness. “I just never got comfortable with the thought of . . .”

“Breeding quickly and laying many eggs?” I say, and immediately regret it. Like so many fruit fly gigolos, I frequently forget—in the heat of the chase—that there are vast differences between the sexual life of little insects and human beings.

“Why . . . you cad, you bounder!” Millicent exclaims. I deserve her scorn, and the obloquy of all right-thinking entomologists.



*Now you're talkin'!*

“I am so sorry,” I say, and I get down on one knee to apologize when she lifts my chin gently with her hand.

“What are you apologizing for?” she asks with an upraised eyebrow of anticipation. “Let's get a room with an mini bar!”

