

Bland, weak, spoiled, slaughtered

by Michael Dermansky

"Honey," I say, pulling the thick part of my tie through the knot, "I just don't want to go. It's creepy."

"Come on, it'll be fun," my wife, Adina says. We'd just come back from our honeymoon in Hawaii.

"We didn't register for this." Her friends, the perfect New York couple, let's call them Rali and Kate, ignored our registry completely. They were aware, like everyone else, that we had a registry with Crate and Barrel, Bloomingdales and Michael C. Fina. And if they had checked on line, they could have bought us flatware, a Cuisinart, even a kitchen clock, but no-where did we ask to be taken to a fancy restaurant and a play.

Their wedding gift to us was a night out with them and tonight was the night. But, you see, Rali and Kate had so much more to offer us than we could ever think to register for. They were giving us an exclusive guide on how to live as an up and coming couple in New York City. Rali and Kate were the couple you might see snuggling on a soft plaid blanket under a Monday moon at Bryant Park, watching *Gone with the Wind*; hugging on the front deck of the Staten Island Ferry taking in the sunset, or floating above Manhattan in a helicopter feeding each other grapes.

Disappoint my happy new bride? No. There was no escaping our "Gifted" evening with the "Perfect Couple."

We went first to the play. Sarah Jessica Parker was starring as this young newlywed whose husband was sick because he had been swallowing Barbie doll heads and pooping them out. It was quite a shock to Sarah Jessica when she discovered that her new husband was sick because he had been swallowing Barbie doll heads and pooping them out. I wondered why they'd picked this play; if it had

anything to do with me? Had my wife told them about my Beanie Babies Collection. Rali leaned back and laughed his roaring laugh whenever there was mention of poop.

I first met Rali on the night of Barbara Streisand's farewell concert: Well, anyway, Barbara said it was farewell. My wife to be, Adina, she wasn't my wife yet. We'd just been dating for one month, and she really wanted me to meet this awesome couple. They had other plans after the concert, but they were going to take a minute to say Hi to us after the show.

Adina spots them in her binoculars. They have floor seats right behind Oprah, Rosie and Gail. The concert is madness, metal detectors at Madison Square Garden, 250 dollar concert t-shirts, vendors shouting "Get your Cham-pagne and Straw-berries here! Straw-berries here!"

We wait for Rali and Kate after the concert at the entrance on 7th Avenue.

"*People, people who need people*," Rali, singing, runs up and hugs Adina. Beside him is his Kate, with wild frizzy hair, a faded skirt, a crinkly black blouse, her look is that of a pocketbook turned inside out but she pulled it off, "Honey, this is Adina's beau, Michael Dermansky."

"Hi. Great to meet you." Rali shakes my hand. It's a balmy June night, people line up for cabs, ladies clutch their Barbara Steisand posters and immigrants sell hot-pretzels. There's a few black milk crates strewn by the wall under the Ringling Brother Circus banner. Rali grabs a crate, steps up and shouts, "I love my wife. I love her, and I don't care who knows it."

Women start clapping.

"Did you hear me? I LOVE MY WIFE."

A policeman, with a gun in his holster, was on his walkie-talkie, "Do you believe it. There's a guy here who loves his wife." The hot-pretzel vendors start to hum... (hum the song *people, people who need people*...)

"Isn't that sweet," whisper the couples on the Taxi line.

"TONIGHT, I'M GOING TO MAKE MAD PASSIONATE LOVE TO MY WIFE!"

Wife Kate nonchalantly fiddles with her frizzy hair, as if her husband were giving stock tips. Rali points at me, the way Apollo Creed pointed at a hapless Rocky Balboa, "You two are a cute couple. Why don't you go home and make love."

I shrug my shoulders.

I don't like being given orders concerning my sex schedule. Now when I see Rali, I think "Do I love my wife as much as Rali does? Or is Rali's love unsustainable and in ten years he'll be yelling *I Love My Mistress!*"

I remember this from the backseat as Rali drives us cross-town to an ultra modern restaurant. We walk in the revolving doors, which has a video camera angled at all who enter. We are seated at a round table in the middle of the floor.

"What'll you have?" Rali asks.

"Em, to drink or eat?"

"Do them both at the same time."

Was he bored with me? I'd complimented the Barbie swallowing show. I complimented his SUV and his gas grill in the back seat. I Even told him how much I'd love to go barbequing with him under the Brooklyn Bridge, because Adina told me how he barbecues under the Brooklyn Bridge, and I envisioned the homeless people joining us for hamburgers and hotdogs like in the Fisher King. I even told him about my idea of having a one-person show of monologues taken verbatim from Trip Advisor. I gave him everything I had but could not find away to become good friends.

See, I felt if I could just make friends with Rali my wife would never text message me, the text message every new husband fears, "Honey, I changed my mind. I want a divorce."

These feeling of inadequacy are why I just wanted to stay home with my new China plates, and flatware and kitchen clock. We were newlyweds. We needed time time to nurture our union, not this psychological pressure cooker.

I look down at the menu in front of me. The menu is a thick card with embossed lowercase purple type:

Filet mignon 46 - Alaskan halibut 39 - Lamb 34 And Chicken 23 bucks...

A real man would order Filet Mignon. I imagine Rali's reply, "*A mignon man, you're a big man on my tab. A mignon man; You're just a spoiled little boy letting a real man take you out to dinner.*"

Well maybe order the lamb, symbolizing the slaughter of my self-confidence. Try the halibut, a bland northern fish. Just be bland. Or Chicken: bock-bock bock-bock.

Adina, wears a fuchsia gypsy dress with tiny mirrors; she smiles blissfully, unaware that her husband is being castrated. Above the bar is a row of ten black and white TV's set-up like monitors. The TVs continually run footage of people entering the restaurant in time delay. I see myself on TV, just ten minutes ago, spinning into the revolving door, like the one at Grand Central, in black and white; I'm wearing a plaid scarf, a wool over coat, my head is up like I am trying to be proud at a funeral.

I look over at my wife, I wiggle my wedding band, *Please honey, Order for me.* I don't trust my impulses. Give me a barbie doll head with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and hot fudge. Anxiety settles in my stomach, my breath is short and I can't do this. Order the fish-Bland, no the chicken-weak, no the steak-spoiled, the lamb-slaughtered.

All the couples sit at tables, light streams from spots that are filtered from the high ceilings though giant sponges hanging from ropes, house music pulsates, the revolving door keeps spinning, people keep changing from the past to the present on the TVs above the bar. Next to Rali's arm is a thick coupon book, with discounts for the upscale restaurants in Manhattan. Buy three meals get one for free. My meal is the coupon meal.

I peel off my Joseph Aboud jacket, look up at the TV monitors. "What'll it be?" Rali barks.

I resign myself to the bland choice. As I'm about to say 'Alaskan Halibut,' my wife swoops in and says, "Rali, we'll both have the filet mignon."

I smile. Being the perfect New York Couple will tak a little bit more time but my wife has got my back. As I wiggle my ring again, all I can think is: "I LOVE MY WIFE. I LOVE MY WIFE. I LOVE MY WIFE."

But I won't scream it to strangers.

