

## The Perfect Search

I'm boiling in my own oils in the hot tub behind the tract house I just hastily purchased. Afraid that my daughters might stop visiting the farmhouse, I rammed this purchase through, thirty days from seeing to closing. Though the kids initially overlooked the isolated mouse or spider in the farmhouse, the regular appearances of these pests during the past six months made infestation undeniable. But I'm not sure buying this house was the greatest idea because, with the twins leaving for college shortly, and the youngest opting to stay mainly at her mother's, soon I'll be plodding down this split-level's low-ceiling, resoundingly empty hallways alone, like Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*.

I'm turning up the jets, wondering about all these failed attempts at coupling. Actually, I'm blaming myself for barreling through relationships, punting or becoming disenchanted at the slightest sign of being pestered. This must be sobriety. Taking responsibility. Looking beyond the surface. The route to becoming relationship-capable.

Being alone seems so much easier. I recently read that the monogamous relationship may have been designed to last only for the duration of the once drastically shorter human lifespan. Maybe we simply

age-out of relationships now that we live so long. If so, when that period ends, with novelty receding and pesky routine setting in, do the more mature among us just double down with the devil we know, perhaps the only person in the world who one day may be willing to push our wheelchair and change our diapers?

I know this just can't be what it all means. Am I wanting too much? Clinging to a childish fantasy? The male version of those Match women who warn that you'd better be terrific because they *won't settle*? Am I in that subset of humanity that would rather wake up to emailed *billet-doux* representing endless possibilities than roll over against the same muss-haired, croaky-voiced adjoining body?

Perhaps, though, the problem is me in a different sense: that I'm just picking the wrong women. I decide to talk this over with Steven, a guy who divorced long ago who I recently met while walking Kobi. Steven's *experienced*; he's practically a founding member of Match. I dial him from the hot tub on my cell phone.

"Steven?"

"You just caught me. I'm heading for San Francisco," Steven answers.

“Why San Francisco?” I ask. His trip seems a little late, what with Jerry Garcia dead, Haight-Ashbury gentrified, Mama Cass having succumbed to the ultimate weight-loss plan.

“I found her.”

“In San Francisco?”

“Yeah. We’re inseparable. I’m going out to meet her.”

“How can you be inseparable when you’ve never met?”

Steven doesn’t answer. I assume that’s because he doesn’t want to consider whether, as with most Match dates, his ballooning infatuation is about to meet reality’s cold, cruel pinprick.

“Who is she?”

“She’s thirty-nine. A psychologist with her own small practice. No kids. Never married but some long relationships.”

“How did you find her?”

“I did a nationwide Match search, and there she was.”

“A nationwide search for what?”

“I just put it all out there. Everything I want: Jewish. Graduate degree. Under forty. Doesn’t want kids.”

“That’s it?” I ask, thinking how many great women aren’t Jewish or are but lack graduate degrees. And what of all of the US’s single Jewish women with graduate degrees—a number I’d guess is in the hundreds of thousands? How did Steven use Match’s search capability to exclude those who listen to Suze Orman? Who read Eckhart Tolle? Who have spiritual lives that are *active*, like yeast?

“There she was. Jumped right up.”

“Well, good luck,” I say.

Not yet willing to throw in the towel, I head for my computer. I switch on Match and begin culling women by age, height and body type, then selecting divorced nonsmokers not wanting kids, looking through the photos that even slightly appeal to me. I chastise myself for being as careless and nondeliberative in picking women as I’ve recently been in selecting houses, though the latter at least is somewhat justified by a dearth of choices. But then I remember the sculptor Henry Moore saying something about his art involving “chipping away at what isn’t.” That’s my method too, I think, as I hone in on an attractive woman who doesn’t live far, the residue of the process of elimination wielded by a guy exhausted from moving.