

The Princess

While my story about the Duchess would provide some context, it is not necessary. I thought I had determined that what I was looking for in this twilight of my life was a Beryl Markham. Someone bright, tall, attractive and who could tolerate, even challenge, an existing relationship; and might even be interested in getting into my pants.

Women that I regularly meet for a happy hour, a movie, or jazz in the park, have shared their on-line dating experiences. I decided to try it in a limited way. I checked the box for “casual” relationship; wrote a clever profile, with an observation that I very much enjoy a three-hour dinner; and posted “check-in” type pictures of me reading a book at a bar. The book, a good read, doubling as a prop, represents deliberate staging – a different approach to the bar scene opening gambit – the possibility of an intelligent conversation.

The site’s algorithm determined that the Princess and I were a so-called match. She had checked the “friendship” box and looked very smart in a hat. After a few days of on-line thrust and parry, we met for dinner. While making the arrangement seemed collaborative, yes, technically, I initiated the invitation.

We met at Jaipur and were seated at a window table. She seemed quite content to take advantage of my listening skills. I learned she is on a golf league, is in to fashion, and heavily involved in wedding (not hers) and travel plans. She registered no notice of the check arriving, such details were not her concern. No look, no gesture – as though it was invisible. There was a pleasant hug as we parted.

Of course, the man picking up the tab at the first meeting should be unremarkable – certainly not unexpected, and was confirmed by my research. However, this has not been my experience. I have a friend who, from the beginning, happy hour or dinner, instructs the server that we will have separate checks. Debbie, whose pants I have wanted to get in to since 1979 (I’m beginning to think it’s not going to happen), examines the check, let’s me pay it, and provides me with currency for her share. And Joanna – we just split the check. The Duchess was another story, after first we made love, she sent flowers to my office. After visiting Paris, the

Duchess sent me back without her four times. I lived, and studied, second wave feminism and enjoy parity in relationships. Thus, the Princess was a horse of a different hue.

After another clunky round of coordination, we met for dinner at Linden House. We had cocktails and dinner at the bar, and shared a desert. Unlike my other friends, she ignored the separate plate, and we forked from a common dish – an unexpected intimacy that did rouse a thought of Howie Mandel-esque germaphobia. There was no gesture on her part when the check arrived, but there was a pleasant hug as we parted.

For the next encounter, I maneuvered carefully until it was her suggestion that we meet. She proffered dinner Saturday and asked me to select the venue – a trap? Very well then, I selected the Wave Bistro, third in our series of dinners at upscale establishments. I had introduced her to my inventory of designer Teresa Goodall necklaces, which I am gradually giving away in her memory, and she was “wearing Teresa.” After cocktails and a bottle of wine with dinner, we shared desert. Once again, she gracefully avoided the check. There was a pleasant hug as we parted.

The next meeting was a happy hour at my regular venue, Goose120. I like the idea of taking turns with invitations, but I find in our texts such cooperation becomes ambiguous. She would toss the ball back, it seemed. Happy hour went well, and she was introduced to patrons and staff. The Princess was good company with my friends – not as vivacious as Debbie, and not reserved like Kathy. She ignored the check. There was a pleasant hug as we parted.

Wait, wait! Actually, somehow, the pleasant hug included a kiss. Kind of a peck, but on the lips. Similar to a kiss on the cheek, but a step up in intimacy. It is my recollection that it was me who had so upgraded the hug. I surprised myself, as I feel pacing is important and wouldn't have expected a kiss yet. I have gone forty-five years without kissing Debbie.

I suggested another happy hour, and she asked if we could have a table instead of sitting at the bar. I gallantly countered with a booth. By now, the staff was abuzz that, unlike others, the Princess was a “date.” Next thing you know they will probably refer to us as “an item.” I have found myself in the item category before, scary stuff, cultural implications.

In the meantime, having experience in PDGA competition, I asked if she was interested in being introduced to disc golf, and arranged an outing the morning of our coming “date.” After a few minutes of practice, we played the back nine. Her initial field work drives had been unremarkable, though I could see signs of control. By the end of the round, I was impressed with her improvement, and more important, she was pleased with her performance. What am I doing? There was a pleasant hug as we parted.

Cocktails that evening, in a booth, were followed by a bottle of wine and dinner. Amanda, our server, encouraged us to order the mahi-mahi special – and it was. I picked up the tab (smile). There was a pleasant hug on parting, and another peck as our noses met playfully. Stepping away, I found myself turning back for another hug, and another kiss.

The next Monday morning, we met for disc golf field work in a nearby park. I measured off, and placed cones to mark the distance. My goal was to have her throw a hundred discs. During a break I had her review a Paige Pierce video on my phone to introduce her to the scissor-step run-up to the drive. For a novice, she nailed it. What fun.

Later in the day, I sent this text: “The following is not an invitation (as in date) ... it is a notification, or an FYI: I will be at Goose120 later (smile) ...just sayin’.”

Her response was, “Hmmm... if it’s not an invitation ... and say I happen to stop by ... am I to ignore you ... just sayin’.” I didn’t insert the winking emoji here, and there were a couple of additional playful texts.

I arrived first and informed the bartender, Mathew, that the Princess would be along, and that unless I indicated otherwise, we would need separate checks (I’m so clever). We had cocktails and decided to split the chicken, bacon, and avocado flat bread. When it was time to leave, Mathew, as instructed, set down separate checks. I placed my card on my check, pushed it forward, and then slipped off to the bathroom. I returned to find that the Princess had slid her check over into my space. We left, and outside there was a pleasant hug on parting.

I then returned to the bar to pay the Princess’ check which had been left behind.

Mark Goodall 5-14-25