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Romance is not my middle name

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—The dreaded February 14th looms.

Valentine's Day is an asymmetric holiday, because it means more to women than men. And that means men are required to do a lot for women on Monday for reasons that are eternally obscure. And that means if we don't live up to the expectations we don't understand, we're in for a long year.

Take, for example, this totally fictional conversation that never occurred yesterday between my wife, Melissa, our local prosecuting attorney, and me—a frequent victim of prosecutorial excess.

Melissa: Are we watching the calendar?

Me: Daily. ...er...what are we watching it for?

Melissa: Anything coming up that we need to be aware of? Like on Monday, the 14th?

Me: You didn't think I'd forget the three-month anniversary of your horse stepping on your foot, did you? Would your broken toe like a box of chocolates?

Melissa: Why do you want to make me fat?

Me: (You see how this works.) My mistake. How about a romantic weekend away?

Melissa: For my toe?

Me: No, for you. For all of you. For Valentine's day.

Melissa: With whom?

Me: Well, for starters, I had me in mind.

Melissa: Oh.

Me: How about The Inn at Little Washington? Supposed to be the best food in Virginia. Hideously expensive. Fifteen courses, each the size of a single wizened pea.

Melissa: Too fancy.

Me: OK. How about the annual Lions' Club Groundhog Supper Saturday night?

Melissa: Fresh or roadkill?

Me: It's not really groundhog. It's turkey and oysters.

Melissa: I'm asking about the casserole. Anyway, that's too fancy too.

Me: How about a hot dog?

Melissa: Is that the best you can do for me on Valentine's Day?

Me: Quite possibly.

Melissa: The problem with going out is that I always run into someone I've just convicted who is going to jail.

Me: That could be awkward.

Melissa: Especially when he's my waiter.

Me: How about a disguise? No one will notice you dressed in a head-to-toe burqa.

Melissa: You are a geyser of good advice.

Me: Well...I can always come up with a bouquet.

Melissa: Not gladiolus again. Please, promise me.

Me: How about a trip? London, Paris, Rome?

Melissa: They talk funny over there, especially the English.

Me: I could brush up on my college French.

Melissa: The only way that you got through college French was by flirting with your instructor. You can't brush up on something that never existed.

Me: A small detail. Bag France. How about Cairo?

Melissa: Better yet, we could hike along the Iranian border and visit their penal system for several years.

Me: How about a local B&B?

Melissa: If I want to see dust bunnies under the bedroom dresser, I can look at my own bunnies under my own dresser.

Me: How about a drive to nowhere in particular?

Melissa: Where would we sleep?

Me: We'll find a place, wherever we end up. We'll just drive for a while, to someplace neither of us has ever been. See new things.

Melissa: How do I know we'll get a room?

Me: Maybe we won't. Worst case, we could sleep in the car.

Melissa: This is your idea of a Valentine's Day present?
Me: I'll take the tent.
Melissa: Camping in February? Are your marbles still at the dry cleaner?
Me: OK. I'll give you a card.
Melissa: You don't believe in cards. You say they are gimmicks to get people to spend money foolishly.
Me: Nonetheless...how about one with a plush velvet heart?
Melissa: Your brain needs a CAT scan.
Me: Guys are supposed to be a little dopey on Valentine's Day.
Melissa: Guys are a little dopey on most days. Don't push your envelope.
Me: A card with red-lace trim?
Melissa: You...have been snatched by aliens!
Me: Maybe with a little perfume....and a poem.
Melissa: MEDIC!
Me: Flowery prose....
Melissa: ...like what...kind of flowery prose?
Me: Oh, real sappy stuff. The kind that makes your teeth hurt.
Melissa: ...like what...kind of real sappy stuff?
Me: "Roses are red...."
Melissa: I have no large quarrel with that statement.
Me: "And violets are blue."
Melissa: That's debatable, but I'm listening.
Me: "Sugar is sweet...."
Melissa: So you're back again pushing calories.
Me: "And so are you."
Melissa: That is so hokey.
Me: BMV.
Melissa: Oh, all right. Just keep it between us.
Me: Do you think I'm WikiLeaks? I'm not one to blab this kind of mush from every street corner in the county.
Melissa: Why am I not comforted by your testimony? So what do you want for Valentine's Day?
Me: A soap box.
Melissa: Don't think so. You'd probably lose your balance...and fall off. How about a box of chocolates instead?

Curtis Seltzer is a land consultant who works with buyers and helps sellers with marketing plans. He is author of How To Be a DIRT-SMART Buyer of Country Property at www.curtis-seltzer.com where his weekly columns are posted. He also writes for www.landthink.com.

Contact: Curtis Seltzer, Ph.D.
Land Consultant
1467 Wimer Mountain Road
Blue Grass, VA 24413-2307
540-474-3297
curtisseltzer@htcnet.org
www.curtis-seltzer.com