



A VISIT WITH BEAR

by owen mould

On that warm day in early February, we had just settled into the Easy Chair after the ineffable 2nd Movement of PDQ Bach's *Variations upon the Erotica Symphony No. 3* with its sublime employment of slide whistle and windbreaker -- in short, we were thoroughly enjoying a pleasantly middle-class and middle-aged afternoon with the soothing pleasures of classical music -- when who should come a rap, rapping upon our door but our dear friend and bro', Bear.

Bear rushed in with his beard uncombed, his unwashed shirt-tails flapping in the breeze, his pants unzipped, his tennis shoe laces thrashing about untied and his mismatched socks down at the ankles-- appearing, as he usually does in fact -- but with an added sense of distraction. Well, it turned out that Bear had

discovered the meaning of his miserable life and he was not only there to tell me all about it but also there to take me away and show me.

It being a sort of local holiday with nothing to do -- St. Valentine's Day actually -- and there being no beer left in the house, I agreed to go with him for the sake of journalistic professionalism.

While scrounging for beer at his place -- his storage system consisted of equal uses of space under the bed, in the fridge, between the seat cushions, various clothes closets, pantries and several lamps -- he told me all about a new group he had discovered which had given him the name and reason for his being: *quirkyalone*.

Now, it appears that a group of people has banded together in a kind of social club for those who have refused to engage in mindless and socially-dictated romantic pairing for whatever personal reasons the individuals have chosen. While the rest of Western Civilization launches maniacally into these relationships, leading to lifelong entrapments, children, stultifying careers and halitosis -- according to Bear -- entirely because this behavior is expected, the *quirkyalone* prefers to remain individual, unbonded and unfettered for personal reasons, which may vary, it appears, from career dedication, pursuit of achievement, or something as simple as the fact the right one just has not come along yet -- after about four or five decades of waiting.

It's not that the *quirkyalone* disbelieves in Love or dislikes people in general -- far from it. The *quirkyalone* adores people, socializes readily and always keeps at least one eye out for that Special Someone who just might trot

along any day. These people make enduring friendships, go to parties and social events and occasionally pair up for economic or social purposes -- with no commitments of course -- but they just do not marry, do not have children and generally are identified on the 1040EZ as Single.

Well, we can understand reticence towards rash jumping into things of course. And there needs be some sympathy for the lady fielding those calls from mother, the entire subtext of which reads inevitably "How come you are not married? When am I gonna see grandchildren . . .". Bear, however, could never be concerned with these sorts of things; he was constitutionally unable to comprehend. What he did have, was a problem with relationships and with women in general. At least in our humble opinion.

While looking (somewhat admiringly we admit) at the six-foot poster on Bear's living-room wall of Linda "Juggs" O'Reilly perched most fetchingly on a gleaming Harley Davidson we commented in our usual dry journalistic style that perhaps his issues needed to be otherwise addressed. What, after all, was he saving himself from marriage for, as it hardly seemed sufficient to count restoration of a 1957 Panhead to be worthy of lifelong achievement.

Upon this, he called me an insensitive lout and momentarily without reason, although the exact phrases he employed were somewhat rougher than that. After sulking a bit and acting hurt he pulled himself together and we went off to the East Bay Quirkyalone Social, which appears to have been a counterpart to a more glitzy affair over in Babylon.

At this affair, like the one across the Bay, the chief party game involved composing a list of true past quirkyalones as distinguished from such people as Emily Dickenson -- who was definitely quirky and most certainly alone, but not one of the club by reason of being such an antisocial, um, prig (Bear's words, not mine).

We circulated among the people there, finding quite a mix of people and an even wider mix of reasons for being what they were, running the gamut from an accomplished Epidemiologist and member of Mensa named Diana (obvious reasons) to a guy named Hal, who didn't seem to mind having relationships with pretty much anyone and/or any gender, but didn't seem to be able to latch onto anyone because his socks, well, always smelled like they had missed the hamper. Then there was Susan, a neatly coiffed and immaculately dressed blonde who would like to enjoy sex, but for one problem.

"It's the fluids," she said. "If it weren't so damn messy all the time. There you guys go firing those things off all over the place ruining the sheets and then (shudder) there's the *sweat . . .*".

Still, in general, there were a fair number of attorneys, doctors, and a good helping of painters, musicians, writers, and a plethora of actors and performance poets who had very clear reasons for staying focused.

On the last circulation about the room I found Bear and Susan sitting close together on the couch, their heads almost touching while engaged in some very intense, and, at least for Bear, meaningful discussion. I thought it best not to

interrupt and I let myself out into the cheerful, rainy chaos of Chinese New Year. Hope, it seems, springs eternal.

So, wending our way between dripping urchins, small, papery explosions and one very soggy dragon, we travel home in jolly spirits to pour a stiff one or two and flip over the CD to play Bach's *Pervertimento for Bagpipes, Bicycle and Balloons, Opus 66*, all the while wondering just what is Susan going to do when she sees the Linda poster on Bear's wall.

(Excerpted from 2005)



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