

The Rules of Seduction

It surprised me that I felt aggressive towards him. I'd never met the man before. We had barely begun to speak. Yet I wanted to kick his face in. He was sitting opposite me on a red leather armchair in an Edinburgh pub almost exactly one year ago today - Valentine's Day. I can't reveal his real name, for obvious reasons, but it's fair to say he was, and still is Scotland's Casanova. He is reputed to have slept with well over a thousand women. His existence had been unknown to me until, on hearing about The Casanova Project, a friend suggested I talk to him. 'For research.' she said. 'You never know,' she said, 'he might give you an idea'.

At the time I'd ignored it. Graham and I had decided to tell this story. We'd shaped a narrative - all I had to do was imagine myself into the character. Observation is for sociologists. Besides, I thought, I can always draw on my own experience. I'm by no means irresistible to women, of course, but - I do ok. I do just fine. Somewhere in me, somewhere in my psyche, there must be a Casanova. In all men, surely? To write him is just a matter of... getting in touch with my inner lothario.

So I plugged away for a few months and got nowhere. It's tricky writing chat up lines destined to be spoken by a man labelled 'the greatest lover in history'. I may as well have been a monkey at the typewriter. Screeds of material was being produced but none of it rang true. None of it was, in fact, seductive. Which is why, against all my instincts, I finally found myself dialling his number and arranging to meet.

The air on Princes' Street hung half frozen in front of a low sun. The heat from shoppers' lungs condensed into wet clouds and steamed the windows of the card shops. It was that day of the year when dangerous un-nameable desires are made safe. When the base metals of lust, of need, and of longing are turned, by the alchemy of the greetings card industry, into the gold-leaf kitsch of love.

I asked him if he'd sent a Valentine's card. 'No,' he said. 'Received any?' 'A few.' he replied. 'Yeah, a few'. He reached into the pocket of his black leather jacket and drew out a small white card. He slid it across the table to me. I opened it and read. The red light of the pub fire played across the words. 'Roses are red. Violets are blue. I want to fuck and be fucked by - you.' I looked at him. His face was poker straight. 'Do you know who sent it?' I asked. He nodded his head towards the slim, dark haired young woman who was washing pint glasses behind the bar. She noticed him looking and caught his eye; a half smile lit her face before she returned to her work. It was at that moment that the sudden tug of aggression in my gut took me by surprise. I passed the card back to him.

I had fancied her. When I walked into the bar she had caught my eye. I had made a special effort to be pleasant as I ordered the drinks. And all the time, behind my back, she was lusting after - after this specimen, this skinny,

bespectacled piece of cocksure slag in front of me. 'Do you have any idea what you're getting herself into?' I wanted to yell at her. 'I - me - I could be good for you. But him - this - never.' The emotion boiled and died in an instant like milk in a pan. But its violence interested me. It was illuminating. The man I was talking to makes men angry. He makes them feel as though they're about to be stolen from.

DG One thing surprises me. I expected you to be followed around by legions of angry women. When in fact, so far as I can tell, the women you've been with remain... friendly.

C Steady.

DG Well, you know.... When they talk about you they're not aggressive. They're... sarcastic sometimes but in the end, if anything, it seems they adopt a wistful tone.

C I wouldn't know.

DG You're not curious? About how you're talked about, behind your back?

C No. I'm not interested in what people say behind my back. I think people tell the truth when they talk to you one on one. When they talk in groups they say what they think people want to hear.

DG Do you get a lot of aggression from men?

C Yeah.

DG What sort of thing? Violence?

C Rarely. More often it's a kind of low grade contempt whenever I'm in male company. I get taken aside quite a lot. Told that if I go near his friend, his sister, his daughter etc... that he'll kill me. There's a lot of moralising from men. These are guys who've all indulged in some deceitful adultery or other, maybe they even go to prostitutes - but, you know, I'm beyond the pale. I'm sick.

DG Does that surprise you?

C No. It's like Clinton. If you look at what's happening to Clinton at the moment. Most of the viciousness against him is coming from men. Kenneth Starr comes down on him like the wrath of Jehovah or something. And all these men are asking - 'Why do the women keep saying they'll vote for this guy?' 'Don't they see he's evil?' But the truth of the matter is - Clinton likes women. He's actually interested in them. He likes their company. He promotes them in his cabinet.

Women can tell that. The truth of the matter is that most men don't like women. They like being looked after and they like being fucked but they don't actually like women. They're not very interested in them. Whenever they can, straight men seek out the company of other men. If you like women you're seen as being a bit queer. A bit sissy.

His eyes were cast down towards his distorted reflection in the black mahogany of the table. It was as though he was peering down into its darkness hoping to catch a glimpse of her. But I read too much into things. He was probably just tired. He was probably just shy of meeting my gaze.

Suddenly his phone went off. He apologised and checked who was calling him. 'Do you mind if I take this call?' he asked. 'It's important.' I nodded. He opened the notebook that was sitting in front of him. 'The rules you asked for. I wrote them up last night.' He pushed the book towards me and then wandered towards the back of the pub where he could talk to... whoever it was.

I couldn't help trying to imagine her. I saw some London executive, up in Edinburgh for a meeting with the suits at Scottish Widows or wherever. She's suddenly bored with the talk about interest rates and rugby matches and she sneaks out to call Casanova. Later I told him the picture I had conjured and he said it was essentially true except that she ran a fish farm and had come down from Orkney. They'd met on millennium night when he happened to be up in Kirkwall. Amongst the fireworks, they'd shared a night he described, maddeningly, as 'transcendental', and the next morning they went their separate ways into the year 2000. I wanted to hit him again. What was it? Fear? Did I envy him? Did I despise him?

I looked over his notes. I'd asked him, as a research tool, to give me a list of techniques. He was sexually successful on a grand scale. How did he do it?

This is what he had written:

¹Be in love.

You are absolutely interested in her. In no one other than her. Everything about her has bewitched you. You want to know her. You cannot fake this. This has to be real.

²Be honest.

If you want to have sex with her, tell her. There is a difference between lechery and seduction. The lecher, when he says, 'I want to fuck you', wants to make the woman feel uncomfortable. He wants to express how much he despises her. When I say it, I mean it. It carries no threat, coming from me, because it is an expression of desire, never an expression of hostility.

³Be Sensual In your language, in your thought, be alive to the form of things. Two people who look at a painting together, or who discuss the shape of the rocks on a hillside, or who argue about the merits of a particular novel... are seducing each other: their rhetoric is the language of touch. Note: There is a glass factory in Provence where you can watch the workers blow the molten glass straight from the furnace. This is very seductive. You could try it.

⁴Don't Be Beautiful, Be Talented.

Serge Gainsbourg, Georges Simenon, Keith Richards, Shelley, Lord Rochester, Casanova. None of history's great lovers have been good looking. They have all been talented.

⁵Let yourself be looked at.

At some moment you will be unselfconscious. You will engage yourself in some task which will absorb your total attention. At this point she'll look at you and, whatever her feelings for you, she will feel them in an intense, distilled form. She will always attempt to recover this moment, this first glimpse, but never will. Note: The same works in the negative. This could be the moment she leaves you.

⁶ Place yourself in the presence of death.

Funerals, hospitals, television news reports of disaster, aircraft, rock climbing.

⁷ Have a reputation.

The presence of the possibility of sex is a powerful aphrodisiac. If she knows about your reputation, the possibility hangs in the air. Any dyke will tell you that straight women are forever propositioning out dykes in ways they would never approach closeted women.

⁸Understand pleasure.

Simply because there are other things in life besides pleasure does not mean that it's sinful to become expert in it. To know its possibilities, to seek it and take it where you find it.

⁹Never blame.

Never, ever, ever talk about other women in anything other than flattering terms. You will not judge her. You will not blame her. You will not compare her.

10 Keep secrets.
Not your own. Hers.

DG I've looked at this and... I'm a bit shocked.

C You asked for it.

DG No, I asked... I mean, it's brilliant for the play I'm doing. I mean, as a human being... that you can be... what's the word...

C Detached.

DG Yeah. Detached. That you can be detached enough to...

C I've been thinking about it a lot recently. It's been on my mind.

DG So... this... you've been working on it?

C I've been looking at things. Trying to understand them. I - I'll be honest with you - I'm not sure I'm able to be the kind of person I am, anymore. It's tiring. It feels like I'm a fucking spy or something, and I have no - you know - no public life. I believe in it, I believe in what I do but I'm out on my own. I'm in the cold. I want to stop.

DG You're concerned about the morality of sleeping with hundreds of women?

C No. I'm concerned about the weight of responsibility. As long as I exist, then the marrieds will remain married. They will not tear each other apart. I'll have to stop sometime. Perhaps that sometime is coming soon.

DG You think you might meet the right woman?

C I might.

The list, I think it's fair to say, took me aback. Hand-written in blue ink, a sharp edged, spidery hand, legible but indistinct. Words seen through a fog. But the force of what he'd written, the sheer... baldness of the analysis. I suppose I had expected hints and tips - instead he'd given me something almost like a philosophy, a way of living. How can a man achieve such... distance in the face of such intimate experiences.

I paid for the drinks and left. All along Lothian Road the restaurants and clubs were gearing up for the couples who would, in a few hours, display their love in corner tables, over champagne, on the dancefloor, in hands held in the cinema darkness. It was difficult not to be moved by the innocence of it. And yet desire, and desire's violence remain evident in the bloody detritus, the tears and shouts and bruises that litter that curved nicotine stained finger of the city every Friday night.

He buttoned up his leather jacket and walked. I didn't call him again. I've heard nothing of him since. I haven't asked. He scares me, I'll be honest with you. So I don't know if he gave up, moved on, or if he's still out haunting the cities. Maybe he'll come to see the play. If he does, I hope he likes it. And I hope that whoever's with him, be she the right woman or not, I hope she likes it too.