

ADVICE TO YOUNG LOVERS ON VALENTINE'S DAY

A monologue

By JANE CAFARELLA

SYNOPSIS: OLIVE, 50-60s, a flower-shop owner, gives romantic advice to her last customer of the day on Valentine's Day

Oh, You're lucky! I was just leaving. No, that's fine. Come in.

I'm afraid there's not much left to choose from. (*She turns the lights back on as she speaks*). I've been up to my eyeballs in roses and teddy bears. No. Please, take your time.

Mostly phone and online orders actually. The worst thing is the people who send flowers to themselves. Frankly, I'd rather buy myself jewellery. It lasts longer.

We don't get many young people like you. They'd rather get a tattoo. Diamonds aren't the only things that are forever.

The pink roses? The last bunch. Lovely. Pink roses mean innocent romantic love. And you're young so that's perfect. I hope he's as romantic as you are.

She? Oh. Well, I hope she spoils you.

She wraps the flowers as she talks.

I do love Valentine's Day. I got married on Valentine's Day, you know. It's such a romantic day!

I guess that's why I find that particular wedding anniversary so easy to remember. The other two I keep forgetting.

I've been married for almost 30 years – but not to the same person.

The first wedding occurred when I was too young to know any better. He proposed in the car on the way to a meeting. I seconded the proposal; it was passed and we drove on. It was an early sign of how much romance I had to look forward to.

I spent months choosing that dress. Cream lace - size 10. I carried yellow roses and wore gardenias in my hair. We got married in his parents' backyard. All the wedding photos had the clothesline in the background - another sign of things to come.

He turned up wearing the only thing that was left on the rack at the hire place the day before: a purple velvet suit with matching velvet bow tie.

And that's about as much effort as he put into the relationship for the next seven years.

I guess that's why I don't have much nostalgia for that particular marriage.

My second wedding - cream lace again, size 14 - was the epitome of romance.

We'd only known each other a few months when it became clear that we should spend the rest of our lives together. So, we flew to the Las Vegas where we married on – 24 years ago today!

Red roses.

It was on our honeymoon that it became even clearer that this was mistake.

“But I made you feel like a million dollars, didn't I?” he said after I walked out.

He did... but it cost me thousands.

By the third wedding - midnight blue satin, size 20 - I was older and wiser.

By that time, I had a son - but not to either of the men I'd married. I carried pink roses – and our daughter, who arrived six months later.

She smiles.

Third time lucky.

Bill. We're still married, 20 years later and to each other, so I guess this is the real thing - perhaps because this time I spent more time choosing the husband than the dress?

But I'd be less than honest if I didn't admit that marriage is hard work.

It's hard to keep the romance alive when neither of you bothers to apologise when you fart in bed...and when “hanging out” together just means not holding your stomachs in. And when the chief topic of conversation is the kids - or money.

So... after three “I dos” and two “I don't any-mores” here's my advice to young lovers on Valentine's Day:

First of all, size matters. The size of your bank balance, that is. Don't marry for money, but don't marry at all unless you both have some prospects of getting any - especially if you have kids. You can hand down booties but you can't hand down education.

Secondly, familiarity breeds contempt, so perhaps the ensuite next to the bedroom is not the ideal situation after all.

Thirdly, get a life, and not just a family life. Do something for yourself occasionally - apart from going to the dentist or the gynaecologist. Nobody wants to be married to a martyr or a bore.

Fourthly, don't wait for Valentine's Day to say, “I love you”. Better still, don't just say it, show it - and not just today but *every* day. But don't bother with trashy bears with red satin hearts. Show it by sharing responsibilities, not just your bed.

Love is like paint. It wears off. You need to keep applying it.

And finally, if you must celebrate, remember that St Valentine was clubbed to death and died a martyr.

So, if you still want to sanctify love and marriage, why not commemorate St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) on October 15 – the patron saint of headache sufferers? She never married, but it seems she had a mystical insight into the pressures of married life as her symbol is a heart, an arrow and a book.

There you go. (*She holds up the flowers, all wrapped and tied with a ribbon.*) No – don't worry. I've closed the till anyway. Have a lovely evening. Happy Valentine's Day!

She goes to leave – then hesitates, returning to the counter. She picks up a small card...the kind that's attached to flowers when they're delivered, thinks for a minute and with a wicked grin, enunciates as she writes:

ROSES ARE RED,
VIOLETS ARE BLUE
IT'S BEEN 20 LONG YEARS
AND I'M STILL STUCK WITH YOU.

She turns to leave, reconsiders, and then takes another identical card. She stops to think, then enunciates, this time softly, as she writes:

ROSES ARE RED
VIOLETS ARE BLUE
IT'S BEEN 20 LONG YEARS
AND I STILL LOVE YOU.

She places both cards on the counter so the audience can see the backs of both and surveys them, thinking.

She picks up a pink rose and goes back to consider the two cards, deliberating between them.

She takes ONE, then picks up her handbag and quietly exits.

The phone rings.

We hear the answering machine click on.

OLIVE'S VOICE is heard:

Hello...Posy's Flower Boutique...Happy Valentine's Day.

Your call is important to us...please leave a message after the beep and we'll get back to you as soon as we can.

OS: BILL's voice.

Hello Olive, love, what time will you be home? Thought we might go out for a change.

After all, it is Valentine's Day.

ENDS

Approx. 900 words

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