

Dear Abby
by
Joanne Steel Yordanou

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DEAR ABBY: *You are my last hope. I am still looking for a man I met in LaCrosse, Wis., during the Second World War. We only spent one evening together, but it was the most wonderful evening of my life. All I know is he had HERB tattooed on him and he's from Sioux Falls, S.D. I thank you.*

CAN'T FORGET HIM.

DEAR CAN'T: *He went that-a-way.ⁱ*

Dear Abby,

In response to your vague, but humorous answer, “He went that-a-way,” I took it upon myself to find my mystery man. Your advice had more to do with entertaining your readership than with giving me helpful guidance. Therefore, with only the sweet memory of him on that one delicious night together and his tattoo, “HERB,” I headed to Sioux Falls. The bus ride was five dreary hours. While I looked out the window, we crossed the Mississippi River and I daydreamed of what I might say to him—if I found him, that is. This might have been another question of you, Abby, if you hadn’t given me such a pithy response.

By the time we were on the Interstate 229 (the long stretch of highway into Sioux Falls), I had formulated three possible scenarios. The simplest and most disappointing conclusion was that I don’t find him. The tattoo could be his father, grandfather, or child’s name, so I planned to first search all the tattoo parlours of Sioux Falls. You can appreciate the adventure I imagined that to be!

The second conclusion was that I find him and we don't need to say anything; the sheer remembrance of one steamy night will come back to him instantly, having harboured it as long as I have, and he will gather me up into his arms and kiss me madly.

The third conclusion could be that he's married, happily or otherwise, and my appearance would be heart wrenching for us both.

Having arrived at Sioux Falls, I began my search at Ronny's Ink Spot. A bulky, tattooed man, his baldness wrapped in a doo rag, tells me my mystery man has since added the names June and Mikey to his other arm and chest. I tottered out of there in my powder blue pumps and leaned on a lamppost. The tattoo (ac-hem) artist also told me my Herb is actually one Jim Dixon, an officer of the Navy and that the Dixons lived over on South 4th Avenue by McKennan Park. Though I hadn't yet asked, he offered this information freely and renewed my desire to find Jim. I caught my breath and straightened my powder blue pillbox then headed to the nearest phone booth. There were ten Dixons in the Sioux Falls phonebook, one being J. Dixon, at 1410 S.4th Ave. It was so easy to find him, Abby; I needn't have bothered writing in to you in the first place.

I arrived at #1410 on the tree-lined S. 4th Avenue and paid the cabby, asking him to wait there until I gave him the nod to leave. In his rear view mirror, my reflection revealed my blonde curls in place beneath my hat, but I looked somewhat fatigued from the journey. With red lipstick applied, I took a deep breath in and opened the cab door.

The day was bright; too warm for my wool suit this end of September Saturday. Across the street laid a green expanse of a park with tennis courts with the sound of rackets swatting balls about at a rhythmic pace. I walked with some amount of confidence up Jim Dixon's hosta-

lined pathway and rang the bell. My palms did perspire so, as I rang the bell. In all the different scenarios, I hadn't envisioned the following one.

Behind the door, I heard the thumping of a child running towards me, and then with the click of a latch, the door opened. A boy stood before me, maybe four or five years old, with a shock of red hair. "It's my birthday today," he announced, and wiped his nose on the back of his hand.

I leaned over. "And how old are you today?" He held up his tiny fingers and counted up to four. "Four! My, that is a big number! Well, happy birthday, little chap! You must be Mikey." I was hoping I wouldn't meet June. He nodded. "Is your father home?"

Mikey looked behind him, then turned back to me and said, "He's in the yard with everybody at my birthday party. Do you want to come to my party?"

"Thank you, Mikey. Can you just tell your father someone is at the door to see him, please?"

The child ran off down the long hallway, leaving the door wide open, so I could see right through to the yellow kitchen. He ran out the back door and I prayed Mikey would not forget his mission amidst the whooping and hollering of his celebration.

Then, Jim appeared, at first sauntering down the hall, as though reluctantly meeting a sales pitch at the door, his short-sleeved shirt exposing his tattoos, his black trousers clinging to his svelte physique. I smiled and left a well-rehearsed expression of delight plastered to my face. He stopped midway, mouth agape. Then, with a check over his shoulder, he quickly advanced towards me, his dark sideburns still shorn in the straight line exactly as I remember.

“What the...is it really you?” He scooped me up into his arms and held me so tight I lost my breath. “My God!” Jim held me at arm’s length and simply gawked at me. Then, he laughed and shook his head.

“Yes, it’s me, Sandra,” I said, in case he’d forgotten.

“Sandra! Well, I’ll be damned! You...you look delicious enough to eat with that...thing on your head—like the cake we have out back.” His thumb flew over his shoulder.

I touched my hat, and smiled again. “Hello, Jim.”

“How on earth did you...? Well, that doesn’t matter now you’re here. Well, I’ll be a monkey’s uncle! I never thought I’d see you again...ever!” He chuckled nervously, shot a look over his shoulder again, and then took my hands and rubbed his thumbs over them. His wedding band flashed bright as a beacon on his finger; my fourth finger, obviously bare.

“Mph,” he emitted, then shook my hands once and released them before bringing his thoughtful gaze up to me. He opened his mouth and took a breath to say something.

“Jim!” A woman’s voice came from down the hall and she soon arrived at the door. “Jim, our guests are waiting. Hello,” said the woman, her auburn hair pulled back in a ponytail; blunt bangs curtained her forehead.

“June, this is Sandra, m-my second cousin from Wisconsin. Cousin Joe’s first wife,” Jim lied easily, as a way of explaining me.

“Oh, won’t you come in, Sandra?” she said. “We’re having a party out back for our son. Pure bedlam, of course, but you’re welcome to some cake.”

“Thank you, no. I’ve just...” I turned. The cab was still waiting. “I thought I’d stop for a quick hello. I have to catch a bus back to LaCrosse, but thank you.”

“Well then, it was a pleasure meeting you, Sandra,” and she shook my hand, warmly, and then retreated down the hall, her full, peach-coloured skirt swishing side-to-side. I looked back to Jim, who had pulled his pursed lips to one side of his face in consideration.

“Second cousin?” I asked and raised my eyebrows.

“You sure look good, Sandra, but as you can see, I’m married.” He smiled in a good-natured manner, the same way he did on leave during the war; the way he grinned as he climaxed on top of me.

“That’s okay Jim. Now that I’m your cousin, we can see each other more often.” I leaned in and kissed him, not at all as a cousin would, and I could feel an exhalation of surrender come out of his nose. He didn’t embrace me, as I had expected. Instead, he pulled back from me, his eyes searching mine. Fear and passion floated in those pools of blue.

“Yes. Oh God, yes! Forget the taxi,” he said, and waved it away. “You can stay here, in the guest room, Cuz.”

So, you see, Dear Abby, your flippant remark spurred me on, and now Jim has come *this-a-way*.

Warm regards,

Can’t forget him.

¹ http://www.buzzfeed.com/ellievhall/memorable-dear-abby-columns?utm_term=.rtwmYLkDB&sub=1974824_817057#.bixePNLAM