

DEAR ABBY: *You are my last hope. I am still searching 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 that he has HERB tattooed on his arm and lives in Detroit. I thank you.*

CAN'T FORGET HIM.

TORONTO

DEAR CAN'T: *He went that-a-way.¹*

Dear Abby,

In response to your vague yet humorous remark, “He went that-a-way,” I took it upon myself to track down my mystery man. Your advice seemed more geared towards entertaining your readership than providing me with useful guidance. So, armed only with the sweet memory of our one delightful night together and his tattoo that reads, “HERB,” Last autumn, I made my way from Toronto to Detroit, a dreary seven-and-a-half-hour bus ride, I might add.

I gazed out the window as the bus crossed the Detroit River on Ambassador Bridge, daydreaming about what I might say to him—assuming I found him, of course. This could have been yet another question for you, Abby, had you not offered me such a pithy response.

By the time we reached the Greyhound bus terminal downtown, I had formulated three possible scenarios. The simplest and most disappointing conclusion was that I won't find him. Since the tattoo could have been his father's, grandfather's, or child's name, I planned to search all the tattoo parlours in Detroit. You can appreciate the adventure I imagined that to be!

The second conclusion was that I would find him, and we wouldn't need to say anything; the sheer remembrance of one steamy night would come back to him instantly, having harboured it as long as I have, and he would 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 in downtown Detroit, 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 Fairway by the golf club. 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 thirty or so Dixons in the Detroit phonebook, one being J. Dixon, at 850 Fairway Drive. It was so easy to find him, Abby; I needn't have bothered writing to you in the first place.

I arrived at #850 on the tree-lined Fairway Drive and paid the cabbie, asking him to wait until I gave him the nod to leave. In his rearview mirror, my reflection revealed my blonde curls in place beneath my vogue hat, but I looked somewhat fatigued from the journey. After applying red lipstick, I took a deep breath and opened the cab door.

The day was bright; too warm for my wool suit this end-of-September Saturday. Across the street, another Tudor-style home, apparently with a tennis court from the sound of rackets

swatting balls about at a rhythmic pace. I walked with a small amount of confidence up Jim Dixon's circular driveway and hosta-lined path and rang the bell. My palms did perspire so. In all the different scenarios, I hadn't quite envisioned the following.

From behind the solid arched door came the thumping of a child running towards me, accompanied by peals of laughter. Then, with the click of a latch, the door slowly opened. A boy stood before me, perhaps four or five years old, with a shock of red hair. "It's my birthday today," he announced, wiping his nose on the back of his hand.

I leaned over. "And how old are you today, dear?"

He held up tiny fingers and counted to four on them. "Four!"

"My, that is a big number! Well, happy birthday, little chap! You must be Mikey." I was hoping I wouldn't meet his mother, who must be 'June.' "Is your father at home?"

He nodded. 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. I prayed Mikey would not forget his mission amidst the whooping and hollering of his celebration, and leave me waiting there.

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, his mouth agape. Then, with a quick check over his shoulder, he quickly advanced toward me, his dark sideburns still shorn in a precise line exactly as I remembered.

“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. Then, he laughed and shook his head.

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

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

I briefly 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 he 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 more 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’s lie came easily, his 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 and an adult drink.”

“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 Toronto, 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, raising 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 while 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 the exhalation of surrender come from 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

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