

The Fiancé

(EXCERPT)

by
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CHARACTERS

Bea: 85, a widower from Maine who has just moved to New York City

Joan: 62, her daughter

Alex: 31, her granddaughter

Malcolm: 60, Joan's ex-husband and Alex's father

Doug: 80, Bea's neighbor

Lights up on an apartment in a retirement high-rise in Manhattan. Moving boxes are stacked everywhere.

Furniture from different eras fills the room - that thing that happens over time as items are purchased or passed down, and you have a mid-century end table with a late 70s sofa and an 80s ottoman. A visual timeline of a life.

BEA and ALEX sit at the dining nook, working on a laptop. JOAN unpacks boxes alone.

ALEX

What about him?

BEA

Nope. Golfer.

ALEX

Doesn't mean he's a bad person.

BEA

That's debatable.

ALEX

He looks nice.

BEA

There's a dog in that picture.

ALEX

That means he's affectionate.

BEA

Sure, but who wants to compete with a dog?

ALEX

This guy says he enjoys reading.

BEA

Can he see well enough to read? Doesn't look like he's long for this world.

JOAN

Can you do that later?

ALEX

I'm just setting Gran up so she can browse.

BEA

Have you done this yet, Joni? It's like shopping for men.

JOAN

I don't even order books from Amazon.

BEA

Why would you? I haven't bought a book in two years.

She holds up her Kindle.

BEA

This thing? This little slab of metal? Holds ten thousand books. Can you believe that?

JOAN

Call me old-fashioned, but I like to find books in bookstores and men in bars.

BEA

Oh, this is much better than a bar. You need to see a man in the daylight.

JOAN

So I can see his horns and scales?

BEA

You haven't picked the ripest pumpkins in the patch.

ALEX

There are lots of divorced and widowed men on here.

JOAN

Oh, well, now you've tempted me, let me at it.

BEA

We're social creatures, Joni. There's nothing noble about being alone.

ALEX

Save it. I've told her a million times. Let's do your profile. What do you want your name to be?

BEA

My name's Bea.

ALEX

You shouldn't use your real name.

BEA

Why not?

ALEX

No one uses their real name.

BEA

What happens when some man picks me up for a date and I say, "By the way, my name's not Veronica."

ALEX

Maybe add something to it. Like, Bea Sting?

BEA

Bea Sting?

ALEX

Or Honey Bea?

BEA

That's ridiculous.

ALEX

Honey Bea's taken. How about Honey Bea 85?

BEA

Is this honestly what people do?

ALEX

You need a fun name. Like an alter ego.

BEA

Well, my own ego suits me just fine, but if you think I should be Honey Bea 85, go ahead.

ALEX

All right. First question: what are you looking for?

BEA

Love.

ALEX

What kind of love?

BEA

With a man!

ALEX

The site wants you to be specific about what you're looking for.

BEA

It's a dating website. Isn't it obvious what I'm looking for?

ALEX

Like, a long-term relationship? A short-term relationship?

BEA

Well, any relationship with me is going to be fairly short-term. I'm 85.

ALEX

Or no strings attached?

BEA

What am I? A marionette?

ALEX

You know, like, casual sex, or...

BEA

That sounds good. Put me down for casual sex.

JOAN

Mom!

BEA

What? Where do you think you came from?

JOAN

Just...

She gestures towards Alex.

BEA

She's the one who said casual sex in the first place. I'll bet she's even had some.

ALEX

(beat) I'll just put short-term relationship. Um...what are your hobbies?

BEA

Well, I need to find some new ones now I'm not in Maine anymore. But for the time being, put down my volunteering at the high school. And the food bank. Going to the theatre. I want to see as much theatre as I can before my hearing goes.

ALEX

And this way, we'll find a nice man for you to see it with.

JOAN

What's the point in taking a date to the theatre? You don't talk. You just sit there.

BEA

But don't you like sitting next to someone in the dark? Feeling the heat of their arm? Hearing them laugh?

JOAN

Hearing them breathe. Shift. Snore. No, thank you.

ALEX

So the next question is: what would your ideal first date be?

BEA

An opera at the Met! Your grandfather hated opera.

ALEX

Aw.

BEA

He had other good qualities.

ALEX

Like what?

BEA

Flat feet.

ALEX

Is that code for something?

BEA

It got him out of the war. I'd have been a widow if he hadn't had flat feet.

ALEX

He might have made it.

BEA

Tall as he was? He'd have caught the first bullet. Everyone thinks they want a tall man, but a short man is less likely to be spotted in a trench.

JOAN

Words to live by.

BEA

I'm not kidding! Short men are highly underrated.

JOAN

And undersized.

ALEX

What's your favorite body part?

BEA

Mine or his?

ALEX

His, I think.

BEA

Well, I can't say the real answer, so let's just say eyes. Isn't that what you're supposed to say? Eyes?

JOAN

Don't they ask for any useful information?

ALEX

Such as?

JOAN

Written and verbal testimony from their last 5 girlfriends?
Not their star sign and what music they like.

BEA

It would be nice to meet a man who appreciates music.
Although people's definition of music these days can be very
broad. I met a young man at my dermatologist's office last
month.

JOAN

Define "young."

BEA

Forty.

ALEX

Did he ask you out?

JOAN

Alex!

ALEX

What? She doesn't look a day over 70.

BEA

Sunscreen. And yes, he did. I thanked him and said, "Darling,
you realize I was 45 years old when you were born?"

ALEX

What'd he say?

BEA

After recovering from the shock, he said, "How about Phil's
Chowder Shack? Friday at 8:00."

ALEX

Did you go?

BEA

Oh, no. He was listening to Eminem.

ALEX

Yeah. I don't suppose you'd like Eminem.

BEA

His lyrics are nowhere near as clever as Missy Elliott's. Now
if he'd been listening to Missy, I'd have happily accepted
his invitation to Phil's Chowder Shack. No, I thought to
myself, I can't go on a date with this man no matter how good
his skin is.

JOAN
Aren't there any dating websites especially for...?

ALEX
What?

JOAN
You know.

BEA
Old folks?

JOAN
I just don't want some opportunistic young stud--

BEA
Believe me, I'd be the opportunist in that situation.

JOAN
Seducing you for your money.

BEA
Darling, no one is going to get your money. That's locked away tightly until I kick it.

ALEX
Gran!

BEA
It's inevitable, darling. I'm going to die. Almost certainly sometime in the next 15 years.

ALEX
I don't like thinking about that.

BEA
It's a privilege to be able to think about it. It means I've lived a good long life.

ALEX
I don't want you to go anywhere.

BEA
Oh, no one goes all that far.

ALEX
Still. We're counting on you being here a lot longer.

JOAN
Which is why I don't want some drifter squandering your retirement fund on Nintendos and street drugs.

BEA

Oh, he wouldn't squander it on that. Cards and nightcaps maybe.

JOAN

I'm serious.

BEA

So am I. I'm not 15. You're treating me how I used to treat you.

JOAN

I remember.

BEA

So give me a little credit. You turned out okay.

JOAN

Did I?

BEA

You picked a good father for Alexandra. Shame about the leaving part, but nothing lasts forever.

JOAN

You'd think by a certain age, you could have an adult conversation with your mother.

BEA

It never changes. My mother passed when I was 62 - *your age, Joni* - and there wasn't a day she didn't make me feel 12 years old.

ALEX

I know what you mean.

JOAN

We have an adult relationship.

ALEX

Yes, technically I'm an adult.

JOAN

I don't treat you like a child.

ALEX

Uh...

JOAN

I don't. And if you're so eager to be an adult, you can help me unpack these boxes.

BEA

I'll take it from here, dear. Just make the words bigger like you did last time.

ALEX

You hold down the Command key while you hit the plus sign.

BEA

Okay, and how do I go to the next question?

ALEX

Hit the Tab key.

BEA

What does Tab mean?

ALEX

Tab. You know. Like, tabbing over.

BEA

Tabbing over?

ALEX

I dunno. Like...?

BEA

You're just moving down. Shouldn't it be called the Move key? Tab sounds like you're paying a bill.

ALEX

If you hit Tab, it takes you down.

BEA

That makes no sense.

ALEX

Neither do most things on the internet, Gran.

BEA

If the internet were a real place, we'd all be too scared to go there.

JOAN

So get off of it, and come help me.

Joan's unpacking a set of plates.

ALEX

Gran, those are beautiful!

BEA

Your grandfather bought those for me in Monterey. 1964. I saw them in a store and mentioned I liked them, and there they were waiting for me when we got home.

That's the kind of man you should be looking for, Alexandra. An attentive man is worth his weight in anything worth weighing. And whatever I asked him, whether it was to move heaven and earth or put away the beef stroganoff, he did it and never complained. Don't suppose this website can bring him back, huh?

JOAN

No, Ma.

BEA

Ah well.

Bea turns back to the computer.

BEA (CONT'D)

List one fun fact about you. Fun fact?

ALEX

Just something fun. Like your favorite color.

BEA

What does my favorite color have to do with anything?

ALEX

Well, it says a lot about you. Whether you're a green person or a red person.

JOAN

She means the color of your personality.

BEA

My personality's invisible.

JOAN

Hardly.

BEA

I don't care if a man is a green person or a red person as long as he has a reasonably sized member and a lust for life.

ALEX

Gran, you put me to shame.

BEA

That's why you're next.

ALEX

What?

BEA

Come on. We're doing you next. What do you want your name to be?

ALEX

Oh, no. I don't think...

BEA

You're the one who talked me into it.

ALEX

I know, but...

BEA

Where do you meet men?

ALEX

I don't.

BEA

So? The cupcake's not gonna ice itself.

ALEX

It's not just about sex.

BEA

You don't want to have sex with men in bars, Alexandra.

JOAN

No, it's much better to trawl the internet for men to have sex with.

ALEX

Oh, my God, you two, can we just...When I moved to the city, I joined a dating website, and the first person I saw was my boss. I don't want people I know to find me.

BEA

Isn't it better if you already know them?

ALEX

It's not for me.

BEA

Well, this is sure easier than things were in my day. In my day we didn't have phones, not even landlines, so if a man wanted to see you, he had to work. He had to FIGURE IT OUT and set a date to see you again or else - he wouldn't. There was no texting at the last minute to cancel, so if something interfered with a man's journey to see you, you were stood up! You ever heard that phrase? "He stood me up!" That really happened. So men had to make their feelings known, and make plans, and there wasn't all this texting and sexting and I don't know what. Take your ex-boyfriend.

ALEX

Gran, I don't--

BEA

I know. You don't want to talk about him. You're heartbroken. I know. Don't look so surprised. You're putting on a brave face and trying to hide it, but we can all tell.

ALEX

I'm not heartbroken.

BEA

Is there anyone in this room who isn't?

They look at each other. No one speaks.

ALEX

What are you saying?

BEA

I'm saying your ex-boyfriend moving back to Ireland would've been the least of your worries. If you had met him in 1912 instead of 2012, you'd have had to marry him on the spot, or you'd never see him again. You'd have had to go back to Ireland with him on a boat. And then you'd have been killed in the Easter Rising of 1916. And then where would you be?

JOAN

That's a little far-fetched.

BEA

Hush, Joni! Point is, in my day? That relationship never would've happened to begin with. We didn't have email and Skype. And no, you wouldn't have had to deal with these manchildren with their texting and sexting, but it isn't my day. It's your day, and despite its challenges, your day is better. The man you love broke your heart. Great! You can find another one. BY TYPING WORDS INTO A BOX. An old lady like me can, God willing, find someone not quite at the grave's edge to go see a movie. Or a play. Or an opera. BY TYPING WORDS INTO A BOX. This is the world we live in. And it's beautiful.

She holds up her Kindle.

BEA (CONT'D)

This little slab of metal? Holds 10,000 books. TEN THOUSAND.

JOAN

WE KNOW.

BEA

Well? It's magic is all I'm saying. If that isn't magic, I don't know what is. What about you, Joni?

JOAN

No, thank you. I'm enjoying the 10 minutes a woman gets between children in college and parents dying. Why would I waste that on a man?

ALEX

Come on, Mom. If Dad can do it...

JOAN

What do you mean "If Dad can do it"?

ALEX

(beat) Nothing. Just--

JOAN

Your father is online dating?

ALEX

Not anymore. At least, I don't think.

JOAN

He's seeing someone?

ALEX

Yeah. I thought you knew.

JOAN

No, I... You've met her?

ALEX

Yeah. She's--

JOAN

No. I don't want to know. That's...great he's seeing someone. That's...great.

Joan exits.

ALEX

Should I...?

BEA

Give her a minute. It was bound to happen sometime.

ALEX

I only met her once. Dad brought her to dinner. She's...really nice.

BEA

How old?

ALEX

42.

BEA

That's not so bad. At least she's 42 and not 22. It's always so tragic when you see a man and a girl eating dinner, and think, "He must be a good father," then he leans over and starts sucking her face. Don't ever date a man your father's age.

ALEX

I won't.

BEA

In fact, we'll put that on your profile. "No men who could have contributed to my genetic makeup need apply."

ALEX

Gran. I really don't want to do this.

BEA

Me neither.

Alex looks at her grandmother, and sees that her bravado has dropped.

ALEX

(beat) Oh, Gran. You don't have to.

BEA

I didn't want to leave Maine either, but...it's for the best.

ALEX

You want to talk about it?

BEA

No. I want to finish unpacking those plates. And cook our first dinner in my new apartment. And cheer up your mom now that she knows about your father's girlfriend, and...not think about losing the love of my life. Or even begin to think about finding another.

ALEX

Before we do all that, how about you set up my profile.

BEA

Really?

ALEX

Neither of us wants to do this, so let's do it together. I'll even let you choose my photo.

BEA

All right. What do you want your name to be?

ALEX

I don't know. Pick one.

BEA
World's Best Granddaughter 85.

ALEX
Funny.

BEA
Kidding. How about Maine Squeeze? Get it? Because you're from-

ALEX
I get it. That's corny. Or cheesy. Some food adjective.

BEA
Crabby.

ALEX
That's how I feel.

BEA
So then it's perfect. Now first question: what are you looking for?

END OF EXCERPT