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## **(Post)Modern Love: My Little Mate**

BY KATHLEEN GUTHRIE

Like any self-aware and psychoanalyzed single woman in her late 30s, I dreamed of meeting my soul mate. The last place I expected to find one was inside a cold, musty warehouse space that was packed floor to the ceiling with cardboard-covered computer accessories. The setting in no way resembled the Monet-like garden of my fantasies.

David, my darling and commitment-phobic boyfriend of almost two years, needed something for his G5—the latest unnecessary gadget or fancy wingding. I had no such need or interest, but, being a good, supportive girlfriend, agreed to go with him to Mac Mall on our way to dinner one unseasonably warm winter night.

The place, as usual, oozed low levels of testosterone. I wandered, randomly checking out new developments in virus protection and the various choices for the keyboard I probably needed to replace, having permanently disabled my arrow keys during an energetic game of Deimos Rising. David promptly engaged in a deep philosophical discussion about classic cars, guitars, the newest feature on Protools, or some other subject that held the sales clerk's rapt attention. I could hear that David's British accent had become more pronounced, indicating his obvious enthusiasm for the topic.

I was in for a long stay.

In the center of the display area was a round, low-to-the-ground bar where slick and shiny new models of Macs and PCs attempted to entice me with their charms, not unlike a row of slot machines in Vegas. Squat, cloth-covered stools shaped like oversized champagne corks surrounded the bar. I balanced myself on one near the center, feeling like the mom at a parent-teacher conference who, with whatever dignity she can muster, squishes herself into a first grader's desk.

What to do, what to do? Writing a fake e-mail held no appeal, nor did doodling with the latest greatest edition of Adobe Illustrator. But, hey, a chess game. I could do that. In fact, this seemed to be the perfect opportunity to practice.

A beautifully cut glass chess set had been among the many gifts that Christmas, and David had started teaching me how to play. He took it easy on me in our first few games and I was determined to improve. Googling “chess” led me to Web sites that defined the different playing pieces, moves, and strategies. A pawn can only move forward, one space at a time. The bishop is restricted to diagonal moves. The King, well, you’ve got to protect him at all costs. And the Queen, like the female in most relationships, is the strong one.

I knew I had no chance of outsmarting my computerized opponent, but playing would allow me to practice, commit some things to memory, and it would kill the time.

I played along for about three minutes, a little bored since Mr. Computer beat me unmercifully at his first opportunity. “Check mate,” he droned in his inhumanly digitalized voice. But I was absorbed enough that I didn’t at first see the approach of a quiet observer. Rather, I felt him. A little boy, maybe about 6 and small for his age, had eased up alongside me, watching intently.

“Do you know how to play chess?” I asked.

He shook his shaggy, due-for-a-trim, dark brown mane.

“Would you like to learn?”

“Okay,” he said quietly, nodding so that his long bangs fell into his shy brown eyes.

I began with some basics—which was about as much as I knew—demonstrating how the pawns and the knights and the other pieces moved. He soon took over the mouse and made the moves himself after we discussed the strategy of each.

Mr. Computer was a ruthless opponent, not at all like the parent who “cheats” at Candy Land, losing every time so his child can develop confidence and a love for the game. But each time our King surrendered, my teammate and I clicked “new game” for another chance. We would have lost a fortune gambling. As we focused on the chess screen, I noticed he had moved his small left hand onto my leg. He leaned his head lightly against my shoulder, and then, almost imperceptibly, he moved into my lap. I caught a whiff of his mildly sweet, slightly metallic little boy scent, when...

“Son?”

Like a bird fleeing the nest, he hopped off my lap in answer to his father’s sharp call. But soon he was back.

“My dad says I can play s’ more,” he announced with a grin that lit up my whole being.

And so we did. I did most of the talking, although our words were few. He commanded the mouse. In perfect symbiosis, we made a great team. It all felt so easy, so natural, almost primitive, which is ironic considering we were playing a game that was thousands

of years old on a piece of technology that would be outdated before we left the store. Maybe we had known each other in a previous life; maybe he was my soul mate and this was our one predestined encounter in this lifetime. I never learned his name, nor did I give mine. Formalities seemed unnecessary.

Too soon, David signaled that it was time to leave. He had long ago selected and paid for his item.

I thanked my young companion for playing with me and made my way out of the store, nodding to his father, who had also finished his business. Both men had been quietly observing us, allowing us our little time together.

I wondered why this sweet child came to me. Did he feel I was safe? Did I look nice or maternal or helpful? Or like I would be fun to play with? What attraction had drawn us together?

Untapped emotions and biological yearnings churned through me as I cradled myself in the soft seat of David's convertible. "You really should have kids, you know," he said, starting up the engine that would make all further conversation inaudible.

I know.

\*\*\*Freelance writer Kathleen Guthrie lives in San Francisco with two dogs and a great man (not the guy in the story).

Posted by MadlyDeeply and LoveNPotatoes at 9:41 PM  
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[Hot Cup Lutheran, August 27, 2009 at 4:53 PM](#): What a beautiful post... even my doggie, layin' here next to me grunted in agreement!