

My Funny Valentine

As first dates go it was not going spiffingly well – to be completely honest in terms of laughs , it was right up there with my Gran's funeral.

I'd made the monumental mistake – with emphasis on mental – of letting my flatmate Jill know that I didn't have a date for Valentine's day. Or even anyone to send a card and of even more concern I wasn't expecting to get any either, and by that I mean cards... obviously.

"Oh that's alright" she'd said in a voice that sounded suspiciously like Minnie Mouse – "Stephanie's on her own too....she's a right laugh - you'll get on famously"

More likely infamously I suspected.

However, before I could protest or ascertain exactly why this 'right laugh' Stephanie was going to be alone on this romantic occasion, it was all arranged

What an idiot I thought as I sat nervously and feeling rather self concious opposite 'just call me Steph'

She was undeniably attractive but so far she was as much of a laugh as having root canal – without an anaesthetic by the maniacal dentist in 'Shop of Horrors'

Inevitably, being the evening of the 14th, the restaurant was packed and we were surrounded by loved up couples gazing into each others eyes across tables covered with roses and, god help us, bowls of love heart sweets.

There was also a hint of proposals about to take place – and some of them might even have had to do with marriage.

Although presumably not the table where the lady had just chucked a glass of prosecco over, her soon to be ex boyfriend, before storming out.

To break the embarrassing silence at our table I suddenly blurted out "I used to work in a circus"

"What?"

"Oh I wasn't in one of the acts....I was the only one who could " get the tent in the bag"

"Clown more like "she responded, but there was just the hint of a smile

"It was just a joke"

"Only just" she replied, but with a very slight grin

"Interesting you should say that" I continued "There were these two cannibals eating a clown...and one said to the other "does this taste funny to you?"

This time Stephanie did actually giggle and the couple on the next table laughed, albeit somewhat sympathetically I thought.

Obviously their conversation had been as stilted as ours...or perhaps the bloke was simply using the distraction to avoid getting shiraz down his frontfor making the wrong sort of proposal.

Further encouraged I continued "I took my 5 year old daughter on a 'take your kid to work day', she didn't look happy and asked me " Daddy, where are all the clowns you said you worked with?"

I quickly added, "I don't really have a 5 year old daughter"

Stephanie looked relieved

“She’s actually 13”

Smiling Steph held up her hand as I started to tell another circus joke about the trampoline artists from Prague.

“Enough” she said “I’m glad Jill told me you didn’t have a daughter”

We grinned stupidly at each other and the rest of the meal did turn out to be fun and I was reminded of Victor Borge who said that ‘Laughter is the shortest distance between two people’

After I settled the bill I walked her home and despite her warning I mentioned that the trampoline act was known as the ‘Bouncing Czechs’

She raised her eyebrows and shook her head this time, but more in amusement – at least I hoped so!

As I was about to say goodbye she asked me if I’d like to come in for a cup of coffee

Stupidly I replied “I don’t drink coffee”

“Good” she replied “I haven’t got any” and took me by the hand...it was one garden path I really didn’t mind being led up!