

BAGELS by Art Shulman

TIME: The present

SETTING: Jake's living room in an apartment

AT RISE: RACHEL, in a very large bathrobe, folds the bedding that had been on the couch. WE hear JAKE, in the kitchen, humming. JAKE enters with a bagel on a dish..

JAKE

It's still snowing.

RACHEL

I've never seen it snow this hard so early in November.

JAKE

I'm glad you stayed, Rachel.

RACHEL

I only stayed because it's dangerous out there. Someone could easily slip and break a hip.

JAKE

You have nice hips.

RACHEL

You could have complimented my smile. (*SHE displays a broad, but fake, smile.*) It would have been more accurate. Thanks for letting me use your robe.

JAKE

You look good in it. It belonged to Laura ... my wife. She was big! Fat, actually. It's in good shape and I never know when I'll need it for a woman staying the night. (*Beat*) Sleep well?

RACHEL

I slept fine. And, Jake, thanks for being considerate enough to let me sleep here. On the couch.

JAKE

I did explain that my temperamental back is not compatible with sleeping on that couch.

RACHEL

Of course. I do feel somewhat strange, sleeping over at the apartment of a man I've just met.

JAKE

Just sleeping, though. (*Beat*) Computerized matching is the wave of the future. But I think they made a mistake this time.

RACHEL

Agreed. The traditional ways of meeting people do have their advantages -- frequenting bars...

JAKE

Blind dates set up by well-meaning friends who think they know what's best for you.

RACHEL

Singles cruises.

JAKE

High society charity balls. Although the women I meet there are so snooty.

RACHEL

Bumping your cart at the supermarket into men not wearing wedding rings.

JAKE

Picking up hitchhikers.

RACHEL

Thanks for bringing me my bagel.

JAKE

This is my bagel. Yours is in the kitchen.

RACHEL

Is it still in the toaster?

JAKE

No, it popped up and I put my bagel in. Yours is on the counter.

(RACHEL exits to the kitchen.)

What's wrong?

RACHEL (o.s.)

Nothing.

JAKE

What's wrong, Rachel?

(RACHEL enters with her bagel.)

RACHEL

Your lack of caring, Jake.

JAKE

What lack of caring?

RACHEL

You could have said something like, “Rachel, I’m taking your bagel out of the toaster.”

JAKE

You were in here.

RACHEL

You could have yelled.

JAKE

I was humming when I prepared my bagel. It’s hard to hum and talk at the same time, much less hum and yell.

RACHEL

It’s OK. Your bagel is more important than mine.

JAKE

I put yours right where you could see it. In case you wanted a schmear.

RACHEL

Ladies apply dabs of cream cheese, not schmears. *(Beat)* And after I was caring enough to leave the good bagel for you!

JAKE

What “good” bagel?

RACHEL

Yours has more sesame seeds than mine.

JAKE

That’s because yours is an onion bagel.

RACHEL

It is not. See, it’s a sesame. I told you I chose the one with the fewest sesame seeds.

JAKE

Thanks for your supreme sacrifice. *(Beat)* But when I see a bagel I don’t make it a point to count how many sesame seeds are on it.

RACHEL

I’m not surprised. Ever since I’ve known you, you don’t seem to notice anything important.

JAKE

You’ve known me less than twelve hours. *(Beat)* The number of sesame seeds on a bagel is important?

RACHEL

Not per se. It's just an example. I thought you'd be more observant. eMatchmaker.com said we matched on just about all one hundred dimensions.

JAKE

As I recall, whether or not one counts sesame seeds on bagels was not one of the hundred dimensions. I can't believe you're making such a big deal out of a stupid bagel.

RACHEL

It's not really about "stupid" bagels. Or sesame seeds. In the grand scheme how important is a bagel? But what's important is how I feel. And you're saying how I feel isn't important to you.

JAKE

You're right. Everybody makes mistakes.

RACHEL

I don't hear any apology coming out of your mouth.

JAKE

I apologize for taking your bagel out of the toaster.

RACHEL

And not telling me.

JAKE

And not telling you.

RACHEL

You don't mean it.

JAKE

Of course I don't mean it.

RACHEL

But you're willing to apologize anyway, even if you don't mean it?

JAKE

That way, you can eat your bagel in peace. And I can eat mine in peace.

RACHEL

And this is your way of communicating? Instead of working through a subject of contention and arriving at a meaningful resolution, you just toss it off by apologizing insincerely.

JAKE

I apologize... for apologizing insincerely.

RACHEL

You don't mean that either.

JAKE

Of course I don't mean that either.

RACHEL

One of my mandatory requirements was I be matched with someone good at communicating.

JAKE

We're not very compatible, are we? I found that out last night.

RACHEL

Found out what?

JAKE

You communicated that we're not sexually compatible.

RACHEL

How did I communicate that?

JAKE

You said you didn't think sex was appropriate until a couple was together at least three months.

RACHEL

What's wrong with that?

JAKE

Three months? I think if two people are really compatible sex is appropriate on the first date.

RACHEL

Of course you think that. You're a man.

JAKE

You probably haven't had much sex.

RACHEL

I was married once.

JAKE

Yes, you told me you had two kids. So, we know you had sex at least twice.

RACHEL

They were identical twins. (*Beat*) I'm not the type to just hop in bed with someone after one date.

JAKE

Afraid of getting pregnant?

RACHEL

Of course not. I'm very vigilant about taking my birth control pills.

JAKE

Well, you led me to believe you were interested in "getting it on".

RACHEL

When did I do that?

JAKE

Last night I delicately touched your hair and you didn't move away.

RACHEL

What's that got to do with anything?

JAKE

Let's say a man wants to kiss a woman, but he's not sure if she wants him to yet. If he tries to kiss her and she says no, that's a turn off that ruins the possibility of any future romance. So, instead of trying to kiss her, he deftly touches her hair. That's not nearly as forward. Now, if she moves her head away, the romance can still develop. But if she doesn't move her head away, it's a sign she wants him to continue with his advances. It's a maneuver well known to men.

RACHEL

I didn't move my head away because I thought you wanted to remove from my hair the chunk of bagel you accidentally spit out when we were playing Scrabble and you told me how well you (*displaying how he spit the bagel*) spelled.

JAKE

Well, I thought it was because you wanted me to kiss you.

RACHEL

You were wrong.

JAKE

I know. Not only didn't you want to me to kiss you, you didn't even want to have sex with me. Unless you were playing hard to get. A maneuver well-known to women. And men know that. (*Beat*) Does anyone in your family have sex?

RACHEL

How do you think I became a grandma?

JAKE

So, grandma, why did you come back to my apartment last night?

RACHEL

I thought you were serious about playing Scrabble.

JAKE

I was. But I thought that after the game, since you came back to my place...

RACHEL

That I'd submit to you.

JAKE

I wasn't looking for you to "submit". Just participate. I thought we had some chemistry going. But it must have been some fluke, temporary arrangement of molecules that have since rearranged themselves.

RACHEL

I was a high school English teacher for over thirty years. Some decorum needs to be followed.

JAKE

I took you out to dinner, didn't I? Paid for the whole meal. Except for the tip. *(Beat)* Which you insisted on paying.

RACHEL

I'm not cheap, even if I am on a tight budget.

JAKE

Didn't I willingly agree to go to the romantic comedy you wanted to see, instead of the war movie I wanted to go to?

RACHEL

It was a wonderful romantic comedy, don't you think?

JAKE

It was OK, but it was missing something.

RACHEL

What was it missing?

JAKE

A car chase. Explosions. *(Beat)* The whole evening I held doors open for you, treated you like a lady.

RACHEL

And then expected me to act unlady-like. Which I didn't do, most of the time.

JAKE

When were you unlady-like?

RACHEL

There was that erotic moment.

JAKE

What erotic moment?

RACHEL

I slept in my underwear. You saw me in my bra. My red bra.

JAKE

That's not my definition of sex.

RACHEL

You are consumed about sex.

JAKE

If I was consumed about sex I'd have gone out with one of those women who likes sex a lot.

RACHEL

What makes you think I don't like sex a lot?

JAKE

Well... three months.

RACHEL

But, after three months, I'm an animal.

JAKE

What kind of an animal?

RACHEL

You'll beg me to stop. You'll plead for some rest. I'll make your eyes pop. You'll be panting like a thirsty dog on a sweltering day. To keep the neighbors from being disturbed by my loud moaning you'll jump out of bed, escape to the kitchen, toast me a bagel and serve it up to me with cream cheese, lox, and onions, in the hope I'll leave your stud body alone for a few minutes.

JAKE

Really?

RACHEL

You think I'd lie? I'm no prude. I use the "F" word whenever I want.

JAKE

Okay, use it.

RACHEL

I only use it when it's appropriate.

JAKE

And when is it appropriate?

RACHEL

You'll find out in three months, if you're smart enough to stick around that long.

JAKE

Why three months?

RACHEL

Because we need at least that time to get to know each other.

JAKE

But we already know so much about each other. We both hate smokers. You're a social drinker, and so am I. You appreciate the English language and so do I.

RACHEL

You're right. I'm good at words. That's why I beat you at Scrabble last night.

JAKE

At least they matched us well in that respect.

RACHEL

Matched us well? I beat you by fifty points.

JAKE

It was luck. You drew all the esses and both blanks.

RACHEL

It wasn't luck. Proofreaders aren't as creative with words as English teachers.

JAKE

I was the editor. Vista Magazine is a very eclectic arts publication and I had to know lots of words from various fields of interest. Proofreading was just one of my duties.

RACHEL

Want to play Scrabble again once we're done with our bagels?

JAKE

Can we have sex afterwards?

RACHEL

No.

JAKE

I did it with Laura all the time. We found it was a good way to bond at the end of the day. First thing in the morning. At noon.

RACHEL

Then, why don't you have sex with her?

(SHE realizes what she has unfortunately just said.)

JAKE

Because I gave up being a necrophiliac five years ago.

RACHEL

I'm sorry.

JAKE

It was tough kicking the habit, but my support group has been terrific. Although members of Necrophiliacs Anonymous do smoke a little too much for my taste.

RACHEL

I'm sorry. Sometimes I say stupid things. I'm sorry about your wife.

JAKE

I'm OK now. I've even had a few girlfriends since she died. Know what I've found?

RACHEL

What?

JAKE

That if a relationship ends due to whatever reason, things can be done to compress the grieving period. For example, if your girlfriend dumps you, the grieving period will be much shorter if you rip all photos of her into shreds, picture by picture.

RACHEL

Some men are more "creative" with the pictures they have of the women they've been with.

JAKE

What do they do?

RACHEL

Post nude photos of their ex-girlfriends on the Internet.