

THE RENTAL
by Mark Harvey Levine

© 1998 Mark Harvey Levine
515 S. Los Robles Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91101
(626) 793-2287
markle9@hotmail.com

SONYA's apartment, early morning. There is a knock at the door. Sonya staggers out, half awake, tying on a robe. At her door is HAROLD, a 30ish, normal-looking man in a nice coat. He carries a bouquet of flowers, a clipboard, and a picnic basket.

HAROLD (*through door*)

Hello, Sonya? It's Harold!

SONYA

...Who?

HAROLD (*through door*)

Harold! Valerie sent me. Valerie Persky?

SONYA

Valerie...?

She opens her door a little. She gapes at all the stuff he has.

SONYA

Oh my God!!! What did she do?

HAROLD

(*handing her the flowers*) Happy Birthday from Valerie Persky. I'm Harold, your boyfriend.

He kisses her in a familiar manner, and enters.

SONYA

I...I...What?!

HAROLD

(*quickly*) Let me get this stuff in the fridge... Honey, did I wake you? I did. I'm so sorry. Sit down, relax, I'll be right back. Is this the kitchen? Great.

He exits to kitchen. Sonya grabs a baseball bat she has by the door.

SONYA

Excuse me! Excuse me! Hello? Who are you?

HAROLD (*O.S.*)

I'm Harold! Harold, your boyfriend.

SONYA

My boyfriend?!

HAROLD (*O.S.*)

Yeah... You know, for your birth--?

He reenters and sees her with the bat. He ducks behind the couch.

HAROLD (*cont'd*)

Aaaah! Don't shoot!

SONYA

...It's a baseball bat.

HAROLD

Alright, don't hit.

SONYA

I'm pretty sure I'd remember having a boyfriend.

HAROLD

From Valerie! I'm from your friend Valerie! Wait, wait...I come with a card.

He holds out a standard "enclosure card" which she grabs and opens.

SONYA

Well, this IS her hand-writing. (*reading*) "Sonya...what do you get for the girl who deserves everything? Well, you deserve a really great boyfriend, so I got you one, for today at least. Don't wear him out, ha ha. Happy Thirtieth! Love, Valerie." (*pause*) You gotta be kidding.

HAROLD

You had no idea I was coming. Okay, okay...this happens occasionally. Once they sent me to the wrong house; I thought I was gonna have to date an 80 year-old guy named "Lou"...

SONYA

(*waving bat*) They?! Who's they? What is this?

HAROLD

Wait! I'm your birthday present! From Rent-a-Boyfriend, Ltd.! ...Apparently, I'm a SURPRISE birthday present.

SONYA

Rent-a-Boyfriend, Ltd.?!?

HAROLD

I can explain, if you promise not to shatter my skull.

Still suspicious, she lowers the bat.

HAROLD (*cont'd*)

Thank you. (*the company speech*) "Rent-A-Boyfriend, Ltd., has been providing the finest in temporary romantic relationships to the discriminating woman since 1985." I've been rented to you for our sixteen hour "affaire de coeur" package. I'm sure you'll enjoy it, it's one of our most popular ones.

SONYA

I'm going to kill Valerie for this.

HAROLD

Listen, this is a generous gift. And I can promise you a relationship that, though brief, will create a burning, romantic memory that will shine in your heart to the end of your days. (*pause, she snickers*) They make me say that.

SONYA

So you're a...a gigolo?

HAROLD

No, no, no. A professional boyfriend. It's a specialized craft. There's six months of training, three months of supervised infatuation...

SONYA

Valerie rented me a boyfriend.

HAROLD

It's a very thoughtful present. She told me that...um, that you've had a lot of... disappointments in this area. Well, Sonya, you're about to have the most fantastically romantic day of your life.

SONYA

This is crazy...

HAROLD

(*really selling it*) Is it? Sonya, today you have someone who cherishes you the way you should be cherished. Who adores the way you curl your fingers in your hair, the way you move across a room. The way you hold a baseball bat. Someone who lives and breathes and dies upon the merest glance of your cobalt blue eyes...

Sonya's starting to crack.

HAROLD (*cont'd*)

...and all you have to say is yes, I deserve this. Yes, at long last. Yes.

SONYA

...Yes.

HAROLD

(whipping out a contract) Sign here.

SONYA

(signing) I don't believe I'm doing this. But you know what, I DO deserve it.

HAROLD

Of course you do. And initial here, and here.

SONYA

(initialing) After all the creeps, the bad dates, the blind dates, the personal ads, the-- *(Harold kisses her full on the lips the moment she finishes signing)* --mmmph!

HAROLD

Thank God we got that over with. Finally, I can hold you in my arms. Hello, sweetheart. Happy Birthday.

SONYA

Wh-- Okay. We've started, right?

HAROLD

Right. Your boyfriend has come to whisk you away on a fun-filled birthday celebration! I've got a picnic here I think you'll like. Salami and egg sandwiches! Chinese noodles in sesame oil! Chocolate Raspberry Mousse Cake!

SONYA

How do you know what my favorite foods are?!

HAROLD

Valerie told me. But remember, I'm your boyfriend. I know all about you. You like Louis Prima records and old Dick Van Dyke reruns. Your books are in strict alphabetical order. You never wear beige. You live in constant fear you've left your purse somewhere.

SONYA

My God.

HAROLD

But Valerie never told me you wake up first thing in the morning looking breathtakingly gorgeous. I thought that only happened in the movies.

SONYA

Wh-What? Oh God. I must look like hell.

HAROLD

You're stunning. Look at you. Your eyes are--

SONYA

Wait, wait...this is a little much for me right now, okay? I don't like to be cherished before my first cup of coffee.

He takes out a "travel-cup" of coffee and hands it to her.

HAROLD

Ah! I brought you some. Dark roast Kenyan. Your fav--

SONYA (*overlapping*)

--My favorite...of course. I don't believe this.

HAROLD

Sonya, my dear, this is just the beginning...

She sits stunned on sofa, sipping coffee. Harold starts to massage her feet. Sonya protests, then with an "I give up" wave, lets him.

HAROLD

First, I make you breakfast. Then it's off to Lavender Springs Spa, where you get a mud bath and a massage while I see how many sonnets I can compose about you. Then our picnic lunch in a secluded grove, --

SONYA

(*stunned, softly overlapping*) Uh-huh...

HAROLD

-- a drive along the coast, sailing in the bay--

SONYA

(*falling into his spell*) Yeah sure...

HAROLD

--Our reservations at La Coupole are for seven-thirty, and afterwards a horse-drawn carriage takes us to --

He produces two tickets from his pocket.

SONYA

The Eric Clapton concert?!!!! Oh my GOD!!! I love you!!!

She throws her arms around him. Then realizes what she's doing.

SONYA (*cont'd*)

I'm sorry! I mean...Wow. You ARE good. Are you sure you're just here for one day?

HAROLD

It'll be a day to remember.

SONYA

(*makes a little noise of disbelief*) I... gotta get dressed. Would you...excuse me for a minute? Don't go anywhere.

HAROLD

Of course.

SONYA

I'll be right back. (*as she leaves*) Oh my God...Oh my God!

She exits. He produces a dustbuster-type sweeper and begins to casually clean.

SONYA (*O.S.*) (*cont'd*)

So...um...Harold. Do you do this often? I mean...how many...uh, girlfriends do you--?

HAROLD

Sonya...right now there are no other women for me. I've never met anyone like you.

SONYA (*O.S.*)

Oh...my...GOD.

She hops in, half-dressed, putting on shoes.

SONYA (*cont'd*)

Well, I've certainly never met anyone like -- What the HELL are you doing?

HAROLD

Dusting.

SONYA

Don't! Don't...do that. Just...sit. Sit! Stay! You win. You are officially the best boyfriend I have ever had. Or ever will have.

She exits. He appears a little concerned over this last remark.

HAROLD

Really?

SONYA (*O.S.*)

Are you kidding? Gold medal, Boyfriend Olympics, One Day Sprint.

HAROLD

I was a little worried. We got off to a kinda weird start there, what with you swinging a baseball bat at me.

Sonya reenters, fully dressed.

SONYA

(*peevd*) You've been my boyfriend ten minutes, already we're reminiscing? Anyway, I didn't SWING it, I brandished it.

HAROLD

...in a threatening manner.

SONYA

How do you "brandish" in a non-threatening manner?

HAROLD

All I'm saying, is, is, we started off on the wrong--

SONYA

What the hell did you expect, a strange man comes bursting through my door, kisses me...you kissed me! You're lucky I didn't bash your brains in!

HAROLD

(*beaming*) We're having our first fight! Oh honey!

He hugs her.

SONYA

I'm not sure I'm ready for this kind of relationship.

HAROLD

I'm sorry, sweetheart. Let's forget about it.

SONYA

Yeah...yeah... we let it go too long...

He laughs. She leans back and relaxes into his arms.

SONYA (*cont'd*)

I have to admit, this is nice. Y'know, this is all I wanted. Just to be in someone's embrace. Is this too much to ask?

HAROLD

Absolutely not.

SONYA

You know what? I want to walk down the street swinging our arms like we're fifteen.

HAROLD

Okay.

SONYA

I want to sit at a restaurant and stare into each other's eyes and completely annoy everyone else.

HAROLD

You got it!

SONYA

I can't wait to show up at yoga tomorrow. You'll drop me off with a quick kiss, and then watch as I -- you're not gonna be here tomorrow.

HAROLD

Forget about tomorrow.

SONYA

It's just...kinda hard. Here I am, in your arms. And then you just leave? It's not fair. This is all I get? One really romantic day? For the rest of my life?

She starts to cry a little.

HAROLD

The nice thing about this kind of relationship is you KNOW when - - Sonya? Are you--? No--don't cry! Oh God.

SONYA

I'm okay.

HAROLD

No, crying's bad. There's not supposed to be any crying.

SONYA

Oh, I cry all the time.

He grabs a tissue and starts to dry her tears himself.

SONYA (*cont'd*)

I'm okay...

He hands her tissues -- and then more tissues, until she has way too many. He places them on her, floats them at her, etc. She laughs.

HAROLD

Much better. You know, I just discovered something. I can't stand to see you cry.

SONYA

Oh, Harold. You're very sweet, y'know.

HAROLD

Sonya...there's something else. ...I love you.

SONYA

What?!

HAROLD

I love you! Can't you see it in my eyes?

SONYA

(since she is wiping her eyes) Not at the moment, no...

She continues to wipe her eyes.

SONYA *(cont'd)*

(jokingly glances at him for a split second) Yeah, now I can. Got it. *(finishes wiping her eyes, then looks at him again)* You can't be serious.

HAROLD

You don't believe in love at first sight?

SONYA

Do you mean it, or is this part of the package?

HAROLD

I'm your boyfriend. I really love you.

SONYA

How can you love me?

HAROLD

How could I not? You're warm, funny, smart--

SONYA

Stop, stop. Look, I don't know if you're crazy, or I am, but--

HAROLD

Don't you deserve to be loved?

SONYA

Of COURSE I do. EVERYONE does. But this -- you just -- I mean, you don't REALLY really love me. You're doing this because Valerie paid you.

HAROLD

We have today, because someone paid for it, sure. But I do "REALLY really" love you. I love you, Sonya.

She stares at him. They move in closer...they almost kiss, but--

SONYA

Wait a minute. As presents go, this beats a basket of bath gels. But don't come in here telling me you love me.

HAROLD

But I do.

SONYA

Well, that's just swell! Where were you when I needed you? Like when my car was stolen. Or when my Grandmother died? I could have used a boyfriend! You weren't there! I had to deal with that alone!

HAROLD

Sonya, I --

SONYA

And are you gonna be there tomorrow or the next day when something really good happens and I want to tell you about it? You gonna be there?

HAROLD

No, I'm not gonna be there.

SONYA

You love me. Ha! You're just like all the other men.

HAROLD

No, I'm not! I'm a trained professional!

SONYA

I mean, yes, I like romance. Yes, picnics are fun. But I want someone who...wants to do laundry with me. Or do absolutely nothing -- with me.

HAROLD

We could do that too! I'm here to give you what you want!

SONYA

What I WANT is someone who not only knows my favorite coffee but also my soul. Love me? You haven't even MET me!

HAROLD

Listen, I thought I'd--

SONYA

You thought you'd give the girl a small thrill for once in her life?! I make my own thrills, darling. Hey, we're having our second fight!

HAROLD

I'm offering you love--

SONYA

No, thanks! Already got some! I've got my whole family! They drive me crazy, but they love me! And my friends -- I have great friends! THEY love me! My God, look what Valerie did for my birthday. I have plenty of love, pal.

HAROLD

Do you.

SONYA

Yes I do. And I sure as hell don't need a Don Juan wanna-be. Guess what, Harold, we're breaking up! I'll remember the ten minutes we had with great fondness. But y'know what? This isn't half a couple standing over here. Okay? I'm a whole couple all by myself. With a great family, incredible friends-- I even kind of like my job! Y'know? So if I end up meeting someone, fine! If I don't, ALSO fine! Got it? I don't need you!

HAROLD

No, you don't.

SONYA

You better believe I don't! (*still yelling*) Did you just agree with me?!

HAROLD

Yeah, I did. Because you're right. You don't need me. But if you ever find someone...who deserves to love you...I will envy him. Goodbye Sonya.

He exits. Pause. He returns, slightly embarrassed.

HAROLD (*cont'd*)

(*company speech*) "This has been a date from Rent-A-Boyfriend Ltd. If you've enjoyed our service, please...tell a friend."

With a curt bow, he exits. Sonya stands stunned for a moment.

SONYA

(*shouting after him*) Hey! I enjoyed your service! Now get back here and MAKE ME BREAKFAST!

BLACKOUT.