

**The God of Love
Will See You Now**

By Anthony Schmitz

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Seven Facts Concerning the God of Love

1. The God of Love has no recollection of a childhood.
2. The God of Love's earliest memory is of *La Traviata's* Venice premiere, in which the overstuffed but aptly named Fanny Salvini-Donatelli filled the lead role of a dying consumptive. The God of Love left the theater with the understanding that love is beautiful, tragic and ridiculous.
3. Despite tireless effort, the God of Love is incapable of fathering children.
4. The God of Love appears at first glance to be about 40-years old, but is commonly considered to be older or younger, depending on the beholder's desires.
5. Having provided the God of Love with his title, the Higher Powers issued no further instructions.
6. The God of Love has lived in 23 countries and speaks the local language fluently upon arrival.
7. The God of Love hopes that he is not immortal.

Abandon

The God of Love Gives the Dial a Twist

"Shirley, I am going to tell you something now."

"Go ahead, Vic. It ain't like you're competing with the radio. Ain't like you're competing with anything except the wind."

"These are not the best of times. I admit that, Shirley."

"You ain't doing so much worse than the other characters here."

"The other men in this camp are not the God of Love."

"You don't mind my asking, who around here *is* the God of Love?"

"I am surprised you would ask."

"Excuse me now, Vic. But here are a few things I do not believe about the God of Love. I do not believe the God of Love has a bedroom that is also his kitchen and parlor. I do not believe the God of Love sleeps on a mattress stuffed with bed bugs. I do not believe the God of Love has a slop bucket in the corner instead of an actual bathroom. I do not believe the God of Love lives in a Hooverville with dust blowing through all the many crannies."

"Shirley, my dear, the gods move in mysterious ways. I got nothing more to say about that."

"Vic, excuse me now for my language. But the gods are not that goddamn mysterious."

"Answer me this. Do you think everything that goes on in this shack is ... normal?"

"I could use some normal."

"I am talking about our marital relations."

"I'm giving it to you straight now, Vic, since you're pushing me. It ain't like you got two dicks, if you know what I mean. Excuse my language again."

"You are a tough nut, woman. You are forcing me to prove my point."

"You go ahead, do what you got to do, Mr. Victor Valentine. I'm not saying you're *deficient*, I'm just saying you have not necessarily reached the God of Love level in my mind. Whatever that may be."

"You are driving me to this. I am hitching another horse to the plow, so to speak. I hope no one gets hurt."

"I don't suspect many girls ever got hurt by big talk."

She whisked off her flannel nightgown and tossed it to the dirt floor.

"I'm giving my dial a turn, Shirl. Don't say you didn't ask for it."

"Dial away, fool."

"Maybe my stock certificates are good for nothing but lighting fires. Maybe my Ford is broke down and dead. But in this bed I am a millionaire. I tell you, these bedbugs are about to jump ship and run for cover. The dust itself is going to grow legs and hustle out that door. I hope the cardboard on the walls does not start on fire."

"Ain't you one for talk?"

"I am warning you for the last time. I am about to put my tongue here, and my big toe there, and I will twirl my pinky this way and my thumb that way and if you are lucky you will continue breathing."

During the next hour or so certain things occurred. Water in the tea kettle boiled though there was no fire under it. The alarm clock went off. A water glass shattered. The God of Love himself passed into unconsciousness. When he awoke, his ear felt like it had been bitten off. He touched it and his hand came away sticky. Shirley was face down on the mattress, her arms stretched out as if she had been tossed from an airplane.

"Shirley. Shirley."

"Uunnhhh."

"Say something."

"Is that you, Victor?"

"Baby, do I need to give the dial another crank? Or are you ready to believe?"

"How much more you got?"

"I don't believe I'm at ten, and my dial goes up past twenty."

She reached around, grabbed him and squeezed.

"Victor, I am not saying that you are surely, one-hundred percent certain, guaranteed-or-your-money-back, the God of Love. Maybe for instance there is some kind of special pecker powder you're dusting on when I ain't looking. But I do got to admit there is a possibility you got some extra-mortal thing going on.

"Nonetheless, you ought to explain to me, Vic, if you are the God of Love, why we live in this shithole like the poor people we are without two pennies to rub together and no prospect whatsoever for the future?"

"Damn, woman, I'm the God of Love. I am not the God of Wealth. I am not the God of Gracious Living."

"You know them?"

"You do not want to meet those boys."

"How do you know I don't?"

Revenge

The God of Love Says It's on the House

"What'll it be?"

"Something white. Chardonnay?"

"Red, I think."

"Excuse me?"

"Red. It's more... appropriate."

A pause. "Appropriate?"

"The season. The light. The situation." He gestured vaguely toward the window.

"What do you mean, the situation?"

"It's on the house."

"I should know better."

"No one knows better." He shrugged. "Just a minute."

He opened a door. She heard his feet on the stairs. Down. Up. He blew the dust off a bottle, then wiped it with a bar rag.

"Here." He set down a glass and poured.

She was reluctant to touch the glass. It was spotless, perfect. She reached for it anyway.

He stopped her. "Not yet."

"Look, it's been a long day."

"It should breathe."

"Why is this so complicated?"

"It's not so complicated."

"Compared to everything else, yeah, that's true."

"You want to talk about that?"

"Look, I just came in for a glass of wine."

"No problem." He polished the bar.

"I'm back from the lawyer. Trying to figure things out."

"Marriage?"

"How'd you know?"

"It's a bar. I'm an expert."

"You would be."

"Go ahead." He pointed at the wine.

She lifted the glass, drank. "God. What is that?"

"Border region. Bolivia and Argentina. Crushed by foot. By nuns."

"You're kidding."

"Never."

"It tastes like there's something in it."

He just cocked his head.

"So I'm home with the kids."

"Kids."

"Girls. Three and four. He's working. So he says."

"At what?"

"The secretary. If you want to know the truth."
"Hmm." He gave the bar another swipe.
"What about you?"
"You really want to know, I'll tell you."
"I asked."
"I'm the God of Love."
"That's a good one."
"It's all the same to me. People believe or they don't. Not my problem."
"And you're the bartender here. In your spare time."
"It's my place. Valentine's Café."
"So you're..."
"Victor Valentine. I get sent around. Here and there."
"Sent around?"
He glanced toward the ceiling. "The higher powers."
"Sure." She looked into her glass. "This stuff really has a kick."
"True enough."
She touched her forehead, felt a film of sweat.
"So Mr. God of Love..."
"Victor."
"Victor. What do I do? You should know."
"I'll tell you. If you want to know."
"Sure I want to know. I just came from the lawyer. I bet you're cheaper."
"Different coin. Different realm."
"But this is your racket, right? Love. Whatever that is."
"Exactly."
"So..."
"You know Jack Frost's?"
"The restaurant?"
"Barely. Anyway. In a half hour you walk in the door. You sit in the corner behind the bar. Your husband arrives with Janet."
"You know her name?"
"I know."
"You sure this is just wine?"
"It's not. Don't worry. Just listen."
"I feel like I'm burning up."
"Of course you do. So Dale walks in with Janet. Helps her with her coat. Pulls out her chair. A gentleman."
"Sure. With her. Prick."
"Waiter. Wine list. You wait for the drinks to come. He puts his hand on hers. There's something going on under the table. You okay with this?"
"This is nothing. Compared to what I imagine."
"Compared to what else actually goes on. Listen now. This is important. You can't do it halfway. You do it like you invented the word grievance."
"Didn't I?"
He chuckled. "Good. You get up. You knock over your chair. You march to their table. Her phone is next to her wine glass. You pocket her phone."

"I steal it?"

"You take it. Next you grab the table with both hands and flip it over."

"Lucky you're not the God of War."

"Pay attention. Here's what you say. Shout is more like it. *Here's my husband and the secretary he's been fucking while I sit at home with two kids.* You want to repeat that?"

"I think I got it. Here's my question. Won't they arrest me?"

"Nah. Nobody knows what to do in this situation. Everybody wants it to be over."

"Then that's it?"

"No. You've got her phone. You stand up straight. Take your time. Walk out the door. You go to your car, open her phone book send this group text. *Janet fucks my husband, Dale, while I sit at home with two kids.*"

"Then what?"

"Divorce him. Same destination. Different path."

"What's in it for me?"

"You want to forgive and forget, go to church. You want a life of passion, listen to the God of Love."

"I walked in here by accident."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"I won't regret this?"

"Sure you will. But you'll regret it more if you don't."

She thought about that. She checked her watch.

"I better get going," she said.

Constancy

The God of Love Meets His Match

"Mind if I share your bench?"

"No problem," said the God of Love.

He moved over. They sat and watched the ripples on the lake. Ducks squawked at the geese. Petals dropped from the blossoming trees.

"Name's Lou."

"Victor. Vic."

They shook hands.

"Those are some hot mitts you got there, Vic."

"That's me. Burning up."

"Me, I'm either freezing or pissing or both."

"Prostate?"

"Like a watermelon. Bladder the size of a walnut."

"They got drugs."

"I suppose they do." They both thought about that for a while.

"What you up to, Vic? Watching the girls?"

"The girls. The guys. The kids. The birds."

"Ecumenical. Your age, I'd be watching the girls. Cupid behind every tree on a day like this."

"People think that."

"What, they're wrong?"

"Fat kid in diapers with a bow and arrow? Let's say I doubt it."

"Okay. Maybe not literally."

"The love racket, believe me, you need professionals. Adults. For starters, you got your product, which isn't perfect. When is love not a mess? You remember those old billboards, Lou? Next time you need help, try calling a hippie. Well, next time you're wife-to-be two times you with your best man at the wedding, try calling a naked baby with a bow and arrow."

"What? That happen to you?"

"I know the guy. A work deal."

"Jeez. Okay, Cupid's off the table."

"Good."

"Anyway, I thought love sold itself. Like all the basics. Hate, greed. Happiness, to be fair."

"People think Coke sells itself. It's a brand. Somebody's got to work on the brand."

"You sound like you got the inside track on this."

He considered telling Lou that he was the God of Love. Usually that was more trouble than it was worth. He was trying to take the day off.

"I've thought about it."

"You want to hear something funny, Vic?"

"I could use that. It's been a rough week."

"My wife used to tell me I was the God of Love."

"I tip my hat, Lou. What did you say to that?"

"I didn't argue."

"You're a lucky guy."

"To a degree. Yeah. Who knows. Maybe she was right."

He looked at Lou. He wore a tweed hat and a frayed trench coat with stains on the lapels. He had a cane propped between his knees.

"I don't know, Lou. I mean..." He gestured vaguely.

"Maybe there's more than one. Assuming there's even that many. You got, say, your front-end guys. Your long-term satisfaction guys. Maybe a crisis-management unit. A team approach."

"What end were you working?"

Lou sat quietly. Finally he said, "Look at these girls, Vic. They don't even know how good they've got it. They don't know they're never going to feel better than they feel right now. It's like not knowing you're rich. "

"We don't want to get down on ignorance. People see into the future, the love business just gets that much harder."

"You want to know how long I was married?"

"I'm guessing, what, thirty-five years?"

"Sixty."

He whistled. "When it works, it works."

"She was sick the last five. Wheelchair. Needed somebody to feed her. Trapped, basically. Five long years, my friend."

"I'm sorry, Lou."

"This is the deal you sign up for."

"Not everybody. Not everybody thinks they signed up for that."

"The wife was not one for a nursing home."

"Who is?"

"Right. You got your own decay, and then you've got everybody else's. As if you need more. So one day she asks me how much do I love her."

"Tough one. What did you tell her?"

"After sixty years. How much do I love my arm? It's this old withered thing hanging off my shoulder. No muscle. Chicken skin. Some tattoo I got in the service that used to be the devil smoking a cigarette. Now it looks like a bag of flaming shit. But Christ, it's my arm. Been there as long as I remember. I could live without it, sure. But I don't want to."

"Not really a Valentine card, Lou."

"Yeah, well, fuck the easy sentiment. She says, if you love me, you'll round up a bottle of Oxycontin and a tumbler of brandy."

"You read about this stuff."

"That's what you want to do. Read about it."

"You did it?"

"Let me tell you. You think you can't wait to be done taking care of somebody who's dying. Until you realize she'll be gone. But not you. It's you against her, no matter what."

"What did you do?"

Both of the Gods of Love sat silently for a while.

"I loved her," Lou said. "You know what I did."

Find more information on Anthony Schmitz's novels, *Darkest Desire: The Wolf's Own Tale*, *Thereafter*, *Mermaid in Vegas*, and *Valentine's Café*, at AnthonySchmitz.com.