

Don't Smoke In Bed

By
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CHARACTERS

RICHARD - 35, Jamaican-American professor and husband

SHERYL - 35, Irish-American-born professor and wife.

SETTING

New York City. The bedroom.

SCENE ONE: Simple Simon

SETTING: Richard and Sheryl are being interviewed in their new bedroom. The chairs and couch are covered with white sheets and moving boxes are stacked in the corner. They talk to a reporter via webcam. Sheryl holds some notecards with questions written on them.

SHERYL

Something new about us? We both quit smoking.

RICHARD

Yes, we agreed to quit at the same time. I love Black and Mild cigarillos.

SHERYL

And I like Marlboros.

RICHARD

Which I thought was a bit un-lady like when we first met. Women are supposed to elegantly roll their own cigarettes while sipping espresso or use Virginia Slims.

SHERYL

Virginia Slims taste like fruit-flavored Goodyear tires.

RICHARD

But they look so elegant.

SHERYL

Looks can be deceiving. They taste awful. But he insisted so I said that we live in a fair and democratic society so if I can't kill myself from smoking, he can't either.

RICHARD

We both quit. At the same time. The sheets smell wonderful now.

SHERYL

We used to smoke in bed which, even I will admit, is a disgusting habit.

RICHARD

And if we want to have a family then we better get used to being nicotine free. So why are we being interviewed here?

SHERYL

It's a series of articles called "Bedroom Interviews" where the Times interviews dynamic or interesting couples in their bedroom via webcam. We answer questions and they monitor us on the webcam.

RICHARD

"Monitor us?" It sounds like Orwell meets Oprah. They don't expect us to talk about our sex life.

SHERYL

No, this is about our relationship. But being in the bedroom gives it a more personable feel. And if they like us we're invited back. We could even have a series from that.

RICHARD

A series like the Kardashians or "Jersey Shore?"

SHERYL

No! Well sort of like that except it's in print. (to interviewer) Maybe even a book, right?

RICHARD

A book? That's brownstone money.

SHERYL

A brownstone in Cleveland maybe.

RICHARD

So we have to give 'em the razzle dazzle or they cut our camera.

SHERYL

The story can just start off with something simple like 'Richard and Sheryl, don't think their relationship merits any attention. But when they walk down the street...'

RICHARD

No, no. I've read that a hundred times. 'How about Jamaican men aren't just for reggae any more?'

SHERYL

He's joking. Please don't put that in the article.

RICHARD

You know I saw an article in Time Magazine a few years ago that stated "Asian Men are In," and it had a picture of a white woman riding the back of an Asian man. No kidding. Like he was a human rickshaw. Maybe you should take a picture of Sheryl riding me with a blunt in her mouth and a dreadlock wig.

SHERYL

He's joking again. Richard likes to stir the pot. (to him) Richard, they're going to think you're serious.

RICHARD

I really did see an article about Asian men being 'in' for white women. Like they were talking about a Curry sauce or Acai berries.

SHERYL

Not that, the riding part.

RICHARD

You don't take me seriously, do you? How can anyone take themselves seriously when talking on a webcam.

SHERYL

Don't knock it. We get to keep it. I put some of their questions on note cards. (reads card) They want to know how we met. We met at Columbia and (phone ring in kitchen)...

RICHARD

It's Pavlovian for her. You could see the salivating glands begin to percolate at the first ring. It's probably Jasmine. Her prize student.

SHERYL

It's not Jasmine.

RICHARD

It's all right, you can go answer it.

SHERYL

No, I wanna tell this story. Our serious love story.

RICHARD

Yes, we're a serious couple. A serious, intellectual, stern, Germanic couple. We like efficient walks in well-lit parks, punctual tea at proper times, and-

SHERYL

-it feels a little bit like we're asked to be the interracial couple.

RICHARD

(kissing her)

We're SII. That's seriously intelligent interracial. Irish and Jamaican. It's a movement. We're what gays in the 70s were to the village: a fresh, redecoration of America. You could put that in the article, how there's this rising tide of upwardly mobile, well-educated seriously intelligent interracialists. That makes us seem radically relevant.

SHERYL

I'm not comfortable with saying 'intelligent interracial.' It implies that we're justifying relationship by contrasting with other interracial relationships that are not intelligent.

RICHARD

There is an opposite to intelligent interracial marriages. It's called 'fetishized interracialist.' Those who are more attracted to skin tones, body parts, and being contrarians and pissing off their Irish racist fathers who think all Jamaican men beat their wives and cheat. You can either be Sii or Fi.

SHERYL

My Dad does not think that. (to interviewer) Richard likes to play devil's advocate. Oh my God, Dad would drop dead of a heart attack if he read that in a paper.

RICHARD

You're giving me incentives.

SHERYL

I think that's why we get along so well.

RICHARD

What, cause we both want your father to drop dead?

SHERYL

No, we enjoy having strong conversations. Debate.

RICHARD

That goes without saying for seriously intelligent interracial, which makes us TDC: 'technically desirable couple.'

SHERYL

We're both professors who have a love of obscure versified english like..."Simple Simon met a Pieman going to the fair."

RICHARD AND SHERYL

Said Simple Simon to the Pieman "Let me taste your ware."
Said the Pieman to Simple Simon "Show first ya penny."
Said Simple Simon to the Pieman "Sir, I have not any!"

They laugh. Sheryl sighs.

SHERYL

God, we're weird, uh... (to reporter) don't write that.

RICHARD

You won't let the poor man write anything. Maybe that's it. You can begin the article with one of our nursery rhyme games. That way each article can begin with a different rhyme that underlies the meaning.

SHERYL

You're getting ahead of yourself. We just have this one.

RICHARD

You'll want more once we tell you how we first met.

SHERYL

Oh, yes. That's very journalistic-y. You'll like that.

Sheryl stands up and fixes some of the furniture.

RICHARD

Cu ya! Love, what are you doing?

SHERYL

I'm getting ready to tell the story.

RICHARD

Okay, why are you moving stuff around?

SHERYL

I'm trying to recreate the setting.

RICHARD

Ya see what I put up with...(smiles to journalist) I always wanted to say that. Sounds so adult like the things my Dad used

RICHARD (cont'd)
to say. 'I had it up to hear with ya Alice,' or 'No badda bawl
im soon come back.'

SHERYL
What does that mean?

RICHARD
Don't bother crying, he'll soon be back.

SHERYL
Sounds so poetic in your tongue.

RICHARD
It's not my tongue.

SHERYL
I wish you talked more patois around me. You can write that in
the article "Sheryl wishes Richard spoke more patois around
her."

RICHARD
Don't know much. My father raised me proper. Didn't want me
talking like no ragamuffin Maga Dog.

SHERYL
But you're father and mother sounded like that and they're not
ragamuffins.

RICHARD
They rose above their patois. (to reporter) Got rich buying and
flipping cottages to British bed and breakfast'ers. Poor
Jamaican village idiots didn't know what hit them when they
met my Dad. He's a shark. So when he got rich, he didn't want
his son to remind him of where he came from, but where they were
going: the promise land of Royal English Enunciation, Elocution,
and Edification.

SHERYL
You ever wonder if they see me as a status symbol of their
ascent?

RICHARD
(laughs)
No.

SHERYL

No, what?

RICHARD

(still laughing)

They do not see you as a Virginal White trophy.

SHERYL

Well you don't have to take that 'you're ridiculous for thinking that' tone with me.

RICHARD

I do. Because...

SHERYL

Because what? I'm not good enough to be that.

RICHARD stands up and kisses her.
They take a moment.

RICHARD

You don't fit a mold. Not even a trophy one.

SHERYL

Now if you could only say that with a little Island flava...

RICHARD

(switching back to interviewer)
Anyway, we met at a Columbia social.

SHERYL

Academic party.

RICHARD

An oxymoron if there ever was one.

FLASHBACK TO ACADEMIC COCKTAIL
PARTY. SHERYL, 30 year-old White
female stands against the wall
checking her messages on the
phone. RICHARD, a 30 year-old
handsome Jamaican in a finely cut
suit.

RICHARD

Pocket full of rye.

SHERYL

Excuse me?

RICHARD

I said a 'pocket full of rye.' Now you have to guess.

SHERYL

I don't understand.

RICHARD

It's an old Irish Parlour game. I name a rhyme and...figured I'd have to say something to getya off dat phone.

SHERYL

(on phone)

Irish? My family is Irish.

RICHARD

I'm Jamaican. Two Island peoples come together on the island of Manhattan.

SHERYL

(goes back to texting)

Uh-huh. I'm in the grad writing department for poetry but Victorian and Irish lit is one of my secret joys.

RICHARD

Both are my focus.

SHERYL

Fascinating.

RICHARD

Yes. I'm also a Herbologist and Cosmologist.

SHERYL

Okay, I'd love to read your dissertation.

RICHARD

And then on the weekends I'm a ninja. Actually on Saturday I'm a ninja and on Sunday I'm a lion tamer.

SHERYL

Really I'd...(looking up) wait a minute, what? Did you say you

SHERYL (cont'd)

were a ninja?

RICHARD

A ninja? Cu ya, why would I ever say such a ridiculous thing?

SHERYL

I must've misheard.

RICHARD

Yes, your misconstrued ears. Well miss, Miss Construe are you that unavailable?

SHERYL

Unavailable for what?

RICHARD

For a conversation.

SHERYL

Are you a grad student here?

RICHARD

Visiting professor. I lecture on Irish and English poetry which makes me as relevant as a stained glass repairman. I feel so out of place among all these important blowhards.

SHERYL looks up and smiles. She shakes hands.

SHERYL

I always feel that way here. I'm Sheryl.

RICHARD

Richard Simon. So what's bothering you so much that you have your face stuck to your phone?

SHERYL

It's a student crisis. One of my proteges is having some trouble with...issues.

RICHARD

What issues?

SHERYL

I'd prefer not to say. No offense, it's just private.

RICHARD

We all need our privacy Mrs. Sheryl.

SHERYL

It's Miss.

RICHARD

Interesting.

SHERYL

Yes, so now you know that I'm not owned by anyone. And even if I was it would still be Miss.

RICHARD

Miss Construe, you mistake me once again. I wasn't trying to procure your marital status. I just assumed someone as handsome as you would be taken.

SHERYL

Guys are handsome. Women are supposed to be pretty, petite. Dazzling and vivacious.

RICHARD

You don't fit any 'supposed to be' Miss Construe. And plenty of women are called handsome. My mother was handsome. My grandmother was handsome. I come from a long line of handsome women.

SHERYL

And what about the men?

RICHARD

The men were vivaciously gorgeous. My Dad was pretty and petite. His Dad was dazzling and gorgeous. So you can see that I come from a very confused family, Miss Construe.

SHERYL

(laughs)
You're very...strange.

RICHARD

I was going for petite and vivacious.

SHERYL

I'm sorry. I don't see that.