

# Love in the 21st Century

At a corner table in a Starbucks, Cliff just sat there, staring at Renada, stunned.

“I am sooo sorry, my love,” Renada moaned, hanky in hand, her face racked with guilt. “For all of human history, mankind has been waiting for something to come along that would put all the best relationship wisdom at our fingertips, so couples like us could finally be happy.” She whimpered. “Little did I know that all the tests and checklists on the Internet would show that we will end up making each other more miserable than we are being alone.”

“But dearest,” Cliff pleaded, his face full of anguish, “we’ve only checked the first hundred, top-rated relationships sites. We have three thousand four hundred and forty-seven more to go.”

“But, darling, the evidence is already overwhelming.” She pointed to her laptop, with tears welling up in her eyes. “Even the Compatibility app shows that we’re just like our parents and will be at each other’s throats—in just four months.”

“But that just means, we’ll have three months of heavenly bliss. And, and when we’re not busy making mad, passionate love, we’ll have enough time to find an app that will make us see each other’s personality flaws as adorable quirks.”

She plucked a tissue out of her purse and whined, “But, sweetie, the Conflict Resolution App shows that every time we even try to talk about money, we’ll end up screaming and throwing things at each other.”

“That was an hour ago, my pet!” he protested. “Since then I’ve come to realize that women have to spend more money on themselves so they can light up the world with their beauty.”

“Cliff!” she said flatly. “Even the porn star’s app shows that I’ll end up getting more sexual satisfaction from the sex toys she sells than I’ll ever get from you.”

Cliff crossed his heart and hoped to die. “Nothing will stop me from perfecting my technique so you’ll get all the health benefits of daily morning-and-night orgasms.”

Renada slouched back in her chair and sniffled with an “I’m-so-sorry” look on her face.

“But, my sugar plum,” he cried out with all his heart and soul. “You can’t give up on our love already! It’s only been two days since we met.”

Renada looked off and let out a mournful groan. “All I ever wanted was to have someone appear out of nowhere, and fill my miserable life with beautiful thoughts and feelings and my future full of wondrous possibilities, so I could have a life worth living.”

Cliff also stared off into space. Somehow he had to save their love, but how?

Then she broke down and sobbed. “But now, I see I’m destined to live a lonely, miserable life, with only my cats to give me the unconditional love I so desperately need.”

Something occurred to Cliff, and he dove into his laptop.

“This situation is not your fault, my dearest darling,” he said. “You’re perfect in every way. It’s *my* fault. And I want you to know that I’m already hard at work to make an even bigger difference in your life than you’ve made in mine.”

She just sat there, red eyed, honking her nose into her hanky.

He clicked on one icon and tried with all his might to sound upbeat. “See? I’ve already downloaded hundreds of apps that I haven’t even had time to try yet, like this one called Time Out.” He glanced back at her and explained. “When I leave my phone on, the instant it detects that we’re on the verge of screaming and yelling at each other, it calls for a time out. Then we go into separate rooms and continue the conversation on our phones. The app then uses our own voices and turns what we’re yelling at each other into a calm, rational conversation, even sprinkling it with loving comments.”

She leaned forward, put a hand on his shoulder, and looked into his poor, sad, puppy-dog eyes. “Oh, my dear, sweet Cliff. It’s not you. It’s our biologies.” She swung her laptop around so he could see the website. “After years of extensive research, evolutionary biologists have determined that the genders were never compatible to begin with. Our brains are only wired for a series of brief, meaningless, sexual encounters.”

The words were too painful to bear, so he turned back, refused to listen, and pressed on. “And there are dozens of social network apps that specialize in fixing relationships, like this one. All we have to do is post the YouTube link of our latest argument to this forum and thousands of couples who have gone through what we’re going through will tell us how they handled it.”

“And that’s why evolution had to make us believe in love at first sight and make love blind,” Renada continued, “so we could perpetuate the species before we came to our senses.”

“And then there’s this one run by filmmakers,” he said, talking faster. “Based on the answers we give on a questionnaire, a staff of screenwriters will write as many drafts as it takes until our relationship has been turned into a great love story.” Then he added with a whimper, “Then not only will out-of-work actors show us how to play the critical scenes. And if I still have difficulties getting the role right, a director will take me through it, step by step.”

She begged for him to understand. “And evolutionary biologists calculate that at our current stage in evolutionary development, it’ll be another fifty-million years before our brains will be capable of turning the vision of how incredible our love lives can be into reality.”

“I—I know it’s a little pricey, at five hundred an hour,” he said, with tears welling up in his eyes, “but in this case, money *can* buy happiness. And if our love story gets green-lighted for a movie, we can actually turn a huge profit.”

“Please stop, my love.” She gave him an affectionate hug. “You have no idea how much it hurts seeing you torture yourself in this way.”

“And see that?” he said, clicking on another. “I just signed up to get an online master’s degree in feminine psychology. When I graduate, that women’s university guarantees that I’ll be the kind of person that any woman could love.”

She stroked his back to comfort him. “You don’t understand, my love. The only app we need now is the Suicide Watch app, to keep tabs on us for the next two years till we can stop obsessing about each other every moment of the day.”

He turned to her and wiped the tears from his eyes. “No, my dear, sweet, adorable Renada, *you* don’t understand. The science of relationships is in its infancy. We know more about Mars than we know about how to make each other happy.” He pointed to his laptop. “But with the invention of the Internet, the science has taken off. And just like high tech, it’s evolving at an exponential rate.”

She begged him to be brave. “But dearest, that just means that only the rich will be able to make their relationships work. No one else will have the resources to hire the tens of thousands of people to plow through the mountains of data, to find out what they need to do to be happy.”

He threw up his hands and cried, “Nooo! Any day now, some geek in college will come up with yet another ten-billion-dollar idea that will make it possible for computer networks to prevent all our stupid mistakes.” He counted off on his fingers. “Like getting into unwinnable wars, destroying the planet, sending idiots to Washington, and . . . and stopping couples from accidentally saying things, in the heat of the moment, that they can never be taken back.”

Renada looked off, blew her nose into her hanky, and had to admit, “Maybe you’re right.”

“Of course I am, my sweet honeybun,” Cliff cried. “And at the current rate of development, we won’t have to wait until we’re in our nineties before scientists come up with ways for us to be happy together.”

“And if you and I started a charity,” she said, perking up, “the contributions from billions of couples in the same predicament we’re in could easily take years off of that.”

“Exactly!” he cheered. “And, and once corporations see the trillions they’ll be able to make off the relationship industry, not only will they jump in, but when the breakthroughs come, they’ll bring them to market in months, rather than decades.”

“If that long, once Washington gives them hundreds of billions of dollars in tax breaks, just to keep the jobs here.”

Cliff put an arm around her shoulders, pressed his face against hers, and held his other arm out to the future. “And so you see, my dearest darling, this is not the time to give up on our love. If we stay together, one day soon, we could very well be one of the couples who lights up the world and gives hope to millions with our story of how our love conquered all.”

Renada heaved a hopeful sigh. “I can hardly wait.”