

*This article is for use in eTOC lessons only. Use outside of eTOC is strictly forbidden.*

## **Reading Article GP2**

### **Article #10: Sunny Days and Sunny Nights**

*by M. E. Kerr*

"Females prefer chunky peanut butter over smooth, forty-three percent to thirty-nine percent," Alan announces at dinner, "while men show an equal liking for both."

My father likes this conversation. I think even my mother does, since she is telling Alan enthusiastically that she likes smooth. Moments before she confided that she preferred red wine, after Alan said that women are more likely than men to order wine in a restaurant, and a majority prefer white.

Alan is filled with this sort of information.

He wants to become an advertising man. He is enrolled in journalism school for that purpose. He's my height, when I'm wearing heels, has brown hair and brown eyes, lives not far away in Salisbury, North Carolina. We go out mostly to hit movies, and he explains their appeal afterward, over coffee at a campus hangout. He prides himself on knowing what sells, and why, and what motivates people. Sometimes when we kiss, I imagine he knows exactly what percentage of females close their eyes, and if more males keep theirs open.

I long for Sunny.

Whenever Sunny came to dinner, my father winced at his surfers' talk and asked him pointedly if he had a "real" name. Harold, Sunny would tell him, and my father would say, that's not such a bad name, you can make Harry out of that, and once he came right out and told Sunny that a man shouldn't have a boy's name.

When Sunny finally joined the Navy my father said, well, they'll make a man out of him.

He's a man, I said, believe me. Look at him and tell me he's not a man. Because Sunny towers over my father, has a Rambo build, and a walk, smile, and way about him that oozes confidence. Hair the color of the sun, deep blue eyes. Always tanned, always. Even my

mother murmured, oh, he's a man, Sunny is.

But my father shook his head and said, I don't mean *that*. I mean the boy has a boy's ambition, you only have to listen to all that talk about the big waves, the surf, the beach—either he's a boy or a fish, but he's not someone with his eye on the future. He's not someone thinking about a profession!

One of the hard things about going to college in your hometown is that your family meets your dates right away. If I had the good luck to live in a dorm, my father couldn't cross-examine all of them while I finish dressing and get myself downstairs. Even when I'm ready ahead of time, he manages to squeeze out as much information about them as he can, once he's shaken hands with one, and while we're standing there looking for our exit line.

He likes Alan right away.

After dinner is over, while Alan and I go for a walk, Alan says, "I really like your family. Did they like me, do you think?"

"I know they did."

But my mother never once threw her head back and laughed, the way she used to when Sunny was at the table, never said, oh *you!* to Alan, like someone trying hard not to love his teasing—no one ever teased her but Sunny.

He'd tell her she looked like Princess Di (maybe . . . a little) and he'd often exclaim, you've made my day, darlin'! when he'd taste her special fried chicken. My father calls her Kate or Mama, and he can't eat anything fried because of the cholesterol, but they've been rocking together on our front porch through twenty years of marriage, and he *does* have a profession: He's a judge.

Oh, is he a judge!

Sunny, he said once when Sunny alluded to a future with me, every Friday noon Marybeth's mother comes down to my office and we go out to lunch. It's a ritual with us: I get to show her off to my colleagues, and we stroll over to the hotel, enjoy an old-fashioned, have the special-of-the-day, and set aside that time for us. . . . I hope someday my daughter will be

going down to her own husband's place of business to do the exact same thing.

Later Sunny said, He wasn't kidding, was he?

Him? I said. Kid? I said.

It was a week to the day that Sunny asked me to marry him. We were just graduated from high school. I was already planning my courses at the university when Sunny got wind of a job in Santa Monica, running a shop called Sun & Surf. Sunny'd moved from California when his folks broke up. His mom brought him back to Greenville, where she waited table in his grandfather's diner. . . . I never knew what Sunny's father did for a living, but my father, who spent a lot of time trying to worm it out of Sunny, said it sounded as though he was a "common laborer." Can't he be just a laborer? I said. Does he have to be a common one?

Marybeth, said my father, I'm just looking out for you. I like the boy. He's a nice boy. But we're talking here about the whole picture. . . . Does Sunny ever mention college?

I want to go to college, I told Sunny.

You can go out on the coast somewhere.

How? Daddy won't pay for it if we get married.

We'll figure out something.

It's too vague, Sunny, and too soon

.

What's vague about it?

Don't *you* want to go to college, Sunny? Don't *you* want a profession?

Sunny said he couldn't believe I felt the way my father did, in the letter he left with my mother for me. He said the Navy was his best bet, and at least he'd be on water. He didn't say anything about waiting for him, or writing—nothing about the future. I'd said some other things that last night together, after he'd made fun of my father's talk about my parents' Friday-noon ritual. They don't even touch, he'd said: I've never once seen them touch, or

heard them use affectionate names, or laugh together. So she shows up at his office once a week—big deal! . . . Honey, we've got a love that'd like to bust through the roof! You don't want to just settle for something like they did! They settled!

They love each other, I argued back, it just doesn't show. . . Sunny said that was like plastic over wood, and love should splinter, crack, and burn!

You know how it is when someone criticizes your family, even when you might have thought and said the same things. You strike out when you hear it from another mouth, say things you don't mean, or you do, and wouldn't have said under any other circumstances.

I said, at least my father could always take care of my mother! At least he'd made something of himself, and she could be proud of him! That's good enough for me, I said. I knew from the hurt look in Sunny's eyes he was hearing that he wasn't.

"Seventy-four percent of American adults are interested in professional football," Alan says as we walk along under the stars. "Eighty-seven percent of men and sixty-three percent of women."

I can hear Sunny's voice saying blah blah blah blah blah!

"Alan," I say, "what kind of office does an advertising man have?"

"Mine's going to be in New York City, and there'll be a thick rug on the floor, and a view of the whole Manhattan skyline from the windows. Do you like New York, Marybeth?"

"Anyplace but here!" I answer. "I'd like to get out of the South! I'd like to live near an ocean." I was picturing Sunny coming in on a big wave out in California. "I'd like to always be tanned."

Alan shakes his head. "That's out of style now. The ozone layer and all. White skin is in. No one wants a tan anymore."

When we get to the curb, Alan puts his hand under my arm and remarks, "You smell good. What perfume is that?"

"I don't remember what I put on." I was thinking of nights with Sunny we'd walk down this street with our arms wrapped around each other, and Sunny'd say, let's name our kids. Say we have four, two girls and two boys. You get to name a boy and a girl.

Alan lets go of my arm when we get across the street.

"I like the fact you're majoring in economics," he says.

"You could go into investment banking. New York is where *you* want to go too."

"Sure, New York," I say. "That's for me."

Next weekend I have a date with John. Premed. Chunky. Beautiful smile. On the porch he tells my father, "I'll take good care of her. Don't worry."

"What are you going to specialize in?" My father gets one last question in as we are heading down the steps.

"Pediatrics, sir," and John grins and grabs my hand as we walk to his white Pontiac.

My mother is sitting in the wicker rocker on the porch, waving at us as we take off.

"Nice people," John says.

We drive to the SAE1 house with the top down, the moon just rising. "Your family reminds me of mine," he says. "Your mom so warm and welcoming, and your dad all concerned about me. . . . My father's that way about my kid sister when boys come to take her out. I don't have a lot of time to date, so I like dating someone whose family I can meet. You can tell a lot about a girl by her folks."

"They never touch," I tell him. "I mean, not openly."

"Like mine. You watch mine and you wonder how two kids got born."

We look at each other and laugh.

I like him. His wit, his good manners, his dancing, even his "shop talk" about his premed courses. He is a good listener, too, questioning me about what I'm studying, my ideas; he is the perfect date.

"Did you have a good time, sweetheart?" my mother asks.

"So-so." I tell the truth.

"In that case I hate to tell you what's on the hall table."

It's an overnight letter from Western Union. Short and sweet.

ARRIVING TOMORROW NIGHT. HAVE PROFESSION AND HIGH HOPES. LOVE, HAROLD.

"He's coming back, isn't he?" Mom says.

I show it to her.

You like him, Mom, so why did you hate to tell me about this?"

"I like him a lot, but I don't think your father's ever going to resign himself to Sunny, even if he does call himself Harold."

"He has a profession, he says!" I am dancing around the room, hugging the letter. "He has high hopes!"

"I think he's the same old Sunny, honey, and I think it's just going to be more heartbreak. Oh, I *do* like him. Truly I do. But you started seeing Alan and John. You took a step away from Sunny."

"Just give him a chance, Mom."

"Give who a chance?" my father's voice.

He is coming into the living room in his robe and pajamas.

"Harold!" I exclaim. "Just give Harold a chance!"

"We used to chant 'Give peace a chance,' when I was in college," my father says, "and I'd say Sunny having a chance is like peace having a chance. Peace being what it is, and Sunny being what he is, no chance will do much to change things. Won't last. . . . Now, John is a young man I really warm to. Did you have a good time with John?"

He was the perfect date," I answer.

"You said it was a so-so time," says my mother.

"Maybe I'm not into perfection."

When I meet the little plane that flies from Charlotte to Greenville, I can see Sunny getting off first, lugging his duffel bag, dressed in his Navy uniform, hurrying through the rain, tan as anything, tall, and grinning even before he can spot me in the small crowd.

He has a box of candy—"Not for you, my love," he says, "it's for your mama." Then he kisses me, hugs me, hangs on hard and whispers, "Let's name our kids. Say we've got six, all boys, first one's Harold junior. We could call him Harry."

There is no way I can get him to talk about his profession on the way home in my father's Buick. He says he is going to tell me at the same time he tells my folks, that all we are going to talk about on the way there is how soon I can transfer to the university near the base. He has three more years in the Navy and an application for reduced tuition for Navy wives, providing I still love him the way he loves me, do I? . . . Yes? Okay!

He says, "Park the car somewhere fast before we go straight home, because we've got to get the fire burning lower, or we'll scorch your loved ones." Here's a place.

My father growls, "One *hour* getting back here from the airport, was the traffic *that* bad on a weeknight? We thought you'd had an accident. . . ." And my mother purrs, "Guess what's cooking?"

"Fried chicken!" Harold cries, sounding like the same old Sunny. "Darlin', you have made my day! Love you and want some huggin' from my one and only!"

"Oh, *you!*" my mother says.

It does not take my father long to start in; he starts in at the same time he picks up his fork.

"What's this about a profession, Sunny? Harold?"

"Yes, sir, I am a professional man now."

"You're becoming a professional sailor, is that it?"

"No, sir. I'm leaving the Navy eventually, but thanks to the Navy, I now have a profession that suits me."

"Which is?"

"I'm an underwater welder."

"Let's eat before we get into all this," says my mother, fast.

"You're a *what?*"

"An underwater welder."

My father begins to sputter about Alan, who is going into advertising, and John, the aspiring baby doctor, those are professions, but what kind of . . . what kind of . . .

And my mother is passing the gravy, passing the cranberry relish, the biscuits, keeping her hands flying between the table and Sunny.

"Where will you, where will . . ." my father again, and if he ever finishes the sentence, I don't know. For I am seeing Sunny see me. I am seeing him be true to me and to himself. Perhaps my father wants to ask where will you do this, where will your office be, for my father is one to think in terms of a man's workplace.

But I am drifting in my thoughts to future Fridays, traditional and loving, donning a wet suit



for a rendezvous in the deep blue sea. Keeping my date with that warm fish I married.

eTOC生徒様以外使用禁止