

A C T U R N E R



MATCH 13

A S H O R T S T O R Y

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MATCH 13

By

AC TURNER

Carmen pulled her dyed black hair back into a scrunchie and pressed play on the Video Cassette Recorder's remote control. While the VHS tape clicked and spun around the machine's magnetic play head, she looked down at the sleek box the tape had arrived in. It featured a picture of a pink television screen with the words "Perfect Match Video Dating Company" written across it in neon green letters.

She wasn't sure about meeting men through a video taped "audition", but it was 1983 and everyone seemed to be talking about how rad video dating was, so why not give it a try?

Carmen leaned forward, staring at the television, waiting patiently as static gave way to an animated winged heart flying across the screen.

When the heart came to a stop, the image crossfaded to reveal a swarthy, well-muscled man.

"Match 1: Monroe 555-3830", appeared under his smiling face.

This looks promising.

"Hi, my name is Monroe. You've probably already noticed that I lift weights and have piercing blue eyes."

Ugh.

Carmen fast-forwarded the tape. The machine squealed sharply in protest. She stopped the tape when the next hopeful suitor appeared.

“Hi, my name is Phil, but most of the ladies call me 'Big' Phil.”

Gross.

“Hi, my name is Maurice. I’m an executive by day and a wild man by night.”

Sad.

“My name’s Mike and if you’re sitting there watching this tape smoking a cigarette, hit the fast forward button because I don’t smoke and I don’t like people who smoke.”

Ouch.

“I’m looking for the goddess. Who is the goddess? The woman is the goddess..”

Weirdo.

“I enjoy full bodied wines and European chocolate. I'm looking for a partner with few-to-no sexual limitations to join me on my adventures around the world and throughout the upstate New York area.”

Creepy.

“If you like what you see, stop the tape. The rest of those guys are losers.”

Ugh.

“I’m a 25 year subscriber to both Playboy and the New Yorker magazine.”

Really?

“I’m John. ‘Type A’, I am not. Serious about meeting you, I am.”

Carmen paused. On the screen was a handsome, clean cut blonde man in his early 30s. He sat upright in his chair with his shoulders relaxed, even though he was exposing himself to the gruelling judgment of unseen potential dates.

He wore a navy blue suit that was obviously not off-the-rack and it looked like his gold wrist watch could pay her rent for a year.

Finger hovering over the fast-forward button, she leaned in, scrutinizing him.

“I don’t know why, but I haven’t had any luck with a long term relationship. Most end after the first date. But I’m a romantic at heart and I refuse to give up. So here I am. Heart on my sleeve. Just a man, trying to find love in this crazy mixed up world.”

Perfect.

The video tape squeaked to a stop. The frame frozen on his face. His easy, natural smile and the slight doe-eyed, innocent look on his face intrigued her.

She smiled and nodded.

This is the one. He’s the one for me.

“Match 13. John 555-2376”, appeared under his smiling face.

Carmen traded the VCR remote for her cordless telephone and wandered into the kitchen. She dialled his number while preparing a cup of tea.

The line rang.

The receiver clicked.

“Hello?”

“Hi John? My name’s Carmen. I saw your Perfect Match Video Dating profile.”

He laughed, “Oh, god. Aren't those things horrible?”

His laughter was natural and uninhibited.

Carmen smiled, poured some hot water into a cup and dropped in a tea bag.

“They're the worst. But... there was just something about your video. Something that I found really intriguing. I was wondering if, well, if this isn't too forward... would you like to have dinner with me?”

“Dinner? What -- me? Really?”

“Yes you, silly.”

Carmen reached for the sugar jar, fingers closing around it.

“Well that sounds nice. When were you thinking?”

She looked down at the jar, squinted at the label, shook her head and put it back.

Wrong jar.

“Tomorrow evening?”

She took down the correct jar and spooned some of the sweet powder into her tea.

“Tomorrow works for me.”

She took a sip of tea, then gave him her address.

The next evening, John rang her bell.

Carmen opened the door. She wore a tight black dress and heels. Her long black hair fell in waves over her shoulders. Black bracelets hugged slender wrists. A silver chain teased down toward her breasts.

John stood in the doorway looking delicious in a black blazer and a crisp, tailored white shirt, gold watch still gleaming on his wrist. His brilliant blue eyes came paired with a sparkling smile that could light up cities, but he still had that innocent look that made her feel so safe.

Carmen didn't tend to invite men over who looked like they could buy her apartment building, just as John didn't look like the type to appear on a Video Dating Service tape, but here they were.

He looked at her approvingly.

She returned his look.

“I thought we could stay in tonight. What would you say to dinner and a movie?”

“I would say yes to both of those things. What's on the menu?”

“Pasta primavera.”

He responded with a hum of approval.

“My favorite!

“We can watch the movie on the couch while we eat.”

“What movie?”

Carmen passed him a video cassette.

“Your profile said that you *love* foreign romantic comedies so I picked this up at the video rental store this afternoon.”

He looked at the box, nodding enthusiastically.

“Oh! I heard this was good. Aren't subtitled movies the best?”

“They sure are. How about some red to go with it?”

Without waiting for an answer, she deftly uncorked a bottle of wine, splashing the deep red first into one glass, then the other.

She passed John a glass, then tipped hers back and drained it.

She felt his eyes on her, so she tilted her head and playfully raised an eyebrow.

“Yes, John?”

For a second he seemed at a loss, but quickly gathered whatever remaining thoughts he had.

“I -- it's just that -- you know. Dinner. Movie. Wine. A beautiful girl...”

“Don't overthink this, John.” She pointed to the VHS player. “Put the movie in and I'll be right back with our meals.”

He fumbled with the tape, taking it out of the rental box and inserting it into the video player.

Her lips tugged into a quick smile as she walked back into the kitchen.

On the counter were two heaping bowls of pasta. Carmen looked up at her spice rack. It was full of small jars and bottles. She ran her fingers across them, stopping at the one she had held earlier. The one that almost ended up in her tea.

Hello my old friend.

She smiled, then liberally doused one of the meals with the white powder.

This should do the trick. I hate foreign romantic comedies.

Carmen picked up the bowl, looking at it from several angles. Inspecting her work.

I do however, love a good thriller.

Satisfied with her work, she carried the bowls out to the living room.

A perfect meal for a perfect date for a perfect, dead man.

She caught him refilling her glass.

“John! Are you trying to get me drunk?”

Surprised, he nearly dropped the bottle.

“I’m sorry! I just assumed --”

So polite.

“No worries, John. I like wine. A lot.”

Relieved, he finished filling her glass, then pressed play on the remote control. The screen flickered to life. The opening credits rolled and a lush musical score filled the air.

Carmen placed the bowls on the coffee table.

His eyes met hers, and she gave him a slow smile. She patted the couch.

“Have a seat.”

He slid onto the couch and Carmen walked behind him. Her fingertips found their way to his shoulder, his neck, then she carefully draped a napkin across his lap.

“Th -- thanks Carmen,” he stammered.

She sat down next to him, crossed her legs and smoothed her dress with a free hand. She felt his gaze burning into her .

She sipped at her wine, saw a relieved smile settle on his lips.

“This meal looks amazing.”

She watched him carefully. The night was rich with potential. He was full of life. So certain that he was going to get laid. It was all so alluring. It would be all the more interesting to watch the hope fade from his eyes.

He picked up his glass and swirled the deep red around.

“Here's to an eventful evening.”

She raised her glass to his with a soft *clink*.

“Eat up. I worked for hours on this.”

“Really?”

“No.”

They shared another smile and another sip.

Carefree, light, airy.

All of her dinners started this way.

Carmen paused and looked to the television. The couple on the screen were singing and cycling through a small European village.

This had better be over soon.

She turned just in time to see John take a bite of the pasta, then another and another.

A dark thrill rushed through her as she watched his enjoyment turn to confusion.

The confusion quickly turned to discomfort.

His brows furrowed and his eyes lifted to meet hers.

“Carmen... what’s on this?”

She took a bite of her own food and washed it down with more wine.

“It’s my Mother’s secret recipe. Why?”

He stared at her, at the meal, at her again.

“Uhh... no reason.”

John shifted uncomfortably. Beads of sweat began to form on his upper lip.

Carmen’s eyes narrowed.

She loved it when they squirmed.

She matched him bite for bite, smile for smile.

His first cough gave her more of the rush that she lived for.

Not long now.

The coughs that followed were choking -- barely controlled.

“Are you okay, John? Do you need some water?”

John held up his hand. He paused, took a deep breath and wiped some sweat from his face.

“No -- I’m good.”

Carmen licked her lips in anticipation of what was to come next, then stopped.

What was that on her lips?

Grit?

Her gaze drifted down to her near empty glass.

I feel so cold. I really could use some m --

She swirled her glass, watching the red liquid mix with a white powdery clump that had settled at the bottom.

That's unexpected.

Her eyes met John's. He was sweating and smiling.

Her glass clattered against the coffee table, wine splashing across it.

She looked back to John, her heart pounding, her vision blurring.

“Did you... put...”

Despite his flushed appearance, he managed a smug smile.

Sweat rolled down his brow and he started to clutch at his stomach.

“Something... in my drink?”

She stared hard at John, but all she saw was a mass of grey and blue and gold sitting at the other end of the couch.

John's fork clattered to his bowl, his breath wheezing, barely audible over the sounds of the happy onscreen couple.

He shrugged, even as his body began its twitching, panicked struggle to keep him alive.

“That -- unh -- depends,” he gasped. “Did you put something -- in my food?”

Pain settled in Carmen's stomach, then spread out like tiny electric currents to her fingertips.

She laughed softly.

Is this what karma feels like?

John had played her. She had played him. Both had lost and won.

She nodded silently, acknowledging his game.

That was more than most received from her after she made them dinner and watched their hearts stumble and fail.

She approved of him. John returned the nod. He approved of her.

Match 13, a match made in heaven.

John slumped into the corner of the couch, bile and white foam running down his chin.

Carmen slipped to the floor, her throat closing off with a low gurgle.

The video tape shuddered and paused. The two onscreen lovers were in a restaurant, the subtitles shaky on the screen.

[I've never met anyone like you.]

[Me neither.]

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A skills collector by nature, best-selling Mi'kmaw author **AC TURNER** has climbed Mount Fuji, panned for gold, swum with sharks and performed random acts of kindness. He has been a glider pilot, a college lecturer and an award-winning screenwriter/film producer.

After his films "Like Father", "Wing Man" and "Lure" received accolades at festivals around the world, AC turned his creative lens to other forms of storytelling including comic books, novels and short stories.

Having lived in Vancouver, Toronto and Tokyo, AC now calls K'jipuktuk (Halifax), Nova Scotia home.

His creator owned crime/horror comic book, **“Frightmare City”** can be read online at:

www.frightmarecity.com

To sign up for AC Turner's mailing list to get more free books and stories, please visit:

www.acturneronline.com

PRAISE FOR AC'S WORK

Satisfying and gruesome, AC Turner does not go light on the scares. He brings us well-written, bone chilling tales of terror.

Five stars!

Reviewer: Melissa Hannon, Horror Geek Life

Great, well paced stories - there's relationship drama, criminal misdeeds, and teenage hijinks - all with a sinister spin. AC Turner has serious potential and I can't wait to see more!

9 out of 10!

Reviewer: Clare Hemsworth, FANdemonium Network

Its just the right combination of entertainment - a little horror - a little humor. Intriguing stories well told - I'm blown away.

Highly recommended!

Reviewer: Shannon Sylvia TV Host, My Horror Story, Paranormal State

AC Turner brings brutal, beautiful bites of horror to life with this wildly imaginative new series!

Five Stars!

Reviewer: Will Blosser, Home Grown Horror

Its pure genius that will send chills down your spine. It had me chanting "you're gonna die" by the end!

Five Stars!

Reviewer: Jenn Marshall, Sirens of Sequentials

Awesome stuff - I'm really digging it! The writing is amazing - I'm a big fan! Go check it out everyone – AC Turner's got my seal of approval.

Reviewer: Daryl Marston TV Host, A&E Ghost Hunters

ALSO BY AC TURNER

FRIGHTMARE CITY VOLUMES 1-5

THE DARKNESS WE MUST FACE

SESSION #1031

TEST PATTERN

TEMPORAL

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