

EXTRA CREAM

by Michael Percy

Setting

The kitchen of a comfortable house on a modern housing estate.

Characters

Lillian- Forty-ish, mother, housewife.

Steve- mid thirties, the milkman.

EXTRA CREAM

Lillian wears a frilly apron and is at the table chopping vegetables. she pauses for a moment and sighs. there is a knock on the kitchen door. She goes to the door.

Lillian: Hello, it's not time for the bill again already?

She admits Steve who is carrying a note and two bottles of milk.

Steve: I got your note.

Lillian: Note? Oh the note. That was yesterday, or the day before. I forget.

Steve: Tuesday. It was Tuesday. I've got it here. Look. ***(Brandishes note.)***

Lillian: I remember what it looks like.

Steve: Bit different from 'two extra pints and a carton of cream' though.

Lillian moves away from the door so the table is between them.

Lillian: Is it? (**Smoothing her hair**) Is it really? I suppose you could say that.

Steve: A bloke doesn't get many notes like this one I can tell you.

Lillian: People usually just ask I suppose. Come right out with it.

Steve: Maybe. I was puzzled by your note but the blokes at the depot put me on the right track - men of the world, I suppose you'd say.

Lillian: (**Anger beginning**) So you showed my note to your mates at the depot did you? I thought it was quite a simple request, not something that would need a team to sort out and certainly not the kind of thing we need 'a man of the world' for.

Steve: The main thing is that I understand. You know - the hidden meaning.

Lillian: What hidden meaning? It means what it says.

Steve: Oh. Your saying you mean what it says then?

Lillian: Why would I write that (**Points to note with the chopping knife**) if I meant something else.

Steve: (**Moves away from the knife**) Notes can be open to interpretation.

Lillian: Interpretation?

Steve: Yes, alternative meanings: meanings that are not obvious, hidden in fact.

Lillian: I know what interpretation means. I do not understand why you felt you could do it to that note.

Lillian stabs the knife into the chopping board.

Steve: Perhaps I've got it wrong.

Lillian: The note says what it says and it says it in English. You can read? Or did you get someone at the depot to do that as well?

Steve: I'm halfway through a Jeffery Archer.

Lillian: So you read my note and saw a hidden meaning?

Steve: (**Groping for a way out**) I saw the possibility of one.

Lillian: And what was this possibility?

Steve: Well...words have different meanings in different situations. I only saw the possibility of another meaning by accident. I wasn't looking for it. (**Warming to his new tack.**) And I'm not the type to follow it up if I found one. But other men...

Lillian: You think I was giving you the come-on.

Steve: Not me. Oh no, you wouldn't catch me thinking that about you. No chance.

Lillian: (**Disappointed**) Thanks very much.

Steve: Sorry, I mean I don't think you're that sort. I mean, you're nice and everything but...

Lillian: Are you that sort?

Steve: Some men are. That's my point. My fear on your behalf. A fear that this note could be misread...by somebody else.

Lillian: But you're my milkman and that note was in a milk bottle on my doorstep. How would somebody else see it?

Steve: I could have been off sick. That note could have fallen into the wrong hands very easily.

Lillian: Okay, so you're concerned about confidentiality between a milkman and his customer are you?

Steve: Absolutely. Data protection and all that. Freedom of information etc.

Lillian: Good, I'm impressed.

Steve: All part of the service.

Lillian: So in the spirit of data protection and to protect the confidentiality of my note, you thought it best (**Now shouting**) to show my note to everybody in the depot?

Steve: Only for advice, you know - two heads are better than...

Lillian: Thicker! In your case, two heads are just thicker than one.

Steve I think I'd better go.

Lillian: Yes.

Steve turns to leave

Lillian: What about my note?

Steve: I do care you know – about my customers. I know I come and go when you're all in bed and we never get the chance to establish a proper relationship...

Lillian: Except at Christmas and on milk bill days.

Steve: ...but I do care. I like to see myself as an unseen guardian – out there in the dark and the rain looking after your interests.

Lillian: Delivering my milk.

Steve: Women can get into tricky situations without realising.

Lillian: I'm sorry?

Steve: It's always innocent I'm sure but you need to be careful.

Lillian: Where are we now?

Steve: The note, we're still on the note.

Lillian: Just checking. Coffee?

Steve: You see I... Coffee?

Lillian: Coffee. Would you like a cup of coffee?

Steve: Oh., yes please. Milk and two. Thanks. What was I saying?

Lillian: **(Starts making coffee)** Something about the content of my note.

Steve: That's right: the note could be misunderstood. I was only trying to save you from yourself. A women can get into a tricky situation without realising it. And a note like this... I mean.

Lillian: **(Irritated)** I wrote a perfectly straightforward note with a very clear meaning.

Steve But it was an unusual request.

Lillian: It was not. People ask one another exactly that question all the time. But you assumed I was asking for sex.

Steve: SEX!

Lillian: Yes, sex. S.E.X. No hidden meaning there.

Steve: Not me. You wouldn't catch me thinking that.

Lillian: You thought I wanted sex. Don't deny it. You didn't read my note and assume I wanted cable television or an extra pot of cream. Your mind went straight to sex.

Steve waves the note in Lillian's face

Steve: What was I supposed to think?

Lillian snatches the note and reads aloud.

Lillian: Dear Milkman.

Steve: Steve.

Lillian: Dear Milkman. My television went wrong last night and I missed Coronation Street. If you saw it, could you pop in and tell me what happened between Rita and the man she met in the pub. Thanks.

Only a man could misunderstand that. Women say maybe and men hear yes. You even think no means yes. The only word you always get right is yes. You never hear a man say: "She said yes but I thought she meant no, so I went home".

Steve snatches the note back and brandishes it at Lillian.

STEVE: Pop in. Pop in.

Lillian: What?

Steve: Pop in. Now that's begging to be misunderstood. Very friendly, almost too casual. Pop in. You normally deal with me on the doorstep and yet here we

are - pop in Mr milkman. Pop in.

Lillian: Is that all your advisers at the depot could find? Just two words? You must be desperate for an interpretation if that's all you've got.

Steve: Okay, I may have got it wrong this time.

Lillian: So you admit it?

Steve: I'm admitting nothing. I'm only guilty of being an optimist; it's expected of a man.

Women: I don't expect it.

Steve: We learn from an early age to be optimistic and persistent. The first time I asked my wife out she said she was washing her hair.

Lillian: I'm sure she regrets changing her mind.

Steve: But here we are - happily married. Persistence and optimism.

Lillian: You've been optimistic in my case - very optimistic. But persistent? **(Now a touch of the flirt.)** I don't think so.

Steve: There you go. Look at you - what am I supposed to make of it. I just don't understand. If I keep on you act like I'm a pest but if I stop you start going all flirty again. I don't know where I stand.

Lillian: You'll just have to work it. You're a big boy, aren't you?

Steve: There you go again. Innuendo. Should I stay or should I go now?

Lillian: **(Beginning to sound like a song by The Clash, Should I Stay Or Should I Go Now)** If you go there could be trouble.

Steve: **(Singing the tune now.)** If I stay it could be double.

Lillian and Steve: **(Now singing together)**

So you've got to let me know,
Should I cool it or should I blow,

Steve mimes air guitar making the sounds of the brief guitar section that occurs here in the song then sings on alone. Lillian obviously enjoys it...

Steve: **(Singing)**
 If you say that you are mine,
 I'll be here 'till the end of time,
 But you've got to let me know,

Steve and Lillian sing the last line together...

Steve and Lillian: Should I stay or should I go.

Steve mimes the guitar part again while Lillian laughs and claps then together they shout:

Steve and Lillian: The Clash - Should I stay or should I go - The Combat Rock album.

The following two lines are shouted simultaneously:

Steve: 1985

Lillian: 1982

Steve: It was Eighty-five

Lillian: Eighty-two, sorry.

Steve: I know my Clash, it was definitely 1985

Lillian: Eighty-two, I was at Uni in my second year. Definitely 1982.

Lillian breaks the moment first moving to put the table between them. Steve laughs on, not registering the implication of her move.

Steve: How can I convince you, it was eighty-five?

Lillian: **(Chilly now)** You can't.

Steve: Come on. I thought we were having fun.

Lillian: Did you?

Steve: **(Tries singing again.)** This indecision bothers me...

Lillian: Don't start that again.

Steve: Here we go. I thought we were getting on. I thought I'd cracked it; found a chink in the armour.

Lillian: Just because I know the words of a song does not mean we're all set for a life long friendship.

Steve: But... What does it take eh? Tell me 'cos I don't know. I'm all at sea. Can't see the wood for the trees. Looking for a needle in a hay stack.

Lillian: 1982. Definitely. I was in my second year at university and those Punk bands were showing us that we could do anything we wanted: turn everything upside down if we liked.

Steve: Sex, drugs and rock and roll.

Lillian: It was a great time but it all went by too fast. It seemed like the start of something that would go on for the rest of my life. We felt so powerful and the world was in such a mess. The Falklands war, the IRA were bombing London. We were fighting Cruise missiles.

Steve: Did you win?

Lillian: No but the protest went on. The Peace Camp at Greenham Common lasted for twenty years.

Steve: Were you there?

Lillian: No, I was busy bringing up two children. But it was an exciting time – the most exciting time of my life.

Steve: but you weren't there.

Lillian: I went to Greenham, once. Hundreds of us were arrested.

Steve: You, you've got a criminal record?

Lillian: Well, no, not me, not exactly. The police arrested hundreds of us – mainly to get us out of the way I think. We were taken to some police station in the middle of nowhere, searched for drugs and then the charges were dropped and we were thrown out. Took me hours to get home. So that's why I was so sure about 1982. A year I will never forget.

Steve: Okay, I stand corrected: you were right. Happy now?

Lillian: **(Flirty)** Very happy, thank you. A girl likes to know when she's in the right.

Steve: I'm not going there again.

Lillian: **(Feigned innocence.)** Where?

Steve: You know, you're flirting again.

Lillian: What happened to optimism and persistence?

Steve: They got worn away by indifference. You've proved I was wrong about The Clash and on top of that I am going to freely admit I do not understand women.

Lillian: What is it you don't understand about us? Let me try to help you.

Steve: We'd be here all day if I get started on that.

Lillian: Well just tell me one thing about us you don't understand – I'm fascinated, really.

Steve: Okay, let's see. I've got one, chat-up lines: women always complain about our chat-up lines but you never tell us what we're supposed to say.

Lillian: You've either got it or you haven't.

Steve: There you go. It's easy for you, you don't have to do the chatting-up. Come on, show me what to do. Pretend you're a man, how would you pick me up?

Lillian: I wouldn't.

Steve: Play the game. Come on.

Lillian: OK I'd just look at you. If anything is going to happen, I'd know.

Steve: How does that work then, just looking?

Lillian: Like this.

The two stare at each other and there is something. They are drawn closer but then Lillian breaks away.

Lillian: It's so hot in here, I might have to open a window.

Steve: It worked didn't it. I saw it in your eyes. It worked.

Lillian: Don't be silly, 'IT' couldn't work with you. 'IT' only works with someone special.

Steve: You're talking about finding your one true love.

Lillian: Everyone meets the right person for them that's true.

Steve: Mr. Right?

Lillian: If you like.

Steve: Suppose he lives in China.

Lillian: What?

Steve: Suppose your Mr Right lives in China. You'd never meet would you?

Lillian: It doesn't work like that.

Steve: Why not?

Lillian: It just doesn't.

Steve: No, it doesn't. The real world is full of Mr Rights but you stopped looking after the first one - settled for the local crop.

Lillian: No, I love my husband - we've got something very special.

Steve: Maybe, maybe not.

Lillian: What does that mean?

Steve: Men and women are different. Women take the romantic view and men are more realistic about relationships. Take football: Most of the time I go with my mate Alec. But Alec doesn't mind if I go with Pete sometimes - for a change. Neither of them get jealous. Sometimes I feel like going with both at the same time. Nobody makes a fuss about it. Why shouldn't it be the same with the women in my life? Why stop at one?

Lillian: Football! Football! That's not real life.

Steve: We should treat sex like an extension of friendship: you like someone; you

have a good laugh; you have a shag.

Lillian: I hate that word.

Steve: Alright, we make love.

Lillian: What about children?

Steve: Use contraceptives.

Lillian: No, I mean what about the effect on children – all that coming and going?

Steve laughs,

Steve You know what you said then – that's funny. Coming and going. That was...

Lillian I know what I said. What about the children?

Steve: They'd benefit because we would all be much more relaxed and happy. Less frustration in the world. Think about it.

Lillian: I'm trying.

Steve: Our kids wouldn't be harmed if we played around a bit. People make too much out of sex. Nobody would turn a hair if we played squash together.

Lillian: I know what I'd like to squash right now.

Steve: It's going to come and you're just standing in the way of progress. Look at marriage: half of them end in divorce and most divorce happens because one side, or both, has a shag – sorry, makes love - away from home. My idea - my philosophy - could cut divorce statistics overnight.

Lillian: Tell me you're not serious, please.

Steve: It's perfectly sensible.

Lillian: So your suggesting that my husband should sit quietly down here watching telly while I'm upstairs having sex with a close friend.

Steve: I take your point, that might be a bit in your face for most men but I have thought this through. There is an alternative.

Lillian: Do I want to hear it.

Steve: We would have to change society a bit to accommodate this new era: pubs could have little sha... loving rooms behind the bar. There could be loving rooms rooms next to the rest rooms at work. Trains could have loving compartments so commuters aren't left out. I think you're right, we should keep it out of the home. But it should be unisex.

Lillian: What?

Steve: Unisex - we let gays in as well.

Lillian: Right. I think I'm lost for words.

Steve: **(Proudly)** Yeah.

Lillian: I've met men who think like that but never one who put it into words exactly like you. Like a political manifesto really. Vote Liberal Shagocrat.

Steve: You said shag.

Lillian: What?

Steve: You used the shag word. Shag instead of making love. Maybe I'm getting through to you.

Lillian: I was making a point. A political whimsy. Vote Liberal Make-Love-o-crat would not have the same impact.

Steve produces the note and moves closer.

Steve: So, if I make a stand, can I count on your vote?

They begin to look deeply into each others eyes again.

Lillian: I never vote in erections... er. elections.

They move closer

Lillian: By the way, do you know what happened in Coronation street?

Steve: No, sorry, I don't follow it.

Even closer

Lillian: Neither do I.

Lillian takes the note and tears it up.

BLACKOUT