

# The Date

Sherrilyn Kenyon

*Copyright © 1989 by Sherri Woodward.*

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.*

# The Date

**T***o everything there's a season. A time to work and a time to play.* And on that particular Friday afternoon as she sat in her posh office, Robyn Garrett was definitely in the mood to play.

Robyn's gaze slid longingly to the corner of her computer screen where the time glared mockingly at her.

Four o'clock.

Would this day *ever* end?

Sighing, she drummed her purple manicured nails on her desk as she flipped through the pages of *Vogue*.

What could she say? At nine-forty when she'd shown up late for work her productivity had been low, and then after her two-hour lunch it'd taken a massive nose dive into oblivion. No amount of anything could resuscitate it.

The day was a complete wash.

For a moment she considered telling her boss she'd developed a stomach virus, but if she used that excuse one more time Alisha might call in a specialist.

Leaning her cheek against her fist, Robyn glanced up as Trish Harris sauntered by. She loved the crisp, black Armani suit Trish wore. It was elegant and chic with just a bold touch of leopard print trim. The entire ensemble really set off the rich deep coffee color of Trish's skin.

"You know what I want, Trish?" Robyn asked.

Trish paused with her left brow arched in that look Robyn had dubbed the not-another-one-of-your-crazy-notions-Robyn look. "I can't imagine."

Robyn turned the copy of *Vogue* she'd been reading to face their hotshot graphics artist and pointed to the model wearing a sack dress that showed her bones off to perfection. "I want a man who can look at this ad and think what I think."

Trish looked at the ad, then back at Robyn. "And that is?"

"Someone throw that woman a cheeseburger and make her eat it before she dies of starvation."

Trish laughed. But as Alisha Bentley stuck her head out of the door of her office, Trish sobered and snapped to attention like a soldier facing her commanding officer. And indeed, that was exactly how Alisha ran their match-making company.

"Tell me, Robyn," Alisha asked in her usual distemper. "Is work for the day optional?"

"It is for what you pay me," Robin mumbled as she tucked the magazine into her desk drawer.

Alisha stiffened, but by the puzzled frown on her face, Robyn could tell she hadn't quite caught her words. "What was that?"

"What was what?" Robyn asked, blinking her eyes in an innocent expression.

Alisha glanced to Trish, then pinned her gaze on Robyn. "What did you just say?"

"When?"

Alisha gave one evil glare, then returned to her office.

Trish took a step forward and lowered her voice to where Alisha couldn't overhear them. "Girl, one day you are going to get fired for doing that."

And Robyn probably would too, knowing her luck. As the old song went, if it weren't for bad luck, she'd have no luck at all. Doom, despair, rained agony on her.

But she couldn't seem to help herself.

She loved Alisha and all the women here. They were more her family than the people genetically tied to her. But the devil

in Robyn made it hard to keep such comments to herself. Then again, the devil in her made her do a lot of things she knew better than to do.

Maybe what she really needed was a good old-fashioned exorcism.

Shaking her head to clear her rambling thoughts, she met Trish's concerned gaze. "I'm going to behave today," she whispered, more for her benefit than Trish's.

"That's the ticket," Trish whispered before heading back to her office.

Robyn turned in her chair back to the computer monitor.

*Work, Robyn, work.*

Work, schmerk. Who could work on such a wonderful summer day?

Robyn's attention drifted to the windows where the bright sun beckoned her with temptation. And Robyn had never been one to deny temptation.

At least not for long, anyway.

It was one of those wonderful D.C. summer afternoons where she'd like nothing better than to shed her stodgy pink office dress (and the lavender pantyhose that felt more like a torture device than fashion item) and pull on a pair of cut-offs and a tank top and walk barefoot around the Smithsonian. Closing her eyes, she could picture herself sitting down on the lawn by Capitol Hill, eating one of the scrumptious hotdogs from a vendor's cart and watching the tourists flit by.

And if she really wanted to make it perfect, Dave would be there as well.

A smile curved her lips. "Dave," she whispered with a sigh, wondering what he did during the daylight hours.

For some reason, she pictured him like a seductive vampire who camped out in the daylight waiting for night to fall. Then, he would come alive and work his sexy spell on her.

With a face to rival Leonardo di Caprio and the bod of Brendan Frasier, Steve was truly scrumptious. She'd ogled him from afar many a night at the *Dark Blue Club* where he played

piano better than Van Clibourne. But she'd only found the courage to speak to him a time or two.

Normally, she had no problem at all walking up to a guy and doing what she wanted with him, but Dave was different. Very different.

If only she knew why.

"You still here?" Donna Royale broke Robyn out of her daze.

"What?" Robyn focused on Donna's face.

"It's five forty, Robyn. Normally you bust out like a bat out of hell at five-to-five."

Robyn started, then glanced to the clock on her computer screen which read 4:30. Times like this, she wished she wore a watch. Then again, if she did that, she'd have no excuse for being late from lunch.

"All right," Robyn said in a loud voice, "which one of you trollops reset my clock?"

"I'm only a trollop if you want to draw unemployment," Alisha Bentley said as she sauntered out of her office and closed the door.

Robyn smiled her sweet face which could normally get Alisha to forgive her anything. "I didn't mean *you*, Alisha. I would never have said it had I known *you* did it."

"Uh-hm. I'm *sure* you wouldn't."

Robyn laughed. "I still love you, even if you did trick me."

"Trick *you*? Consider it penance for the fact that you've been forty-five minutes late every day this week."

Robyn clicked out of her spread sheet and word processing programs. "What can I say? I'm just a little too friendly with the snooze button." Holding down the alt and F4 keys on her keyboard, she brought up the shutdown menu. "Then again, I'm surprised it still works given how much wear and tear it goes through every day."

Alisha rolled her eyes. "Go on and have a great weekend. And for God's sake, Robyn, try not to get into any trouble this time."

Robyn collected her purse and gave Alisha a military salute. "Yes, ma'am. I promise, I'll be *real* good this weekend."

The last sound Robyn heard from her coworkers was a sharp reprisal of her name as she swept through the door and headed for her red Mustang parked behind the brownstone office building.

She got in and checked her car clock. It was five thirty-five and she was supposed to meet her best friend Rachel in less than an hour.

"Oh well." She switched the ignition on. "Rach would die of shock if I ever got there on time, anyway."

Backing up, she peeled out of the lot and headed to her townhouse in Georgetown that "Daddy" had non-graciously donated to her when he found out she'd been living with Gun Club.

Robyn nicknamed all her boyfriends. So far there had been Duh-man, the Boor, Tightwad, and Mullet. The six-foot-tall, macho marine, Gun Club had just been another in a long line of guys who were fun to hang with, but weren't the type of guy a woman settled down with unless she was completely stupid or totally desperate. And in spite of what her co-workers thought, she was neither.

Robyn knew what she wanted. A nice, ever-so-slightly-dangerous-in-a-good-way guy who could make her feel what she'd never felt before.

Unconditionally loved.

Her parents had never had a minute to spare for her. Mom had always been the social queen while good old daddy was too busy running his company to even notice he had a daughter.

The girls at work were good friends, but they were more censorious of her behavior than an old-biddy school marm.

What she needed was someone who could appreciate her for just being *her*. Someone who could appreciate her unique views of the world.

It was the only thing in life she had ever wanted. And it seemed to be the only thing in life she couldn't have.

Gearing down into third gear, Robyn drove around Dupont Circle and changed her destination. Forget about going back to her place, she needed to cut loose tonight and the sooner she picked up Rachel, the sooner she could set herself free.

###

"Freedom," Robyn grumbled four hours later. "Yee freakin' hah."

Growling low in her throat, she pulled up in front of her townhouse. "Of all the lame things to do!"

Okay, so Jason No-neck had been cute enough in the face, but all those bulging Arnold muscles were not to her tastes.

*"You won't mind if I cut out early, Robyn? I know we were talking, but Jason has a Range Rover."* Robin mocked Rachel's words.

Letting go of her anger, Robyn sighed. She should probably hate her friend, but that would be like hating a leopard for having spots. Rachel was one of those tall, gorgeous types who drew men out of the woodwork. They couldn't go any place that guys didn't embarrass themselves trying to impress Rachel.

"That's what I get for letting her take me to The Pub House on a Friday night." Of course, Rachel wouldn't stick around while a gob of men were salivating for the model-thin brunette.

Slamming shut the car door, Robyn caught sight of herself in the window. She barely cleared five feet with shoes on.

Her lank, light brown hair was mousy when not bleached. It took a mountain of mouse every morning to get it to hold the chic tousled look she preferred and her gray eyes barely had a color to them at all.

And never mind her bod.

Yeah, compared to Rachel's statuesque beauty, she was a poor substitute.

Robyn placed her fingertip against the tip of her upturned nose and forced the flesh down into the semblance of a normal, aquiline nose. "Maybe a nose job would help?"

She scoffed at her reflection as she released her nose. "On second thought, a head transplant would be best."

Tossing her small purse over her shoulder where it dangled down her back, she started for her front door.

She'd only taken a step when she decided she didn't want to go in right now.

No, not when she felt like this. Alone. Tired. Discouraged.

For a woman of twenty-four, she felt ancient.

If only she knew what she wanted out of life, perhaps that would help. Trish, Alisha, Alice, and even Donna had always known what they wanted, and they had headed straight for it.

But not Robyn. All through college she had changed majors, seeking something new, something exciting. Flitted from one guy to the next, all the while searching for...

"A *raison d'être*," she whispered.

She wanted her life to mean something.

Robyn rubbed her hands over her eyebrows and shook her head. "Stop it, Robyn, right now! No more pity-party. What is wrong with you?"

No more moping.

Pivoting on her feet, she headed toward the street. She refused to go inside her house and make love to the chocolate-chip Hagen Daz! There were things to see and men to do, and right now she was going to head off toward the club and see what man she could find to silence all the ringing doubts eating her alive.

Life was too short for this, and she was finally in the mood to corner Dave.

###

It was only a short walk to the pub, but the place was completely packed. And worse than the exorbitant ten-dollar cover charge they had Fridays was the fact that Dave wasn't playing.

“Just perfect,” she mumbled. “A perfect end to a perfect day.”

What would happen next? Would Gorbechev drop the bomb on the city?

Robyn blinked. Was Gorbechev still in power? Hell, for that matter was he even still alive? She never could keep her current events current.

“Who cares? Alive or dead, he’s probably having more fun tonight than I am.”

Even more deflated than she’d been ten minutes ago, she turned to leave and walked straight into a wall of hard muscle. Robyn opened her mouth to apologize as she looked up the tall, lean body and into the dark blue eyes she’d been longing for.

“Hi.” Dave cracked that gorgeous smile that made her legs weak.

“Hi,” she repeated, too awed by the feel of him just millimeters away to come up with anything more witty to say. She’d never before been so close to him. So close that she could actually feel the heat of his body. Smell the tart Brut aftershave and see the faint stubble on his angular cheeks and jaw line.

Pierce Brosnan had nothing on this guy. Nothing at all.

He glanced around the crowded bar. “If you’re looking for your friend, she left about an hour ago.”

“My friend?”

“The tall long-legged blond—what’s her name? Dana?”

It took her a minute before she caught his meaning. Seizing it, she nodded. “Oh yeah, Donna. Darn!” She snapped her fingers. “I was hoping to catch her.” Anything beat admitting to the love-god that she’d only come here to bask in the handsomeness of his bod, or sigh at the sound of his deep baritone voice.

“Darn?” he repeated with a short laugh. “Now there’s a word I haven’t heard in a while.”

Robyn shrugged. “Hang around me and you’re sure to hear lots of words no one else uses.”

One corner of his mouth lifted in a devilish grin. “Is that an open invitation?”

For the first time in forever she actually felt heat creep up her cheeks. Nervous, hot and flustered, she couldn’t think of anything else to say.

*C’mon, Robyn, where’s your clever retorts?*

*Hiding in the same place where my commonsense lives most of the time.*

*Oh yeah.*

Shaking her head to banish the thoughts, she tried to think of something to say. But for her life, nothing came to mind. Nothing.

Damn.

“I guess I should be going,” she said.

*Coward.*

*Shut-up self. I can’t talk to him.*

*How do you know since you’ve never tried?*

“You here alone?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“How far’s your car?”

“It’s at my place down the street. I walked over.”

His look turned incredulous. “You did *what?*”

“It’s not that far. I only live twenty minutes away.”

He stuck a finger in his ear and made as if he were cleaning it out. “Girl, what century are you from that you’d walk down the street at eleven thirty dressed like *that* and expect to arrive home safe and sound?”

Robyn folded her arms over her chest. “You know, Dad, I’m a big girl now. I can even tie my own shoes and chew gum at the same time.”

“Yeah well, be that as it may, do you have any idea how many big girls ended up at the morgue last night?”

That took some of the anger out of her.

“C’mon, I was about to head home, anyway. Let me walk you back.”

She resisted the urge to duplicate his actions of cleaning out her ear. Had she heard *that*, right?

“You want to walk me home?” she asked around the nervous lump in her throat.

He shrugged. “Don’t worry, I’m not the Big Bad Wolf, Little Riding Hood. You’re safe with me.”

At least that’s what her ears heard, but her instincts told her he could be more dangerous than anything the Grimm’s had ever fabricated.

And yet beneath the doubt came a strange intuition that he wouldn’t hurt her physically. His danger wasn’t for her.

“Sure,” she teased. “I’ll bet that’s what a lot of guys said to those girls in the morgue, too.”

Laughing, he turned to head out the door. He called to the bartender on his way past, then opened the door for her.

Robyn couldn’t remember the last time a guy had been so chivalrous. A girl could definitely get used to this.

They walked in silence for a few minutes with only the occasional car passing by to interrupt the calmness.

“I love the night.”

“Yeah,” she said with a nod. “Even as a kid I used to see how late I could stay up.” She let her mind drift back to those carefree days. “We had the huge plate glass window in the living room, and I’d curl up on the sofa just to watch the moon creep across the sky.”

“Ah, not Red Riding Hood after all, a moon goddess.”

“I guess. What about you?”

“I’m definitely not a moon goddess.”

She laughed. “I figured *that* much.”

His expression turned somber. “I didn’t look out the windows much after dark.”

“Why?”

“When we were kids, my brother told me once that if you looked out the window after dark then you’d see the devil.”

Stunned, she gaped. "Really?"

"Yeah. Stupid me, I opened the window to prove him wrong and son-of-a-bitch if the devil wasn't there, staring eyeball-to-eyeball with me."

Robyn missed a step. "What?"

"Yeah, my brother Buddy had talked his best friend Eugene into wearing a mask and hiding in the bushes."

She laughed. "No, he didn't!"

"Oh yeah, but that's not as bad as the time he set the house on fire."

"Your brother set the house on fire?"

"When I was eight. I woke up hearing someone whispering, 'I am the devil, I am the devil.'"

"Your brother again?"

He nodded. "Before I recognized his voice, he lit a match and it scared the shit out of me, so I decked him and the match caught my bed on fire."

She couldn't believe his stories. "Oh my God! What did your parents do?"

"They beat the devil out of him."

She laughed even harder.

His deep timbered laugh joined hers.

"I guess the devil never came back to your house after that, huh?" She wiped the tears from her face, then cleared her throat. "So, what's he do now?"

"He's a fireman."

She burst out laughing even harder until she noticed he was serious. "Really?"

"Cross my heart. He found a way to turn pyromania into a respectful career. It was either fireman or arsonist. My parents at least think he chose wisely."

"But not you?"

He shrugged. "My motto is to each his own."

Robyn smiled.

"What?" he asked.

“That’s my motto, too. I’m just not used to hearing someone else say it.”

“Yeah, I guess we need more of us in the world.”

Robyn snorted. “The women I work with would say one of me is plenty.”

“Now, why would they say that?”

She shrugged. “I guess because they all think I’m a flibbertigibbet.”

“And are you a flibbertigibbet?”

“It depends on who you ask.”

He snorted. “What? Were you a philosophy major in college?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Because the last time I heard someone dance around me so skillfully with circular arguments was the one semester I was stupid enough to take Rhetoric and Logic.”

“Why on earth would you take that?”

“It sounded easier than calculus.”

“Was it?”

“Since I ended up dropping out of R and L after four weeks with a D average and ended up making an A in Calculus, I’d have to say . . . no.”

“Ah! I did a lot of that.”

“Making A’s in Calculus?”

She shook her head. “Dropping classes. My advisor called me Bounce Around Garrett.”

“Why?”

“Because I switched majors eleven times in three years.”

“Eleven? Jeez, my dad would have loved you. I switched fifteen.”

“No, you did not!”

“I did. Let’s see if I can name them. There was Art, CAD, History, English, Classics, Drama, Business for about three days, Marketing for about an hour—”

“Now you’re joking.”

“Serious as hell. My dad pushed me into the business school. I took one Marketing class, sat down and before the professor finished going over the syllabus I knew I couldn’t stand two years of that crap, so I dodged out the door and headed straight for drop-add.”

“So, you ended up a musician?”

He shook his head. “No one ends up a musician. If I had to live off what I make playing the piano, I’d be one of those homeless pan-handlers who spends the night on a grate at the Mall.”

“Oh, I didn’t know you had another job. So, what do you do?”

“Steal cars, run drugs. Whatever I can to make a spare dime.”

Robyn blinked, not sure if he was kidding or not.

“Relax,” he said, nudging her. “It’s a joke.”

Still a little suspicious, she glanced askance at him. “Then what do you do?”

“I do undercover work for the FBI.”

Robyn stopped dead in her tracks. “Now, I know you’re pulling my leg. Aren’t you?”

His dazzling smile warmed her. “Yeah, I’m pulling it. I’m actually a Cold Fusion Programmer for a local ISP which isn’t nearly as exciting as the others, but far more challenging intellectually.”

“No way!”

He nodded. “Computer geek all the way.”

“Really?”

“Why do you think I was so interested in what you guys were up to. I was conducting a little industrial espionage.”

“Oh shit, I hope you’re joking for real now or Alisha will cook my goose and eat it with relish.”

“I’m joking about the espionage part, but I really am a web programmer.”

She shook her head as they neared her door. “I just can’t see you doing that.”

“Yeah, well, me either, but a guy’s gotta eat. And sadly, I eat a lot.”

“And for what they pay Cold Fusion programmers, I would say you’re probably eating very well.”

“First class all the way, babe.” He winked at her.

Robyn bit her lip as they paused in front of the door to her apartment. “Thanks for walking me home,” she whispered like some teen afraid of waking up Mom and Dad.

Dave leaned forward and whispered in her ear. “My pleasure.”

His warm breath tickled her neck and the scent of his aftershave did strange tingly things to her stomach. He smelled good enough to eat.

Heaven help her, but she didn’t want him to leave.

*You’re being stupid Robyn. Again.*

She was, no doubt about it. Men like Dave had no interest in girls like her. How many times did she have to get burned to learn that?

How many more times would she open her heart to a guy, have him use her and then leave without so much as a good-bye?

And yet....

“I guess I better be going,” he said. He took her hand and placed a gentlemanly kiss on the back of her knuckles.

Robyn swallowed. No guy had ever done that before and it touched her far more deeply than she cared to admit.

He held onto her hand and stared deep into her eyes. Robyn trembled.

“Would you like to come in for coffee?” she said, her voice sounding hoarse and strange to her.

“Depends. Do you ask every guy who walks you to your door to come inside?”

“I don’t know,” she answered honestly. “I’ve never had a guy walk me to my door like this.”

“Something tells me you’re not telling me the whole truth about that.”

She quirked an eyebrow at him. "Are you insulting me?"

He shook his head. "No, Robyn-egg, I'd never do that. I'm just trying to read you."

"Do you try to read every girl you walk home?"

He laughed. "I don't know. I've never walked a girl home like this."

She pulled her keys out and unlocked the door. "Well, the invitation is open. If you care to accept it."



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Defying all odds is what #1 *New York Times* and international bestselling author Sherrilyn Kenyon does best. Rising from extreme poverty as a child that culminated in being a homeless mother with an infant, she has become one of the most popular and influential authors in the world (in both adult and young adult fiction), with dedicated legions of fans known as Paladins—thousands of whom proudly sport tattoos from her numerous genre-defying series.

Since her first book debuted in 1993 while she was still in college, she has placed more than 80 novels on the *New York Times* list in all formats and genres, including manga and graphic novels, and has more than 70 million books in print worldwide. Her current series include: *Dark-Hunters*®, *Chronicles of Nick*®, *Deadman's Cross*™, *Black Hat Society*™, *Nevermore*™, *Lords of Avalon*® and *The League*®.

Over the years, her *Lords of Avalon*® novels have been adapted by Marvel, and her *Dark-Hunters*® and *Chronicles of Nick*® are *New York Times* bestselling manga and comics, and are #1 bestselling adult coloring books.

Join her and her Paladins online at [QueenofAllShadows.com](http://QueenofAllShadows.com) and [www.facebook.com/mysherrilyn..](http://www.facebook.com/mysherrilyn..)