

Love Lately
A Play
by Kim E. Ruyle

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Love Lately

Cast of Characters

MAEVE Female. A PhD psychologist. Any ethnicity. 50s, could be near retirement age, more or less.

ROB (ROBIN) Male. A welder. Any ethnicity. 50's, could be near retirement age, more or less.

TIME: About now.

SETTING: Maeve's home.

SET: A kitchen to one side. Next to the kitchen, a dining area with table and chairs. A living area with settee, chairs, coffee table, and one or more lamps. A vase with artificial flowers sits prominently on the coffee table. Centered upstage is a double bed with extra pillows, or the head angled up slightly, if necessary, to provide a line of sight for the audience when actors are recumbent. Lamps are on each side of the bed. Doors lead to a bathroom and exterior exit. A clothes tree with coats is near the exterior door. The place is furnished as befitting the home of an established professional woman.

SYNOPSIS: A first date between seemingly mismatched Ph.D. psychologist, Maeve, and blue-collar welder, Rob, turns into a weekend-long whirlwind of surprising connections, unexpected conflicts, and profound revelations as this unlikely pairing explores attraction, compatibility, and love later in life.

RUNNING TIME: ~90 Minutes.

"Being someone's first great love may be great but being their last is beyond perfect."

~anonymous

Scene One

It's Friday evening in Maeve's home. All is dark. The sounds of lovemaking, a male and female making noise, gradually increasing until, suddenly, a roar from the male. A loud gasp from the female. A pause. Movement. Silence. Lights up to dim from bedside lamps. Maeve and Rob sit up in bed, breathing deeply, eyes open wide. Maeve, smiling, amused. Rob pleased with himself, thrilled. They share a look. Maeve begins giggling. At first, Rob is amused, but as the giggling intensifies, he becomes troubled.

ROB

Come on. Give me a break.

MAEVE

I'm sorry. It's just... It's funny. Cute. You're cute.

ROB

Oh, good. I'm cute.

MAEVE

Well, yeah. I think you're cute. Your enthusiasm. Very cute.

ROB

Okay. Well, I guess I let my enthusiasm get the best of me.

MAEVE

What are you?! A lion?

ROB

No. I guess I'm just... Passionate.

MAEVE

Yes, you are! My God! A wild man, what you are. I've got Tarzan in my bed.

ROB

It was just involuntary. It's been a while. I guess I had a lot of pent up, I don't know...

MAEVE

Passion!

ROB

Well, yeah. And it's not all on me, you know. You're not exactly quiet, either.

MAEVE

I hope the neighbors have their windows closed. And I'm not laughing at you. *With you.* I'm laughing with you. Why aren't you laughing?

Maeve gives a little poke to his ribs. Rob recoils, forces a smile, pokes back.

ROB

Bed is not the place a guy wants to hear a woman howling with laughter.

Maeve snuggles in, hand on Rob's chest.

MAEVE

Know what I think? I think you're *Tarzan*. My God, I just wasn't expecting...

ROB

Me, too. I wasn't expecting...

MAEVE

What? You mean the sex?

ROB

This was more than sex, wasn't it?

MAEVE

What do you think?

ROB

Halting. Serious. For Rob, the big question.

But maybe... You think we might...? That this might be more than...?

MAEVE

That's always the question, isn't it?

Maeve rolls over on top of Rob. They kiss and grope for a few moments. Then, she rolls back. They pause. The chemistry is palpable. Maeve, giggling, turns back into him and snuggles.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Holy shit.

ROB

Yeah?

MAEVE

That's a question?

ROB

Yeah. No! I mean... Wow. Yes! We're so... *In synch*. Sure doesn't feel like a first date.

MAEVE

Because we got to know each other online. The messages. Sharing pics.

ROB

And the essay. Don't forget the essay.

MAEVE

Ah, yes! The essay.

ROB

It's just, I never... You know... Not on a first date. So, yeah. Unexpected.

MAEVE

Never?! I find that hard to/ believe.

ROB

/And the boots! Did not expect cowboy boots.

MAEVE

What? You don't like them?

ROB

No. I do. Just unexpected. Cowboy boots and jeans. I like your boots. *Love* your jeans.

MAEVE

What'd you expect me to wear?

ROB

I don't know. Something, uh... Maybe a business suit.

MAEVE

A business suit to Jethro's Suds and Steaks?

Maeve sits upright, puzzled. Rob crosses his arms while making a fist with one hand and squeezing a bicep with the other – his tic, a characteristic mannerism when he's feeling defensive or insecure.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Oh, God. You thought I'd show up, an uptight, prissy –

ROB

No! No. Just knowing your profession, I thought –

MAEVE

Oh. I get it. You decide to wear creased slacks and wingtips so we'd look like a couple. Or maybe you were just trying to impress me.

ROB

Trying too hard, I guess. Next time... Uh, can I assume there'll be a next time?

MAEVE

No commitments, no regrets.

A pause. Now Rob is puzzled, but Maeve sighs, lies back.

ROB

Oh, well, if there is a next time then, more upscale. Linen and candles on the table.

MAEVE

I'm good with a bucket of peanuts on the table. But can I assume that if we go to a fancy restaurant, you'll be pulling on jeans and a pair of shit-kicking cowboy boots?

Now Maeve's hit a nerve, and Rob sits up, tic noticeable.

ROB

And there it is. Wondered when you'd get around to it.

MAEVE

Around to what?

ROB

The psychologist has pegged me as a blue-collar boor. Thoroughly lacking in social graces. Unable to dress myself appropriately for the occasion.

MAEVE

Jesus. Is that how welders talk? Don't be so sensitive.

ROB

How are we supposed to talk?

Beat.

I almost said *indecorous* but didn't want to sound pretentious.

MAEVE

Jesus.

Silence.

ROB

Sex changes things.

MAEVE

Always? You think I'm being critical? About the wingtips and slacks? Really, Rob, I was just having fun. There's nothing wrong with the way you talk.

Maeve lightly lays a hand on Rob's arm which quiets his bicep-squeezing, but Rob remains sitting.

ROB

Okay. No worries, then. I like change. And I'm not sensitive.

MAEVE

In that case –

ROB

Here we go.

MAEVE

What?

ROB

Please tell me you're not going to profile me.

MAEVE

Profile you?

ROB

A psych profile.

Now Rob's hits a nerve. Maeve sits up, frustrated.

MAEVE

Goddamnit. See. This is why I don't like to tell men I'm a therapist.

ROB

I suppose you're gauging my degree of introversion. My openness. Neuroticism.

MAEVE

And you're not sensitive? Jesus.

Maeve, mildly annoyed, gives a sigh. wraps herself in a robe, walks to kitchen. Rob looks after her, shakes his head, and pulls on his boxer shorts.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Stay in bed. I'm coming right back. Just getting us some water. You want anything else?

Maeve opens refrigerator and retrieves two bottles of water. Rob sits back in bed. Maeve rejoins him, leaving robe on. She opens a water bottle and offers it to Rob.

ROB

We can share.

MAEVE

You sure?

Rob nods. Maeve allows a smile, takes a swallow. Rob follows suit. The bottles are set aside.

MAEVE (CONT.)

What I was going to say before you stereotyped me –

ROB

Sorry, but you've got to understand, this kind of relationship –

MAEVE

Now we're in a relationship?

ROB

No. I mean, I'm not used to... Just go on. You were saying...

MAEVE

Saying that I noticed you have hair on your chest –

ROB

A chuckle.

Oh, God. Don't tell me that chest hair is correlated with a psychological disorder.

MAEVE

Jesus, Rob. Can we just agree to make this a safe zone?

ROB

Sure. But didn't we already talk about protection?

MAEVE

Grins despite herself.

So, if we're okay now, I'll try to finish my thought...

Rob returns a coy grin.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Goddamnit. Stop looking so...

Rob cocks his head and ratchets up the coy smile.

MAEVE (CONT.)

So fucking adorable.

Maeve pulls Rob back to the pillow, places a hand on his chest.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Okay. Here's the thing. You have hair on your chest. Not a lot, but it looks good. Feels good, too. But – and here's my point – you don't have much hair on your arms. And I'm not criticizing. Really. I'm not. It's just.... I'm curious.

ROB

Goes with the job.

MAEVE

Okay. I guess I don't understand.

ROB

From sparks. You have to look real closely. See? A dense patchwork of small scars.

MAEVE

Hardly noticeable, but... *Ouch.*

ROB

You get used to it.

MAEVE

How'd you become a welder?

ROB

Aptitude. I have good eye-hand coordination.

MAEVE

Gifted hands. I can attest to that... But God, your tongue.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Beat.

You really like my boots?

ROB

And your jeans. *Love* the jeans. You have a perfect ass. Sorry. Is it okay to say that?

MAEVE

The ultimate compliment. Good to know you're an ass man.

ROB

Oh. Is there an ass-man psych profile? Something different than a tit-man profile?

MAEVE

Neither asses nor tits a sexual deviant makes. That's straight from the DSM.

ROB

DSM?

MAEVE

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. A direct quote.

Rob plays along with the teasing, gives a dramatic sigh of relief.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Yeah. In the realm of sexual deviancy, ass appreciation is considered quite innocuous.

ROB

What about you? If there are ass-men, are there ass-women?

MAEVE

I tend to appreciate the full package.

ROB

Ooh. The package.

MAEVE

Chest and arms.

ROB

Uh huh. And how do I measure up?

MAEVE

On a ten-point scale. I'll give you a nine.

ROB

Is that the psychologist's way of making me feel secure? How can my nine-point chest stand against your ten-point ass?

MAEVE

Competitive, are you?

ROB

More than most, I guess, but not sure I'm qualified to self-diagnose.

Beat.

What's it like being a psychologist?

MAEVE

Well, you know how you've got this patchwork of little scars? We're all – all of us – a walking bundle of psychological scars. Most of us just accept them like you've accepted your scars. They're mostly small, and we don't give them a second thought. It's when they become noticeable that I get involved.

ROB

Difference is, my scars are real and aren't going away. But psych issues, the things I suspect you deal with, are often imagined or transient.

MAEVE

Okay. That's... That's quite insightful.

ROB

But correct, isn't it? I mean, it must be difficult to deal with things that are so... So intangible.

MAEVE

Doesn't mean they're not real.

ROB

But there's more to it. You say you get involved when the scars are noticeable. To whom? Do you mean noticeable to the patient or to others?

MAEVE

My God. Another great question! Nine for the package but ten for the insight.

ROB

High praise from a doctor.

Rob studies her, then kisses and fondles her for a moment. With difficulty, he pulls back just a bit.

ROB (CONT.)

Damn.

MAEVE

God damn.

ROB

I'm sorry. You were saying...

MAEVE

Enthralled, a kittenish smile, a deep sigh.

I was saying, psychological threats – psychological problems – spill over. They impact others. Problems are never imaginary. If it's a problem, it's real to whomever it's afflicting.

ROB

You must be great at your job.

MAEVE

Screws up her face, an expression of doubt.

Well, I do take it seriously.

ROB

Probably never bored.

MAEVE

Are you kidding? I'd love boring. Yesterday, I was counseling inmates at County. In the morning, I had feces flung at me and –

ROB

Holy shit.

MAEVE

Yeah, well... Same day. In the afternoon, I had two marriage proposals.

ROB

So many opportunities, and yet you still chose to go out with me.

MAEVE

Don't get cocky. You never know. Those guys haven't turned in their essays, yet.

ROB

Pretty openminded, aren't you?

MAEVE

My line of work, you've got to try.

ROB

Like I said. Never boring. From shit to wedlock in one day. Quite the variety.

Pause while they study each other.

MAEVE

Lots of psych issues come down to the human inability to adapt. To adjust. Cope with change. Maybe they just need to accept the change created by their scars. Or maybe they need to be proactive. Change their environment. Their relationships. Whatever. But change sucks.

ROB

Okay... But that sounds like a crock. Humans are masters at coping with change. Change is the only constant. If humans couldn't deal with it, we'd have gone extinct long ago.

MAEVE

That's true, I guess. But at some level, change becomes threatening for everyone.

ROB

But if nothing changed, life would be pure hell. We wouldn't learn anything. What's learning without change? We'd die of boredom. And we'd never even laugh.

MAEVE

Are you a black and white kind of guy? Or can you acknowledge there are shades of gray?

ROB

Not everything is gray. There are some universal truths. Or do all psychologists embrace moral relativism?

MAEVE

Wow. There's no way. No way in hell you're just a welder.

ROB

Just a welder? Huh.

Rob sits up, squeezes his bicep, struggles with a decision.

ROB (CONT.)

Excuse me a minute.

Rob hops out of bed, saunters to bathroom. He's not petulant, just very disappointed, sad. He slowly closes the door. Maeve watches him, feels the weight of shame for her insensitive remark.

MAEVE

Shit.

Projecting.

That came out wrong. Rob? Please come back to bed.

ROB

Off.

A minute.

A sound of running water. Then, after a moment, Rob enters, but he just stands, avoids prolonged eye contact, and grips his bicep.

ROB (CONT.)

Um... Maybe this isn't going to work out...

MAEVE

No. Rob. I didn't mean to be insulting or/ demeaning...

ROB

/I get it. I'm *just* a welder. I'm not mad. I mean you're entitled to –

MAEVE

I meant the way you talk!

ROB

You said there's nothing wrong with the way I talk.

MAEVE

There's not! It's just surprising. I mean you talk like you're highly educated and –

ROB

That's what I figured. Jesus Christ.

Maeve gets out of bed, embraces Rob, which he awkwardly allows without returning the embrace. Rather, he continues to grab and squeeze his bicep. A moment, then Maeve takes half-step back and lays a hand on his arm to quiet his tic.

MAEVE

I need you to listen, Rob, because I'm going to tell you a secret. A secret. But it's true. Are you listening?

Rob turns to her, nods his head.

MAEVE (CONT.)

A PhD doesn't mean shit. It only proves a dogged determination to put up with a lot of bullshit and jump through a lot of hoops. Some of the dumbest dumbshits I know have PhDs.

Beat. Sotto voce.

Fact is, I know a welder who's sharper, who's got more on the ball than the whole lot of them.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Beat.

Will you please forgive my insensitive remark and come back to bed?

Rob finally makes steady eye contact and gives a half-hearted grin as Maeve smiles warmly.

ROB

Uh... Yeah, okay. Maybe we can rewind it a bit...

Maeve and Rob get in bed and share the water bottle.

ROB (CONT.)

You know, I had a chance to go to college. Eighteen. Joined the Army. I tested well. Really, *really* well. And after basic training, I was Soldier of the Cycle. Got called into the company commander's office and was offered a slot at West Point.

MAEVE

Wow! That's –

ROB

Unusual. Yeah. But it meant a commitment past the three years for which I'd enlisted, and I didn't think it through. At eighteen you think you know it all but don't really know jack shit. I fucked up

MAEVE

Maybe it was all for the best. You're an autodidact. Nothing wrong with that.

ROB

And just a welder.

MAEVE

Stop! I have no problem with your profession. It was just... You started talking about universal truth. And... Absolutes make me nervous.

ROB

Why? You're telling me there are no absolutes?

MAEVE

No. I'm not saying that. But... Okay. You said you like change. Right? How about changing your mind? Are you able to do that? Or I'm wondering if you're one of those guys who always has to be right. Maybe you want to change me.

Waits for a response.

Well?

ROB

Maybe change would be good for you. Sorry. Okay, finish your point. Can't promise I'll agree.

MAEVE

Empathy. It's about empathy, not agreement. Suspending judgment to learn the lens through which others see the world. We all have a different lens. Truth is relative.

ROB

Really?! Truth is relative?!

MAEVE

That's where it gets tricky. For me. In my work. Two people look at the same set of facts and infer different meanings. Do you not see that?

ROB

Maybe. And through your lens, people can't cope with change.

MAEVE

I need – we all need – to feel in control. Change sucks. People need certainty. To predict. Have answers. Why do you think we've invented so many myths? So many goddamn religions?

ROB

Well, through my lens, it's boredom that sucks. It's pure hell. Probably the reason I'm single. Haven't found someone who doesn't bore the hell out of me.

MAEVE

Mmhmm. And what about me? The jury still out?

ROB

Still collecting evidence. Building a case.

MAEVE

Me, too. The evidence is stacking up. Mostly in your favor.

ROB

Mostly?

MAEVE

Smiles. Pause.

Sure I can't get you something else? Something to eat?

Rob just smiles, wags his head.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Well, let me know. But I'm curious about welding? Doesn't it get boring?

ROB

I've yet to deal with anyone throwing shit. But some jobs are challenging.

MAEVE

Give me an example.

ROB

You've heard the phrase, *welders do it in all positions*?

MAEVE

Not that I recall.

ROB

Let me show you. Can you hand me the water bottles? Make sure the caps are tight.

Maeve hands him the water bottles. Rob holds them out with the bottoms butted so the bottles are in a horizontal position, caps pointing east and west. They sit up, cross-legged, face each other.

ROB (CONT.)

Now, you hold the bottles like this.

MAEVE

Like this?

ROB

Yeah. Now, there are basically four welding positions.

Rob uses his index finger as an electrode and traces the top of the seam where the bottles meet. Maeve, thoroughly charmed, gazes at Rob's eyes more so than his finger. She's enchanted.

ROB (CONT.)

The flat position – welding like this – is the easiest.

MAEVE

And your finger is the welder?

ROB

I'm the welder. My finger is the electrode.

MAEVE

And what am I?

ROB

In this scenario, you're the fixture holding the workpiece.

MAEVE

I'd rather be the workpiece and you be the electrode.

ROB

You've got a one-track mind, don't you? But clever. No shortage of welding euphemisms. You know, of course, that *welders have hotter rods*.

MAEVE

This is so exciting. I'm learning so much.

ROB

Sarcasm? I'm boring you?

MAEVE

Are you kidding? I love it.

Maeve lays bottles down, takes Rob's hand in both of hers, and extends and kisses Rob's finger.

MAEVE (CONT.)

I love your electrode.

Maeve puts Rob's finger in her mouth, slides it in and out. Rob sucks in a deep breath. Then, Maeve leans in, gives a deep kiss.

ROB

Shall we abandon the welding lesson?

MAEVE

No, no. Please continue. You're teaching me about positions.

Rob places the bottles in her hands, bottoms butted, so caps are turned north and south. Then, traces with finger along the seam.

ROB

Okay. This is the horizontal position. A little harder than the flat position.

MAEVE

Well, you and I have already mastered the flat and horizontal positions.

ROB

Takes lots of practice to master. Hundreds of hours.

MAEVE

Hours?! Hundreds of hours?! You've got a lot of confidence in your electrode.

Rob smiles, takes her hands, turns bottles to previous position, caps east and west. Uses finger to trace the vertical seam, not too quickly, as he moves from bottom to top.

ROB

This is the vertical position. More challenging.

MAEVE

So that's with me on top. We did that, too.

ROB

You don't give two shits about welding, do you?

MAEVE

No! I do! Go ahead. We have one more position. Must be the underhand position.

Rob traces the seam on the bottom of the bottles with his finger.

ROB

Not underhand. Overhead. The most difficult.

Rob sets the bottles aside. Pauses, studies her.

ROB (CONT.)

I'm sorry. I said boredom is hell, and what do I do?

MAEVE

You don't bore me! And I feel privileged to have my first welding lesson from a master.

Maeve pulls Rob back down to the pillow, cuddles in, and strokes his chest.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Still, just knowing you as well as I do, I wonder if welding doesn't sometimes get boring.

ROB

Guess it could if I wasn't a thinker. But I drop the hood and watch the little bright light, and my mind's free to think.

MAEVE

Hood?

ROB

The mask that covers my face, protects my eyes.

MAEVE

Oh, right. Hey! Some sculptor should reprise Rodin's thinker. Instead of a naked guy, chin on his fist, a hooded welder watching a little bright light. You could be the model.

ROB

Wouldn't work. They'd want a model with a full package, a rating of ten. I'd never measure up.

MAEVE

Thought you said you weren't sensitive.

Rob shrugs. They share an intimate smile, an intimate moment.

MAEVE (CONT.)

So, what do you think about when you're watching the little bright light?

ROB

Lately, thinking a lot about you. Anticipating our first date.

MAEVE

Did it meet your expectations?

ROB

Expectations just lead to disappointment. I've learned it's best to have no expectations.

MAEVE

But one can hope.

ROB

I've not been disappointed.

MAEVE

Neither have I. Who'd have guessed that Tarzan is a thinker.

Pause. Maeve continues stroking Rob's chest.

MAEVE (CONT.)

What else do you think about?

ROB

About whatever I've been reading. On my nightstand right now, I've got a book about what America's founders learned from the Greeks and Romans.

MAEVE

My God, you continue to... You're just so damn unexpected.

ROB

See! You like the unexpected. It makes life interesting. Gives us reason to smile.

MAEVE

Uh huh... What do you think about spending the night?

ROB

I would, but I've got a very early start tomorrow.

Maeve rolls her eyes and sighs.

ROB (CONT.)

No. Really. I'm not bullshitting. Saturdays are work days for me.

MAEVE

But you do want to –

ROB

See you again? Yes! I do. I want to see you again and... I was even going to ask about tomorrow night.

MAEVE

Two nights in a row? Sounds serious...

Silence. They share an intimate smile, a tender kiss.

MAEVE (CONT.)

You said sex changes things. So, where are we? What's changed between us? Is there something you'd change right now? Something about us?

ROB

Only one thing.

MAEVE

What's that?

ROB

I'm lying on my dominant hand. Okay to change sides?

MAEVE

To free up your dominant hand? Gladly!

Maeve rolls over the top of him to switch sides,
gives a wide grin.

MAEVE (CONT.)

Better?

ROB

Thanks. Now what?

MAEVE

How about the underhand? No, I mean the overhead. Can you show me the overhead?

They kiss as lights dim to...

BLACKOUT

END OF SCENE