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Opening Extract from...

Let's Compromise and Say I'm Right

Calman on Love and Relationships

Written by Mel Calman

Edited by Stephanie Calman

Published by Souvenir Press

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Let's compromise-
and say I'm right..

Calman on Love & Relationships

Edited by Stephanie Calman
Foreword by Michael Palin

Souvenir Press

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Foreword © Michael Palin

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Photograph of Mel Calman courtesy of Alan Young

Many of the drawings included in this volume were previously
published in book form in the following volumes:

Calman & Women (Jonathan Cape, 1967), *Dr Calman's Dictionary of
Psychoanalysis* (W.H. Allen, 1979), *But it's my turn to leave you . . .* (Methuen, 1980),
How about a little quarrel before bed? (Methuen, 1981), *It's only you that's
incompatible!* (Methuen, 1984), *A little light worrying* (Methuen, 1996)

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Foreword

Love and Marriage

We all know, thanks to Frank Sinatra, that love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage. Mel Calman, on the other hand, saw the horse riderless and the carriage overturned. His talent for using humour to pin-point our fears, anxieties and evasions was at its perceptive best when tip-toeing through that minefield of emotions that faces any human being who fancies another.

If it was as easy as Frank Sinatra told us it was than we wouldn't need a Mel Calman. Mel's cartoons remind us that life is complicated. That it is full of contradictions. That we are not good at saying what we want, or wanting what we say. Especially when it comes to attraction. There is something in the north European psyche that cannot easily deal with this awkward emotion. When it comes to knowing when to fight or sell dodgy insurance we've no trouble at all, but when it comes to telling somebody that we like them we're all fingers and thumbs. And there's not much we can do about it, but be honest with ourselves and not get too anxious.

Which is why we need more of Mel. It is not a distorting mirror he holds up to us, but one which is uncomfortably truthful. He shows us putting our foot down, but invariably in the wrong place. Making our minds up only to change them instantly. Turning everlasting love into long-term imprisonment. He played on these inconsistencies, not in a jeering or judgemental way, but with a wit and sensitivity that makes us laugh, ruefully as in 'Familiarity has come between us', joyfully, as in 'Free Women Now!' / 'Can I have one?' and with a guffaw of recognition, as in 'How was it for you?' / 'How was what?'

He had an uncanny ear for the nuances of self-delusion without ever making us feel we're being mocked. In fact it's the opposite. Far from being judged, we feel that we are sharing the confusion with the cartoonist himself. Mel was like that – a psychiatrist who makes you laugh.

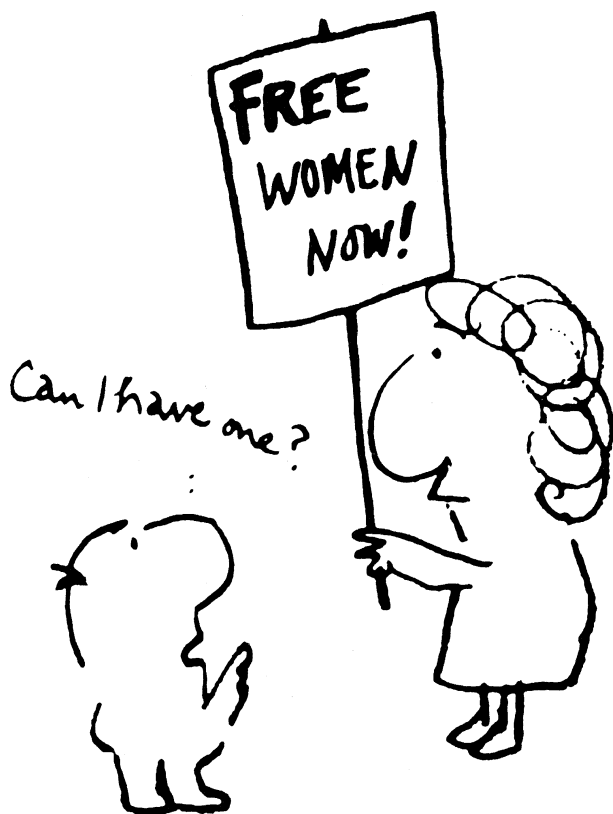
His graphic style is minimalist, but it conveys so much. One of his great skills was to condense pretension and pomposity to a short sharp one liner, usually delivered by a short icon of a man, probably Mel himself. Occasionally there is some almost indecently busy action, all the more effective for being a surprise. As in the red heart being hurled like a discus.

He did concentration and concision with such a deft touch that we are sometimes given much more than we expected. A man in bed saying to his wife 'Being a failure isn't as easy as it looks' could be from one of Tennessee Williams' notebooks. And how about this for the start of a novel? Woman to Man: '*You don't understand women.*' Man: '*You never let me meet any.*'

Mel was an eloquent miniaturist. An exceptionally acute

observer of the human condition. I'd recommend this volume to anyone in love or thinking of getting married. Or, more particularly, to anyone out of love and wondering where it all went wrong. These wonderful cartoons won't stem the tears but they might just produce some choking laughter. And that's a start.

Michael Palin
London, March 2015



Introduction

When my father Mel Calman died in 1994 at the age of just 62, his readers missed him deeply. They felt as did we, his family and friends, that no-one could express the sane human response to a crisis, be it personal or political, so succinctly.

In his files we found many letters, going back decades, from people grateful for this or that joke, often ending with the remark: 'You summed up just how I feel.' Whether on current events, war, fear, parenting, food, travel – any subject – he spoke for many of us, and in so few words. But it was in the area of human relations that he truly excelled, and where his work is timeless.

For *Relate* he once designed a tea towel, featuring a man and a woman sitting with their backs to each other. The woman is saying, *'I'm not talking to you'* and the man replying: *'That's ok – I'm not listening.'*

It shows his instinctive grasp of how communication itself can become a battleground. My own favourite on this theme is one man telling another: *'My wife hasn't spoken to me for three days.'* *'Perhaps'* says his friend, *'she's trying to tell you something.'* It's so 'him', and yet universal. And, more than thirty years on, it hasn't dated at all.

The same goes for my teenage children's favourite, a man looking

up at a woman with a placard demanding ‘*Free Women Now*’ – and asking, ‘*Can I have one?*’

And I don’t think it diminishes his achievements as a dramatist of the human condition to say that some of his captions were actually taken from life. It was recognising which of those phrases had a life beyond the bedroom, or the kitchen, and boiling them down to their very essence, at which he excelled. ‘*It’s only you that’s Incompatible!*’, which became the title of one of his books, was said by an exasperated wife – I had better not say which one – just before she slammed the door on yet another row. And ‘*I related to you yesterday – today I’m resting*’ was his own, real life riposte to one woman’s endless need for conversation. As he might have said, there is such a thing as too much communication. He knew exactly which sort of ridiculous things each sex is prone to saying, and one never felt, as a woman, offended or misunderstood. There are whole conversations, even entire relationships – albeit probably the shorter ones, portrayed in those seemingly effortless retorts.

Above all, he brilliantly zoned in on that paradox of love and commitment, namely that we fall in love with each other, move in together, marry even – and find that that very proximity brings its own problems. In fact, he didn’t live with his last partner at all, as if he’d spent his life adjusting the distances back and forth to get just the right level of closeness, and had finally achieved it. But of course, the two marriages yielded the better jokes. One of the many collections he published during his extraordinary thirty-eight year career is dedicated ‘*to my ex-wives, for their help with the research*’. I hope they took it – and take this too – in the right spirit.

Stephanie Calman

Should I ask
her for her
'phone number
NOW - or WAIT
a BIT?

If he doesn't
ask me for my
'phone number
soon - I'm LEAVING...





Now tell me all
about yourself -
briefly...



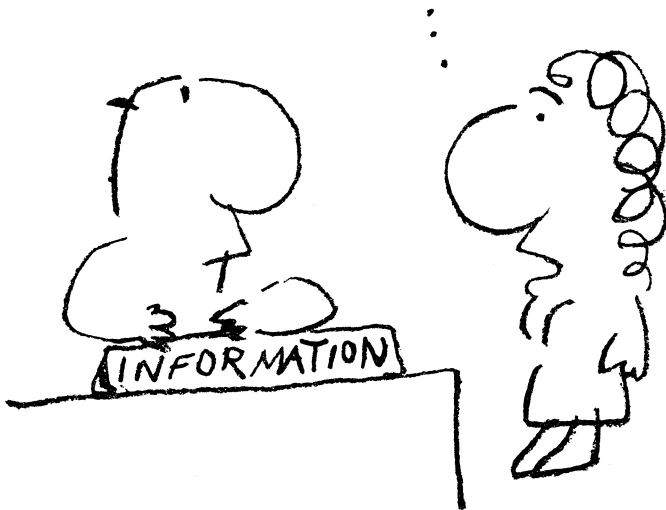
Hello darling!
it's me



oh- which me is that?



Could you tell me
if I'm attractive?



Is this a foxtrot
or a tango you
aren't
doing?



So-how was it
for you?

How was what?

