

## Field Survey

His name was Michael and he was looking up at something outside of the frame of the picture and his grinning white teeth were visible through the darkness of his beard. She scrolled down.

Body type: Athletic.

Pets: Dog.

Occupation: Field of Education.

Political leanings: I'll tell you once I know you.

Well, that wasn't very helpful. She opened the messenger function, clicked on the text box and watched the cursor blink on and off under the message he had sent:

*Hey, you seem like a nice person. It's hard to find good people nowadays. Meet up to see if you feel the same?*

This seemed very quick. She had read that you were supposed to have four distinct exchanges before planning to meet. She looked over the top of her monitor at the counter with the spider plant spilling over it and the bank of computers beyond. She was at work but it was after 3:30. This would not go on her timesheet.

*Sure, why not? Name the place and the time.*

She was taking a risk. She could now be described as a "risk-taker."

At the coffee shop Michael was indeed athletic, bearded, and seemed like a nice person.

"Why didn't you put your political leanings up? Were you afraid to drive people away?"

He ran his hand thoughtfully through his beard.

"I guess I just think that politics divides people. You put something like that up and then people put you in a box."

"But, wouldn't that happen anyway, I mean, wouldn't your date put you in a box once you told them on a date?"

"Yes, but then you can engage in a *conversaaation*."

“Ah,” she said.

Luckily, their political views were aligned, and didn't necessitate much *conversaation*, except to gripe and commiserate about the current state of things.

They spent more time on each other's occupations, his as a special ed teacher (he was currently working to get his hours so he could apply for licensure), which he was doing to affect positive change, since his parents had, in his words, “done enough damage to the world through all their corporate racketeering.”

She told him about her work as an administrative assistant in charge of a student success center. It was her job to put together a variety of events for the director of the center for student success, and to follow up with student concerns, and to make sure that the director's correspondences and scheduling needs were all attended to. She liked the work. It was, for the most part, precise. “After all, I like to be organized. Clarity and cleanliness are important to me.”

“Yes, cleanliness,” he said, though there was something dirty in his voice, as if he was imagining her body.

She changed the subject back to his work and learned how he had sat with one boy for over an hour and had tried to get him to thread beads onto a string to work on fine motor skills. It had not been very successful, and the boy had again and again covered his hand in drool.

“By the end though, we had three beads on that string, and I have to tell you, it just, it felt like the biggest accomplishment of my life. It was amazing. How relative success is, right?”

“Right!”

At the end of their date, they hugged, but did not kiss, and because it was the afternoon, Diana still went to her tennis lesson, where she worked with her coach on her backhand swing. Her mother had told her it was important to maintain healthy habits.

When she got home that evening, she put together a survey and sent Michael the link. The questions were as follows:

1. How attractive did you find your date? Rate 1-10:
2. How compelling did you find the conversation? Rate 1-10:
3. What is the likelihood of a second date? Rate 1-10:

The answers were returned the following morning: 10, 8, 9.

Good, she thought. Her first date had been a success.

She opened the text messaging app and wrote:

*Looks like we could improve on #2. Meet up this Wednesday night for dinner?*

Two hours later her phone buzzed with a response:

*You are too funny!*

*Yes, Wednesday sounds lovely.*

*La Fogata on ninth? 8 o'clock?*

She didn't understand why she was too funny, or how someone could be *too* funny. Was there any such thing as being too funny? Like having too much fun? Or too much candy? Maybe she was making him sick.

*I don't want you to get sick of me though,* she wrote.

*Impossible,* he wrote back.

But hadn't he just said? She let it rest.

Wednesday night was wonderful. They both ate spaghetti Bolognese and drank red wine that left many little pieces of itself at the bottom of their glasses. They talked about political developments and he told her stories about the children, how sometimes it took more time to prepare for the day's classroom activity than the actual activity. He told her how important it was to get the children

involved. How it mattered that they not only get a classmate's coloring book out of the bin, but that they actually deliver that book to the appropriate classmate. "Think what that means, to actually recognize and deliver a book to one of your classmates. And of course, to be recognized!"

This idea made her flush with such happiness that she reached across the table, took his hand, pulled him toward her, and they kissed over a bouquet of red silk roses.

They made plans to meet again, the following Saturday, and he helped her into an Uber.

The next morning she sent him another survey. It had only one question:

1. How much did you like our first kiss? Rate 1-10:

He did not fill out the survey as instructed, but instead texted her the number 10, with four exclamation points. While she was initially upset that he hadn't used the survey app, she happily filled in the answer for him, to keep the data intact.

The next Saturday, after they saw a play, he invited her back to his place. He made food in his kitchen, and they talked about the dating experiences both had had. He told her that he had been using the app for the past six months, and had somehow never managed to get past a fourth date with someone. "Maybe I'm picky," he said.

"Or maybe you just haven't found the right woman."

They smiled at each other, and then he came and gave her a long kiss, leaning over the counter. They had started kissing a lot that day, because they had kissed the last time over dinner, and so now it was allowed.

"I've only been on the app for a month," she told him. "No one answered the surveys as well as you."

He turned from the stove and said, "I thought the surveys were just a special thing between us."

She looked at him a bit bewildered.

“I’m joking,” he said. “I used the same first line with you that I used with all my dates.”

This didn’t help to clear up her bewilderment very much. Why would he use the same first line? Why would he think surveys were special?