

I hadn't been single (and looking) for long before I was strong armed by my buddies into online dating. It wasn't really my thing; not least of all that, given from painful experience the sort of person I was after didn't appear on those platforms much.

My buddies though, they don't exactly know my type. But they were determined I'd have a date for the Feb 14th. We were all 'pals before gals' while we were all single, but I guess getting a partner of your own (gal or otherwise) changed things until I was the only one left.

After hours of watching me scroll, they got sick of me dismissing all the potential matches, and they said the next one that appeared would have to be 'the one'. I had to accept it. Bros code they said, or some nonsense. I only played along with them because they were *my* bros.

The next potential match was a raven haired woman with particularly angular features. She had light brown eyes, pasty face and a slightly forced smile. Her profile photo, just her face, was from sometime last year but I guessed she couldn't have changed much in that time. I read her blurb and honestly? It seemed more like a sob story than a matchmaking profile.

It turned out she was from a country somewhere between eastern Europe and the middle east I had only heard of on the news. She was a student here, and her parents had joined her as asylum seekers three months ago.

I guessed she was about as keen on finding someone as I was, because, as it said on her blurb, her profile had been made by her parents. Ughhh fantastic. Not.

I dutifully clicked to match with her, and she almost instantly accepted, and we arranged to meet on the 14th. I had a date; My bros were ecstatic. I was not.

My match and I exchanged numbers, and over the next two days, much to my surprise we really hit it off. Ordinarily that would have been a good thing, but it only made the knot in my stomach grow larger and tighter. I learnt that we even went to the same university (different courses), and although my mates, who had only seen her profile photo, wondered how I hadn't seen someone "that hot" around campus (their words), I didn't dare explain to them why it was unlikely I'd

noticed her.

She played some of the same games as me, although she said she was more into her FPSs than my RTS games. Something about not owning a PC herself and only playing on friend's old consoles.

I also found out that she read more than me as well which was nice, but said that she preferred audiobooks, and not the dead-tree books I was always talking. She explained about the language barrier, which I guess makes sense.

Oh and food. We both *really* loved our food. That kinda surprised me I guess.

Now about why I had that knot in my stomach. At the risk of sounding incredibly shallow, I don't think I've ever dated outside my type. Well except for the last time that I dated anyone, which was Freshers week. It ended up being a disaster - I had stopped looking since then. And by 'outside my type' I mean... Appearance. I know that's awful, but I had always thought that looks were at least part of the 'equation'. I was worried I'd be forced to choose between looks and personality, and although the choice was obviously personality it felt super awkward I was even considering the other. Welcome to my brain.

Don't get me wrong, by now my match and I were getting on like a house on fire, exchanging authors, challenging each other to online matches of Halo and Age of Empires games. If we weren't set to go on a date tonight we'd probably have ended up as just really good friends. As the messages continued I was starting to think maybe appearances weren't all that important to be honest? I was really hoping I could look past them when I finally met her. I didn't really want to risk a potential friendship with my hangups... Despite trying to reassure myself it wasn't a risk, that knot only grew.

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It was an hour before the date and I was already dressed in something smart but casual, pacing up and down my room. Ping. I flipped open my phone to find it was a message from Puntusha, my date. It's a Georgian name apparently, no idea what it means.

*Hi, uhmm I'm kind of nervous about this date. I can't say why, but please let me explain when you see me before you run off. Byeee -x-o-x-o-x-*

Well, that was odd. Nerves were normal... But what did she think I was going to do... See her and run a mile?

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The time came, and I arrived at the restaurant. She had picked it out, booked the table, everything. Given her nerves, that seemed like the right choice. The place was called Tbilisi Terrace. It was a cozy affair, low lighting, candles. The food smelt amazing.

"Ahhh," said a rather slim looking waiter, with a comically large mustache. "You must be Paul. Tushki is waiting for you."

His wrinkled face creased into a genial smile at her name... I'm guessing a shortening of Puntusha, making me think she must have been a regular here.

And I was Paul. So that was that. Time to meet her. I gulped down that knot, anticipating my knee jerk reaction to seeing her and steeling myself against it.

"She's at the table for four in the far corner. I'll bring you a menu shortly, she's already ordered some starters."

And I weaved my way through the quiet space thinking, *a table for four?*. Had she brought a friend to ease her nerves... I mean fair play, but not exactly what you expect on a first date, right?

All the tables I saw had very basic plastic chairs, there wasn't even a booth. Clearly, like me, she was on a student budget and I wondered if the food actually tasted as good as it smelt.

I scanned the room for that pasty angular face and the long black hair, and when I finally found her I had to double take.

Let me just say that Puntusha no longer had an angular face. Nor did she seem pasty, but she had a pale glow like moonlight to her skin. Clearly the months since that photo had been taken had treated her well. Very well indeed.

She was, put very bluntly, the largest woman I had ever seen, and not for my lack of trying. Yes, I know how that sounds... That at least explained why she needed a table for four, given that she'd turned two of the flimsy chairs in on themselves to sit herself more comfortably across them.

You know those people that casually say "I'm speechless!" And then, miraculously go on to talk? Not me, in that moment, I meant it. I full-on stared at her, drinking her full figure in. Quite rudely I think, but when I say I was stunned I was being literal.

I continued to stare, forgetting myself, all manners out the window. Any gentlemanly pretense gone. My mouth was agape at her size *and* her beauty. They were in my mind linked, but not like in a weird way? You'll have to trust me there.

And where my mouth moved wordlessly trying to form words, my heart started pumping at a thousand miles an hour. It was like seeing her had tipped me over the edge of a rollercoaster, stealing my breath away.

And then, regrettably, she spotted me staring. She had a piece of cheese covered food half way to her mouth. As our eyes met, a large blob of some sort of dip slowly slid off the end of the bread onto the table.

She slowly put the bread down and slumped with her head in her hands, body over the table, her chest clattering into the plate and cutlery in front of her.

"Oh Paul! I'm sorry I can explain!" She cried through what I noticed were very cute chubby fingers.

Her accent was adorable.

Snapped out of my reverie, I quickly took a seat and reached out to gently hold her hands. I accidentally brushed a finger against her bright red cheeks in the process and noticed how hot and flushed she was.

Everso slowly I pulled her fingers away, until I could see those eyes. I realised they weren't just light brown, but a beautiful honey amber. They were much lighter than they'd seemed in the photo. Oh good grief, right then I thought I could have fallen into those eyes forever.

I still held her soft thick fingers, slightly calloused, and tried to make eye contact until she braved looking back at me.

"Paul, I didn't mean to lie... I..."

Oh she thinks... She... Oh she's in for a surprise.

She continued, "My parents wanted me to date, traditional values you know, and I didn't think it would last. One look at me and I'd scare them all away. Then my parents would give up, and I could go back to studying..."

"I'm not scared away!" I offered, trying to think how to word my own revelation.

"And... and, I didn't think I'd click with someone? I didn't want to ... I feel so dishonest. I told myself, why bother updating my photo when I knew I'd be rejected regardless? "

"I have my own secret, Tushki... can I call you that?"

She nodded as a tear crept down her face.

"After seeing your photo, I was worried... Worried after we clicked..." I didn't want to admit my shallowness, so I just finished with, "That we could only be friends... Nothing more."

She turned her head slightly, confused at what I had said.

“And like... I’ve grown to know you and I was an idiot to worry about looks... but it was my friends, they wanted me to date, but... There’s no one quite like you on dating apps. I mean... I thought there wasn’t...”

“You mean you *don’t* mind... My secret?”

“Mind?” I practically shouted that word, “I couldn’t have dreamed of a better secret.”

If I thought she was blushing before, she turned an even brighter shade of red now.

I took a moment to properly take her in as she processed the turn of events.

Red dress. Amply filled out, not tight though, and still what seemed like a dainty build somehow despite everything. I gulped as I realised she still spilled over half the table where she leaned forward, showing enough cleavage that felt like I should look away.

Her rear, straddling those two seats, rose and joined her wide sides, as she defied the usual hourglass look in favour of being generously pear-shaped.

“So you like... You like big women? Like me?” She said, thankfully straightening up, testing the waters cautiously. My face felt red and flushed too, as though that revelation should be embarrassing to me.

My eyebrows lifted in confirmation as I nodded slowly.

Composing myself, I said in a practiced manner, “The ancient statues of Venus, pale in comparison to your beauty. And I don’t mean the greek statues.”

It took a second, but realisation dawned. Her face briefly explored even deeper shades of red, and then she let out a giggle like the tinkling of fine glassware. I joined in the laughter, realising how cheesy it sounded. But I'd wanted to say that line for years now.

I was going to enjoy complimenting her if that was the reward.

We chatted for a while after that, me dropping in more compliments, her explaining what happened when she arrived in the country.

She had been homesick and worried for her parents initially, and the owners of the restaurant, who served Georgian cuisine, took her in. She was here most nights she said, and the owners always spoilt her with extra helpings so she would "Always have a taste of home".

I didn't doubt she had been looked after given, how relaxed she seemed. Smelling the food again I couldn't blame her either. At that, my stomach rumbled something fierce.

"Would you like some khachapuri?" She said while offering the same bread dish I'd see her eating initially.

"Oh I'd love to, it was really kind of you to order us a sharing platter."

Another blush.

"Oh ... I wasn't expecting my date to stay after seeing me... I ordered to calm my nerves... And I got given extra as usual but... I've already finish some dishes... But of course we..."

I assayed the platter with a mix of small traditional dishes. It was a fine spread, it could have been a large main meal or something for friends to nibble at. Some dishes were untouched, others polished clean.

I'm guessing she'd eaten her favourites first.

"Oh you must think me ... so greedy to eat all of this, before you even arrived! I'm sorry Paul... I... wanted to share my country's food with you."

We'd obviously have leftovers, but I wanted to spoil her in that moment.

"Waiter?" I called out instantly hoping to reassure her, "another platter please!" I turned back to Tushki, "I couldn't deprive my date of sharing her favourite dishes."

And I gave the cheekiest wink to Tushki I could. More blushing and the giggle like glassware.

"Oh Paul," she said already eagerly piling my plate up with what was left on the table, "I think I love you."