



Me

One date, three jackpots and a BOMBSHELL!

Story of the Week
VOTED BY YOU

I went on a first date and five days later it was still going. What the heck had happened at the pub? By Paige Howlett, 31

Swiping through a dating app on my phone, I sighed before quickly closing it.

I'd been single for three years, and while I was happy in my singledom, I'd sometimes look to see what was out there.

Evidently, not much.

But there was no time to mope as my friend Vikki messaged asking if I fancied meeting at the pub later.

Let's do it, I messaged back.

I got ready and made my way down to our local in Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire.

We ordered our drinks and as we scanned the room for somewhere to sit, a tall,

handsome man caught my eye.

It was Vikki's brother John. I'd seen him about, but we'd never spoken before.

She quickly turned to me and said, 'You two would suit! Maybe you should go out for a drink.'

'Oh, maybe,' I replied, coyly.

She waved him over and introduced us.

'Maybe we should grab a drink sometime,' he said.

'I'd love that,' I replied.

We exchanged phone numbers and a couple of weeks later, we arranged to meet at our local for a date.

I made my way to the pub and took a deep breath before I walked in.

'Wow, you look really nice,' John said.

'You too,' I replied.

He bought me a glass of white wine and we made our way to a booth.

Rummaging through my bag for my lipstick, I pulled out my passport and laughed.

'Oh, I have my passport on me too!' John chuckled. 'If I win big tonight, we'll go on

holiday.'

'Win what?' I asked.

'I play the lottery every week, I'm part of a syndicate,' he explained. 'I put £20 in a week. You've got to be in it to win it, haven't you?'

I worked in a bookies, so knew all about gambling, but didn't do it myself.

As we chatted and got to know each other, the night flew by.

We shared the same sense of humour and John had me laughing until my sides hurt.

'I'm having the best time!' I said.

Then John's phone rang and he said, 'Sorry, I have to take this.'

He stepped away from the table and when he came back, he was grinning from ear to ear.

'You must be my lucky charm. I just won £5000!' he said. 'That was my mum ringing me to let me know.'

My jaw dropped.

'You're kidding!' I said.

'Fancy blowing this place and going somewhere a bit warmer?' John replied, pulling his passport out of his back pocket.

I thought he was probably

joking, so I laughed and said, 'Yes.'

'Well, let's get to the airport then!' he declared, deadly serious.

But before we left, I had an idea. If John was right and I was lucky, it was worth a try.

'Let me put a tenner in the fruit machine first and let's see what happens,' I said.

I popped a £10 note in, hit a few buttons and was amazed when I won £170.

'That's our taxi money sorted!' I said, scooping it up from the machine.

We called one and hopped in.

'Newcastle Airport, please,' we both said in unison.

'Wait, where are we going?' I asked.

'Let's have a look,' John said.

He pulled out his phone and started to browse last-minute holidays.

'Fancy Benidorm?' he said.

'Why not, let's do it!' I replied.

It felt bonkers, but after a few drinks and the excitement of our first date and John's win, I went with it.

Arriving at the airport, we headed for the check-in desk, giggling like daft teenagers.

'I can't believe we're doing



Benidorm

this,' I said. 'What are we like?'

However, we hit our first stumbling block since our madcap decision.

'I can't let you board until you've sobered up,' the woman on the desk explained.

So we went to Greggs to stock up on carby bakes to soak up the booze, washing them down with coffee.

After that, we were finally able to check in, and once through security we made our way to the terminal pub for another pint.

'Cheers to us!' I said as we clinked our glasses.

A few hours later, we boarded our flight to Benidorm.

We couldn't stop laughing at the craziness of the situation. It was only our first date and we were going on a five-day, all-inclusive holiday together.

We ordered more drinks on the plane, then I must've dozed off. I woke just as we

landed in Alicante.

'Ready for our first holiday?' John said.

'Oh my God, I thought this was a dream,' I said, my head throbbing with a hangover.

As we got off the plane and were hit by the heat of the Spanish sun, I suddenly felt hot in my cardigan and jeans.

'We don't even have summer clothes,' I said.

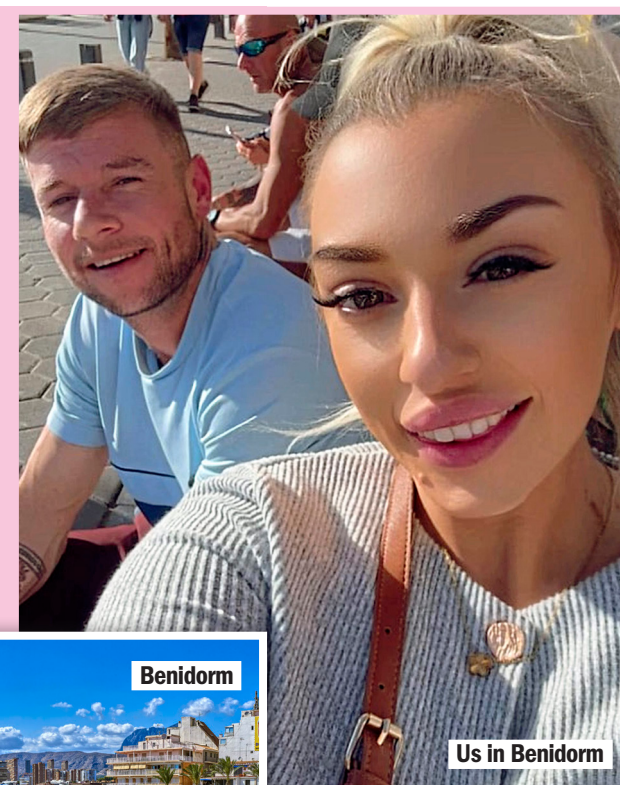
'Don't worry, we can get some when we get to the main strip,' John replied, more chipper than he should be after our night of drinking.

'Are you always this spontaneous?' I asked, knowing I definitely wouldn't have done this sober.

'Not really. I just want to spend more time with you,' he said and that set butterflies off in my stomach.

We were transported to our hotel and as it was too early to get into our room, we went in search of summer clothes.

After picking up what we



Us in Benidorm

needed, John said, 'Well, the world is our oyster. What would you like to do?'

We stopped for a few drinks and then walked along the beach, just as the sun was setting.

'This has been the best first date ever,' John said, turning to face me.

'Mine too,' I replied, before leaning in to kiss him.

As we lounged by the pool in the evening, too tired to do anything else, I messaged my mum and said, *I'm in Benidorm with John!*

She didn't believe me, so I FaceTimed her to prove it.

'What are you like?' she said, laughing her head off. 'Have fun, love!'

I rang work to let them know I wouldn't be in, and John was self-employed so he could take the time off no problem.

Then, over the next five days, John and I played bingo at our hotel, swam in the pool, sunbathed, had many more drinks, and enjoyed every moment of each other's company.

When we sent our pals a photo of us on the beach together, they all thought we were insane.

But for us it had been

magical.

'Who knew Benidorm was so romantic?' I joked.

And when our spur-of-the-moment break came to an end, we were both gutted.

'I don't want to go home,' I said, as we boarded the plane.

'We can always come back,' he replied, with a grin.

After landing, we went back to John's house, in Middlesbrough, and flopped on to the sofa, exhausted after an intense few days that had already begun to feel like a dream.

'Paige, I know this is a bit early,' John said. 'But would you like to be my girlfriend?'

'Are you serious?' I asked.

'I've never had such a good time with anyone before, never found someone so similar to me,' he went on. 'I understand if it's too soon, but I'd love for you to be with me.'

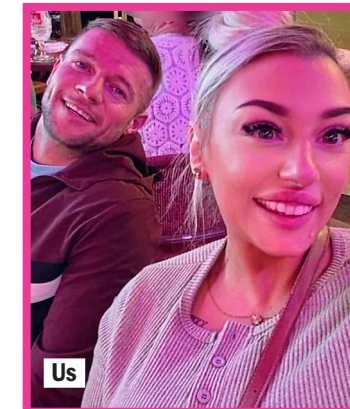
'Yes! Of course I'll be your girlfriend,' I said, flinging my arms around him.

He grinned and said, 'I don't know how I'm going to top this first date.'

'Maybe we can go back to Benidorm for our anniversary,' I replied.

Now, seven months on, although we haven't quite topped our week-long first date, things are going brilliantly.

We both struck lucky that night with the Lotto and the fruit machine. But getting together is where we really hit the jackpot!



Us

By Danielle Lett and Demi Koutouzi. Picture Shutterstock (photo of Benidorm is a library image)

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