

DATING

MY 36-HOUR FIRST DATE

written by Danielle Ma | June 20, 2015



"So I'm never going to see you again, am I?"

She held her iPhone to her ear, head tilted, body propped up against the wall next to her tiny twin bed.

"It was just too much," he answered.

Of course it was. This thing between them was the briefest of relationships—it might've been called a fling if its intensity hadn't rendered the word a mismatch. An emotional affair wrecked from the inside out; they never had a chance.

They had met online exactly 9 days before. Their first conversation was easy, a rapport that was taken from dating platform to texting quickly and without pretense. Each message came through in a little green bubble, and she studied them for the nuances of his personality. She imagined the cadence in his words—he was passionate. Outgoing. A little arrogant. Attentive. She liked talking to him, and he had a grounded presence about him. Longer responses, follow-up questions, occasional emojis. He had things to say about things. That was certainly a start.

After a couple days of texting, they weren't bored of each other yet. The connection hadn't fizzled. They had somehow managed the rare feat of beginning to chip away at the stranger layer between them. He asked her what she was up to in the next week. Never without a fun, or kitschy, or otherwise niche event up her sleeve, she mentioned the Northside Festival in Brooklyn. He wanted to go with her. Concert, dinner, drinks. Saturday. A first date plan was born.

In the days leading up to Saturday, he somehow spun their story into a grand romance. Through messages, then phone calls, then eventually Skype sessions lasting late into the night, he placed her—her in all her sweetness and humor and opinions and good nature and sass and stories—high up on a pedestal. With equal parts reluctance and guilty pleasure, she let him. She let him adore her from afar. She let him rush the things that can't be rushed and felt the gears click in his mind as he decided that they could be right together.

He told his best friend about her. She told no one about him.

She told no one about him because she was skeptical. She held doubt he didn't seem to have, and while she fell easily into his charm and hope, she never abandoned her gut feeling, or rather, a feeling acquired from relationships past. Swept up and let down—a pattern she knew all too well. She liked him though, and she wasn't so far jaded as to categorize sureness, romantic notions, or blind optimism as deal breakers. They felt too close to her own vies for comfort, but she did not nothing about that. She hit snooze, rolled on her side, and pulled a blanket of bright, shiny hope over her. Wrapped tightly, eyes closed.

His mind was already in the future. Did she want to go to his softball game next Thursday? Should he stay over after hanging out with his friend next Saturday? Would she want to go somewhere fun for her birthday? Yes. Yes. Yes. She said yes to everything because it was more fun than saying no. She said yes because, at her very core, she was an all-in-type of person, and if he wanted these things, then maybe the compatibility pieces would fall into place in this backdrop of adventure and companionship. She said yes because maybe it would work out.

Their first date plan evolved. Concert, dinner, drinks was appended with movie, cuddling, sleepover. An ambitious first meeting for sure.

Then it evolved again. As the week dragged on, the sexual tension became more and more palpable, as did the desire to realize this intense, whirlwind, nebulous thing in person. The whole rendezvous was built up monumentally. So why wait until Saturday? Friday night was open.

Crazily, stupidly, they planned a 36-hour first date.

And it was actually a lot of fun. Emotions aside, it was an objectively good weekend. Pizza and craft beer. Live music. Sex. Movie theater popcorn and 3D glasses. Art installations. Netflix. Cookies. But even against the skyline of a perfect playground like New York City, they unraveled in each other's presence. They were torn down from a place of hope into a place of doubt, confusion, and accidental vulnerability.

For better or for worse, she was everything she said she would be in person. Affectionate. Honest. Into PDA. Low tolerance for bullshit. Placed in physical proximity to this boy she'd resolved in her mind to be intimate with, her relationship-preservation mentality kicked in big time. Her brain, her hormones, her emotions would not accept anything less than constant and uninterrupted closeness, because anything other than that would mark failure. Doubt aside, she had accepted this person into her life for 36 hours. He had treated her like his girlfriend from afar, and she acted that role when they were finally face to face.

He recoiled. Not at first and not all at once, but by the end of that one and half day sprint, he realized that he didn't want what he had asked for. He didn't want all of her; he wasn't ready for it. Confused, conflicted, and questioning, he could only emotionally afford to be on for part of that time, for part of their first date. She called him out on it. Impulsively, instinctively, she pushed him. He fell deeper and deeper into an internal struggle until it was too much.

Of course it was too much. What were they thinking?

Propped up in bed, she heard his answer float through her iPhone into her brain space. She wasn't surprised. She was a little bit sad, but she still felt whole. Separated from his physical presence, her initial doubt was allowed to breathe again, and she felt closer to reality in that moment than she had in the past 9 days.

This thing between them, the briefest of relationships, an emotional affair—it never had a chance. And it doesn't stand a chance to be rekindled. Not for a lack of potential compatibility or chemistry. But because in one another, they will always see broken versions of themselves. Mirrors and shadows of insecurities, vices, vulnerabilities, and past hurt that were accidentally shared with a stranger masquerading as more.

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Danielle is a passionate twenty-something living in New York City with too many interests and not enough time in the day. She works at a boutique ad agency next to her favorite building, the Flatiron, and spends a lot of time in parks with coffee. She frequents food festivals, listens to science podcasts, explores comedy clubs, and writes, a lot. She diaries the moments and conversations in her life, writing mostly about dating, love, and sex in the city on her blog, Here's The Thing.

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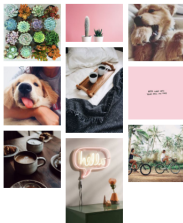
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