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## I'd Love To, But I Have My Genitourinary Exam Tutorial Tonight

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I'm sitting in a lecture on suicide when I receive an extraordinary text. The girl I'd asked on a date says yes.

I met her at a tiki bar in Bushwick, two weeks ago. On my way to order a second round, I noticed two women talking nearby. It took me a moment to realize they were talking to me, because it was the first time this had ever happened.

I should say one of the women was talking to me, while the other looked on coolly, in what could only have been disapproval. Disapproval was a surefire way to get my attention. Plus those big blue eyes, the icicles they were emitting; white blouse, black vegan leather.

I excused myself from the first woman and cautiously turned towards the second. When she looked my way, it felt like someone turned the lights up bright. When she didn't, I felt simultaneously boring, chastened for being boring, and an ardent desire to become more interesting.



The night ended in a double reversal. I still don't think she approved, exactly, but she did give me her number.

I texted her, the next day. She responded. I'm always relieved when a number turns out to be real. I thought this was a good sign, a chance she might, if I didn't blow it, go out with me.

Then I proceeded to blow it. I waited two weeks to ask her out, in flagrant violation of the as yet unwritten, but still widely accepted, rules for dating in our "age of mobile messaging." I had unintentionally sent the unstated, yet unmistakable, signal that other things in my life took precedence over dating and even, for the time being, her.

This was true, but not the kind of thing you want to open with for a first date you hope to eventually go on.

By the time I finally did get around to asking her out, I was sure the answer would be no. I felt like the answer already was no, even though I hadn't asked. No was the only answer she could possibly give such incompetence.

So when I read her text, as I sit there in class that day, I am truly surprised. She says yes. One improbable event has been followed by another, even more improbable event. But I'm not going to think too much about it. I have a date.

"There are about one million suicides per year, worldwide," the lecturer says. In this moment, however, my soul cannot be destroyed. I realize I'm giddy, grinning stupidly, and remember where I am.

For a man approaching thirty, giddiness in any circumstance is unseemly. In a lecture on suicide, it's more like alarming. I look around. No one is paying much attention, which is a relief. Though, come to think of it, it's medical school. You could probably do anything in a lecture hall and no one would pay much attention. Still, I try to remain discreet, even as she does me one better. She proposes we do something that very evening, which would be good news, if I didn't have my genitourinary exam tutorial tonight.

"I'd love to, but tragically I have..." I write before stopping, mid-line.

Could I really send this to someone I met once, at a tiki bar, two weeks ago? It might as well have been an eternity. The explanation would surely lead to more questions, and I'm afraid the answers to these questions would surely lead her to never speak to me again.

The stakes are high. I'm in recovery from five years of relationships. I was with one person, whom I almost married, for four of those years. When we split up, I moved in the ill-advised, time-honored footsteps of immediately seeing someone else. That lasted a year, about eleven months longer than it should have. When it was all over I decided to take some time off from dating, maybe forever.

Now, a few months later, I'm out of practice. But I have an excuse. It's not that I've been doing nothing (I started medical school that year, late, at twenty-eight), just nothing that would be helpful to me in this situation.

Therein lies the problem—with me, with dating, with life. I'm twenty-eight years old. I'm a first-year medical student. Basically, my life is already over. The only consolation is that I have a killer bio for my Tinder profile.

Maybe if I had been more like my accomplished peers and started earlier, I would have had a chance. As it was, I wouldn't graduate for another three years, at the earliest. I would be thirty-one, rapidly approaching thirty-two. Assuming my life didn't get any further off track than it already was and I started residency, I'd have three to seven more years of training, depending on just how old I wanted to be before finally becoming an unqualified attending physician. A junior attending physician. So still qualified, I guess. Residency begins and ends in July. I have an August birthday. When I finish, I'll be just under forty-years-old. Half my life will be over. More than half, if physicians really do die sooner than everybody else. This is a statistic I believe.

Besides, I'm only moderately attractive. On the basis of half a semester of Psychiatric Medicine lectures like the one I'm sitting in, I've diagnosed myself with social anxiety disorder (performance-only subtype) at the least, and possibly something much worse. I can count on three fingers the number of times I've gone out with an absolute stranger in all my wasted years of life.

I'm either exactly like everyone else, or I'm totally fucked.

This is the first real opportunity to go on a date to come along in months, and for all I know

it could be the last. Maybe, against the backdrop of the lecture on suicide, there is a certain urgency. Whatever the reason, I want to go on this date.

My one saving grace is that due to the information asymmetry in our relationship, she doesn't know any of this. She hasn't done the math yet.

So here I am. As matters of life and death are discussed, I'm thinking about how to say, "I'm sorry, I can't go out with you tonight. I have to learn how to perform a genitourinary exam from a professor who will also play the patient while I try out my scrotal palpation technique and perform a digital rectal exam for the first time. I will observe and be observed by two of my classmates, who, by the way, I'd really like for you to meet sometime." I must say this in a way I hope won't ruin possibly my only chance at future happiness.

It's a situation I know well. About a year ago, not long after I started medical school, I began to notice I couldn't tell anyone what I was actually doing. It was less an issue of professional confidence (to the great relief of everyone involved, for the most part we weren't even in the same room as patients our first semester of medical school), and more an uneasiness about whether I should.

"What did you do at school today?" my mother would call and ask. I think it bears repeating that at the time, I was twenty-eight years old.

"We cut someone's face off," says the voice in my head, though it could easily also have said, "We resected her brain." Or "We cut out her heart." Or "We sawed her pelvis in half."

“We did it in small groups,” the voice in my head drones on. “Cutting someone’s face off only requires two people, so the others were free to quietly weep in the corner. After we had finished, we tossed her face in a red bucket, underneath the table.

“Three hours later, around five o’clock, we tied off the orange, tripled-lined bags—stamped with BIOHAZARDOUS WASTE, filled with human remains—and tossed them in a dumpster in the hallway outside the lab, waiting for a man I never saw to roll them away, to where I never learned.”

I thought it would be better not to say this to my mother, or anyone else. She was kind enough to call me, in the mid-two-thousand tens, and ask about my day. She deserved to be spared from the superfluous daily horror of what I’d decided to do with my life.

So I don’t tell her. I keep it to myself. By the time I have my genitourinary exam tutorial problem, I’ve been doing this for almost a year.

Of course, an obvious alternative presents itself: I could simply *not tell her* and suggest another night. But I want to tell her, I realize, to my surprise. If she’s going to be in my life, however briefly that may be, I want her to know about it. Not the sanitized version—the truth.

Then again, I don’t want to be alone forever.

We date because we hope that somewhere out there is a person (or several people, if we’re feeling optimistic) who will understand us, and given the exact right set of circumstances, most of which are completely outside our control, will love us for it.

Not in spite of ourselves, but because of ourselves. (At least I think that's why we date. I have no idea, really. I've hardly been on any dates.) Dating is an admittedly imperfect method for finding this person, but so far we have yet to come up with a better alternative.

In a profession where confidentiality is an imperative and there's so much we can't disclose, it becomes that much more important to say what we can. But how much *can* you really tell someone else? Where should we draw the boundaries around our experience, especially the part where we threw away someone's face after cutting it off?

I decide to find out with the person I met at the tiki bar. It feels right. Sure, it's asking a lot of a stranger, but isn't life about taking risks? What's the worst that could possibly happen? Shame? Humiliation? Failure? That happens every day in medical school! Though maybe not, admittedly, vis-à-vis dating.

I tell her the truth. Okay, I *text* her the truth. I don't include all the details, but somehow I think she'll understand. While I wait for a reply, the lecturer expresses a cautious optimism about the future of suicide prevention. He thanks us for our attention. Then it's over. I look down. No reply yet. I pack my bag, and look again. Still, nothing. So I guess that's that, and I get up to leave.

I'm walking out the door when I feel the buzz in my hand. "Well," she says, "I'm free on Friday."

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