Chapter 3: How Long Have You Been Dating Your Boyfriend?

So let's take a trip down memory lane, back before all this dating abroad was even a thing. I didn't start traveling internationally until later in life. That being said, the majority of my dating experience is based on my time living in Atlanta, Georgia. Hopeless romantic, Southern gentleman, raised with exposure to women. Could you ask for a more feminine man? Not to mention I'm a double Pisces. I don't know enough about astrology to know why that matters, but apparently it does. Or so they tell me.

I didn't date growing up. I was very much into video games and drawing, which consumed a lot of my time alongside normal school activities. I can't remember what age I was when I had my first actual girlfriend, but it was well after university. It's kinda wild to think back: online dating didn't really become a thing for my generation until I was in my teens.

This is a rather embarrassing story, but I'll tell it anyway. When I say I never had an "actual" girlfriend until after college, I legit mean that. My "relationships" before that were long-distance virtual ones. The first woman I considered myself in L-O-V-E with is someone I never met. I only saw photos and spoke with her on the phone. I'm certain this was a catfish situation before the show had even been imagined. I recall trying to get her to come meet me or even do video chats, with no luck.

We met on the dating app Plenty of Fish. I think it was probably the first one I used. We'd spend countless hours exchanging messages. In those days, I legit had to sit at a desktop and send messages while browsing the web. I think we "dated" for a year or two. All the details are extremely fuzzy at this point, but this was certainly not a typical first-love situation.

Why online worked for me then: I was a nerdy, socially awkward, fat kid. I was well liked, but I never had any "game," just a friendly personality. My only exposure to women in social settings was at university parties. I wasn't an amazing pickup artist at bars or clubs. This reminds me of a story from those days.

I had gone to high school with this very beautiful girl, well out of my league at that time. Basically, I considered everyone out of my league. We ended up going to the same college near our hometown. This isn't a high school sweetheart story, unfortunately. I had a huge crush but would never have bothered to ask her out. I'd see her on campus, and we'd smile and wave. I doubt we exchanged more than ten words our entire time knowing each other.

Whenever I saw her approaching our building, I always went well out of my way to hold the door open for her. I even once saw her approaching the building from a distance and did a fat man slow jog so I could get the door for her. She was always very cheerful and kind with her gaze. Apparently that was all I needed for my crush.

One night I was out with some friends at a very trashy college bar. Just cheap drinks, blah music, and a bunch of young wasted university students. You'll never believe who I saw that night. It was HER. I was just excited to see her in a social setting where I could, in theory, walk up, strike up a conversation, and then confess my love for her.

Needless to say, that didn't materialize. What did was the first of many funny stories at my expense. I went on with my night without even doing our normal greeting. It started to get pretty late. One of my good friends was buying lots of drinks for us, so that night I got a bit loose. Liquid encouragement was what it was going to take to talk to her. As I was getting ready to leave, I caught her at the bar. I smiled and asked if she'd like a drink. She excitedly accepted. We waited for her drink and just exchanged pleasantries.

I wish I could remember what I even said. I'm certain it had no bearing on what happened next. We got the drinks, I paid, and we went back to the dance floor. I made my best attempt at dancing with her. I noticed a guy looking at us. He didn't say anything, but the look on his face was, "What is this girl doing with him?" It wasn't very subtle, so she must have noticed. But instead of thinking that herself, she started making out with me. I was so caught off guard. After a moment, she came to her senses and excused herself. I glanced back at the guy. He was frozen with a shocked look. I shrugged, smiled, and walked away to tell my friends what had happened, leaving him frozen in place.

Fast forward to somewhat later in my dating life. At this point I had a good job and was in shape, so I wasn't the nerdy version of myself from that story. I was still using online dating to meet 90% of my dates. Just like with my virtual long-distance relationship, it felt very similar. I'd talk to them most days for weeks or months before it materialized into a proper date. Even then, in my experience, a man who's respectful to women rarely gets a clear sign of interest.

Of the handful of times I actually met a woman in person, one stands out. I was out with my roommate at a "bar" within walking distance of our house. We'd go there somewhat regularly because it was close. I forgot to mention this bar was a strip club. It had a male and a female side, so it wasn't just a place for sad, lonely men. Women could also enjoy it.

One night I was talking to the woman bartending. I struck up a conversation, and we exchanged contact information. We set up a date for sushi. It was unusual because I rarely go into the real world and meet women. Super excited for the date, I went, and it was seemingly going well. We

were talking and laughing. Then she asked me a surprising question. She said, and I quote, "How long have you been dating your boyfriend?" I thought I had misheard her. I said, "Excuse me?" She said, "Yes, the guy you were with the night we met. He's your boyfriend, right?"

I didn't know where to begin with my response. One, I was well out of my roommate's league, the more attractive half of this hypothetical gay couple. If only he were so lucky. Two, we met at a strip club. We met on the female side. I was certainly paying for our meal. While these questions spun around in my head, what I managed to get out was an awkward smile and "Hmm, no." I actually get the gay comment often, and I find it flattering. I assume it's because I'm attractive, well dressed, and respectful to women. We both laughed and continued with the conversation.

As we were wrapping up dinner, I paid the check, which I figured was strong evidence against her theory. Then again, I don't actually know whether gay men pay on dates with women. Somebody should look into that. Anyway, we opened our fortune cookies. Hers was something generic and forgettable. I read mine and couldn't help laughing out loud. Shit you not, it said, "You should explore your feminine side." I showed her in disbelief, and we both laughed again.

Surprise, surprise: this gay date didn't have the intended result. How could something so painfully obvious be confused? Boy Meets Girl, Boy Likes Girl, Boy Asks Girl Out. I know for certain I'll never have that specific mix-up in Rio.