

A Confession in the Spirit of Openness Right from the Beginning

Mina,

Thanks for the great date. I've been on more than twelve of these things since I went on this site, and tonight's was the best one by far. I would love to see you again. Is the feeling mutual? I just wanted to clarify one thing.

At the end of our date, when we were walking along Garvey Avenue back toward the lot where we had both parked, I asked you if your ex had proposed to you or if you had proposed to him, and you said of course he had proposed to you, and I said, Not of course, and you said, Why, and I said, Sometimes women ask men to marry them, a woman once asked me to marry her, and you said a woman once asked you to marry her too, and I said, Really, and you said, Yes, she was serious, and I said, But you were already married, and you said, That's right, and I said, Well, how serious could it have been, and you said, Serious, and I said, You wouldn't have actually married her if you were single, would you have, and you said, I might have.

At that moment, as I glanced back across the street at the Shanghai-style dumpling place where we had just had dinner and wondered if you were serious when you said you might have married this woman, I had one of those strange, flashing ideas I sometimes get. In this case the idea was that this lovely—this tremendously lovely—person I had just been out on a date with, this person I couldn't keep my eyes off, who I could imagine greeting every morning for the rest of my life over café au laits in a breakfast nook, was confessing to being a lesbian and to leading a false life as a straight person, even perhaps up to and including our date. That she wasn't actually interested in men (me?) at all. Or maybe she was positioning herself at some middle register on the homosexual-to-heterosexual continuum and saying she was comfortable with men or women. Once I had mulled over the possible implications of this idea, an idea that cast you, oddly, in an even more attractive but perhaps unattainable light, you'll recall that I met your honest disclosure (that you might someday marry a woman) with an honest disclosure of my own.

And this is the part I want to clarify, so that you don't go around thinking I'm something that I'm not.

When I said I was a 6.5, I meant that I find some men to be handsome and physically compelling but I do not want to have sex with them. (I would call that a 5.) Sometimes I have strong feelings for men but it is not what I would call sexual desire. It is emotional connection, intellectual attraction, sympathy, combined with the feeling of liking to look at and listen to this person. If that makes sense. I don't want to actually have sex with a man but I also don't identify as the kind of man who says he would never have sex with another man.* I guess I would say that I am very happy being intimate with women and when I lack physical intimacy with a woman in my life, I miss it greatly.

You'll recall that toward the end of our date, as we stood in the half-empty (or half-full, I'd prefer to think) parking lot, there in Monterey Park, you not wanting to show me where your car was because it was our first date and that's totally understandable—there *is* such a thing as privacy—I became embarrassed about admitting that I am a 6.5. I worried that you would not understand what I meant by 6.5, that you would find me less appealing. Believe me when I say, If I wanted to have sex with men, I would. I have opportunities. (In fact, during the last six years, when I've had no girlfriend, and only sporadic dates, it has often seemed that I've had more opportunities to have sex with men than with women.) And to be completely honest, I sometimes find gay men to be more interesting, sensitive, and insightful than heterosexual men. I have a friend here in Los Angeles who is gay, who is among the most brilliant and compelling people I know. I love spending time with him. Then again, my three closest friends are heterosexual men; all are wonderful—brilliant, sensitive, creative—and married with children. I have heterosexuality in common with them, although they are probably 7.5's, 8's, or 9's.

I remember right after I said I was a 6.5, you gasped and said, I am a 9, and my heart sank, out of fear that you would not want to get close to a 6.5. I said, Do you mind that I'm a 6.5, and you—shockingly, since this never happens, since no woman, I sometimes feel, is ever going to accept me as I am—you said, I like it, it makes you unique, most people are 9's. And I said, How do I know you mean that and are not just saying it to be polite, people often don't express their true feelings, particularly to complete strangers that they just met online. And you said, Well, you'll have to find out. And then you added, I actually wish I were a 6.5, it seems a lot more interesting. I've always wanted to be a 9, I said. I've craved it, probably out of insecurity, and you said, Don't be insecure, and I said, But wouldn't you prefer to date a 9 since you yourself are a 9? And then you said—and this was so sweet of you—a 6.5 might be all right.

Okay.

So.

*I have thought about it.

There's one other thing I'd like to bring up. In the spirit of openness. My mom has warned me a hundred times against doing this. Don't talk about this on dates, she'll say. Don't bring it up, you'll scare them away, give it some time, give it five dates, give it ten. But I feel strongly about this. There's a stigma attached to talking about mental illness that's not so with alcoholism any more. Maybe there was stigma attached to talking about alcohol abuse in our grandparents' era. But now people tell people they meet at parties they're alcoholics within ten minutes of meeting them, and it's all right. It's on the table. These alcoholics might even be admired for openly doing battle with their addiction. But with mental illness it's not that way. People are ashamed to talk about it. People don't have the vocabulary to talk about it. They have countless misconceptions. And the larger society reinforces the ignorance and the prejudice. So if I come across as being a little more forward in this area than some other people, now you'll see why.

I suffer from severe depression. Severe depression with two major episodes, both of which required hospitalization in excess of three months. I'm not going to go into the details here. Oversharing: bad idea. Except that with the second episode, six years ago—and my memories of that episode still make my bones hum—I experienced depression that was so grave, nothing the doctors did, including electroconvulsive therapy, could bring me out of it. I am told that I sat next to a pay phone with my head in my hands for seven weeks. It just had to run its course.

Then again, I worry that I may not make it through the next one.

Do you have mental illness in your family? I hope not, for your sake. It seems to run in families. I was reading not long ago that scientists are on their way to piecing together the genetic components of schizophrenia. That's cool. So many suicides in previous generations could have been prevented if the sufferers had had the range of psychiatric medication that we have now. Of course, nobody can make a person take a pill.

You say you're close with your parents. You say they had hard lives growing up in China—Cultural Revolution, ration tickets for everything, etc. You say that your mother didn't feel loved by her parents. You say your father's parents died young. That's tough. I would love to talk more about all that on our second, third, or fourth date.

Have I told you enough times yet that you are fascinating?

As for me, I've always faced a certain pressure to marry a Jewish woman. It's not direct pressure. My parents live on the other side of the country and I'm my own person and have been for a long time. However, something in me really, really wants to tell you, right from the get-go, that I think you're super attractive, super smart, and super funny and I don't *need* to marry a Jewish person. I don't segregate the world, like many people I grew up around, into Jewish and non-Jewish. Or maybe a little, but I'm uncomfortable with the part of me that does that.

Which brings me to the Jewish guy-Asian woman thing. Many years ago, when I was living up in the Bay Area, I waited tables at a restaurant in Berkeley. It was a high-end pan-Asian

place, twenty-five tables. All the watercolors on the walls, I remember, were of parrots. The chef was Jewish—he had traveled all around Asia collecting recipes and learning everything he could about the different cuisines, and he had a wife from Shandong province in China and two kids from that relationship. And one night, he was sitting out on the floor with her, in a booth—I remember it was a Friday night, date night—and the entire restaurant filled up, and I'm not kidding you when I tell you that twenty-one out of the twenty-five tables, including their table, had a white guy and an Asian woman seated at them. No exaggeration. And I don't know why exactly, but it made me sick. I wanted to put some kind of pill in all the guys' ginger martinis. Not that there's anything intrinsically wrong with a white guy dating—or marrying or whatever—an Asian woman. I would be most pleased to marry one myself. But that night it felt like it had just, I don't know, gotten out of control.

So what is it with all the Jewish guys and Asian women? I mean, this has been going on since the 90s or something. I've been to three weddings myself. I've heard different theories: that Jewish guys prefer Asian/Asian-American women because they tend to be educated, loyal, thin, youthful-looking, low-key, adept in the kitchen, yielding, financially self-reliant, family-oriented, exotic. Of course, in your case, you've made it clear that you like Jewish people, in general, and Jewish men, in particular. That's great. That's really great. I think on that score alone, we're off to a nice start.

But, you added warily, as that steaming-hot plate of rice cake with minced pork and cabbage (yum) arrived at the table, Please don't tell me you have a thing for Asian women. And I said, I like all women. Which is true. I like Jewish women, I like non-Jewish women, I like Asian women. And, as I have mentioned, I like some men. I have never been in love. No woman has ever been in love with me. (Full disclosure: the woman I told you wanted to marry me didn't love me at all. She just wanted a green card and was willing to pay me \$17,000 for that purpose. But I only want a love marriage so I walked away.) Do you think that's strange? I guess, as my mom puts it, I haven't found the right person. Let's leave some things to fate.

I once met a 96-year-old woman at the Y. She was actually lifting weights and doing jazzercise, and we just started to talk. And I asked her if she could boil down everything she had learned in her life to one sentence, and she said, "It's all luck." I thought you could relate to that. You say you feel lucky you have had a good life. I feel lucky we went on a date. If I'm coming on too strong here, I apologize in advance. Chalk it up to being inspired by you.

Let's say as a thought experiment that you would like to go out with me again. What would we do? What adventure might we go on? I was thinking that we might try something a little romantic but not too romantic. We want to pace things, not turn up the flame too quickly. I know the curator of the photography collection at the Huntington Library. Really nice lady. She oversees a million photographs. With emphasis on the history of Los Angeles, of California, of the West. With her as our guide, we could look through any batch of photographs you might be interested in—their collection is unbelievably great—then go take a walk and check out the Rose Garden and the Desert Garden. You can't beat the

Desert Garden. Then maybe go eat the hell out of some under-the-radar place in Little Tokyo or Koreatown. :)

Thanks again for your loveliness.

See you real soon, I hope.

Sincerely,

Glenn "Your Very Own Glennster" Marx