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{COLUMNIST} DANIEL BARNES

Daniel Barnes has a day job as a philosopher and art critic, but his social life is a one-man mission to explore the depths and excesses of 21st-century gay life. This column offers a glimpse into his misadventures, such as **The Time I Tried Dating...**



I've reached an age where settling down seems like a good idea. My last relationship, which was more like a hostage crisis, ended a year ago and now I want a boyfriend. After all, everyone else seems to have one. My normal strategy is to meet a boy, sleep with him, and then either wake up in a relationship or never talk to him again. Sometimes, the sleeping with him part happens without properly meeting him first. Surprisingly, this does not lead to meaningful, enduring relationships.

My first foray into the dating game leads me to a charming Brazilian, via Grindr. When I first meet him I am stunned by his tanned, athletic body that is, unusually, even better than in the pictures. As we spend an entire afternoon together, I discover he's sweet, kind, funny and amazing in bed. Literally, one of the best ever. This boy's a keeper, I think, as he flashes me another adorable smile.

There are, however, two obstacles. Firstly, he doesn't speak English and I don't speak Portuguese. We communicate via Google Translate and kisses. It doesn't bother me, since I've never had much luck with boys who do speak English. Secondly, and slightly more irksome, he is married and only passing the time until his husband gets home from work. We now meet every Monday and I conspire to liberate him from his English-speaking husband, who is, after all, only keeping him as a mute trophy.

Meanwhile, I step up my dating efforts by joining Tinder, where the only guys who match with me are Chinese. I famously love Chinese boys, but I find myself less interested when I am unexpectedly inundated with them. Despite my waning enthusiasm, one

catches my eye and we arrange a date. We go for drinks on the roof of the uber-swish Hilton at Tower Hill. As we sit down, he tells me he doesn't drink, which is fine, but I can't help wondering how he has fun. About halfway through his tonic water, which is two beers (for me) and one hour in, he announces that he feels a bit tipsy because they haven't washed the glass properly. I make my excuses and leave.

Then, while my hairdresser is on holiday over the summer, I find myself missing him, and suddenly wonder if my future husband had been cutting my hair all these years. We get along splendidly and he says I'm in his top three men. I decide to test whether he's truly boyfriend material by taking him on a date. But, to avoid prejudicing his behaviour, I don't tell him it's a date.

One day after my monthly haircut, we are sat outside a restaurant on Edgware

Road. "Why," he asks, "are we having dinner?" "Because it's dinner time," I tell him. He gives a withering, knowing look and says, "But we never have dinner. Drinks and sex, yes. But dinner, no. We've been doing it for eight years. Change makes me uncomfortable." I kiss him to avoid further interrogation. The rest of the night goes well: he gets drunk enough to confess he likes me so much that he is jealous when I'm seeing someone else.

Since then we've been doing romantic things like going to the cinema, walking along the Thames at dusk, drinking tequila in G-A-Y and kissing on the Tube. He still cuts my hair, and we now see each other all the time. Who would have thought that after all these years we're getting to know one another? He's utterly delicious and I think there's real potential there, but I can't help also thinking that it would be the right thing to do to break up that Brazilian's marriage. ■



Illustration: Paul Tullier