

A Toast to the First Girl I Never Kissed

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Here's to you— the first girl I ever matched with on Bumble. There's not many of us here, or maybe it's that the algorithm only shows me men. Either way, here's to us finding each other in a sea of cis-het boys holding fish. Here's to me fumbling through flirting— it feels different with you, less self-deprecating. Here's to feeling safe here, finally, after years of wondering what it would be like. Here's to the twenty-nine before this it took me to follow my most basic impulse to look for you.

Here's to weeks of messaging you— the paragraphs we sent about the moments when our jobs feel rewarding, the debates about which artistic modality we prefer, the analysis of Zena Elliot's patterns, the zoom meetings we hated, the simple pleasures that got us through lockdown. Here's to the days we let stretch between each message. Here's to waiting for you long enough to forget I was interested.

Here's to your laugh— I can hear it every time I scroll through the five photos on your Bumble profile: loud, deep in tone, unapologetic, framed by your plump copper lips and straight white teeth. Here's to your smile— it makes me want to crawl into your mouth and pitch a tent under the joy held there, to feel the vibrations of your voice box as you flex your tongue in preparation to speak, to be the first to hear your words as they tumble up your throat. Here's to the pressure of all that sound spitting me out. Here's to your inability to hold me.

Here's to all the dates we never went on. The one after work in the park. The walk along Karaka Beach. The dinner, the cocktails, the dancing I hoped for. Here's to your flakiness. Fuck, here's to lockdown. Here's to the likelihood of you cancelling even though lockdown cancelled us first. Here's to you and your ex, who is now not your ex after four lonely weeks of isolation. Here's to me wondering whether your now-not-ex is a man, to

wondering if you're stuck in the same possessive cycle I used to be in, to wondering if you are too afraid to pop a manu out of the swirling testosterone-filled cesspool and try something softer. Here's to me saying no to the consolation coffee date you asked me on. Here's to me, protecting myself from another person who can't decide what they want.

Here's to my flip-flopping feelings: to my relief that you bailed, to my disappointment, to my fanny flutters, to my fear, to my imposter syndrome. Here's to my imagination being easier than real life: the way my dream tongue circles your breast like chilly morning fog wrapping around the peak of a soft hill. It's hard to imagine what my taste buds would feel like against your nipple in real life. Here's to seeing it all so clearly when my eyes are closed.

Now forget you; I raise a drink to me. Here's to not feeling bi enough, but still being bi. To questioning my queerness, but still being queer. Here's to coming out to my mom on the descent of a bumpy plane ride, even though I still have never kissed a girl. Here's to me, navigating bravely through this obscure terrain. Here's to me, still trying like hell.