

I Just Love Watching You Chew

Let's start with Michael.

It was my first summer in New York City and I was on either the winning or losing side of a promise. I couldn't decide.

It had been almost a year since a friend had made me promise that if I moved to New York I would post a personal ad. We used to read them for kicks, when we were both bored in our lovely, small Pennsylvania college town. And I suppose I didn't think I'd actually ever move up there. So I agreed.

One Craigslist ad and about 60 responses later, I agreed to meet Michael. He had all the classic signs of being a total weirdo, but I was as-yet unfamiliar with said signs. And he's the reason, ladies, that you should never ever go out with a man who sends you photographs of sunsets instead of himself. I promise: he won't look like a sunset.

It was my first New York date and I wore a new blue dress with some white strappy sandals. A totally unnecessary attempt to impress.

Michael met me at the restaurant and we began our evening with a drink at the bar. Very quickly and while I was in mid-sentence, Michael reached his hand under the bar, slipped it inside my shoe and began stroking my foot.

I was shocked and speechless enough that this went on for a good three seconds, which seemed much more like minutes, before I asked him to please stop touching me.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" he said, following up with "I thought that would be okay."

Really? He thought it would be okay? I wondered: has this worked for him in the past? Did he see it on TV and think what a *fabulous* strategy that must be? I'll never know for sure, but I have my theories.

After some nervous laughing and keeping my feet tucked away under my barstool, we moved to a table and ordered some sushi. Michael was silently, creepily and intently watching me eat, with his eyes wide and his face contorted into what he must have believed was adoration. I laughed nervously again and asked what he was thinking. Which was a very bad idea.

"I just *love* watching you chew," he sighed.

My response times to his oddities were beginning to get better, though. And I, fairly immediately, decided that the best way to get his mind off my sexy chewing behavior was to ask him a question. Because everyone's favorite subject is themselves.

"So, Michael," I began, "tell me more about you. What do you want to accomplish with your life? What are your goals?"

He smiled slyly and replied: "I want to marry a really pretty brunette who wears blue dresses and white shoes. And then I want to have babies."

Good thing I'd stopped eating after his commentary on my chewing techniques. Otherwise I might have choked and died. Then he'd have to add dead to his description of said pretty brunette. Apparently.

After the date was over, we ended up on the same train. Shockingly. And I'm certain that it was a fun game for the other passengers to watch: me scooting away from my first Foot Fetishist and him scooting along after me, oblivious to the fact that this was an escape technique.

Finally, pressed up against the wall and keeping my face as far from him as possible, I was trapped.

"So," Michael leaned in, "when do I get my goodnight kiss?"

My normal bluntness, which had been tipped so off guard, finally rushed back in: "you don't." I paused and, then, followed up with a cliché: "Michael, I just don't think we're going in the same direction."

He managed to look both wounded and shocked as he whimpered, "you're breaking up with me on the N train?"

I just nodded solemnly. Break up is a bold phrase on a first date. But, then, Michael was a bold guy.

He leaned in, kissed me on the cheek and jumped through the open train doors. Even on the small island of Manhattan, I never saw him again.

Thus began the years of laborious love, like and holy-crap-get-the-hell-away-from-me that lead to this book.