

Romantic Rites

"Naaaw... man... you can't do *that*."

The food arrived at our table that moment. Mike slid the pepper shaker over to my side of the table, and continued:

"You know what they say about getting back together with an *Ex*?"

"I probably do." I bit into my burger.

"It's like trying to put shit back into your ass,"

Appetizing.

"Oh yeah...?" Bits of meat and onion crumbled out of my face and hit the unused cutlery.

"Gona be *me-e-ss-y!*" preached Mike, leaning in uncomfortably close.

"You can't rely on cliches and internet memes for all of your wisdom, my dude."

Mike smirked and cocked his right eyebrow, readying the kill-shot in his mind.

"Yeah? Well, statistically," he spoke with detached enthusiasm, "getting back

together with an ex is almost *guaranteed* to end badly."

"Uhh..." I replied, "Well, *statistically*, ALL relationships end badly." I replied.

"Eyyy..." Mike prepared to retort.

"No, man, just think about it fo-"

"Brett and Julia." He said.

"Anecdotal." I said.

"Steve and Mari-"

I cut him off here.

"Anecdotal. See, that's not *statistically speaking*, man."

"Okay, well, what the fuck is *anecdotal*, then?"

Mike swiftly finished off his sandwich and moved for the soup. "Fuck, I'm hungry." He said, "Crazy week the shop."

"Well, there's Brad and Marcy..." I had a mild change of heart, "They're in some

kind of 'open relationship', right?"

"Ha!" Mike laughed, "Someone should tell that to Brad."

"Fuck it. Stop telling me how to live my life, dude."

"Mike laughed a little under his breath a little as he produced a cell phone from his pocket, raising it to table level. He gazed at the screen with the greatest of focus. He didn't break motion with his left, spooning soup into his grill all the while as his eyes followed his right thumb darting back and forth across the screen. No discernible pattern. *Oh no. Him too.*

"We're just going for a beer, anyway," I rationalized, "I don't think she's into me like that anymore."

Mike was lost in Tinder Wasteland.

"She's always game to make a guest appearance in your life and leave you in shambles." He didn't look up. *swipe ... swipe swipe swipe ...* "How much do you think that weed's effecting your memory, there, pal...?"

Mike flashed the screen of his phone at me before I could formulate an answer. Black hair, pale skin, tattoos, arresting mascara. Tits squeezed together, pouting at the camera.

"That would look amazing with a fish eye lens," I said.

I wondered if her parents had fucked up or if some people were just genetically

predisposed to slutty behaviour. I tried to picture the house she grew up in.

"I haven't been laid in wayyy too long," I sighed, "Head's all fucked up."

Mike grunted and swiped the screen and showed me another mug shot, both of them smiling from ear to ear.

"Eh?! You gotta get this shit. I know how you feel about redheads, *WELL...*" He started rifling through what I assumed were saved screen caps.

"No, dude," I actually closed my eyes tightly for a moment and held up the palm of my hand, as if I could somehow supernatural repel all the weird feelings pummelling me from all sides.

"Can't do it. *Gross*. And what if I saw my *EX's* on there?!"

"HA!" Mike guffawed and nearly spat soup all over and ruined some perfectly good caesars.

The irony was not lost on Mike. Or was it irony? I still can't tell half the time. Fuck. FUCK. I'm never gonna find the kind of partner I'm looking for. Should never have let that English major get away. I heard she's getting married. Fuck, I'm old. I wonder if I can count on medical science to keep em alive past like sixty years old. I've been pretty hard on myself. I wonder when my dick will go?

All of these anxieties and more in a fraction of a second, dissolved as swiftly by a pretty server with a smile that makes me feel shitty that I can't afford a 20% tip.

"How are we doing here, guys?"

Redhead. Those teeth. God damn. I fall in love for the tenth time that day.

Mike spoke up: "The way you look at girls, man, you may as *well* be swiping right."

I felt my penis recoil like an accordion.

"What???" she asked, still smiling. Total pro.

"Whut?" I asked, voice cracking a little like a teenager questioning drive-thru customers.

"Another pitcher, babe?" Mike grinned at her.

Why do women take his shit? I hate the way he uses the name 'babe' so frivolously.

Our server just smiled graciously. "Great!" She said, and hustled off.

"I'm going to die alone." I said.

"If you keep acting like a little bitch, yes, you definitely will." Said Mike.