

# Drinking and Dating

By Timothy L. Hopkins

Setting up a first date when you're drunk is a reprehensible act; one I don't recommend to anyone under any circumstance. But sometimes, after a few too many drinks, almost anything seems like a good idea.

A few years ago, after going through an awful breakup, I joined the free online dating site, OkCupid.com. I needed to meet new single women outside of my circle of friends and, naturally, the site reeled me in with the words "free" and "single women."

Friends of mine joined the site to get over past relationships and the convenience of point-and-click dating was much more appealing than flirting at a bar or club.

After setting up an account, I headed straight for their buffet of photos and profiles. There were several great options but one girl in particular caught my eye. Her screen name was KatyaGotya, an eastern European brunette with big green eyes and a fun, playful profile. I sent her a message saying something along the lines of liking her smile and made reference to her love for the movie *Fight Club*, which is *very* hot in a woman. The rest of the message consisted mainly of terrible jokes and, all in all, it was probably a two paragraph disaster. But, for whatever reason, she wrote me back. We exchanged messages though the site for a few days, and hit it off.

That led to the first intrusive ask – should we take this to the next level? You know, Facebook? Promise me you won't "Poke me" there, since I've been hurt before, I said.

We wrote back and forth through the message system for a while before she finally asked for me to chat.

The night she asked was a special one. I'd just gotten back from celebrating my birthday with friends at a restaurant downtown. It had been tradition for those friends to buy several shots for the birthday guest, so I was the night's target. By the time I got home and read her message asking to chat, I was still recovering from the haze of the long night.

Now, in a sober state of mind, I would have declined her offer to chat by just ignoring the message until the next day. But drunk me at the time said, “Do it! It’ll be so much *fun!*”

I wrote back, and said, “Sure, anytime!” I clicked the “Online Now” button and sure enough, she was right there online.

Now the rest of the conversation was difficult to recall. In my own revisionist history, I remember saying sweet things, her LOL’ing a lot but the next thing I remembered was waking up on my bed with a crushing headache, still wearing the clothes from the night before, with only a faint recollection of chatting at all.

The next day, Katya wrote on my Facebook wall. “Had a wonderful time chatting last night! Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow at my favorite place!”

I had no idea what place she was talking about, or even when we were supposed to go. It’s embarrassing enough to meet someone new in person for the first time; it’s another thing to start off without having paid full attention to the little details of probably the most intimate conversation the two of you have ever had.

I had to be delicate in the process. I didn’t want to ruin things before they got started, especially since we’d gotten along so great before, so I took to damage control. I messaged her saying I had to work late and I offered my favorite Thai place down the street, Mai Thai, and 7:30 p.m. as a meet-up time.

The three hours spent waiting for her to reply were very humbling. When she finally wrote back, she agreed to the time and place, but added that she really had her heart set on ‘the other place.’

When I arrived at the restaurant a few minutes early, she was already there waiting. In person, she was even more gorgeous than her photos had let off. Her sweet, innocent smile glowed as I walked up to her table.

We said “Hi,” and exchanged small talk, covering the basics.

“You look great,” I said nervously.

She giggled and said, “You aren’t half bad yourself.”

We ordered appetizers and drinks. She ordered a Cosmopolitan and I had a water – on the rocks.

“I really enjoyed talking to you last night,” she said. “Though I really had my hopes set on going to that other place.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry about that,” I said. “I love that place too.”

“Really? But I thought last night you said you hated that place with a passion?”

“Hmm... *I* said that? You sure?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure that’s what you said. Because then you said you’d rather dumpster dive for scraps in an alley like *Lady and the Tramp* before going to that place ever again.”

“Hmm...” I said, just as the waiter came by and dropped off appetizers.

We placed our dinner orders and I immediately went for the spicy mango salad. Katya nibbled on a crab-shrimp spring roll, her eyes glued to me through each bite.

“What?” I said. “I’m sorry if my forehead’s sweating, they make this so spicy here.”

She shook her head. “No, I was just thinking.”

“About what?” I said.

“Well, there was this one thing you said last night midway through our conversation that didn’t seem to make sense.”

“Oh yeah? Just one?” I said, with a playful smile.

“Well, it was unclear, since part of what you typed had a few misspellings.”

“Hmm... that is odd,” I said. “Which part, exactly?” I said.

“Well, the part about how your family is just like mine, but you didn’t go on. After I’d told you those things about my family, it was just a little odd that you’d cut short how you did. You know, right after what I told you.”

I took a *long* sip of water.

“*Of course*, after what you told me about your family...” I said. “It must be about how we both have large families. You know, me with my six brothers and sisters, and you...”

“I’m an only child, remember?” she said. “With a small family.”

“Yeah, yeah, of course!” I said. “Oh! It must’ve been the part about how my family never went on vacations, while yours did, you know?”

She folded her arms angrily. “I said my family never took vacations. I grew up in a foster home because both my parents passed away when I was young. Since moving here when I was 10, I’ve never been outside of this area.”

I turned my head and stared out a clear glass window overlooking the water.

“I can’t believe you don’t remember that,” she said.

I tried to change the subject, but she didn’t seem to let up. It didn’t take long to bury myself deeper into a hole.

“Tell me about the high school you went to,” I said.

“I bounced in and out of them, so I really didn’t have one in particular.”

“Ah,” I said.

“I told you that already, though,” she said.

It didn’t take long for the tension at our table to grow noticeably. Even the waiter approached the table carefully when he brought the food to us.

We ate in silence. And in no time at all, the waiter was back, and handed the check over with the delicacy of a death announcement.

He hovered a few steps away as he watched us squabble over who’d pay. She insisted on paying half. I refused, adamantly, and said I’d pay. As far as I was concerned, the least I could do to free myself of some guilt from my terrible act was provide a good awkward meal for the girl.

It was an awkward situation, but one that I won. I motioned the waiter over as he pretended to be staring at the wall, and as I handed my credit card over, I

waved him away impatiently. The last thing the date needed was more witnesses with better recollection than mine.

As we sat in silence, waiting for the check to return, I couldn't think of anything clever to say to salvage my lack of knowledge about her.

Finally, I gave in. "I was drunk," I said, as I lowered my head into my hands before I looked up at her with the most guilt-ridden eyes man has ever produced.

"What?" she said.

"I was drunk the last night, during our long chat." I said. "I'm sorry."

"That's just... appalling!" She said, as she quickly grabbed her purse from under the table.

"Wait, you see, I had my birthday last night, with friends," I said. "My friends, whom I love to death, are terrible people when it comes to birthdays. They buy shots after shots, sometimes until the point of pain. So, when I got home, still heavily hypnotized by the powers of the drink, I saw that you'd messaged me and was so happy, I couldn't wait to hear back from you."

She sat back in her chair and put her purse onto her lap.

"When I checked to see if you were online, and there you were, I couldn't help myself," I said. "I just went for it... and can't remember a single thing we talked about. At all."

"So all of those intimate things I told you last night," she said, "you don't remember a single one?"

"*Intimate* things?" I said. "I... I guess not. And it's totally embarrassing and, really, I only admit this now, because I feel like a total jerk about this whole thing."

"Yeah, well, you are," she said.

"You're right. I'm a lot of bad things, but a dishonest man is not one of them," I said. "Look, I completely understand if you don't want to see me ever again."

The waiter returned and placed the check in front of me. We sat staring at the table in silence for a while, before she finally looked over at me, half-smiled and said, "I'm not an only child, you know."

I looked back, confused. "Wait, what?"

"And my parents are perfectly healthy and live in Philadelphia, near my three brothers."

I was speechless.

"I accept your apology," she said.

"Thank you?"

"Seriously, do you really think you can have a long conversation with someone with any bit of a brain and have them not realize that the belligerent, smiley-face abusing, terrible speller wasn't on *something*?" She folded her arms and smiled like she'd just solved a great mystery.

"I... I've never done this before – meeting someone on a blind date under these circumstances. And, well, being the lead cause for such awkwardness makes me feel like shit. Sorry for taking up your time tonight. Good luck meeting someone more appreciative down the line."

I stood up and extended my hand. "It was great finally meeting you, Katya."

"You could've owned up to it before you went and dug as a big a hole as you did."

"Um... excuse me?" I said.

"If you really didn't remember what we talked about, why keep on? Do you think I didn't know you were drunk last night?"

"Well, I couldn't be sure... considering I can't tell you anything I said then."

"You were entertaining, for sure. But you were spelling so many words wrong..."

"Damn it."

“Yeah, and I didn’t have you pegged as an over abuser of the smiley face initially, but you were going nuts with it. I’m sure if you check your keyboard the colon and parentheses buttons are severely damaged.”

I laughed, “Shit, you got me. Though hardly any el-oh-ol or ROFL could express the pure joy in a smiley, I guess, right?”

“True,” she said. “That’s what my little sister thinks, too.”

“You have a little sister, too?”

“Nope.”

She stared at me and frowned. “So, what, you aren’t going to ask me out on another date while you’re sober this time?”

“I... guess. If you still think I deserve it, I’d love to,” I said.

She stood up, started to walk away and turned. “Oh, and just to let you know, there was no ‘other place.’”

“Huh?” I said.

“The other place, you know, my favorite place that you don’t remember agreeing to go to?”

“Yeah?”

“I never told you one.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I was sure that you had no clue what was going on, so I had a little fun.”

I smiled and shook my head. “You’re such a liar,” I said as I walked the opposite direction. “We might get along after all.”

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Katya and I went on another date after that, and then several others. And through the entire relationship, she held that first date over my head in every argument, joke session and dinner date.

I don't recommend you drink and message. But sometimes – and I believe it to be a special rarity – it works out for you. Luck may fall on your side and the door doesn't close on your hand, so to speak, as you reach beyond your allotted distance from reasonable connection. People do dumb things when they're drunk and sometimes things work out if you just man up and tell the truth.

Do not repeat my mistake – or, maybe do. But for the love of happy connections, please try your best to Facebook message sober.