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The Dutch Girl

[an excerpt from her new book *Kissing a Tree Surgeon*, (Guernica Editions, 2020)]

The Muslims on our street sang prayers for me.

Everyone on Facebook encouraged me to date her: we were both quirky, and though on different continents, we played Scrabble with slang words—me in English and her, also in English.

The only person, of course, who had doubts, was my therapist, Dr. Samson, who was certain she was a fabrication—she was Mohamed of Tunisia rather than Vivian of Amsterdam.

To begin with, Vivian said she lived in Switzerland, though her office was in England, and that she was from Amsterdam. This seemed an odd transposition of places to accumulate for a paycheck.

“And my lover just died of cancer, so I’m looking for a new one.”

“I’m sorry about your loss.”

“LOL and thanks.”

Between “LOL” and “thanks” I surmised this person might not be who she said she was.

I had already endured, a decade earlier, a woman of Aryan-Hispanic origins who wrote me from Africa (she was originally from Illinois), where she was staying with her sick mother. Our relationship had tidy moments of S&M via Skype, but got insidious when she mentioned her mother’s terminal illness; this maternal calamity caused irreparable financial damages, and could I please send \$2,500?

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Loneliness can make a Bronx dyke swerve to fake lesbians on OkCupid.

“What do you do for a living?” the Dutch girl asked.

“I’m a meteorologist,” I said, because, like me, weather is organized by chaos, and within its chaos there is its own organization.

This sounded better than my real occupation—word processing in the pharmaceutical department at a Bronx hospital.

“Wow,” she emailed, “that’s cool.”

“Yeah, most of my friends hate me if there’s a blizzard. I’m like—it’s God’s mood swing—*not mine.*”

“LOL!” she wrote. When you get an “LOL” while dating, it means things are neutrally fine, there is a possibility you will kiss them, and that in your flannel nightgown, lying on flannel sheets, in weather you incorrectly predicted, you are still in the running for the position of “girlfriend.”

When the Dutch girl mentioned she was now living in Madison, Wisconsin, selling laboratory equipment, I was confused.

“Do you think she exists?” I asked my psychiatrist.

“I think you should stick with women who resemble your ex but need plastic surgery.”

Yes, in addition to the Dutch girl, there was, on OkCupid, another girl interested in me. This one resembled a former lover, but her face was asymmetrical. “Plastic surgery girl” lived in Manhattan; had an oil-burning stove in upstate New York; liked art and Afghan food.

“You need someone on the continent,” he said.

“Vivian lives in Wisconsin.”

“As I said,” he continued, “it wouldn’t hurt to date someone within an hour’s distance.”

The girl with an oil-burning stove was Jewish, which was a factor that my dead mother and psychiatrist loved. I, however, was more into the Dutch chick, who was originally from Switzerland, had witnessed her girlfriend die of lymphoma in the Netherlands, but was now in Wisconsin.

“You are geographically challenging,” I wrote the Netherlander.

“Coordinates well with you.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I’m worldly and you’re *weatherly*. LOL.”

I didn’t get her humor, but it might have been a translation issue.

Vivian was a single girl with a simple understanding of life who wore a hat to appear androgynous and other times let her curls fall out so she could yell, “*Godverdomme!*” which was “Goddamnit” in Dutch.

Her friends called her “*gek*,” which, in the Netherlands, means “crazy.”

She liked older women, though it was not clear why.

I found her sweet, charming and inscrutably kind, and the geographical confusion issue, which I had discussed with my shrink, sunk into the background during our flirtatious moments.

“What are you doing now?” Vivian asked.

“Thinking about you.”

“And what are you wearing?” she prodded, as if it were a nuclear secret that the Russians and Americans were already sharing.

“My blanket!” I texted.

She texted back, “That’s sexy!” with a smiley face.

After viewing porn, I’d circle my brain and kindle the fires with her photo. The one with the hat. It was euphoric.

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Some people, like my friend Eddie, do “date in three-dimensional reality,” and call their choice “old school,” even if it means, as it did for me, meeting drunk poontang in Jersey City women’s bars. Though sloppy and wobbly, you know what you are taking home. Or at least you think you do.

I’d bring girls home, read them excerpts from Dr. Seuss’s *Fox in Socks*, endear them to my inferior social skills, and get laid. Seuss and Heineken made a great night of fun, and though it was not cyberspace, the reality was that it was over in twelve hours. At least with cyberspace you can endure a fictitious affair for a week.

“I’m not able to sleep at night,” Vivian via Wisconsin via Amsterdam texted me.

“Oh boy,” I replied, feeling the pangs and intimacies of love through the iPhone, “I wish there was something I could do.”

“There is...”

“What dear? How may I give you greater comfort in the evening?” I had already checked out the Priceline.com tickets for Madison, Wisconsin, which were slightly cheaper than Amsterdam.

There was a brief pause. She wrote back.

“Financial.”

I stopped breathing momentarily. I thought this only happened once every ten years via the Internet. But it had been ten years.

The Muslim prayers were failing me.

All the support I received on Facebook had been for naught.

“I’m sorry,” I wrote her back quickly, recalling the Illinois Aryan/Hispanic hottie who had solicited money for her dying mother in Africa, “I cannot help.”

I then deleted her profile and text number from all associated sites and devices.

I proceeded to the girl who resembles my ex but needs plastic surgery; who, though also on the Internet, was a subway ride away. The problem was, unlike the Dutch girl, the girl who needed plastic surgery waited a week each time she responded.

"I'm not having an affair with a turtle," I told my psychiatrist.

"No, reptilian love is not what it's cracked up to be," he said. This must be psychiatric humor.

I said nothing.

"Didn't you suspect that someone who kept switching continents might not exist?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Good night." I went for the door.

"Why are you leaving?" he said. "You have ten more minutes."

"Do you think that ten minutes will transform me?"

I grinned and signed my check.

"Here ya go." I gave it to him. "I'll text if anything comes up."

"Are you sure?" he said. "What about that woman Cindy who wrote you?"

"She puts makeup on cadavers."

"And?"

"She prefers the dead."

"Oh," he said from his seat, the place where he deliberated my life, which frequently came from the Internet.