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Any Way You Like it

Madeline Eubanks

“Yeah, I don’t experience sexual attraction,” Adam said for maybe the twelfth time that night.

He wasn’t sure why he had bothered staying after the first couple times.

“Oh,” said the woman across from him, surprise coloring her face.

“Yeah. I really don’t like it at all, sorry.”

She stammered for a second.

“H-How?”

He blinked.

“How what?”

“How do you...not like sex?”

“I just never have.”

“Have you tried it?”

“Yes,” he sighed.

“Maybe you just haven’t had good sex,” she suggested, eyes scanning him again, “It’s atotally different experience.”

“No sex is good sex for me.”

“But—”

She was cut off by the bell, signaling that their two minutes was up, and he let out a quiet sigh of relief.

“Well, nice talking to you,” he lied as he hurriedly stood, not giving her a chance to respond.

He moved to the next table, looking at the exit door he was growing closer toward.

Nearly free of the nightmare.

His roommate, Mark, had suggested speed-dating to him, as that was how he met his partner.

“It’s a queer-friendly place, man,” Mark had told him with a pat on the back, “Ace is queer, too. I’m sure you’ll at least make a friend!”

He had not. In fact, his last match hadn’t even been the worst. He’d had at least three people tell him asexuality wasn’t real, that he just needed to try harder, or find the right person, or so on and so forth. A few had accused him of being straight and invading queer spaces. One had called him homophobic. A decent amount of people had been accepting, but the conversation had then grown cold, as it seemed everyone who came to these events was only in it for the sex, and not any other parts of a relationship.

He really should’ve left by now. Damn the sunk-cost fallacy.

Adam looked up from his sulking when someone sat across from him—and was surprised by what he saw. A person of almost inhuman androgyny; dark hair, defined arms, and a dangerous look in their eye, all wrapped up in

a vibrant red spaghetti-strap dress and heels that could crack a walnut. If he were allosexual, he was certain he’d have been turned on by their appearance alone. But he was not, and as they gave him a once-over, he prepared himself for another rough two minutes.

The bell dinged, and they offered their hand with a sultry smile.

“So what’s your name, stranger?”

He shook the hand.

“Adam.”

“How funny,” they grinned, revealing sharp teeth.

“I’m Eve.”

“Oh, wow.”

“So look,” they took their hand back and crossed their legs, one heel brushing against his thigh.

“I’ve made a bit of a hit list here. But I’d be willing to shoot you to the top.”

They twirled a piece of their hair around one clawed finger.

“After all, I was made for you, wasn’t I?”

“Cool pickup line, but no thanks.”

He shifted his chair away from their leg.

“I’m asexual.”

“Oh?”

They blinked out of their lustful look and into surprise.

“Yeah.”

Much to his surprise, Eve laughed and relaxed, sitting more casually.

“Well, well, well, Adam. We might just have more in common than you think.”

“We haven’t gotten to know each other at all.”

“Adam,” they leaned forward, “I’m aromantic.”

It was his turn to be surprised.

“Why are you at a speed-dating event, then?”

“Why are you?”

“I...”

He sighed.

“I don’t know. My buddy thought it’d be a good idea. At least make some friends, or something.”

Eve tsked.

“Sorry, darling, but these things are about ninety percent horny incels, and ten percent desperate hearts. Who are usually also horny. Not the greatest place to look for a lasting relationship, especially an asexual one.”

He nodded. “Yeah. I’ve gathered that much.”

Eve hummed for a moment. “How old are you, Adam?”

“Twenty-five.”

"Are you a virgin?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"What?"

"I jumped ahead. How about this: how long have you known you were asexual?"

He thought for a moment.

"I didn't have a word for it until I was fourteen or so, but I think I've kinda always known. In elementary school, we had those little puberty sex ed things? I was the only guy I knew who didn't start making sex jokes and stuff after that. I thought it sounded gross, I couldn't understand why adults would do it for fun. That kind of thing."

They nodded.

"So you've spent over a decade with a label that fits. So why aren't you still a virgin?"

Adam bit his tongue.

"Peer pressure, I guess. I was popular enough in high school and college that I dated around and stuff. And my partners and friends always just...expected it of me. So I did."

"Did you like it?"

"Not even for a second."

"So why did you keep doing it?"

"Because I thought I had too."

"But you don't," Eve smiled, more genuine than before, "You know that now, don't you?"

"Yeah. Wish I knew it earlier."

"I'm sorry you went through that."

He nodded.

"What about you? Why are you here?"

They grinned.

"It's a bit of a sex fest if you play your cards right. I'm not interested in a serious relationship, romantic or otherwise. I'm just looking for a good lay, I believe is the saying."

They licked their lips as they looked around the room.

"These people are so tasty. Young, energetic souls. Looking in the wrong places for everything."

Adam raised an eyebrow at their wording, but they waved him off.

"Regardless, darling, you're better off elsewhere. Unless I'm getting ahead of myself again. Have you had a good time?"

"Not really," he admitted, "I...I try to be confident in my sexuality. But I've never had a partner who accepts it. I've lost non-romantic relationships because of it, too. My parents don't understand. Old friends tell me to man up. My buddy Mark is one of the only people I know who's fully accepting of it. Even a lot of the people who are accepting start out with invasive questions and all that."

"Sorry to have done that," Eve patted his hand, "I was trying to get to a point."

"Yeah, I know. But still. Sometimes I love myself, asexuality and all. But other times it's just...so hard. Every movie has some sexual romance sub-plot. We don't want teenage pregnancy, but if you're still a virgin by the time you leave high school, something's wrong with you. God forbid if that continues into college, or your whole life."

"God forbid nothing," Eve shook her head, taking his hands, "Adam. You're made in God's image."

"It's just my name."

"No. Everything is made in God's image, that's how it works. Humans just like to think that it's something unique to them. But do you know what the first life on Earth was?"

"Bacteria, right?"

"Microbes, but same idea. And those little specks of life?" they smiled, "Reproduce asexually. God is supposed to love all its creations, but you, Adam, are closer to that image than most."

The bell rang, signaling the end of their two minutes. It felt like hours. Eve pulled out a business card from the top of their boot and gave it to Adam.

"In case you need a friend," they said, "And honestly? You should just get out of here. Watch a good movie, eat a good burger. Enjoy the non-sexual pleasures of life."

He looked at the card.

Eve Godspeed

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More interestingly, on the back, there was a hand-drawn emoji—the smiling, purple devil, but above its wicked grin and horns hovered a halo. There was no number to be seen.

"Will I ever see you again?" Adam asked as he looked up.

Eve was already gone. He couldn't spot them at any of the tables. They had simply vanished. Another person sat across from him at the table. He looked over to see a fidgety young man, adjusting his glasses and looking down at the table.

"Uh, hi," he muttered, "Sorry, it...sounded like you maybe found someone."

"No," Adam shook his head, "They...they're just a friend."

"Oh."

"I'm Adam."

"Simon."

"Good to meet you."

Despite Eve's mysterious disappearance, their talk had made him feel slightly better.

"What brings you to a speed-dating event?"

Simon continued to fidget nervously.

"Looking for...I don't know, really. Just someone who understands, I guess? That doesn't make any sense. I don't have much taste in people, is my point, I don't really know what I find attractive. I guess I'm looking to find out about that."

"Tough thing to do. You're looking at a pretty small pool. Had any luck?"

Simon hesitated.

"Not really. I'm gay, but the men here are a little, uh... intense, for my liking."

"Sorry to be intense, then."

"No, you seem fine so far."

"Oh, thanks. Can I ask what's different?"

Again, Simon hesitated.

"Everyone here is just talking about sex," he said quietly, like it was a secret, "and I...don't really know how

INDIVIDUALS TOGETHER

Linda J. Kuckuk

graphite on paper

I feel about it.”

Adam’s eyebrows raised.

“Oh.”

“Yeah. I know it’s weird, I guess I’m just a late bloomer, but—”

“No, no,” Adam shook his head, “No, listen. I’m asexual. Even if you aren’t, which it’s totally fine to be, it’s okay to have reservations about it, or to be uncertain. That’s totally fine.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Everyone’s always told me asexuality isn’t real. That it’s just straight people faking. And that having sex is part of being gay.”

“It’s part of it for some people. But not everyone.”

Simon had stopped fidgeting.

“That’s...I should’ve known that.”

“Sometimes you gotta hear it from someone else,” Adam smiled, “I just did a bit ago.”

Simon smiled back. He was cute, in an awkward sort of way. He fixed his glasses and cleared his throat.

“Do you like monster movies?”

“When I see them, yeah.”

“There’s that retro movie night downtown soon. They’re gonna have some of those old 30’s ones. I’d—if you wanted, um—”

The bell rang, and both of them jumped. Simon shook his head.

“Sorry. That was a mess. Nice meeting you.”

He stood, and Adam stood with him, taking his hand.

“Never asked someone out before?”

Simon flushed.

“No.”

Adam smiled.

“Do you wanna get out of here? I know a good diner that’s open late.”

He smiled back, looking down as if to hide it.

“Yeah. Sure.”

As they walked out the door, Adam’s phone buzzed as he received a text from an unknown number. All it contained was three emojis: a smiling face with glasses, a pink pulsating heart, and an angel.

Simon caught a peek of it.

“That friend of yours?”

“I think so,” Adam said as he pocketed it.

“Do you want to invite them?”

“I think they’re gonna be busy for a while. Called that place a sex fest.”

“Oh wow.”

“They’re playing the game, and I can respect that. But it’s not for me.”

“Me either. At least, not that much.”

“And it’s all fine,” he said more to the air than to the man beside him, “any way you like it. It’s all fine.”