

The Daterator: Adventures in On-Line Dating

Report # 1 (aka the date from Hell)

Her name was Mallory. Youwho.com (that's the dating site I'd chosen) looks at profiles and suggests people that they think would possibly be close to my heart.

That's the way they put it. 'Close to my heart.' I wondered how in the world they had more members than any other on-line dating site. Never mind. Anyway, I had come up for Mallory which was why she'd messaged me.

I looked at her profile before I messaged back. Her picture looked o.k. She certainly wasn't my type, although I had begun to wonder lately if I even knew what my type was anymore. From what she'd written I thought she seemed o.k. Well, sort of. There may have been a light pink flag or two that went unnoticed at the time.

In her Youwho profile she said she spoke French, was an educator, and loved to watch synchronized swimming. She said she was looking for someone to hang. I figured she wasn't an English teacher, given that she'd left out some pretty important words related to what she was looking for. 'Maybe more' came after 'hang'. What else could you do after you hung someone? She could be very funny or an idiot. I decided she was going to be very funny. A good sense of humor is important to me.

I moved on reading the rest of her profile. She loved sushi, had no use for dogs or cats, but preferred fish and had a state of the art aquarium. For a fleeting moment I wondered if that was where her sushi came from.

Reading? I wondered what she liked to read. I'm a voracious reader. Perhaps we had some of the same interests. She liked to read the Weather Channel reports. Weather, she stated in her profile, was the

bottom line in life. Your life was determined by weather. What a creative thought, I marveled.

After a few messages back and forth, she suggested that we meet. I didn't want to drag all this out. Meet. Get back in the game. We decided to meet on a Wednesday, mid-afternoon.

I was very excited to learn that she spoke French because French was my next to my next to my next favorite class in high school.

Armed with all the information I had gleaned from her profile firmly embedded in my memory, I arrived at the restaurant before she did and I cleverly used the time to Google 'How do you say Hello, it's nice to meet you' in French?' She said she spoke French and I thought that saying that to her would certainly make a good impression. I practiced the answer trying to remember what I'd learned from my French teacher who was my next to my next to my next least favorite teacher in high school.

“Alright,” I thought, proud of myself for coming up with the idea. “This is so clever of me.”

She entered the restaurant, all 5’2 of her. All probably 160 pounds of her. She recognized me from my photo and made her way to me, knocking over only 1 chair which she didn’t bother to return to its upright position. I then understood why she’d posted only 1 picture and it was from the shoulder up.

I stood when she walked up to the table, smiled, and said “Bonjour, Mallory. Je suis enchanté de faire votr’e “. She looked pained and pointed out that I had pronounced all my vowels incorrectly and to call her Mal, not Mallory. I’m fairly easy going, besides, hey, she’s probably nervous, you know, the whole Youwho.com thing. So, at this point I thought it might be amusing to say ‘I’m sorry’ in French. I knew this sentence without the use of Google because I had said it

innumerable times in my high school French class. Evidently I said that badly too and was once again corrected.

She turned and jerked her thumb, indicating we were headed outside to the patio. She informed me that we were going out there because she was cold. She also informed me that the barometric pressure had dropped because there was a low front moving slowly across Mississippi and Alabama and was on its way to Georgia, but you really couldn't be completely sure it would get as far as Georgia since atmospheric movement could be unpredictable due to various troughs in the gulf stream, plus there was a mid level upper air disturbance that was complicating things. I nodded, realizing she hadn't been joking at all about reading the Weather Channel reports. I wasn't quite sure how to respond, so I followed her out the door into the 112 degree, 100% amount of

humidity that is Atlanta. I was thankful I'd chosen a purple sleeveless shirt and a pair of shorts. Jesus sandals, too. Because of my clothes choices, the odds went up that I wouldn't die of heat exhaustion.

"Outside, yeah, outside. Hmm, warm is good," I lyingly agreed. Hindsight's always 20/20. Why can't foresight be? How could I not have seen all this coming?

My match had arrived at the restaurant from a meditation class bitching about the meditation class. Correct me if I'm wrong but I thought meditation was supposed to bring about calmness and peace of mind. I also thought that meditating would not make you sweat and smell like you just came from a workout at the gym and you were still wearing your workout clothes. Trying to find the pony, I figured she must have meditated on some

incredibly important issues and that she was simply sweating them out.

I decided to stop judging what she was wearing and how she smelled. I looked at her face, scrutinizing it intently. The first thing I observed was that her face didn't exactly fit was her, well, kind of on the hefty side body. It was certainly an interesting juxtaposition seeing a face that looked like it went with a 130 pound body, yet was on the body of a 160 pound woman. I moved along in my examination of her. It was her, but it wasn't the 'real' her. The woman sitting across from me had a hard, sharp, pointed nose and a chin as pointed as her nose. Her eyes were scarily close together. I like ears. I didn't like hers. I'd never seen any where one stuck out and the other didn't. When her teeth showed, I quickly decided they weren't hers or maybe they were and they hadn't been brushed in a week or two.

Deciding not to feel deceived, I went with the belief that everyone Photoshops their pictures on on-line dating sites. Everyone but me. I had no idea you could do that when you were on-line dating. I thought you were supposed to show what you really looked like. Then I began to grasp what my friends meant when they told me I was naïve and innocent.

I looked up to see our server standing behind my Youwho person. When your server at a restaurant stands behind the person you met on Youwho.com and rolls her eyes several times, and then makes an imaginary line across her throat with her finger indicating she would rather be dead than be with that person, that should have been a sign for me to get up and leave. But it wasn't. The server and I hadn't even met and I just thought how nice it was that she was watching out for my best interests by pretending to cut her throat,

giving me a sign that I interpreted as 'You better get out of this now, Girlfriend.' I truly thought it was so kind of her to care, but I really didn't need her input or opinion. I am an adult, I told myself, as I gave her a small smile, trying to let her know all was fine.

We, well, my match actually, had decided on the restaurant where we'd meet. It was the kind of restaurant where your server brings you a bread basket when you first arrive and you fill up on that and you don't have to order a 'real meal' unless you're really hungry or you feel guilty that you ate all their bread and you believe that you need to make up for doing this.

Our server arrived, got our drink orders and set the bread basket on our table. Mal immediately reached into it and handled both pieces of bread obviously trying to decide which one she wanted, then she tossed the discarded one back with a

thud. I'm okay with thoroughly examining things before you eat them, but I need to know you more than 10 minutes before I'll eat what you've examined and rejected. Hunger is powerful, though, I realized as I picked up the piece of bread that she didn't want. There are lots of superior antibiotics out now, I reasoned.

"Damn, you sure put a lot of butter on things," she muttered as she buttered her bread.

"Oh, well, I guess it depends on how much you think a lot is," I replied with a soft tone that indicated I could possibly see her point.

"Well, that's a lot," she emphatically informed me.

"Oh, okay, well, thanks for the information. So, what do you do?" I asked cheerfully. By God I was going to make this work no matter what Sadie/Sade did behind my Youwho's back. Point of clarification: when our server had come to our

table to give us our complimentary bread basket and take our drink orders, I saw that her name badge said SADE. I asked about it and she said her mother named her after the singer because her father had been a smooth operator. We had a good laugh about that. Well, the two of us laughed. My Youwho woman just stared at Sadie/Sade who ignored the stare. She said she just let everyone call her Sadie. It was just easier that way. I agreed. Easy is good. Easy didn't seem to be happening in my world at the moment.

Back to 'So, what do you do?' "I saw in your profile that you teach. What do you teach?" I leaned forward, attempting to indicate intense interest in her life.

"ESL," she announced, chewing the desired piece of bread with her mouth wide open giving me the opportunity to quietly observe that she

certainly put a lot of butter on her bread as I could see all of it in her mouth.

Okay, here I go again. I WILL make this work, I vowed to myself. I looked up to once again see Sadie/Sade cutting her throat with her finger and shaking her head in a forceful 'NO'. Again I ignored it. "Well, that sounds interesting," I said thinking that it really did. "So what languages do you focus on? I guess one must be French. I remember from your profile you said you speak French."

She was still chomping on her first bite and had the second aimed at her mouth and said before swallowing, "Yeah, French and I have to teach Spanish, too." She looked thoroughly disgusted. "You know, I don't know why the damned thing is called ESL. Making English second. What a joke. They can't speak English and here they are in a country where English is the first

language so they have to learn English, but it's their second language because they spoke Spanish before they got here. Don't have any trouble with the French people. Now that's a smart bunch of people. Not too many of them. Sure are plenty of Hispanics, though. Anyway, God, everybody knows English is always the first language everywhere." Everywhere," she repeated as she nodded her head strongly.

'Hispanicals'? I had a choice, once again, to assign a meaning to a word she'd used. Amusing and creative or demeaning and xenophobic? This time I couldn't find a single reason to give her the benefit of the doubt. 'Hispanicals'. Jesus, help me.

I had a fleeting thought that perhaps she would choke since it can be dangerous to talk when your mouth is full of food. I immediately felt bad for having such an unkind thought. Her use of the word 'Hispanicals' really had not set well with

me. Anyway, she wasn't the only one who'd been to meditation classes. I could meditate with the best of them as long as I could stay focused. Unfortunately that wasn't for very long. I had been told by an instructor that the monkey in my mind was on speed. In spite of a monkey mind in need of rehab or Adderall at the very least, I had learned enough to know that I needed to behave with lovingkindness. Yeah, here was chance to put that into action.

Her eyebrows became furrowed to the point of meeting and forming a unibrow. She was almost daring me to disagree. I tried to see if she had a red, white, and blue flag anywhere on her perspiration dripping T-shirt. Nope. Probably hidden under the layers of foul smelling sweat, I assumed. I did not feel bad about this thought.

Then I realized I had heard a word that sent chills down my spine: 'They'. I always feel worried

and uncomfortable when there's a 'They'. My stomach began to feel a bit uneasy. The fog in my on-line dating brain very, very slowly started to lift.

Sadie/Sade appeared yet once again. As she was walking to another table she was serving, I saw her shoot me a look. She was shaking her head slowly side to side and I could see her mouthing, 'Um, Um, Um. Good Lord.'

Damn, I thought. She was right, but I didn't want to do anything that would let her know I knew she was right about my match. My thoughts went immediately to Mary Chapin Carpenter, one because I wished my match looked like her and two because in one of her songs, there's a line that wisely points out that of all the things that leave us, pride is always the last thing to go. Deciding to prove Mary Chapin wrong, yet knowing she was right about the pride thing, and, well, after

factoring in feeling completely humiliated, I decided to stop being a grown up. Much too often this is an easy decision for me to make. I was not going to give in and accept that Sadie/Sade was right, so then and there I took a stand. I squinted my eyes at her, supposedly to indicate irritation. I've never seen someone laugh so hard and make no noise whatsoever. I bit my lip and returned to my match.

"Hmmm, well, I can kind of see your point about the name, you know, the ESL. I guess I was just thinking, though, that if someone grows up speaking, say Spanish for example, then learning English would make English a second language. I..." and she cut me off sharply and with a condescending tone said, "You just don't get it, do you?" She didn't wait for a response. Her tirade began. "God, what a joke. They're here, they can't speak the language in the country they've come

to, so now we have to teach them English so they can work and use our resources and marry somebody so they can be citizens. Then they have a bunch of kids who can't speak English worth a damn and we have to 'accommodate' them," she said holding her fingers up to indicate quotes around accommodate. "Then what do we do? We teach them English so they can do all that to us. Jesus, they need to stay where they came from and speak their own damn language. What a joke," she repeated as she pulled her lips in so tightly that I thought they might disappear.

All through her diatribe I found myself thinking several things that I won't go into, but I did have one thought that there was no way around. I needed some information. I just couldn't understand why anyone would do something they really loathed. Somewhere in my head I could faintly hear my friends saying 'Disney, Disney,

Disney' with a tone of pity. This is my nickname from people who know me and believe me to be the innocent type. I hate the nickname, they know it, so they continue to use it. Hell, I'm just as jaded and cynical as they are. Why can't they see that?

"You know, Mal, you really seem to feel strongly about this," I pointed out. "I'm thinking this must make your job hard for you. Seems like you really don't like it. I guess I'm wondering why you do it." Empathy, not judgment. I'm sure there's some reasonable explanation she's a racist. Then I felt anger: she hadn't put that in her profile.

She began to laugh. "Damn right I hate helping them, but God, I make a ton of money doing it. Kind of funny, huh, getting paid real well for doing something you hate?"

Funny? I thought. Funny? Suddenly I felt alone. Abandoned. Trapped. Helpless in the presence of a wretched racist.

I vowed then and there to walk away, well, mentally and emotionally. I obviously didn't seem to know much about on-line dating, but I do know it's impossible to reason with an unreasonable person. I also promised myself the first thing I would do when I got home was take my profile down. Who knows who I might get matched up with next time? What if she turned out to have a red cap at home?

No words. Nothing I could think to say to all of that, so I mumbled 'Hmmm' again. O.K. no more job questions.

"Yeah, great language English. People who speak English, well, you know, it's a great language. Should be the only language," she declared.

“Yeah, well, o.k. Yeah. That’s a thought.” High road, Kate, just take the high road in your mind here and then get in your car and get on I-285 and back to Decatur as fast as you can.

Sadie/Sade suddenly appeared by my match. My mouth went dry. Oh, God, what was she going to do? Had she overheard what the match from hell had said?

“Would you like more tea, ma’am?” she asked politely.

“Nah. Not very good. Too much sugar.”

O.K., enough’s enough. First she turns out to be a revolting and disgusting racist, and then she insults sugar. For God’s sake, we’re in the South. Everyone here knows there can never be too much sugar in tea. I’d had it, but she saved me from letting her know I’d had it.

“Anyway, I gotta go. Supposed to go meet up with some friends,” she said as she stood and stretched her arms up into the air, revealing perhaps 2 weeks worth of underarm hair. “Listen, you mind getting the check? I don’t wanna be late.”

Stage left: Sadie/Sade appears, stands behind my match, and vigorously nods her head, alternating with a jerk over her shoulder. I interpret correctly: ‘You pay. It’s worth it. Get her going and do it now.’ I let go of my pride. Holding it could possibly keep the ‘I hate other cultures’ person around longer. Having that thought made me nauseated.

I stood. “Sure, no problem,” I told my match who pitched her napkin on the table and turned to leave the patio through the white wooden gate that opened to the parking lot. Over her shoulder she told me, “I’ll get it next time.”

“No, you won’t,” I thought, smiling and nodding as she sauntered away. “Because there won’t be a next time.” I shoved my hands into the pockets of my freshly ironed tan shorts, irritated that I’d wasted time ironing them for what was obviously an encounter not worth ironing anything for. I shook my lowered head in incredulity and borderline shock.

As I turned to sit down, I was very pleasantly surprised to find a fresh glass of tea in front of me and Sadie/Sade standing there with an amused look on her face and a little smile that showed in the corner of her eyes.

I took a deep swallow of my tea. “Just the right amount of sugar. Really. Thanks,” I said with what I was sure was a look of absolute embarrassment.

For the first time since I’d arrived, I took note of her. Really saw her. She looked very cute in

black pants, a short sleeved white shirt with a red vest, her light brown hair pulled up in a ponytail with a few loose strands that framed a very pretty face. And she had really pretty ears. How could I not have noticed? Then I understood what a stupid question that was. Sometimes the focus is on the wrong thing.

She gave me a small smile. "Do you have your phone with you?"

Strange question, I thought. "Yeah. Need to borrow it?"

She shook her head. "Do 'O.K. Google' and ask what mal means in French. Set it so you can hear what she says out loud."

"O.K."

We both knew our eyebrows went up. Sadie/Sade because she knew what was coming; me because I had no idea what was coming.

I cranked up my phone. "O.K. Google what does mal mean in French?"

The awful robotic voice of the Google woman told me:

Evil, bad, wrong

I hastily turned the phone off. I played with the phone for a few seconds before looking up at Sadie/Sade.

"Well, if the name fits, and in this case it certainly does, huh?" I gave her a rueful smile.

She seemed to be studying me. Probably wondering what kind of woman would match up with a sweaty meditationer, bread chomping, underarm hair, racist, zilla whose name truly indicated who she was.

"What's your name? I didn't catch it," she asked.

"Kate. I'm Kate."

“Ask about the meaning of Katherine.”

The voice of the Google woman robot began:

The name Katherine comes from the Greek, meaning pure, caring, and kind.

I’d had no idea what my name meant. It wasn’t something I’d ever thought about finding out. So, pure, caring, and kind, huh? Not bad I thought as I silently thanked my mother and father.

Once more I played with my phone for a few seconds. “A little better than Mal,” I said with my one-sided smile.

Again I watched her study me.

“I get off in 20 minutes,” she told me.

I smiled my first real smile of the day.

“Really?”

“Yes. Really. Will you still be here?” I knew she was asking a question she already knew the answer to.

“God, yes. I’ll be right here,” I responded, trying to contain my excitement.

She returned my smile and walked back into the restaurant. Then something hit me: Because of Youwho.com, I had met someone worth spending time with. It just turned out that she wasn’t the one Youwho.com had obviously mismatched me with. Maybe I wouldn’t take my profile down after all. After all, I did owe it to them that I met Sadie/Sade.