

# If Michelle Obama didn't shave her underarms...

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They were on a date.

They had met online through a dating website, the only way to meet in 2008.

He was 27-and-a-half, already balding and pot-bellying, a software engineer a decade too late to take advantage of the turn-of-the-century dot.com boom. He spent most of his spare time attempting to create an app for Apple because that was the only way to make it big now. When he hit a wall, he updated his Facebook status with purloined Buddhist quotes.

She was 31, self-consciously aerobicizing to keep her figure svelte and youthful. Every evening after her jam-packed day as a second-grade school teacher at an alternative school, she hit the gym and then went to meet with the musical theater amateur group she had co-founded where she wrote-produced-directed radical shows. When she got home late at night, she'd spend a good twenty minutes or so returning all the clothes her mom had ordered for her from LL Bean.

On their first date, she had invited him to one of her musical theater shows. Its incendiary title: "What If Hillary Had Been the One to Cheat?" Since the group was 100% female, or rather womyn (so-called biological and transgendered), they liked to focus on feminist, heteronormative and homophilic issues.

They went on a second date because they had discovered they had a lot in common. For example, they both worked in Manhattan and lived in Brooklyn - she in Carroll Gardens and he in Williamsburg. After the third date, they had dutifully slept together

as magazine dating advice dictated and since the sex was not half bad, they had kept at it. They bonded further whilst chatting online and watching The Rachel Maddow Show on MSNBC which they did religiously since a presidential election of great historical magnitude was mere weeks away.

Date #17, she took him to see her group's new show: "What If Michelle Obama Didn't Shave Her Underarms?"

The show's pedantic logic ran as follows: Would we still so admire her triceps and delts if we caught a glimpse of some hairy tendrils in her armpits?

Worse: could the American voting public prove itself so shallow and callow that those stubborn strands would translate into a landslide victory for the Republican ticket despite the McCain-Palin aka Tina Fey train wreck which kept insinuating that Barack Hussein Obama was a Kenyan-born Muslim who wouldn't only win every marathon but might also take away American guns and bacon whilst passing Sharia law and making women wear burkas?

Now they were on their twenty-ninth date on the Brooklyn Bridge and he was tying his shoelaces and she was squinting into the wind to make out the Statue of Liberty against the cloudy sky. Suddenly, he said, "I'm going to canvass for Barack Obama next weekend in Philly." He stood up as she raised an eyebrow enquiringly, her voice quavering with suspicion, "Yeah, but, like, you are going to do it ironically... right?"

It was his turn to look into the wind across New York Bay, "Whaddya mean?"

"Well, you don't really buy all that 'hope we can believe in' and 'change is coming' crap...do you? You're not seriously one of those gung-ho hope-and-changers?"

He turned his back to the wind, "You aren't?"

"No, I mean it's necessary for the masses but I mean...Dude, you're, like, being tongue-in-cheek, right?"

His voice was cold. He drew himself up to his full height - 5 feet 8 inches - and managed to say two whole sentences without inserting a single "like." "I am being tongue in mouth. Hope and change is what this country desperately needs right now after eight years of George Bush destroying our country's standing in the world and our entire economy!"

"Yeah, I get that but nothing ever really changes. Politicians make empty promises all the time. I mean we have to go through with the whole election charade. That's democracy etcetera, etcetera, picking the lesser of two evils - but we don't really take it too seriously...do we? I'm not even going to bother to vote. It's all, like, a big farce."

That night he went home and thought about how words were meant to build bridges between people but how could that happen when his generation only spoke with flippancy or by text message? He began to write in his blog:

Hey Folks, today I went on a date and it all began to fall apart. The problem is that she is ironic and I am sincere. Isn't the Age of Irony over now??? When we are fighting two wars and destroying the global economy with security-backed mortgages (or is it mortgage-backed securities?) and calling torture 'enhanced interrogation' and Republicans protect the lives of unborn embryos but support the death penalty for the living and and and AND...isn't it sincerely time to get a little hopeful, pray for a little change?

He read what he had written, opened a beer and read it again. But before he published it, he wanted to give her one last chance so he sent her a pointed text message.

Him: What about all your shows??? Do you really think Rachel is not going to vote??? Are you serious about seriously not voting???

Her: Very serious. Serious is the new black.

He rubbed his growing bald spot as he contemplated her response and as soon as his blog post went live online, he sent her an email with the link. She never responded.

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Three years and seven-and-a-half months went by and a lot of stuff happened but it was all a bit blurry for him because as soon as Obama was inaugurated, things got really tedious with the whole health care reform thing and even though he tried to keep up with current events by watching online episodes of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, he got really into Bikram yoga and chanting at kirtans so he shut down his Facebook profile and then discovered he couldn't really get off Facebook so after a while he got back on and realized that now that he was in his thirties, it seemed most of his 467 friends were mainly putting up baby pictures and so he thought about getting married and about all the girls he had ever dated and began to wonder if he had somehow bypassed the One.

He made a list of all his ex's beginning with Mindy in Seventh Grade. He realized he didn't want to be a hipster anymore and so he stopped following Ryan Gosling's twitter feed and he gave up his roommates and the L train for a one-bedroom in Park Slope and joined the Fascist Food Coop, the first baby steps towards adulthood. Excerpts of Shrek 1, 2, 3 and 4 sent him off to sleep every night as he went over his list again and again and each time he would stumble upon Her.

Was she still ironic? Had she become sincere?

He tried to re-Friend her on Facebook after the abrupt de-Friending subsequent to the disillusioning bridge/blog episode. Three weeks later, she finally accepted his request but when he saw her profile, both hands went up to his ever larger bald spot.

There was nothing ironic about it. She was wearing a big pouffy white dress that conveniently concealed all her tattoos and she was wielding every girly prop possible: a wand, a tiara, a huge bouquet of lilies. He combed through the comments on her wall - she had lost her job owing to the apocalyptic economy but all was well since the groom was a Google Maps exec. There was nothing much he could do except

download Adele's new album and write on her wall, "Congratulations!!!" followed by his own version of a Buddhist aphorism: "The sincerest action is not conforming to the world's empty conventions."

A week after their long honeymoon, she sent him this message:

Dude! Me and my new hubby are thinking of manning a phone bank to raise funds for Obama. Yeah, he didn't close Guantanamo and the economy still STINKS and wow, the drone strikes are really outta control and no movement, nothing, nada on immigration reform, I mean the list of his failures is endless not to mention the fact that Hillary the Womyn should have been the nominee in the first place BUT we totally can't let the gun-toting religious-freaks in the GOP back again! If one more Republican mentions rape and abortion in the same sentence, I may shoot myself. So it's all about the lesser evil, you know...ARE YOU IN?

She was suddenly so...pragmatic.

But he couldn't write back immediately because he didn't have a TV anymore much less cable and even though the election wasn't far off, he realized he had no idea what was going on in the country so he ordered a flat screen online and eagerly awaited it but when it finally came, he discovered MSNBC had become the Democratic Party's Propaganda Department whilst Fox News continued to provide fair and balanced coverage of Karl Rove's predictions, scribbled onto a white board, of a Republican victory for handsome white guy, Mitt Romney, and CNN featured Anderson Cooper flirting with Isha Sesay.

Most certainly, a lot of stuff had happened! Obama looked completely Tea Partied-out and his hair had gone so gray. At any given campaign event, he might be asked whether he would consider military action against Iran if they continued to try and emulate America by acquiring nuclear weapons or if he would get his daughters a new puppy if he were re-elected or if in fact, he would break into the viral-video-on-YouTube Gangnam Style dance.

Trying to figure out the country's zeitgeist and if he should join the

phone-banking, he watched SNL spoofs and tuned into Bill Maher and even Jay Leno but where was the hope and change? Nothing but economic fear and pragmatic negative campaigning!

He wanted to write back to her and say something witty like, "Pragmatism is the new post-ironic black," or something cutting like, "I hear you're married now and you're such a hypocrite." Or perhaps it was finally time to devise that new app, one that could craft clever responses to irksome ex's. Or maybe he could just write on her wall so all her friends could see, "If Michelle Obama didn't shave her underarms...she wouldn't wear sleeveless dresses!" That would show her what he thought about her silly, superficial views.

Instead, he just closed down his Facebook profile again. Ten minutes later, he joined Instagram.

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Almost 35, suddenly single again and pretty much bald. After three-and-a-half years of a long distance relationship with an earnest techie who worked in San Fran, he abruptly ended things when he realized the frequent flier miles were not enough to keep it going. Flying back to New York on the red eye, he felt both empty and light, hopeful and despairing. When he opened the door to his apartment in the early morning, the summer humidity was already making him sweat.

He didn't know what to do with himself. He had taken the whole week off work to spend with her. Maybe he could do some make-up shifts at the Fascist Food Coop? Or catch up with the news? There was yet another election looming. The circus had started the year before and he had steadfastly blocked it out. Besides, he never watched TV anymore or listened to the radio and had not read a newspaper online since 2002 - and that was for a class project. No, most of his current news came to him via a Whatsapp group formed by his softball team. He sat down and began to click through various links.

Somewhere in the Midwest, former reality TV star and purported billionaire, the tangerine-tinted real estate mogul named Donald Trump was throwing a big party for him and his family. Actually on further examination, he found out that it was not a Trump family

reunion but a Trump family brand-boosting marketing campaign masquerading as the Republican National Convention which in theory was meant to formally declare the man often referred to using the article “the,” as in The Donald, the Republican nominee for POTUS. His third and most trophy-esque wife with her whimsical white dress, high cheekbones and charming Slovenian accent, had given a big speech at the convention to support her husband's candidacy for president but unfortunately had plagiarized Michelle Obama's 2008 convention speech. Yikes! What a fox pass, he thought to himself.

Who had jokingly renamed the hoity-toity faux pas, the fox pass? Her!

And there in the early morning heat as Park Slope began to wake and prepare for work, he realized that he hadn't thought about Her in months and months. Where was she now? Still married? Or was she divorced? And where did she stand in this election with her capricious flip flops? What was she this year? Ironic, sincere, pragmatic, cynical or clueless?

He resisted the temptation to google her. But he spent the rest of the week streaming the Republican National Convention on his iMac, wondering if, wherever she was, she was also watching. He poured himself a vodka and mixed it with some club-mate and then downloaded last year's hit single, Adele's "Hello from the Other Side," and tried to make sense of the lyrics. What was she crooning about? He really couldn't relate it to any of his own failed love stories so he went back to watching various Trumps parading across the stage.

The tangerine-tinted candidate for president kept insisting that the family was both very, very - "tremendously, incredibly" - wealthy but also pretty much your average blue-collar, working-class family struggling to make ends meet in a middle-class-killing economy geared towards the super-rich. A lot of time was spent lambasting his opponent, the devil or sometimes also called Hillary, and blasting China as a job-stealer. His eldest daughter appeared on stage with her coiffed blonde hair and perfect poise to take advantage of the huge viewing audience to show off her very own line of clothing - made in China - and lo and behold, it sold out the next day!

It was not cynical. It was not ironic. It was not hypocritical. It was stupendous.

Politicians no longer had to even project the pretense of answering a higher calling to public service. No, politics was revealed in its crudest, coarsest form as merely a marketing jamboree to make rich people richer. All in all, the billionaire's expedition to the Midwest was a total win-win.

Except for the country. According to him, the country was a hot mess! Law and order (not the TV show) was no more. Bands of armed terrorists were running about everywhere, more numerous than squirrels. The donkey-loving Democrats just refused to call them radical Islamic terrorists. Illegal immigrants were flooding across the border bringing more and more cerveza, platanos and burritos. Uppity black people had the audacity to say that their lives mattered.

But the tangerine bully kept trumpeting on, ramming it home again and again: China was manipulating its currency and stealing American jobs like crazy. That's why the Trumps did their manufacturing there. They couldn't help it. It made business sense. It was cheaper. But that's just because the game was rigged and the system was fixed. America was a big, fat loser! But never fear, the Donald was going to make his profit from low-paid Chinese labor BUT as soon as he was elected president, he was going to impose a 45% tariff on goods imported from China and thus make this steaming hot mess of America great again!

By the end of the week, he was in a daze. He ventured out of his apartment to Prospect Park keeping his eyes peeled for camouflage-clad suicide-bombers. Who knows, they could have taken hostages in Brooklyn Central Library or tried to start a caliphate in Grand Army Plaza. The reality was shocking. Children flying kites, chirpy families picnicking outdoors, roller skaters zooming around the new rink. Did these people not know this impoverished, corrupt, unstable, crime-ridden country was about to collapse?

He saw a missed call on his phone from his ex's San Fan area code. But what about Her? 2008 was a long time ago. A lot of stuff had happened. But was she the One? He texted one of his softball team pals explaining the conundrum. He texted back, ASK GOOGLE! :)



All weekend he mulled over what to ask the modern-day oracle on all relationship questions. Ask Google if she was the One or just find out where she was or if she had a LinkedIn profile?

By the start of the next week and the Democratic National Convention in swing state Pennsylvania, he wasn't sleeping very soundly. What if he had lost the One and would never find her? This was the tragedy produced by a childhood of too many Disney movies. As soon as he got to work, he watched [John Oliver on Youtube rebuking the Republicans for the lack of facts](#) informing their opinions about the state of the country. Yes, he hadn't been in a very good state himself over the weekend. Now he had to kick his hangover and pull himself together and so he downloaded Tinder, the only way to meet in 2016. The only thing to do was to get right back out there and hook one of the fish swimming around in the great sea of the mobile internet. But then he discovered that he would have to reactivate his dormant Facebook profile to sign up. Ugghh.

When he got home that evening, he started streaming the Democratic National Convention as he prepared some barley, quinoa and kale for his healthy dinner, punishment for a weekend of excessive drinking. But then he poured himself a little vodka and club-mate and contemplated doing something soooooo radical. What if he didn't try and contact her through social media? What if he didn't even try to send her a text message? Imagine if he just picked up his phone and tried her old number if he could actually find it? He poured himself another drink. What if it rang and then she actually picked up? That would be so crazy.

He chewed some more kale and watched the DNC. It was a parade of black women - young and old sporting a variety of different hairstyles - alongside Hollywood celebs and rock stars. They were very rah-rah-rah and all about climate change, gun control, unity over division and actually acting as if immigrants were human beings and not just criminals. Love trumps hate, they cried, as supporters of the adored, avuncular, septuagenarian Bernie Sanders glared angrily at Hillary backers.

He looked through his Whatsapp messages. So the Dems were going to try and make the case for Hillary, the party's first female nominee

ever, by reintroducing her as a womyn - there he went again, thinking about Her! - whose true awesomeness had somehow remained hidden from the citizenry all her forty years in public life. But America seemed to think she was corrupt, compromised and calculating.

Maybe he should google Her? But then it occurred to him that she might be using her husband's name. Nausea rose. He quickly typed her name into his iPad and 59,700,000 results came up in 0.48 seconds. She had a rather common name. He looked uncomprehendingly at the contradictory information. A woman in Seattle bearing her same appellation had started a petition to allow the whole world to vote in the US presidential election. It said: "Every day, we hear that the American President is the most powerful (wo)man in the world. Shouldn't the whole world have a say in choosing the leader of the free world?" There were more than 182,000 signatures. Was it her? Couldn't be sure.

He clicked on images and there was a fuzzy pic of a woman in running shorts crossing the finish line with her arms in the air. It was so unclear. The digital world made information available at our fingertips but gave us no help in processing it.

Then suddenly Michelle Obama appeared on the incredibly high-quality screen of his iMac. She was wearing a blue, cap-sleeved dress, talking about her daughters and putting forward a choice to the American people. But he could not concentrate on which candidate would be a better role model for the children, the tangerine-tinted man or the email-deleting woman, because he was trying to catch a glimpse of her armpits. If Michelle Obama had not shaved her underarms, her husband would never have become the Democratic Party's nominee. It would have been Hillary back in 2008 and he would never have been sincere or hopeful and the whole bridge/blog episode would never have happened and he would right now be with Her, the One, and the tangerine bully would be making infomercials advertising a tanning bed that didn't turn one orange.

He put Michelle Obama on mute and googled her name again, adding "+ womyn." The first hit was a website for soccer moms in New Jersey who were holding a fundraiser for Trump. His heart stopped. Did she have kids now? Worse: had she become a

Republican?

And then he saw that it was just a comment bearing her name appended to the website's first posting about an upcoming event.

“Womyn and Dudes! What if Donald Trump won't reveal his tax returns because he is broke and needs the job of president for the paycheck?”

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