

## Dominant

I look slimmest and youngest in my blue and black wrap dress. If the light shines on it in a certain way, you can look through it. My legs are still to be seen. To add volume to the hair, with my head upside down, I rub powder at the hair roots. The line above the eyes shoots out. Make-up remover on it. Now my lens hurts. Lens out, back in. Now a red eye. Skewed line. Shave my legs. I open my skin at my ankle, it's bleeding profusely. Used a cheap razor blade from a hotel, stupid. Band Aid. Dress off. Black trousers with a low crotch and tapered at the ankles, white blouse through which you can see the lace bra slightly. I like my reflection. I need something summery with this: open shoes. Trim toenails. Cut into my skin, blood again. Jesus I'm an idiot. Another plaster. Just put on white socks and cool black shoes. Quickly on the bike towards the Zuidas, the business district of Amsterdam, it's already late. A Friday night speed dating. Not the alone on the couch on Friday night depression.

At the entrance of what I think is the wrong hotel, the receptionist asks where I should be. I am blushing. She directs me to the speed dating counter, down the main hall. People my age stand and sit at a bar and around tables. Men in suits or shirts, women in dresses or skirts that reach just above the knee. Between them a much younger lady in a miniskirt, apparently the organizer. I feel a sudden impulse to run away, go home. Rather alone on the couch than this. What am I doing here? The organizer walks up to me.

"You found it!" She smiles encouragingly. I decide to continue, as I did find the place. Then a somewhat portly man appears next to me, wavy gray hair, mischievous eyes under bushy eyebrows, a generous smile, light blue linen shirt under a dark blue well-fitting suit.

"Now that I see you, I know that I have not come in vain." Big grin. Southern-Dutch accent. I look up and smile.

"Shall we just go away the two of us, find a bar? Do you know it here, are you from Amsterdam?" Quick tongue, a man used to get his own way. I don't know bars. I'm not going out any longer. And certainly not in the Zuidas. I shake my head.

"Then give me your e-mail, we'll make an appointment and I can leave now." It looks like he's in a hurry. My panic has subsided. I'm starting to get curious, not just about this man, but about the whole evening, about all these people.

I stick out my hand, "Hannah".

"Rutger."

"If you hadn't spoken to me, I probably would have escaped."

"Let's get away from here together".

This man doesn't take no for an answer. I shiver.

The organizer has taken a microphone and stands on a platform, her skirt seems even shorter now. Calmly she explains the rules of the evening. The women choose a table. Every five minutes the bell rings and the men move on. There are more men than women tonight, so two men per round don't have a table companion, she explains. We get a card with 15 columns printed on it. Fifteen dates, a short break after every five dates.

"During the break you can talk a little longer with whoever has piqued your interest. I recommend that you make some notes on the card next to the name at each encounter to aid your memory. At the end of the evening, you cross on your card who you want to see again. If the other person has also ticked you, there is a match and you will receive each other's email addresses."

We each get three tokens for drinks. She advises not to drink too much. Although I feel like white wine, I order a cappuccino.

I settle down at a table. Look at the women on my left and right, at the same table. The bell rings. The first man sits down at my table. He's wearing a gaudy purple shirt. He tells in detail how he first visited his mother, what she had cooked, where she lives exactly, and how easy the way to here was afterwards, twice left, once right. Because he didn't have a match last time, he was allowed to come again for free. I feel sorry. Ask him a few questions. Look interested. Smile kindly. When the bell rings I note on the card: purple.

Two more men with wrong shirts follow. Then I see Rutger sitting, talking animatedly to another good-looking, much smaller, bearded man. I walk over to them and joke:

"A match! You click!"

Both men hasten to say that they are just talking about football.

"But that's exactly what I mean, you have a common interest, and then it clicks!"

The last man of the first round at my table is Rutger. He hangs his jacket over the chair and rolls up his shirt sleeves. A Rolex.

"What is your profession?" I ask.

"I am an entrepreneur."

At a rapid pace, he continues with grand gestures about his family business, the lack of free time, the ambition of always higher, further.

I recognize the passion, the speed of thinking, the drive that I love. He is sitting straddled.

Firm hands. Brown skin. The light blue linen shirt stretches around his round belly. Gray chest hair peeps above. His aftershave stings my nose. I note down: dominant.

Then the bell rings: the first break.

"Shall we go?" he suggests, standing up. It seems like a commandment. I ignore it.

"Wine, beer?" I ask, standing up. The game has started. With the last two tokens I get our drinks. When I return, he is talking animatedly to a woman who is almost as tall as he is. She's attractive. Younger than me. Do not be jealous. I ask her what she does. Journalist. I like her. It pleases me that nice, beautiful women come to a speed dating evening. Speed dating isn't just for losers. The men with the wrong shirts join, including the short, bearded man who had a "match" with Rutger. He explains in detail how to grow oyster mushrooms on coffee grounds. The ease with which he takes up space. When the bell rings for the second round, Rutger hands me his business card.

"I'm going, and hope to see you again. It's in your hands now". He walks off. Then the tall woman comes out of the toilet and he gives her his business card too. The rest of the evening I'm unconcentrated, I keep thinking about Rutger. He intrigues me, but my alarm bells ring. The last man at my table is the beard man. I'm tired, no more questions to ask.

"What does your father do?" I joke, to open original. I remember how that was always my dad's first question when I had a boyfriend. He takes the question seriously and says that his father is a successful writer who left the family when they were young because of another woman. How he started working at a young age to help his mother with the family income. And only later made a career, with various green startups, the last one: growing oyster mushrooms from coffee grounds collected from bars. The story fascinates me. On the card I write: oyster mushroom. Then we get some time to note who we want to see again, by putting a cross behind the names in question. He gets a cross: 1 out of 15. I don't have to tick Rutger, because I have his e-mail.

Back home, I google Rutger. I'm impressed. He is a successful entrepreneur who writes books about this, gives lectures and coaches others. Rows at a high level. Plays cello. I watch a Ted talk of him where he was much slimmer than he is now. I study his images, his many faces, on stages, at awards ceremonies, with a beer in a café, in a skiff on the water, with his cello in an orchestra.

Then I receive an email from the organization of the speed dating evening.

"Congratulations! There was a lot of interest in you. Of the 15 men you met, 14 wanted to see you again. We hereby give you the e-mail address of the man you have a match with. We wish you good luck!"

Saturday morning I send Rutger an email. He emails right back. That he is at work. That he is almost always there. Can I call you later, he asks. I email him my number. In the evening he calls. I'm in bed reading. My safe boat. He googled me.

"Impressive what you do! Are you still sleeping? But I'm going to give you some advice about your website. You can use my website builder. And I'm going to give you a job. In my company we need people like you! And do you know what I love about you? That you are so dominant. How you walked up to us and said we had a match. I like dominant women". I smile.

"I'm curious how you lie in bed, and what you're wearing. Can you send me some pictures? Good night, sweet dreams, I hope I'm in it!"

No one has ever asked me that before. I take a selfie in bed, in my sleeping shirt. Then the apps come:

"Isn't that too hot?" "Naked!" "Understand?"

I feel uncomfortable. App back: "Not funny".

He: "SORRY!" "Have a good one."

I'm going to sleep.

When I open my phone on Sunday morning, there are six apps from Rutger, sent in the middle of the night, at different times.

"Excuse me!". "You just have to correct me!" "Just tell me what you want!" "I listen!" "Sleep well!" "Voulez vous?"

He makes an uncontrolled impression. I ignore him.

On Monday morning, when I open my work computer, I find an email from him. Sent Sunday night, three o'clock.

"Hi darling!! You know what I like about you? You are so domineering! Did I already tell you? When will we see each other? And if I misbehave a bit, just correct me! I'm just a bit naughty!"

I just go to work, ignore his mail. Then three more apps from him:

"Have a good one!" "When do we meet?" "Where?" I app back:

"From Amsterdam to Maastricht is further than from Maastricht to Amsterdam".

"Okay okay, I'll come to you, Dauphine, at the Amstel station, tonight at 7 pm?"

I leave work early and cycle into town to buy something new. It is the hottest day ever, which has disrupted train traffic in many places. So maybe he won't come. Relief. In the fitting room I squeeze into a thin linen dress, sweating. I like it, but then I see the wound on my lower leg. This is only possible if I still buy boots, but where can I find something that fits this dress so quickly? My other clothes smell of perspiration, I can't go to my date in them. Sweat breaks out on me. A hot flash. In the full-length mirror, I look like I've thrown a bucket of water over me. Wet spots appear on the dress. I have to buy it now. The price tag shocks me. An app from Rutger.

"Did I tell you I love Dominant?"

"Is there something wrong with your memory, you've said that many times" But wait, why does he capitalize dominantly?

"Or do you mean sexually dominant? I'm just in the store buying a whip!"

"Oh really??? I am very humble, I am your servant, I kneel for you, I lick your shoes!"

"NO!"

"Then we should just cancel the appointment. May I ask you to keep this to yourself."

"Naturally."

"And if you have another Dominant girlfriend..."

Offended, I wriggle out of the dress, thinking what this non-date has cost me. I see the screen light up again.

"What do you think of that tall lady from speed dating? Would she be Dominant?"

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