

## Love Ain't Etsy

Two strangers, who found each other through unusual means, ask their friends for advice and ignore them anyway. It works out fine.

"Sorry, what?"

"What?"

"Whaddya mean 'you're falling for an Etsy Seller?'" adding finger-quotes for emphasis.

"Don't say it like that." Stefanie pouted as she sipped her stemless glass of red. It was, eh, fine. She regretted having Betty bring the wine; she always had mediocre taste. "That's just how we met."

"And what's he sell?"

"Hm?" Stef was still "enjoying" her sip.

"You heard me."

"He's" – she started slowly in an airy voice, curiously inspecting the wine legs left in her glass – "where I found my art books."

"You mean the coloring books?"

Now it was Stef's turn for a hard look. "They're art when I'm done with them."

Betty popped a cheese cube. "Oh, yeah. You're a real Van Gogh with your color-by-numbers."

"That was one time and it wasn't even his."

"Cheating on him already, huh?"

"For Christ's sake..."

Betty tutttuted. "Not a good sign."

The two friends sat there in the park on their checkered blanket as the sound of park life continued around them.

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"You met her where?"

"Well, I didn't really meet her yet."

"But she's from Etsy? Like another seller or—"

"A customer."

Matt stood a little slack-jawed. "Dude, that's kinda weird."

"Why's it weird?"

"I dunno. Maybe she's looking to get free handouts."

Sam scoffed as they stopped to wait for the crosswalk.

"Look: you know how I put my books together. Some designs are mine; some I grab off the internet. When she selects her pages, she always picks my custom designs. Now, I'll tell ya: that's weird. It's like we're—"

"Really? Every time? Every page?"

"Well, sometimes it's the random ones, but—"

"Oh, here we go."

"But it's pretty consistent."

"That's pretty thin, Sam."

"She's the one who reached out to me!"

"Ya. And it's weird! Would you reach out to some rando online dice merchant and ask for a date?"

"It's not like that. I include in my bio that I'm Pittsburgh-based and—"

"And she's just like" — Matt clasped his hands together against his cheek and batted his eyes at Sam, adopting a scratchy falsetto — "'Oh mysterious internetman, I feel so connected to you through your glorified coloring books that I simply must go out on a date with you.'"

Sam's face flushed. "First of all, my name's public on my page. Second: we've talked through email for a few weeks now. Third—"

"Oho! Email, you don't say? How formal. Please just don't tell me her first contact was through the feedback page."

Sam's reddening deepend.

"Dude." The lights changed and they started across the street. "Like I said: weird."

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Stef and Betty's wine and charcuterie picnic was running dangerously low on Stef's good parm.

"Stef, listen, you're a gorgeous girl. Beautiful face. Great tits. Sure, you've got a bit of a flat ass," — Stef's eyes shot daggers at Betty — "but your smile lights up the room. Why'd'ya feel like settling for some guy who's selling adult coloring books outta his mama's basement?"

"He got a house in Squirrel Hill," Stef replied tartly.  
"and he works for UPMC."

"So, you do know more."

"Yes, Betty. I'm not an idiot."

"I never said—"

"Well, you damn well implied it."

Stef was still sipping her wine, gazing out across the park  
absentmindedly. Betty sat there trying to catch her eye.

"Ah, quit sulking."

"Hmph. You're being very rude."

"C'mon."

"And you said my ass was flat."

"Hey, on that, I calls 'em hows I sees 'em."

"Still rude."

"So, you've talked to this guy beyond when to expect your  
next custom art book?"

"Yes. In fact," Stef checked her phone, "it's about time I  
get going." She stood up, straightened out her sundress, and  
picked up her heels. "I'm meeting him at St. Pete's in a few  
minutes."

"Wait. What? Aren't you going to help me clean up at  
least?"

"Nope. I've got a date." Stef started off across the grassy park lawn. She called back, waving her hand without turning around. "See you back at the apartment."

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Sam sighed. "I get you think it's a bit sketchy or whatever, but this was more of a courtesy than a question."

"Whaddya mean?"

"I said I was headed this way, but I've got other plans."

"You're not serious."

"As a heart attack. In fact," Sam nodded down the corner from where Matt was walking straight. "I'm headed to St. Pete's to meet a lovely lady named Stefanie."

"Heh. Lovely, you hope."

"Whatever, dude. You're just jealous."

"Pff. Whatever." Sam was already walking down the side street. Matt called after him, "Good luck, I guess."

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Stefanie sat atop a barstool waiting on her just-ordered latte, nervously watching the door. Then, in walked a tall man in a rose-colored t-shirt and jeans. He wore wide-framed glasses and sported a clean-shaven face with a soft chin and happy eyes. He was a bit on the slender side, but he stood straight up looking like an artist surveying a landscape.

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Sam walked into St. Pete's and looked around for a girl in a sundress. He spotted her, second apparently, already on her way over from the counter. She was a darling little lady with an idyllic smile. She wore her hair up in a neat bun, showing off the graceful curves of her neck, and was a little soft across the middle, but she shone out against the warm woods of the coffee house.

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"Sam?"

"Stefanie?"

"Hello!" She said brightly, reaching out her hand.

Sam brought up his own to greet hers, finding it to be quaint and porcelaneous; she found his large and warm with dark hairy forearms. She had not known that she liked that sort of thing.

"I've brought something for you." In his other hand, Sam carried a bag that Stef had not seen when he came in. He pulled from it a neatly bound collection of pages. "It's a one-of-a-kind."

Stef squealed slightly. "I'm so excited." She hooked his arm with hers and started back to her seat. "Let's get started."