

How I met my wife

My cat stopped eating dry food about a month ago. I turned her on to wet, but she got tired of that after a fortnight so now she only eats ants. *The Little Princess*, as I've taken to calling her, refuses to eat anything unless it's served in a 2" deep silver bowl, approximately 15 minutes after sunset.

I got the neighbor's kid to collect the ants for me. He's three, can't barely talk right, but the boy's got talent: he can sing like nobody's business, can't dance though. He was riding by my place on a Big Wheel one day and I says to him, I says,

“Hey, you there, neighbor boy. Come here.”

“Me?” he says.

I told him to fetch me some ants, gave him a burlap sack, a slotted spoon, and a hearty push down the hill. While he was gone I went over to the lake to soak up some rays. I think I deserved it.

The town just tore down the old McMurphy's place and the vacant lot is full of ant hills. When the parents died, the kids couldn't stop fighting over who got the house, the car, the pool, etc, so somebody torched it all in the middle of the night. I think it was the twins, Sally and Jane. They were always looking out for the family. The rest of the kids decided to sell the property and cut their losses. There's a fence around the lot now, but the boy — he's wiry, he can crawl through the holes.

The boy came tearing up the hill just before sunset, not a minute too soon, and gave me a big, writhing sack of ants. He asked for the money and I gave him a firm handshake and some life advice: *When you lose your money learn to lose.*

He peddled off in huff, all saying that he wasn't going to put up with my bullshit anymore, but I knew that next time rent was due he'd come pedaling back for more odd jobs.

The Little Princess seemed content, but she stopped halfway through her meal to stare at me, her whiskers full of squirming, half eaten ants. She informed me as politely as she could that, while it was very thoughtful of me to have gathered the ants (I didn't tell her about the

neighbor's boy), she would prefer if I let her catch her own food next time. I was shocked, a little hurt too.

I apologized. I asked her if there was any way I could make it up to her.

She said she felt I was suffocating her.

"I just love you," I said.

She said she knew that and she was sorry, but that I, being a man who lives all alone with his cat, needed to find another outlet for my love, that she was just overwhelmed by all the attention I gave her. Which is how we came to set up my online dating profile.

I don't have a lot of photographs of myself. I actually only have two. One taken when I was a baby and the other last year on Halloween when I was dressed as a skeleton. I didn't have any hair in the first picture and in the second I was standing next to a much more attractive man, also dressed as a skeleton. Neither would do, so I called a number from the Yellow Pages and ordered some headshots.

The headshots arrived promptly, but none of them were of me, so I went over to the neighbor's house and asked to see their son about some photographs.

The boy was still pissed at me over the ant fiasco, but I told him I really would pay him this time and I showed him the big sack of money to prove it — hoping that he wouldn't recognize it from yesterday (I only own one burlap sack).

"Can you take my photo?" I asked him, "I don't know anybody else with steady hands."

"You got the wrong guy," he said.

I deflated a little bit, then he told me that he knew somebody who could take my photo, but warned me that it wouldn't be cheap. I agreed and so we set out: he on his Big Wheel and I on my skates (a relic from my disco days). We went down the big hill and past the empty lot full of stupid ants, up the small hill, and onto the highway.

The McMurphy kids had moved into a condominium off exit 4. They all slept on bunk beds and worked at the community college. Joey McMurphy had gotten into DJ'ing and when the neighbor's kid and I knocked on the door, he asked if we fucked with J Dilla. We both said

yes, and to seem cool I added that I thought JD was fire. I think Joey could still tell I was a square though.

The twins were the ones we were looking for. They were sitting in the way back of the condo, playing with matches. The neighbor's kid did the talking and I took off my skates. I didn't want to look too tall in my new photos.

Sally held the camera and Jane held the flash. They took three photos. I had my eyes closed in two of them and my tongue out in the third, but it didn't matter because we couldn't afford a reshoot. As we were leaving, Joey offered us a hit from his recently purchased four-foot tall, triple walled, hand blown glass bong — complete with a double honeycomb percolator system, polycarbonate reinforcement, and a trippy wizard painted on the front of it. I looked to the neighbor's boy to follow his lead, but he declined because he was a recently converted straight edge.

When we got back to my house, I broke the news to the neighbor's boy that I didn't have any money left. He cussed me out and told me to give him my skates. I gave him the skates even though they were much too big for him, and he told me that he was happy to have me as a friend. I told him I was happy to have him as someone who would have me as a friend, then asked if I could borrow a stamp to mail my photos to the online dating company.

In a couple of days the photos appeared on my profile and after a few frustrating weeks, I had my first match.

We chatted: She was good at stuff, I was into stuff.

We arranged a date for the evening of the upcoming Saturday.

Oh I was so nervous.

When the day finally arrived, The Little Princess helped me dress for my date. I wore the same tuxedo I had worn to prom, except I had to rip the sleeves off because my big strong arms didn't fit anymore. I debated buying a corsage, but the neighbor's kid said it was tacky.

“You're gonna scare her away regardless, you don't need any props,” he told me.

My date was named Maria and she was awful pretty. She wore shoes and a blouse, pants, and her hair. She was a real live woman sitting right across from me at a real wooden table with

a paper table cloth. I was nervous to say the least, so I ordered a cocktail, vodka and red Gatorade. The bartender called it a Clown's Nose.

While we waited for the food to arrive, Maria told me all about her day and I began to plan for our next date. Maybe, I thought, we could go to the aquarium, unless the bridge is up, because I never have, and certainly ever will, *like* waiting for the bridge to come down once it's up. If it's not up though, we'll walk over it like it was nothing and I'll ask Maria if she's ever been to the grand canyon. Maybe she'll say something funny — then I'll laugh.

Once we're inside the aquarium, after we play-fight about who pays (and I lose), I'll gently steer her towards where they keep the mollusks because I have two anecdotes about shellfish, and if the time is right I'll tell her one of them (Anecdote A) right then and there.

Oh, but what if the bridge really were up when we tried to go to the aquarium. No worries, because I always have a backup plan. If the bridge is up, we'll walk down below it and if someone has conveniently left us a bucket, we'll look for scallops. If we find enough we'll have them for dinner, this, of course, being dependent on us finding a bucket. If, however, we do find a bucket, and enough scallops, but Maria doesn't like to eat scallops, then we'll throw them all back and I'll tell her my other shellfish anecdote as a consolation prize — Anecdote B: the story of my childhood best friend.

“Do you have any pets?” she asked me.

A familiar subject. The perfect time for me to check back into our first date.

“Why yes, I have a kitty.”

“Oh marvelous, I do too. Mine is just the most darling thing. She's getting older though and now all she eats is chicken and rice! What a prima donna!”

“How funny.”

“Yes.”

Then there was an awkward silence. But I had an ace in the hole, one of my famous stories.

“You know, it's funny--”

“Yes it is.”

“It's fu--”

“I know.”

“Look, I’m trying to say it’s funny that your cat is a picky eater because mine is too.”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, see, my cat stopped eating dry food about a month ago. *I turned her on to wet, but she got tired of that after a fortnight so now she only eats ants. **The Little Princess**, as I’ve taken to calling her, refuses to eat anything unless it’s served in a 2” deep silver bowl, approximately 15 minutes after sunset. I got the neighbor’s kid to collect the ants for me. He’s three, can’t barely talk right, but the boy’s got talent: he can sing like nobody’s business, can’t dance though. He was riding by my place on a Big Wheel one day and I says to him, I says...*”