

# THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By **Brian Mitchell and Dimitri Makedonsky**

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**SYNOPSIS:** When Matt's wife leaves him for the local toilet-puck salesman, he is forced to move in with his younger brother, Joe. Joe quickly decides that what Matt really needs is a lesson on “the ten rules of internet dating.” What follows is a rollicking tale of misbegotten dates and Pakistani cuisine.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 MEN, 3 WOMEN)

- JOE WILSON (M)** ..... A young man without any genes related to cleanliness, 35. (333 lines)
- MATT WILSON (M)** ..... A recently divorced dentist, Matt is the older of the Wilson siblings, 40. (383 lines)
- MARGARITA ROBINSON (F)**... A young woman who seems to find the silver lining in every cloud, 26. (105 lines)
- PAKISTANI PETE (M)** ..... A local entrepreneur and owner of Pete’s Pakistani Palace and Sushi Bar. Pete is not Pakistani, 40. (52 lines)
- LUKE WILSON (M)** ..... Luke is Matt’s twelve-year-old son. (92 lines)
- MARTHA HENDERSON (F)** ..... Elderly woman looking for love “online,” 75. (15 lines)
- BETH TUCKER (F)** ..... A young woman who is not who she seems to be, 30. (22 lines)

**TONY (M)**..... Beth’s jealous husband and part-time professional wrestler, 30. *(14 lines)*

**MISTER GREEN (M)** ..... A fifty-year old, chubby, balding landlord. *(16 lines)*

### SETTING

The entirety of the play takes place in the small apartment of Joe Wilson.

**TIME:** Present day.

### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

#### ACT ONE

**Scene 1:** An evening in September.

**Scene 2:** Two weeks later.

#### ACT TWO

**Scene 1:** The following afternoon.

**Scene 2:** An evening in October.

**Scene 3:** Two weeks later.

**Scene 4:** The following July.

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ACT ONE, SCENE 1

**AT RISE:**

*Action begins in the small apartment of JOE WILSON. The place is a mess, clothes are scattered about, pizza boxes, soda cans, empty bags of chips, and the like. JOE is lying amidst the clutter. He is dressed in gym shorts and an old t-shirt, watching television. His cell phone rings. He answers it.*

**JOE:** This is Joe. . . (*JOE quickly rises and brings a large flowchart from behind his desk.*) I'm supposed to be on a date with you tonight? . . . Gee, I'm really sorry, I had something come up suddenly. . . . What? . . . Is this Kar – er, Su – uh, Em – Who, who is this? . . . Oh, Margarita! Stop calling and pretending to be a date! I swear you're going to give me a heart attack! . . . No, no date tonight. My brother's supposed to be here pretty soon. . . . Yeah, he just got divorced. His wife left him, I guess. . . . Well, sure, I feel bad for him. I mean it's not his fault he's a complete geek. I tried to tell him that girls like bad boys, but he wouldn't listen. . . . Yeah, I'll call you later. Bye.

*The doorbell rings. JOE rises and opens the front door, revealing his older brother, MATT, who carries a small suitcase.*

**JOE:** So, you finally made it. Come on in, Matt.

**MATT:** Yeah. You know, your place is hard to find in the dark, Joe. Don't they have streetlights in this neighborhood?

**JOE:** I think they were shot out last spring. Well, come on in. I guess if you're gonna live here, we might just as well get you settled. You need help carrying your things in?

**MATT:** Sure. Could you grab those golf clubs in the hall?

**JOE:** Sure. (*JOE exits into the hallway, returning with a golf bag half full of clubs.*) The rest of your stuff down in the pick-up?

**MATT:** No. Natalie got the pick-up in the divorce settlement.

**JOE:** Did you have to rent a moving van?

**MATT:** No.

**JOE:** How did you get here, then?

**MATT:** I took the bus. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. Sure, the guy next to me hadn't bathed in the past year, and some drunk old lady hit on me. But I was really kinda lucky. She puked on the guy in front of me. And I didn't get mugged, so I guess that's a victory, right?

**JOE:** A pathetic victory, maybe. . . How'd you get all your stuff up here?

**MATT:** Your super helped me out. He's a patient of mine.

**JOE:** My super doesn't help anybody out! Wait. Old man Green is your patient? I guess that explains it.

**MATT:** What do you mean?

**JOE:** People are always nice to a guy that can cause them extreme pain the next time they see them.

**MATT:** I'm a good dentist, Joe. I wouldn't hurt someone on purpose!

**JOE:** Come on, Matt.

**MATT:** Just once or twice. Honest!

**JOE:** Right. So where's your stuff?

**MATT:** This is all I got out of the settlement.

**JOE:** You got a suitcase of clothes and some golf clubs, and that's it?

**MATT:** We split assets fifty-fifty. She got the house and the pick-up. And the car. But I get to keep my office and see Luke every other weekend. It could have been worse.

**JOE:** Yeah, you still have half your dignity, right? It sounds like your fifty-fifty is more of a ninety-ten to me. Why didn't you double-check her figures?

**MATT:** Natalie explained the numbers to me. Besides, you know I'm kinda dyslexic when it comes to math. If you hadn't done my homework in high school, I'd still be trying to pass Mister Collins' algebra class.

**JOE:** You're the only one that called it Mister Collins' algebra, Matt. Everyone else called it remedial math.

**MATT:** Thanks for reminding me. It doesn't matter anymore. I have an accountant. And if Natalie got a little more than half of our stuff, that's fine, too. The important thing is that I get to see Luke. Let me tell you, Joe, that boy is something special!

**JOE:** Luke Skywalker! I still can't believe you named your son Luke Skywalker Wilson. I mean, I liked Star Wars as much as the next guy; I even keep tabs on the Star Wars chatroom. But the kid's going to have a tough life with a name like that. Of course, he does have the force working for him, I guess.

**MATT:** It's a good name! I couldn't get Natalie to go for Obi-wan Kenobi, but she let me have Luke Skywalker . . .

**JOE:** How did you ever get Natalie to go along with that?

**MATT:** I bet her that I could recite every line of "Return of the Jedi." She didn't think I could. I won. She cried.

**JOE:** You may have won, but I think Luke lost on the deal. Why would Natalie even make a bet like that?

**MATT:** Yes, well, if I had lost, my son would be named Adolph Eugene. It's a family name on her side, apparently.

**JOE:** That's just great, Matt. At least when his friends are making fun of him, he can explain how he got his name. "My mom lost a bet." *(Pause.)* Hey! Do you know you only have even-numbered clubs in here? And no putter?

**MATT:** *(Smiling.)* I got the even numbered clubs and irons, and the pitching wedge. Natalie got the odd numbers and the putter.

**JOE:** Why are you happy about that? She took half your clubs!

**MATT:** True. But I can still play golf. *(MATT takes a bowling shoe from his suitcase.)* I, on the other hand, got her left bowling shoe. Let's see her bowl without this!

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**JOE:** Boy, you sure got her that time, Matt! Very shrewd! They don't keep bowling shoes at the lanes anymore?

**MATT:** Oh, right. I could never hit a 3 iron anyway. (*Looking around the apartment.*) Gee, Joe. I . . . love what you've done to the place. What style is this, Early Sanitary Landfill?

**JOE:** You always were the funny one, Matt. I got stuck with the looks and personality. (*JOE gestures grandly about the living room.*) Welcome to Chez Wilson! And more importantly, welcome to your new bedroom. My room is through that door. The bathroom is through there, and the kitchen is through that door. You can share my closet for your clothes. Or did Natalie take those, too?

**MATT:** No, I have some here, and I took my work clothes to the office. A couple of smocks, some socks, a handful of ties . . .

**JOE:** Apparently Natalie keeps the pants? It's only fair. After all, you never wore them.

**MATT:** Marriage is a series of compromises, Joe . . . at least for the husband.

**JOE:** If you say so . . .

**MATT:** You're still mad about the bachelor party, aren't you?

**JOE:** No. Well, just a little.

**MATT:** I've explained that a thousand times! Natalie didn't want me to drink that night. She was afraid I'd look bad for the pictures.

**JOE:** Okay, first of all, it was my bachelor party, not yours. Secondly, you still looked terrible. And thirdly, Natalie would never have known if you had a couple of drinks.

**MATT:** Are you kidding? She can smell alcohol on a person's breath at fifty paces. Natalie has a nose like a bloodhound!

**JOE:** Natalie has a face like a bloodhound!

**MATT:** Joe . . .

**JOE:** All right! I'm sorry. Natalie doesn't have a face like a bloodhound.

**MATT:** Thank you.

**JOE:** More like a pit bull.

**MATT:** So, how's the new job? (*Seriously.*) I mean, you haven't been fired, yet, have you?

**JOE:** Nope. I've still got that job at the sanitation department. I'm the department manager for acquisitions.

**MATT:** So you're in charge of garbage pick up?

**JOE:** Yep. Twenty-seven trucks at my beck and call. It pays better than Jocko's Beer Garden and House of Fine Eats, but the hours stink.

**MATT:** I imagine everything there stinks. And from the looks of your apartment, I can see you bring your work home with you.

**JOE:** Gee. I haven't heard that one before, Matt. You're a laugh-riot. Though I do have first pick of the good stuff that comes in.

**MATT:** And you must make the most of it!

**JOE:** Look, I may be a little bitter about the bachelor party, but you are in a real stink over this divorce. Admit it! I was right about her. It took you fifteen years to

figure it out, but I was right! I told you she'd dump you when something better came along, didn't I?

**MATT:** I'm sorry, Joe. You were right. Please don't let my life-shattering divorce prevent you from giving me the "I-told-you-so" routine.

**JOE:** Oh, right. Sorry about that.

**MATT:** It's okay.

**JOE:** But I was right about her, wasn't I?

**MATT:** You were right, all right? I guess I'm just nervous about being alone again. I'm a little bitter, but I'll . . . I'll get over it. *(Pause.)* How long does it take?

**JOE:** To get over a divorce? *(MATT nods.)* It took me four months.

**MATT:** Wow, that's longer than you were married!

**JOE:** Don't remind me! Being married to Sylvia was the worst twenty-three days of my life!

**MATT:** At least you finished the honeymoon, right? Three weeks in South America?

**JOE:** What choice did I have? There were no phones or computers, and no one spoke enough English to grant us an annulment. I filed for divorce from the airport in New York on day twenty-three of the worst twenty-three days of my life.

**MATT:** Did she marry that guy?

**JOE:** The tribesman? Yeah, I guess so. I got a postcard from her about a year ago. They have two kids and three goats. He still works as a guide for tourists. She teaches English at the school there.

**MATT:** Natalie still teaches at Briarcliff Academy. Weird, huh? I guess we both have the same taste in women.

**JOE:** No, we don't. I never wanted to tell you while you were married to her, but I never really liked Natalie all that much.

**MATT:** That's okay. She never liked you, either. She said you were "obtuse, crude, and calculated."

**JOE:** It's a good thing I don't know what those words mean. No biggie, though. She never had any taste in men.

**MATT:** Gee, thanks.

**JOE:** You know what I mean, they all had to be little lapdogs or she'd panic. She was a control freak, Matt. Admit it!

**MATT:** Yeah, I guess . . .

**JOE:** I mean, she'd say rabbit and you'd jump, right?

**MATT:** Well, not really.

**JOE:** She'd order duck, and you'd be under the table.

**MATT:** You're exaggerating, Joe.

**JOE:** I mean she only liked people if they were spineless worms that catered to her every whim, right?

**MATT:** Hey!

**JOE:** Well? Correct me if I'm wrong.

**MATT:** I just didn't like to argue with her, that's all. She'd yell and scream, and in the end she'd get her way anyway.

**JOE:** Well, you're free now.

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**MATT:** Thankfully!

**JOE:** You won't have to look at her bony bottom anymore.

**MATT:** Nope, fleshy, well-rounded bottoms from now on.

**JOE:** You won't wake every morning to a face that should be on the before picture of a plastic surgeon's advertisement.

**MATT:** I won't miss that!

**JOE:** Or that voice! Shrill and whiny; she sounded like fingernails on a blackboard.

**MATT:** I'm done with her, that's for sure.

**JOE:** And better off for it.

**MATT:** Yep. Except . . .

**JOE:** Except what?

**MATT:** I miss her. I mean, the bony bottom, the Picasso face, the voice that sank a thousand ships . . . everything! I loved her! I guess I still do.

**JOE:** I know, Matt. It gets better. You just live your life, and things will fall into place. I'm not saying you'll be better tomorrow, or even next week, but someday things will be better. I promise.

**MATT:** That's good to know. So what are you doing tomorrow night?

**JOE:** Nothing, why?

**MATT:** Luke has a school play at Briarcliff. I wondered if you wanted to go along.

**JOE:** You're not going just to see Natalie, are you?

**MATT:** No, really! I just want to see Luke's play.

**JOE:** What's it about?

**MATT:** It's just a skit to show what the kids are learning in school. Luke is playing a colon.

**JOE:** A colon? Is that English or biology?

**MATT:** English, I think.

**JOE:** Thank heavens! Can I bring a date?

**MATT:** Can you get a date?

**JOE:** Are you kidding? I've got eight ladies on the line at the moment. Internet dating.

**MATT:** Eight ladies are attracted to you?

**JOE:** No. Don't be ridiculous! Three are attracted to Joe Hamilton, a dashing airline pilot. One is attracted to Joe Post, an Internet entrepreneur, two to Joe Regalia who owns a chain of motels in Mississippi, and two are attracted to Joe Franklin, a plastic surgeon.

**MATT:** How do you keep all of that straight?

**JOE:** Copious notes, pie charts, and graphs. It's all math, really. The trick is to make sure you keep good notes and never let them see the apartment.

**MATT:** I can understand about the apartment, anyway. You know, if you worked as hard in school as you do scamming lovelorn women, you'd be rich by now.

**JOE:** True, but school was never this much fun. Hey! You must be starving!

**MATT:** Well, I am a little hungry, now that you mention it. Natalie got the stove and refrigerator. What do you have in mind?



**JOE:** Well, *(Digging through some junk on the floor.)* here's some . . . leftover pizza. I think it's sausage. *(He takes a bite. Chews. Swallows.)* Nope, that was a bug. It could be cheese. *(Digging around in the sofa cushion.)* Here's a half a can of beer. *(Takes a drink.)* It's a little flat, though.

**MATT:** Why don't we order in some Chinese? My treat?

**JOE:** If you want, but the MSG in Chinese food is bad for you.

**MATT:** Yeah, I can see you treat your body like a temple.

**JOE:** The doctor told me I have to stay in shape.

**MATT:** And just what shape are you supposed to be?

**JOE:** Funny. Actually, I just had a doctor's appointment last week, and I lost two pounds this last year.

**MATT:** Really? How?

**JOE:** I started exercising for half-an-hour twice a month.

**MATT:** And?

**JOE:** And I got a haircut. And I didn't wear underwear to my physical. Still, it was two pounds! I mean this ol' body and these good looks have gotten me this far, right?

**MATT:** Is that why you live in a trashcan? I keep expecting Oscar the Grouch to pop up.

**JOE:** *(Picking up phone.)* You're hilarious! I'll order the food, Jay Leno. What do you want?

**MATT:** Not much, I'm trying to watch my weight. Some sweet and sour pork, fried wonton, cashew chicken, fried rice, a couple egg rolls, and egg drop soup. Do they have desserts?

**JOE:** I see the divorce hasn't ruined your appetite.

**MATT:** A man has to eat! I don't want to wither away to nothing!

**JOE:** Just remember that this is a small apartment. If you get too large, we'll have to break down a wall or something. *(Into the telephone.)* Hello, Margarita? Yeah, can you come over for a minute? I need a favor. . . Great, thanks.

**MATT:** Margarita? I wanted Chinese, not Mexican.

**JOE:** She's not Hispanic, Matt. I think she's Dutch or German or something. *(There is a knock at the door.)* She lives next door. That's her now.

*JOE opens the door, and MARGARITA ROBINSON enters. She is a perky young woman with terminal optimism.*

**MARGARITA:** Hi, Joe. Hi, other guy.

**JOE:** Hey, Margarita. This is my brother, Matt. He's a dentist downtown. Matt, this is Margarita Robinson. She lives next door and works at the shoe outlet at the mall.

**MARGARITA:** You're Joe's brother? He told me about you. But you don't look like a total loser. Or is that another brother Joe told me about?

**MATT:** I'm his only brother.

**MARGARITA:** You wouldn't have a sister, by chance?

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**MATT:** Nope. Just the two of us. Any idea about what she's talking about, Joe?

**JOE:** She's probably confused, Matt. I'm sure I never actually called you a total loser.

**MARGARITA:** *(Pause. Holding out her hand to shake.)* I'm Margarita!

**MATT:** *(Giving JOE a look.)* Pleased to meet you, Margarita. So you're a shoe salesperson?

**MARGARITA:** No, I'm the one that puts the laces in all the shoes. It doesn't sound like much, I know, but how would you keep your shoes on without laces, tell me that! It's a truly underrated profession. *(Pause.)* So what's up Joe? You said you needed something. What can I do for you?

**JOE:** How would you like to get us all some Chinese food, Margarita? Matt's buying! I'd give you a list of what he wants, but you might just as well bring one of everything.

**MARGARITA:** Really? Great! I needed a walk, anyway. This will be fabulous! If I go to Wong's, I can cut through the park and check out the ducks! I just love the park these days. You know, ever since the muggings started, it's just so quiet and calm there. Thanks, Joe!

**JOE:** Don't mention it. I'm just glad I could finally do something for you after all of the things you do for me!

**MATT:** He's just a giving person. He always has been. It's a cross he has to bear.

*JOE's cell phone rings. He walks to the desk and pulls out a large, cardboard flowchart on which he keeps the notes on the women he is dating. MATT and MARGARITA write down the take-out order.*

**MATT:** I don't have any cash right now. Here's a blank check for the food. Just bring me a receipt so I can put the amount in the checkbook, okay?

**MARGARITA:** Sure. You know, I've never seen checks with dancing teeth on them. They're cute!

**JOE:** *(Answering cell phone while scanning the chart.)* This is Joe . . . Oh, hello . . . No, I'm not distracted; I just need to finish this paragraph for my, uh, acceptance speech. . . . Oh, you just got back from your walk with Sylvester? *(JOE frantically searches the flowchart for the name Sylvester.)* Your . . . cat. . . Yes, I meant son. . . Ah! Susan! . . . What? No, of course I knew who you were. Who else would it be? *(Consults the chart.)* And how is your cat, Derek? . . . Uh huh. Is Sylvester still into soccer? *(JOE winces, sliding his hand down a row on the chart.)* . . . No, I meant chess. It's just that both are, uh, sports. . . . You don't think so? Let me tell you, I always sweat when I play chess! . . . Tonight? No can do, sweetheart. No, my brother just got a divorce and he is just a sobbing, blabbering mess right now . . . Yeah, pretty pathetic, really. . . . Can we do it Tuesday? . . . Sure. Seven o'clock? . . . Am I open? Of course! I'm always open for you! You know, except for tonight. But I'd make it Tuesday even if I had to . . . *(Consults chart.)* find someone else to take my flight to

Tanzania. . . . Oh, don't worry about the starving kids; I just took them some bagels last week. . . . Okay! See you at seven on Tuesday.

*JOE puts the phone away and quickly makes notes on the flowchart.*

**MATT:** You couldn't remember a son named Sylvester? And Tanzania?

**JOE:** Yeah, I think it's in Africa. Or maybe Asia. What's the difference?

**MARGARITA:** I've always wanted to travel; Belize, or Colombia, or maybe Ecuador. South America is so romantic and rugged and warm. I hear that many natives don't even wear clothes! I'm going to spend my honeymoon there someday.

**MATT:** I think Belize is in Central America, actually.

**JOE:** Margarita, I've been to South America. It's like a sauna with poisonous snakes and bugs the size of German Shepherds. The food's weird, the people don't speak English, and the water keeps you running to the bathroom every ten minutes . . . Except, of course, there are no bathrooms. No, you run asking for a bathroom, but no one understands you, so you mimic dropping your pants, and the fat, half-naked lady screams something very loudly while her husband begins to chase you through the village until it's too late for you to find a bathroom. Now you're running slower and trying not to leave a trail or her husband will find you and kill you with his big machete, but the village children see you trying to hide and they follow you through the streets, laughing and joking in Portuguese or Spanish or, I don't know, Yucatanish. And you'd really like to hide out in one of the rundown shacks or shanties you see everywhere, but you've heard rumors of cocaine operations in South America that kill people that stumble onto them, so you don't. No! No, you run and you run, until you're exhausted and almost dead of thirst, and you find yourself drinking a half-gallon of water from the village well before you remember that water is what caused all the trouble to begin with! And you try to clean yourself up, with this tainted, disease-ridden water, but before you can finish, some old man comes and curses you out in Peruvian about dirtying up the well water! By now, your brand-new wife is so disgusted with you she leaves with the jeep and your stinking guide, a man old enough to be your father, except your father doesn't have a plate in his lip, and you're stuck with six bucks, a hundred and thirty miles of jungle to get to the airport, and only the shirt on your back and the dirty, wet pants that have made you the mockery of the entire southern hemisphere. Yeah, a real romantic place, South America. I'll go back after I'm dead!

**MATT:** Gee, Joe, I didn't hear that story before. When did that happen?

**JOE:** That was day three. Day three of the worst twenty-three days of my life. But I'm over that now.

**MATT:** Oh, sure, I can see that.

**JOE:** Nope, I'm not going to let that little incident get me down any more. I've got a good thing going with what's-her-name and Derek.

**MATT:** Sylvester.

**JOE:** Whatever.

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**MARGARITA:** Let me guess, she's another one of your Internet dates? Susan, is it?

**JOE:** Yeah, that's right, Susan. I met her in a Star Wars chat room.

**MATT:** So you know all about Joe's Internet dating exploits?

**MARGARITA:** Oh yes, he's quite the man about town these days. It's amazing he can keep them all straight!

**JOE:** Copious notes!

**MARGARITA:** Oh yes, and the charts and graphs.

**JOE:** It's all math, really. *(There is a sound from JOE's computer.)* I have an instant message. Hold on. *(As JOE sits at the computer, his cell phone rings.)* I got it! Wait. Matt, sit in here a minute, will you?

**MATT:** Me? What do I do?

**JOE:** Just keep a conversation going. Type in what you want to say, and then hit "enter." Let's see, you have *(Checks chart.)* Elaine on the line there. Check the chart, it will tell you all you need to know about her. *(Answering the cell phone.)* This is Joe. . . Hi, Karen! *(He looks over MATT's shoulder, looking for information on the chart.)* How are you doing, sweetheart?

**MATT:** She wants to know how you are.

**JOE:** *(Covering the cell phone.)* I'm great now that I'm talking to her. *(Into cell phone.)* I'm great now that I'm talking to you! And how are you doing, Elaine? Karen, I mean. Elaine is my mother's name.

**MATT:** Our mother's name is Wilma. Are you free Monday for lunch?

**JOE:** Monday for lunch sounds good. . . What? Oh no, Elaine - - Karen. No, I was talking to my brother. . . Yeah, I'm having lunch with him on Monday. . . No, I wasn't asking you to lunch. . . You're right, we should do lunch sometime. How about Tuesday?

**MATT:** Monday or Tuesday?

**JOE:** *(Covering cell phone.)* Monday for Elaine, Tuesday for Susan.

**MARGARITA:** You mean Karen.

**JOE:** Karen, Karen! *(Into cell phone.)* Yes, just chanting your name. It gives me happy chills.

**MATT:** So, Margarita. That's an interesting name. Is it a family name?

**MARGARITA:** Actually, that's what my parents were drinking the night I was conceived, so . . .

**JOE:** It's a good thing they weren't drinking Harvey Wallbangers! *(He laughs. Then, back into the phone.)* Oh, nothing, I was just telling my brother Matt that we should have lunch at this new restaurant in town. It's . . . called Harvey Wallbanger's! I hear the burgers there are bigger than your head! . . . No, I didn't mean that I thought you had a big head. . . No, I'm not suggesting anything, uh, uh, uh. . . right, Karen. It was just a figure of speech!

**MATT:** It's all set then! You have a date on Monday with Elaine at Harvey Wallbanger's!

**MARGARITA:** Wait! Harvey Wallbanger's doesn't exist, does it?

**MATT:** Joe just said that they have hamburgers the size of your head!

**MARGARITA:** You don't like my head?

**JOE:** *(Into cell phone.)* Right, I'll see you Tuesday. Bye, Elaine. Susan. . . . Karen, I mean. *(Hanging-up the cell phone.)* Okay! Another crisis averted! Margarita, I thought you were off to Wong's?

**MARGARITA:** Joe, do you think I have a big head? Matt said that Harvey Wallbanger's has burgers the size of my head!

**JOE:** Harvey Wallbanger's? I don't think there is such a place.

**MATT:** Sure there is. You're having lunch there on Monday.

**JOE:** But it doesn't exist! I made it up!

**MATT:** I should probably write her back, then. What's her screen name?

**JOE:** *(Consulting the chart.)* Karen, Karen . . .

**MARGARITA:** Elaine, Elaine.

**JOE:** Right, Elaine, Elaine . . . Her screen name is "Love my cat."

**MATT:** *(Laughing.)* No, really?

**JOE:** I'm serious! You don't understand how many women treat their cats like children! I dated one girl that had twenty-four cats! Seriously! I'd take her out, and she'd wrap her dinner in a napkin and take it home for the cats. Oh, she'd eat the salad, but when the lobster arrived, into the bag it went. Lobster! For her cats!

**MATT:** What did you say?

**JOE:** What could I say? I mean, the thing was already in her purse. I said the only thing I could think of. I told her that the cholesterol in lobster would kill her cats.

**MATT:** Is that true?

**JOE:** How should I know? But she thought I was Doctor Joe Johnston, veterinarian, so she couldn't take the chance. I bought her a tuna melt on the way home for the cats.

**MATT:** Did you ever go out with her again?

**JOE:** Are you kidding, Matt? No. She's the reason for rule number six.

**MATT:** Rule number six?

**JOE:** Rule six, as in "The Ten Rules of Internet Dating."

**MATT:** I didn't know there were rules.

**JOE:** I made them up. I want to pass along the wisdom I've accumulated over the past three years, Matt. I want to give some poor schmuck a chance to avoid the weirdos and nutcases that can be found online.

**MATT:** Who's protecting the weirdos and nutcases from you?

**JOE:** You mock me now, Matt, but you will become a convert once you have learned to comprehend the magic that is the ten rules. *(JOE goes to the wall and lowers a screen upon which are written "The Ten Rules of Internet Dating.")* Here we are, "The Ten Rules of Internet Dating." Pay attention, Matt, this is your future.

**MATT:** This is my future? Hey, Joe, how come there are only nine rules on your board?

**JOE:** It's a work in progress. I only have nine rules right now, but "The Nine Rules of Internet Dating" just doesn't have the same ring as "The Ten Rules." It's aesthetics.

## THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

**MATT:** Okay, so what have you got?

**JOE:** Glad you asked, Matt. Glad you asked. Here are the rules by which we successful Internet bachelors live. (*Reading from the screen.*) Rule one: "Never, ever assume that the picture you receive from a woman online is a proper representation of her actual features! Never introduce yourself to a woman who posts a 'Glamour Shots' photo of herself as her online photo." (*To MATT.*) If they have to go to that much trouble, they must be hiding something. Request a recent photo, preferably one where she's holding the latest copy of the New York Times, so you can verify the date of the photo. Real-time streaming video is always best, but even that isn't foolproof. Rule two: "If she says that she's of 'average build,' you're gonna want to add 25 or 30 pounds to the photo." (*To MATT.*) Stated plainly, chunky women think they're average. Or maybe they think they can charm you once you meet them and you'll ignore the extra weight, I don't know. Oh, and beware of words like Rubenesque, full figured, big and beautiful, and curvy. These words can be found in a thesaurus under "big as a house."

**MATT:** But I kinda like a woman with a little "junk in the trunk," a little "jiggle in her jiggle," a little "flair in the derriere."

**JOE:** Will you stop that! It feels like I'm giving dating tips to some demented Doctor Seuss!

**MATT:** Sorry. I just like women with a little meat on their bones, that's all I'm saying.

**JOE:** Okay, fine, but if she suggests going to The Sizzler on the first date, that should throw up a red flag. Which brings me to rule three: "Never take her out for drinks, dinner or even lunch on the first meeting." Coffee is best. It's quick, inexpensive, and won't tie up your whole day. It's also a good chance to check women out and abandon the losers.

**MATT:** What if she doesn't drink coffee?

**JOE:** She can order water.

**MARGARITA:** Hmmm . . . superficial and cheap! Every girl's dream! How is it that you've not been scooped up by some lucky supermodel?

**JOE:** Margarita, this is somewhat proprietary stuff, designed for only men to see! In other words, don't you have some Chinese to pick up?

**MARGARITA:** Okay, okay. As much as I'm enjoying your discussion of women's inability to live up to expectations, I am getting hungry. I'll leave you two Neanderthals alone with your list of dating secrets. (*Chuckling.*) If women are from Venus, men must be from Uranus! (*MARGARITA opens the door.*) Oh, hi, Mister Green. Why are you listening at my keyhole? Did you hear something in there? (*MARGARITA exits.*)

**MATT:** What's the super doing looking in Margarita's keyhole?

**JOE:** (*As he sits in front of the computer and starts typing.*) Old man Green's been watching her since she moved in. I guess he's lonely, and she's young and single. I may have mentioned to him that she was attracted to chubby older men with hair loss and a tool belt. Hey, as long as he's watching her, he's not hassling me. Now, I'm going to work my magic on your profile, Matt. Watch,

learn and be amazed! Let's see, you have monogrammed underwear, so we'd better keep your initials the same.

**MATT:** No one is going to be seeing my underwear!

**JOE:** Well, not with an attitude like that, they're not! How does Matt Walters sound?

**MATT:** I don't want to date anyone. I'm in the middle of a divorce!

**JOE:** Hey, Matt, you gotta jump right back on the horse!

**MATT:** Natalie is not a horse.

**JOE:** It's just a figure of speech, Matt. Now, I can add this profile with your help or without it, but it will be put on. If I do it myself, I can't assure you that you'll be happy with the final result . . .

**MATT:** Matt Wilson will be fine, thanks. So what's rule four?

**JOE:** Four: "Never give her your home phone number or work number; only your cell phone number!" The last thing you need is for her to call when you're preoccupied with another houseguest, if you know what I mean. *(JOE's cell phone rings.)*

**MATT:** And thus the reason your cell phone has been going off like Bobby Knight on speed.

**JOE:** Well, yeah, I guess so. *(Answering cell phone.)* This is

Joe . . . Hi. *(He searches the chart for information.)* Yes, it has been too long. How long would you say it's been? . . . Two weeks. Right, two weeks. We'll have to get together soon. When do you get off from work? . . . Oh, you don't work. I remember that now. Sorry for the mix-up. *(JOE is still searching the chart frantically for some information on who the caller might be.)* . . . No, the weekend doesn't work for me. I'll be, uh, at my mother's. . . . Oh, Mom! How are you? . . . Yes, of course I knew it was you. Don't be silly! . . . Yeah, Matt made it here okay. He was mugged, but that was before he left his house. I'm sorry, make that Natalie's house. . . . Sure, let me let you talk to him. *(He hands the phone to MATT.)* Natalie got your cell phone, too, huh?

**MATT:** *(Nodding.)* Hi, Mom. . . . No. Joe was just kidding, Natalie didn't mug me. . . . Yes, Mom, I brought my toothbrush. I am a dentist. Remember? . . . Yes, and clean underwear, I wouldn't want to embarrass you if I got hit by a truck. . . . No, not yet. Joe sent the neighbor lady to get some, though. She should be back soon, if she doesn't get mugged going through the park. . . . Chinese. . . . No, the food is Chinese, not the neighbor lady. . . . Sure, I'll come see you this weekend with Joe. *(JOE shakes his head vigorously, and tries to wave off the idea.)* . . . No, really, we want to. . . . You're not an inconvenience, Mom. . . . No. I'm not just saying that. . . . No, I mean it! . . . I know, Mom. . . . Yes, I know you don't get out of the house much. We'll take you to lunch, all right? . . . Yes, I'd love to take you on a vacation, but I can't leave work for a while . . . Because I'm getting divorced and can't afford it. . . . No, I don't think Joe is going on vacation, either.

**JOE:** Tell her I'll take her on my next honeymoon to South America.

## THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

**MATT:** Joe says he'll take you on his next honeymoon to South America . . . No; I don't suppose that'll be soon. . . . All right. I love you, too. See you Saturday. *(MATT hangs up the phone.)* You didn't recognize your own mother's voice?

**JOE:** Hey, I don't even know how she got my cell phone number. *(He returns to the computer screen.)* All right, I'll put you in as Matt Wilson. I think you'll regret that, though, it'll make the private eye's job a lot easier.

**MATT:** Private eye?

**JOE:** Sure, some women have all their contacts from the personals service checked through a private eye to keep the deadbeats and nutcases away. Not that I'm a deadbeat or nutcase, I just like to maintain my privacy.

**MATT:** And you don't necessarily think a woman would be attracted to a divorced garbage man still paying off his first honeymoon, right?

**JOE:** That hurts, Matt. Do I seem like the kind of guy that would lie to get a woman interested in me?

**MATT:** You're kidding, right?

**JOE:** Well, okay, I might stretch the truth a bit if she were way out of my league . . .

**MATT:** That doesn't narrow it down all that much, does it?

**JOE:** Ouch! Okay, you win. Now, I can't put you down as a dentist. You wouldn't get a date at all. I might as well put you down as an accountant. No, we'll make you a . . . comedian? No, you'd be expected to be funny; too much of a stretch for you. Not a magician, either. How about an air-traffic controller? Or a file clerk?

**MATT:** You get to be a plastic surgeon and an Internet entrepreneur and I get to be a file clerk?

**JOE:** That way your date isn't expecting someone interesting. I only suggest that to take the pressure off of you. It's better to under-promise and overperform.

**MATT:** I am not ashamed to be a dentist.

**JOE:** But you'll seem like a total loser - -

**MATT:** A dentist!

**JOE:** Fine. You know, I'm trying to help you out here, but you just refuse to be reasonable!

**MATT:** First off, Joe, I'm not ready for a new relationship. Second, if I do start a relationship, it will be an honest and open relationship. Thirdly, the day I take advice on dating from you is the day Satan ice skates to work.

**JOE:** Honesty? If you want honesty, why would you even try to date online? That isn't the way it works.

**MATT:** Well, maybe it should!

**JOE:** I want money to grow on trees, but that doesn't make it happen! Internet dating is, by definition, a dishonest approach to encountering the opposite sex. You can't change that! Why would you want to? If you want an honest relationship, go to church, or meet someone at the Laundromat, or in the vegetable aisle. Don't start messing up a good thing for the rest of us! Which, conveniently, leads us directly into rule number five: "Dishonesty is usually the



best policy." Never tell the truth when a lie will do. Honestly, Matt, the truth should only be used as a last resort.

**MATT:** You know, Joe, I don't really think I'm ready for this yet. I have all of these morals getting in the way.

**JOE:** I'm going to be honest with you, brother of mine. You may never be ready. Some birds are made to fly and some aren't. You, dear brother, are the flightless chicken to my soaring eagle, a penguin to my albatross. But all is not as hopeless as you seem to be. I'll tell you what, you are an obvious social misfit, probably because you've spent too much of the last fifteen years in a stifling marriage. We need to get you out there. Meeting people. Meeting women! Let's have a party. It'll get you back in the swing of things.

**MATT:** Look, Joe, Natalie left me for the regional distributor of toilet pucks. You know, the little blue discs they put in urinals to keep the smell down? It's gonna take me a while to recover from that, okay? I don't want to have a party.

**JOE:** Urinal pucks, huh? Hmm . . . it's worse than I thought. You really are a loser . . . Not to worry, though . . . we'll only invite people from the Star Wars chat room. You like Star Wars, right? It'll be easy. We have a few drinks, we play a little space music, we bring out the action figures . . . Then, after you've warmed up and practiced, we can invite real people with social skills and everything to the next party. What do you say?

**MATT:** When?

**JOE:** A couple weeks? It'll give you some time to recover a little.

**MATT:** It'll take two weeks just to clean this place up!

**JOE:** Don't be ridiculous. We'll have it at Margarita's. I don't want complete strangers coming into my apartment.

**MATT:** Afraid they might make a mess?

**JOE:** Well, that, and they could be casing the joint. I've got a lot of nice stuff here.

**MATT:** Where?

**JOE:** Well, half a set of golf clubs, for one. And I have a bowling shoe hidden around here somewhere.

**MATT:** Okay. Okay.

**JOE:** I don't have much, but all this stuff is important to me. I don't want anything stolen.

**MATT:** But you're willing to sacrifice Margarita's stuff.

**JOE:** I've been to her place. I think I've removed everything of real value.

**MATT:** Okay, two weeks. Now, where were we? Rule number six?

**JOE:** Rule six is this. "If a girl treats a pet better than you, it's time to ditch her." And rule seven is related to rule six. "When a girl starts mentioning marriage, weddings, children, china patterns, or co-habitation, it's time to make tracks."

**MATT:** So rules six and seven are the "time to dump her" rules? That's how they're related?

**JOE:** No, Matt. They're related because of rule number eight: "If a woman you are dating is particularly hot, you may ignore rules six and seven."

**MATT:** Wow! I am absolutely shocked!

## THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

**JOE:** I know! Brilliant, aren't they?

**MATT:** No, not that. I just didn't think my opinion of you could get any lower than it was. This is phenomenal!

**JOE:** You can mock me all you want. This is three years of research I'm giving you for free.

**MATT:** Fine. So teach me, Obi-wan. What's number nine?

**JOE:** "Never, ever allow one woman to meet another."

**MATT:** You had to write that down?

**JOE:** The rules are for beginners, Matt. Some of them might not be as bright as I am.

**MATT:** So, you're like a Special Ed teacher for idiots that want to date?

**JOE:** Yes. Like you.

**MATT:** So, have you helped anyone yet?

**JOE:** I fixed my buddy, Eric, up with Margarita a couple weeks ago.

**MATT:** And how did it work?

**JOE:** She told me she was desperate, but apparently not desperate enough to go out with Eric twice.

**MATT:** You and Margarita seem close. How come you haven't gone out with her yourself?

**JOE:** She's great. Don't get me wrong; she's pretty and smart. Pretty is great; smart isn't so great. It's just that she knows me too well. She can tell when I'm lying.

**MATT:** So can I; you open your mouth.

*MARGARITA enters. She has several large bags from "Pete's Pakistani Palace and Sushi Bar." She is followed by PETE.*

**MARGARITA:** *(Speaking into the hallway.)* No, Mister Green, this is Pete. He's not my boyfriend. Really. *(PETE enters. MARGARITA shuts the door. Then, to JOE.)* I'm back!

**JOE:** Who're you?

**PETE:** I'm Pakistani Pete.

**JOE:** Really? You don't look Pakistani.

**PETE:** I'm not. The food comes to sixty-three twenty. Plus tip.

**JOE:** It's for you, Matt.

**MATT:** Wouldn't he take a check?

**MARGARITA:** I didn't have a check.

**MATT:** Yes, you did. I gave you a blank check with the dancing teeth. Remember?

**MARGARITA:** Of course I remember. I just didn't have the check when I got to Pete's. I was kinda mugged in the park. I mean, the guy had a gun and wanted my money. What could I do? And I felt kinda sorry for him; he probably didn't have any friends to help him out.

**MATT:** You felt sorry for the mugger?

**MARGARITA:** Right. So, I was going to give him a couple bucks to help him out. You know, keep on the good side of karma and everything. But, I only had a buck-seventeen on me because I had left my purse in my apartment. Then it hit me! "Hey! I've got this check. Maybe he'll take that." And he was willing. So that ended pretty well, but then I had no check to pay with at Wong's. And I guess they tend not to give a line of credit to people they don't know, without any money or identification, who're sweaty because they just ran through the park. Anyway, when I left Wong's, I noticed Pete's Pakistani Palace and Sushi Bar next door. I mean, what luck, right? Pete said business was slow, and he'd help deliver the food if we'd pay him when he got here. This is Pete!

**PETE:** Pleasure.

**MATT:** (*Making out check.*) How much?

**PETE:** Sixty-three twenty. Plus tip.

**MATT:** (*Rips off check and hands it to PETE.*) I'd cash it early tomorrow, Pete, just in case Margarita's mugger is an early riser.

**JOE:** Pete's Pakistani Palace and Sushi Bar? I thought sushi was Japanese.

**PETE:** It is. I decided to diversify last year. The Pakistani food just wasn't moving.

**MATT:** Did it help?

**PETE:** Not much. I'm still paying off the new sign, and I'm sixty days late on my janitorial supplies account.

**JOE:** Thanks for sharing that. So what did you bring us?

**PETE:** We got a good selection of the finest Pakistani cuisine in town. I brought a squid rolls sampler, eel eggs in tartar, three sushi cakes, and a Pakistani Party Platter. It normally feeds seven to ten, but she said you were hungry.

**JOE:** Well . . . I was hungry!

**PETE:** You try it. I promise you, it's one of a kind. I only use the freshest meat from Fuzzy Joe Campbell's Butcher Shop and Fish Hatchery.

**MATT:** Fuzzy Joe Campbell? Didn't he play linebacker for the Minnesota Gophers about fifteen years ago; big, hairy guy?

**PETE:** Yep, that's him. At least it was, you know, before he was kicked off the team for cross-dressing. Well, I'd better get back before my wife finds out I'm meeting the supply guy today. I mean, how many toilet pucks does she think we need?

(*PETE exits.*)

**JOE:** Looks like you and Pete have something in common, Matt. His wife can't say no to a toilet puck guy, either.

**MARGARITA:** Let's eat!

**BLACKOUT.**

THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

**AT RISE:**

*Two weeks later. The room is much the same, except for many take-out bags that read "Pete's Pakistani Palace and Sushi Bar" scattered about the apartment. The doorbell rings. JOE, seated on the couch and listening to himself on the radio, ignores it. The doorbell rings again. Then again. MATT enters from the kitchen.*

**MATT:** Joe, don't just do something, sit there! I'll get it. You need your rest. *(Looks in an empty bag he picked up off of the floor.)* Darn it, Joe! You ate all of the squid cakes?

*MATT opens the door to reveal LUKE, a boy around twelve years of age. LUKE carries a suitcase and a small box.*

**JOE:** Hey, look who's here! How's my favorite little colon today?

**MATT:** Joe!

**LUKE:** Gee, Uncle Joe, you must really make friends fast, huh?

**JOE:** He . . . he was a colon . . . in the play.

**MATT:** Oh, right. Sorry, I forgot about that.

**JOE:** I enjoyed the play, Luke.

**LUKE:** Thanks.

**MATT:** Did you even understand the play, Joe?

**JOE:** Most of it.

**LUKE:** What didn't you understand?

**JOE:** Well, I didn't really understand the kid in the box surrounded by the other kids sleeping.

**MATT:** That was in the history section, Joe. The kid in the box was an Egyptian pharaoh. The other kids were the servants.

**JOE:** They didn't seem to do too much.

**LUKE:** See, Egyptians believed that whatever was entombed with the pharaoh would follow him to the next world. When he died, they would kill some servants so they could serve him in the afterlife.

**JOE:** Boy, you just don't find job security like that any more, do you? Come on in!

**LUKE:** You were right, Dad. Uncle Joe does live in a craphole.

**JOE:** What?

**MATT:** *(Slipping some cash into LUKE's hand.)* That's not what I said, was it Luke? I said that I'd be staying at Uncle Joe's apartment because Mom kicked me out of the house. You must have heard Joe's apartment is an outhouse and gotten confused, right?

**LUKE:** *(Pocketing the money after inspecting it.)* That must be what happened.

**MATT:** So, how was the ride over, Luke? Did Glen give you any trouble?

**LUKE:** No. He and Mom were eager to get to the big ceremony. Sounds really boring to me.

**JOE:** What ceremony?

**MATT:** Natalie's new boyfriend, Glen, is the top seller of urinal pucks in the Midwest. He's receiving the Golden Puck Award tonight at the Toilet Cake Distributors' Annual Convention. The T.C.D.A.T., they call it in the toilet business.

**JOE:** And dare I ask how one is chosen to receive the coveted Golden Puck Award?

**MATT:** Glen sold over 250,000 sanitary urinal pucks in the tri-state area.

**LUKE:** He also gets a ten-dollar gift certificate to McDonald's, a free carwash, and gets his name engraved on The Silver Urinal at his work.

**JOE:** Hmmm, impressive! *(Pause.)* Well, don't just stand there looking. Make yourself at home, little buddy. This is Uncle Joe's place. We'll have lots of fun while you're here! We can play games and watch cartoons, and - -

**LUKE:** Look, Uncle Joe, don't patronize me, all right? I'm not some naive little second grader any more.

**JOE:** Oh. Right, of course not. Sorry. What's in the box?

**LUKE:** Oh, this was in front of the building. It's got your name on it, Dad, so I brought it up. There's a whole bunch more waiting downstairs.

**MATT:** Let me see what you have there. *(Looks at box.)* Great news! It's the new floss I've been waiting for! Quick, Joe, drive me to my office so I can get this in the examining rooms.

**LUKE:** You're excited about floss? Is this just a dentist thing?

**MATT:** This isn't just any floss, son! This is the latest thing! It's unwaxed and filled with vitamins A, D, E, fluoride, and calcium. It delivers all those vitamins right into the gums! It's super-floss! I've been on a waiting list for two years for this! Only the Beverly Hills orthodontists have had this before now.

**JOE:** Fine, I'll drive you and the wonder floss to your office. You want to come, Luke?

**LUKE:** Can I stay here? I just spent an hour in Glen's work van on the way here. I think I'm a little woozy from the disinfectant smell. Plus it takes energy riding in a van shaped like a toilet. Somehow it seems to suck the self-esteem right out of your body.

**JOE:** I bet it does. Sure, you can stay here. If it's okay with your dad, that is. You can play solitaire on the computer or something. Make yourself at home. Mi casa, su casa.

**MATT:** Its blue, Joe. Blue floss! I don't remember ever being this happy. I think I'm going to cry.

**JOE:** Come on, Matt; let's go dump the floss before you make me regret inviting you into my home. Hey, Luke, when we get back we'll order in from Pete's Pakistani Palace and Sushi bar. You'll love it. Pete makes these lizard tongue crêpes that are to die for!

**LUKE:** Sure, Uncle Joe. But I guess I should mention that I did have lizard tongue for lunch . . .

**MATT:** And don't forget the grasshopper fondue!

**JOE:** I heard they're free-range.

**MATT:** Yeah. All right, Luke. We'll be back soon. Will you be all right?

## THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

**LUKE:** Sure, Dad, I'll just play on the computer.

*MATT and JOE exit. LUKE drops his suitcase and sits in front of the computer. He taps a few keys. There's a quick tap on the door, and then MARGARITA enters.*

**MARGARITA:** Hi, Luke. I'm Margarita Robinson from next door. Joe asked me to keep an eye on you while he went with your dad.

**LUKE:** Margarita? Like the drink?

**MARGARITA:** Yeah. It's what my parents were drinking the night they . . . uh, met.

*The computer announces an instant message.*

**LUKE:** What's that?

**MARGARITA:** Oh, that's an instant message for your uncle. He dates online. You can answer it if you want. His password is "Frisky Business."

**LUKE:** That's funny. Dad's password is "I heart my floss."

**MARGARITA:** Really?

**LUKE:** No. But he might change it after today. You know, Miss Robinson, you are a very attractive woman for your age.

**MARGARITA:** I'm only twenty-six.

**LUKE:** Do you work out?

**MARGARITA:** I do run through the park on occasion. Luke, are you trying to hit on me?

**LUKE:** Me, Miss Robinson? I'm only a kid. *(Pause.)* Unless it's working . . .

**MARGARITA:** And you'd be old enough when I got out of jail, right?

**LUKE:** I'd wait for you. *(He sits at the computer, typing.)* Somebody named "Worship my cat" is sending a message.

**MARGARITA:** *(Pulling out JOE's notes.)* Yes, uh, her name is Brigitte Adams and she's a blonde with green eyes. He hasn't had a date with her yet. She's a teacher at Briarcliff Academy. She thinks your uncle is a plastic surgeon.

**LUKE:** Miss Adams! She teaches at my school. She's a friend of Mom's.

**MARGARITA:** We should set her up on a date with your uncle.

**LUKE:** No way! She's a witch! No wonder she can't find a date in the real world. I can't do that to Uncle Joe.

**MARGARITA:** Then shove over so I can do it.

**LUKE:** *(Letting MARGARITA take his seat. He reads the chart for information on Brigitte.)* Why? She's mean.

**MARGARITA:** Luke, adult men look for different things than young kids. And mean teachers treat men differently than their students. The chart says he wants to set up a date with her. Let's see . . . *(She types.)* How's it going, Brigitte? Haven't talked to you in a while.

**LUKE:** That's it? That's the best you can do?

**MARGARITA:** I suppose you could do better?

**LUKE:** In my sleep, sweetheart.

**MARGARITA:** All right, big shot, let's see what you've got.

**LUKE:** Okay. Write this. "I was hoping you'd be online tonight, Brigitte. You always seem to be able to brighten my day. It's been a tough day at the hospital. Some days I feel that I'm contributing so little for the betterment of mankind. I wish I were a teacher, molding young minds and preparing them for the world. I would trade all of my wealth if I could only make a real difference in someone's life the way that you do."

**MARGARITA:** (*Typing.*) That's laying it on a bit thick, isn't it?

**LUKE:** I know Miss Adams. She's a sucker for anyone that thinks she's special. I got an A in her class by repeatedly writing my essays on how she improves the school.

**MARGARITA:** Wasn't that a little obvious?

**LUKE:** I'm not an idiot, Margarita. I camouflaged it. What does she say?

**MARGARITA:** (*Reading from the computer screen.*) "Oh, Joe, you change lives, too. Bringing beauty to homely people and creating bosoms for the bosom-less is a gift. Just think of the lives you've touched, and the difference you make, especially that one woman. I'll never forget the story you told me about the "thin lipped lady," and how she agonized over the fact that her husband didn't enjoy kissing her anymore because he was always hitting her teeth, and how you miraculously sucked the fat out of her bottom and injected it into her lips! Now her husband kisses full, luscious lips! You are an artist, and your medium is cellulite!"

**LUKE:** He actually told her that? HA! So, that means, every time the husband kisses her, he's kissing her . . .

**MARGARITA:** Luke! Please!

**LUKE:** That's gross! Okay, here. "Again, you bring sunshine into the night of my existence. Your sweet words comfort an agonized soul."

**MARGARITA:** That's good! Let's invite her to the party tomorrow night.

**LUKE:** Are you sure?

**MARGARITA:** It's for Joe. I just click here and here, and . . .

**LUKE:** That doesn't look right, Margarita. How come the screen is sending the note to all of those addresses? Look at the screen names: "I Heart My Cat," "Eye Candy," "Worship my cat," "Heartbreaker," and a bunch more. Did you send this out to everyone?

**MARGARITA:** Well, only to those in Joe's address book. It was an accident, Luke.

**LUKE:** I don't think Uncle Joe's going to appreciate this as much as I thought he would.

*The front door opens and JOE and MATT enter.*

**MATT:** We're back.

**MARGARITA:** Oh, that was quick!

**JOE:** Hey, Margarita, how'd it go?

## THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

**MARGARITA:** (*Frantically clearing screens on the computer.*) Oh, not bad. Luke and I were . . . learning to instant message.

**LUKE:** Uncle Joe, Margarita accidentally - -

**MARGARITA:** Gave out your password! My brain is just going kaplooeey! Yesterday, I put the ice cream in my gym bag and my running shorts in the freezer. Needless to say, I received some interesting glares from the aerobics instructor as I sat on the rowing machine eating Häagen-Dazs in my street clothes. But, hey, you know what? I'm taking us all out to Pete's for dinner. Tonight's Sushi Luau night! We'll get 10% off all entrees if we dress in Hawaiian shirts, Japanese kimonos, or Scottish kilts. I'll grab my kimono on the way out. How's does that sound?

**JOE:** That's very nice, Margarita. I hear Pete has candied wildebeest brain on the menu tonight. Thanks.

**MARGARITA:** My pleasure. You'd do the same for me, Joe.

**MATT:** No, he wouldn't. What's the color of the sky in your world?

**MARGARITA:** Anyway, there might come a time when I need a favor. I don't know; a ride to the airport, someone to talk to, or maybe someone to forgive me for a minor mistake. You never know.

**JOE:** Uh . . . right.

**LUKE:** I don't think wildebeest is a Pakistani cuisine. Are you sure he's not just throwing together odds and ends and serving it as foreign food?

**JOE:** Don't be silly! What kind of fool would fall for that?

**LUKE:** I guess you're right. But about the party tomorrow night, you'll never guess who's coming!

**MARGARITA:** Uh, Luke? I need you to help me in my apartment. Right now. My grease trap overflowed this morning.

**LUKE:** Anything for you, Miss Robinson.

*LUKE and MARGARITA exit.*

**MATT:** Say, Joe, I'm a little nervous about the party tomorrow. There's so much to do!

**JOE:** Piece of cake! We'll get Pete to cater it! God knows he needs the business. Besides, I'm a glutton for those fried eel sushi appetizers in guacamole. Tell you what: we'll talk to Pete tonight about the food. Oh yeah, you'll need to stop by a rental store to see about renting a helium tank . . . and you'll need to get some balloons, maybe some mixed nuts, oh, and booze, and ice . . . probably some soft drinks, too . . . coffee . . . and some decaf. But, besides that, it's a snap!

**MATT:** (*Writing all of this down.*) Hmm . . . decaf, booze, ice. Wait a minute! What are you taking care of?

**JOE:** I'm in charge of the guests and the party room, remember?

**MATT:** Fine, but you get half the bill for all this stuff!

**JOE:** Sure.



**MATT:** How much do you think it'll run?

**JOE:** Probably eighty-five or ninety bucks.

**MATT:** So you owe me . . . (*MATT searches for the answer.*)

**JOE:** Is sixteen the number you're searching for, Rainman?

**MATT:** Is it?

**JOE:** I think it is. I'll pay you tomorrow, all right?

**MATT:** Okay. Just don't forget. I still remember how you always tried to take advantage of my deficiencies in math as a kid. I'm sure I lost a fortune to you over the years.

**JOE:** You did. How else could I afford to live like this?

**MATT:** Okay, maybe not a fortune. But you were a sneaky little kid!

**JOE:** Well, I'm an adult now.

**MATT:** I guess. Do you think Luke would be willing to help out? I mean, as a coat checker, server, something?

**JOE:** Sure, he'll have a ball!

*LUKE and MARGARITA enter.*

**MARGARITA:** Uh . . . why yes, Luke, I have seen the movie, "The Graduate." And no, you don't remind me of Dustin Hoffman.

**LUKE:** Helping you clean your grease trap . . . I felt we really connected in there, Margarita.

**MATT:** That's Miss Robinson to you, son! Say Luke, I need you to help me run a few errands for the party tomorrow. (*To JOE.*) Luke and I will meet you at Pete's in a couple of hours.

*MATT and LUKE exit. The cell phone rings. JOE answers.*

**JOE:** (*Into cell phone, as HE reaches for his notes.*) This is Joe. . . Hello, Elaine. . . . Karen, I mean. Sorry, your voice sounds like my sister's. . . . When did I say I didn't have a sister? . . . Are you sure, because I didn't write that down. . . . Why wouldn't I write that down? It's important information. . . . Well, I do. We just don't get along. Her name is Elaine. . . . No. My mother's name is Wilma. . . . I told you my mother's name was Elaine? (*JOE frantically updates the notes as he speaks.*) . . . Yes, well, I meant Karen. (*Erasing. Then correcting on his notes.*) That is, you are Karen, and my sister's name is Susan. Wilma is my birth mother's name, and Elaine is my adopted mother's name. It's very simple, really. . . . Will you see me at the party tomorrow night? Gee, I'm sorry, but it's been . . . What? . . . No, I wasn't going to say it's been cancelled, so don't go on about how I avoid social situations. Okay? . . . No. I was going to say that I'm sorry it's been so long since I've seen you, and that I can't wait to see you there. At the party. Sure. See you then, Karen. Elaine. Susan. Karen, I mean. You know who you are! . . . Bye.

## THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING

**MARGARITA:** Very smooth, Joe. She can't suspect anything when you flow through conversations like that, right? Joe, can I ask you something completely off-topic?

**JOE:** What is it?

**MARGARITA:** Well, he's a very nice young man, but, about your nephew, Luke . . . Well . . .

**JOE:** Yeah?

**MARGARITA:** How do I say this? He's quite the, um . . . smooth talker.

**JOE:** What are you trying to say?

**MARGARITA:** Well, he hit on me!

**JOE:** He what? I think you're exaggerating a bit.

**MARGARITA:** No, Joe, he actually made a pass at me! I mean, here I was plunging away at my grease trap, and well, he . . .

**JOE:** He?

**MARGARITA:** He said that my hair had an indescribable shimmer and that fate had brought us together.

**JOE:** Well, that doesn't surprise me. He just takes after his old Uncle Joe, that's all.

**MARGARITA:** Well, it sort of gives me the creeps! I mean he's a personable young man and all, it's just that, well . . . Don't get me wrong; I've always wanted to have a child someday . . . just . . . not as a boyfriend.

**JOE:** Oh, Margarita, he just has a crush on you. It's only natural. Who wouldn't be attracted to you? I mean, you're very attractive, you're fun to be with, and you have a terrific personality. Honestly, you're quite a catch!

**MARGARITA:** No one's thrown their line out yet. You think I'm attractive?

**JOE:** Sure. Look, he's a 12-year-old boy. His hormones are raging and he's a bit confused. It'll pass.

**MARGARITA:** Well, I think he needs some advice in that department. Maybe you can tell Matt to have the . . . you know . . . "talk" with Luke. I'm sure that there're a lot of unanswered questions floating around in his head.

**JOE:** You want Matt to talk to him? Don't be ridiculous! What that boy needs is some good advice in the "manly arts," and who better than his Uncle Joe to set him on the right path?

**MARGARITA:** Now that you mention it, maybe Luke's better off learning this stuff on the internet.

*JOE sits down at the computer and begins to read email.*

**JOE:** Holy cannolis, Margarita! Brigitte Adams just sent me an email saying that she's counting the hours until tomorrow night's party? I didn't invite her, did I? What on earth have you and Luke been up to here? I mean . . .

**MARGARITA:** Well . . . yes, about that . . . umm . . . Well, you see, Luke was on the computer when you and Matt were out, and he somehow twisted my arm and got me to tell him the sign-in name for . . . for your instant messaging friends. He's a sneaky one, that kid! Anyway, I tried to get him to sign off, and well we, he

started-up a conversation with one of his teachers at Briarcliff, and . . . things just sort of mushroomed from there.

**JOE:** Mushroom cloud is more like it! My own personal little Hiroshima! This is a disaster! I don't want her here! She's nice and everything, but I already invited Susan.

**MARGARITA:** Susan?

**JOE:** You know, Susan from the Star Wars chat room.

**MARGARITA:** Ah yes, Princess Leia. Ol' hairy earmuffs.

**JOE:** Well, this puts me in sort of a pickle! Two women at the same party. Hmm . . . Well, it's too late now. I can't uninvite her. I'll just have to make the best of it, I guess. What the heck! I'm up for the challenge! I have been known to be pretty smooth with the ladies. This shouldn't be too bad. I'm sure I can keep them both at bay during the party. I'll just have to uh . . . "use the force," if you know what I mean. I mean, how bad can it be, right? It can't be as bad as rubbing up against a hallucinogenic frog in the depths of the jungle and watching as the forest melts around me, right? Especially since I was already woozy from the malaria and couldn't tell for a little while what had happened.

**MARGARITA:** I guess it's not all that bad when compared to that. When did that happen?

**JOE:** That was day thirteen of the worst twenty-three days of my life. By the time I was able to see clearly I found that the swimsuit model I was forcing myself on was a one-eyed leopard with a bad attitude.

**MARGARITA:** Oh my God! What did you do?

**JOE:** I started to run away, but tripped over some vines and sprawled to the ground. I couldn't outrun him, so I outsmarted him. I played dead until he lost interest.

**MARGARITA:** How long did you have to lay there?

**JOE:** Twenty-nine hours. He must've been hungry. Or asleep. He eventually wandered off and probably died of boredom. So you see, this little setback isn't a problem. I can swing two women at the same party. I'm freakin' Tarzan, right?

**MARGARITA:** Well, Tarzan, there's just one slight problem with your plan. You see . . . ummm . . .

**JOE:** What now?

**MARGARITA:** Well . . .

**JOE:** Out with it already!

**MARGARITA:** Luke and I sort of accidentally . . . He, uh . . . well, okay, we . . . accidentally invited all of the women in your address book to the party tomorrow night! It was an accident, honest!

**JOE:** What? This is a nightmare! How on earth? I mean . . . this could ruin me! Are you not aware of Internet Dating Rule number nine? Here, let me pull it up for you! *(He pulls down the screen with the rules on it.)* "Never, ever allow one woman to meet another." I mean, okay, it seems like common sense, I admit. You wouldn't think you'd have to tell someone that, right? Until someone invites them all to a single party! *(He reads again from the screen.)* "This may well lead to disaster!" See? I'm ruined! That's it, I'm dead!

*THE TEN RULES OF INTERNET DATING*

**MARGARITA:** Now, now . . . take the high road here, Joe. Look at this as an opportunity to “showcase” your work in the “manly arts!” What would Obi-wan Kenobi do here?

**JOE:** He'd go over to the Dark Side! If anyone's looking for me, tell them I'm going putting my head in the oven.

*JOE exits to kitchen. MARGARITA picks up the phone, dials and speaks.*

**MARGARITA:** Hi, Mom? . . . Yes, it's working just like you said it would. . . . Yeah, all eight. Can you believe it? I had his nephew help me, so Joe wouldn't suspect. . . . No. I told you I'd have him begging to marry me within the year, and I will. . . . Oh, those women are going to hurt him, all right. But I've got Mister Green ready to go at a moment's notice to break up the party before they actually kill him. . . . Well, sure. Once I visit him at the hospital every day, he'll be convinced I'm the one for him . . . If that doesn't work, I'll just put a ring on my finger and let him know he proposed while under the effects of drugs . . . Of course I remember the five ways to get a man. I had the best teacher in the world, didn't I? . . . Right. First, get him on the rebound. Second, get him while he's down. Third, get him jealous. Fourth, get him drunk. And fifth, get him injured so he can't run away. . . . It worked for you, and you and Dad have been married for thirty years. . . . Look, I hear him coming back, so I'll call you later. Bye!

*BLACKOUT.*

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