

Hey Barbie, What's Your Sign?
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I was at a Barbie doll convention when I found out my marriage was doomed.

Hurrying across the hotel lobby, I tried to keep my voice down as I hissed into my phone at my husband. I was late for my volunteer shift at this chain hotel in the suburbs, but I still needed to wrap up the fight we'd been having on my way there. Neither of us were yielding any points. He's a fairly smart guy, but on the particular issue we were debating, he was 100% wrong. It's my sworn duty (and pleasure) to inform him of things like that, and since he was not being at all receptive to my helpful feedback, I had to conclude that he was wrong, and also, a turd.

My righteous anger still burned, but when I turned down the hallway of the convention hall, my lecture caught in my throat.

So. Much. Pink.

I counted three bejeweled fanny packs. I'd have to call him back.

Barbie convention HQ was a folding table in front of a storage room across from the convention hall. I introduced myself as a volunteer with my charity organization, and Margie and Karen gave me my badge and planted me in a chair just outside the hall entrance, next to a large potted fake tree. I was to be security for the Barbies on display inside the hall.

Barbie bouncer came with a lot of power and great responsibility. If attendees didn't have the proper credentials, it was my job to toss them out onto the aggressively patterned carpet. No doll for you!

It never came to force. One guy from Germany got a little 'lebhaf' when I told him he had to go back to his room for his badge, but most folks understood that there was a lot at stake. Some of the dolls were worth tens of thousands of dollars! There was a vintage Barbie and Ken in full wedding regalia that looked to

be worth more than my car. Some dolls were dressed in spectacular, sequined gowns, propped up on special stands, and carried oh-so-gently between gloved human hands.

Others, not so much. I saw several people walk by swinging clear plastic bags full of naked Barbies. That's the Barbie I remember from my childhood. Mine were always nude, with unflattering haircuts I had given them. I had left Barbie in my childhood, and I was intrigued by this gathering of super fans and eager to learn more.

The attendees were an eclectic bunch, who shared a deep love for the famous statuesque Mattel doll, christened 'Barbara Millicent Roberts,' or 'Barbie' to her friends. We are all her friends. More than one billion Barbies have been sold since she went into production in March 1959. The convention was elaborate. It boasted an auction, entertainment, and several break-out sessions on topics such as "Repair of Barbie Accessories," where, I assume, they learned how to cobble tiny plastic shoes with itty bitty pink hammers. Later that night, Barbie karaoke was scheduled in Hall B. I will never forgive myself for leaving before Barbie karaoke in Hall B.

Fans traveled from all over the world to be there. One devoted man, older than my dad, was just there to get video footage of his lady friend as she shopped for the dolls. He had no badge, so I watched him like a hawk while he crept behind her. He didn't stay long; presumably because he could feel my eyes on him, watching him, watching her...watching tiny her.

Did I mention that children were not allowed? I had to tell several hopeful little girls to bugger off, which felt mean, but satisfying.

I did a lot of eavesdropping from behind the fake Ficus tree. The majority of the Barbie fans were middle-aged women, but there was a mix of women and men of all ages. They seemed like really regular folk. When not discussing the evolution of Skipper doll, they talked about jobs they were tired of, houses that needed new roofs, and the ups and downs of raising kids and grandkids. The more I heard about Karen's bunion surgery and Margie's granddaughter who wears 'hot pants' (and 'we all know what THAT means'), the more I started to understand what made these very normal people love this doll. Barbie is more than a collectible, she is respite.

Barbie has no problems. She is beautiful, does not age, never stops smiling, and is surrounded by successful, well-dressed, friends and family. Everyone in Barbie's world gets along and looks fantastic while doing it.

My friends and I do not look like Barbie and her friends. We get together in our stained yoga pants to bitch about our kids, rage about politics, and ponder how we can have both adult acne AND wrinkles. (Seriously. What IS that? Am I 'Benjamin Button'-ing in both directions?).

Barbie also has a perfect love life, with Ken, or "Kenneth Sean Carson," born in March 1961. Ken is famous for having perfect teeth and no penis. Despite this (because of this?) he and Barbie always seem blissfully happy and pleasant. I bet they can even canoe together IN THE SAME BOAT without an accidental-on-purpose murder occurring. That is something that my husband and I definitely cannot do.

My husband, the turd, and I bicker a lot. It's not that we both always have to be right, it's just that we both genuinely prefer it. We adore each other, but we're sarcastic and loud about it. Not an especially *pleasant* pair. You will never see us in a canoe together, or on a tandem bike, or in any other vehicle that could flip if both parties insist stubbornly on going in opposite directions.

There is so much allure to Barbie's world. The permanent sunshine hanging over these flawless, plastic people and their DreamHouses (and DreamCars, DreamBoats and DreamAirplanes) is magical. I imagine that most of these convention attendees were like me, driving up in my Dream-2004 Honda Accord that failed to even be pink.

When I got bored of eavesdropping on Karen, I found a ton of interesting Barbie lore online. Did you know that in the early 1990's, there was a talking Barbie who said things like, "Want to go shopping?" and also, "Math class is tough!" Yep. Advocates for girls/women in STEMI were not having that, so the dolls were pulled off the shelves, and are now worth \$500 each, because of course they are. There was a whole episode of 'The Simpsons' on this, where their 'Barbie' said, "Thinking too much give you wrinkles." Amazing. Also, in the early '90s, some 'V for Vendetta' type hackers in New York and California exchanged G.I Joe voice

boxes for Barbie voice boxes and replaced them on store shelves. Little girls who eagerly ripped open their 'Teen Talk Barbie' on Christmas morning pushed the button and got, "Attack!" and "Vengeance is mine!"

Those hackers are my heroes.

Despite my earlier irritation with my husband, I still live-text streamed him everything I encountered that night. It would have been selfish and rude to keep it to myself. I bounced some Barbie movie ideas off of him. Mattel had made thirty-six(!) movies so far in the Barbie movie collection, so they obviously needed more. His idea was a Barbie Lifetime original movie called, "Never Trust a Handsome Ken; A Lifetime and Pants-full of Deceit." I know. It's so good. My husband is hilarious. Don't tell him I said that. (It's not that I don't want him to be happy, I just don't want him to be *too* happy.)

Eventually, the crowd meandered off to get their drink on and prepare for karaoke in Hall B. The hotel bar had created a cocktail just for the event, which looked like it tasted very pink.

I gave my Barbie research a break while I scrolled through Facebook, and found a quiz called "[Ranking All 144 Zodiac Couples By Which Ones End Up The Happiest.](#)" Fun! I never do these things because I don't want to. Also, because I have a full-time job in addition to freelance writing, two kids, a small business, and positions on several volunteer boards that keep me busy at events like this, I seldom have the luxury of wasting time by myself. I wondered where my husband and I ranked compared to other couples we knew. I wondered where we ranked compared to Barbie and Ken!

Well. Had I known the consequences of what I was about to learn in this horoscope quiz, I would have just gone back to chatting with Margie about Barbie's horse, Tawny. It turns out, the horse plays piano and lives inside the DreamHouse with the people.

Also, it turns out that, of the 144 possible horoscope couple pairings, my husband's and mine, Taurus and Scorpio, is DEAD LAST. That couldn't be right. I checked again. Sure enough, we are a MATCH TO BE AVOIDED. Specifically, according to the quiz, we are "arguably the worst combination of any two signs. This pair just seems to bring out the absolute worse in each other. Like a tornado

coming into each other's lives and just ruining everything about the other person. There are some people who just shouldn't be together, and this duo is toxic."

That sounds...less than dreamy, but we're fine, right? I wasn't sure now. We had not consulted the stars when we fell in love and got married and hadn't even once glanced at the planets in our fifteen years of marriage. Could the cosmos know more than we do? Is our steady diet of conflict actually a bad thing? Also, now that we're aware of our cursed match, are we required to fold? We even made some babies. Would we have to put them back where we got them? No, not that. We'll think of something else.

I texted my husband. If he was going to have to go back out into the open market, he should know right away so he could start doing sit-ups. We're both in pretty rough shape. We are wiser than we once were, but now that we're around forty, we're also cynical and soft and hairy in bad places. Is anyone going to want to deal with all that, if they aren't contractually obligated to do so? Geez. I've given the best years of my groins to this person, and him, to me. We would have to put that in our dating profiles, probably.

Like Barbie and Ken, my husband and I have been together a long time, but unlike Barbie and Ken, we are NOT going to live happily ever after, apparently. I quickly looked up their horoscopes by their birth dates. Barbie and Ken are both Pisces, which are known for being passive and pleasant. A Pisces/Pisces couple is #2 on the list, or A VERY desirable match.

#2 is a lot higher than #144, in case you're bad at math.

Like girls.

Pisces are peaceful romantics, and a [Pisces/Pisces couple](#), like Barbie and Ken, have a "rich emotional bond and a deep spiritual connection. They both feel that their precious relationship is the most wonderful thing in the world, and it couldn't get any better."

So, according to the stars, according to the internet, Barbie and Ken will be forever side-by-side, holding tiny plastic hands, while my husband and I are doomed to erupt into fiery lava monsters. Cool.

He still hadn't texted me back with feedback on my suggestions for his online dating profile, so this was all probably true.

Are we a natural disaster? Other than that one time, so long ago the details are fuzzy, when someone called someone else a 'turd,' we were doing alright, weren't we? We are both passionate and don't back down easily, but that's a good thing, right? We love (and loath) with passion! The horoscope match gave us points for our passion, but begrudgingly. It said our "personalities are so powerful, they often swing between passionate love and passionate disagreement."

We do argue a lot, but it's hard to know if it's more than the average bear couple argues, since the average bear couple doesn't want to talk about it. I guarantee you we fight more than Barbie and Ken fight. I bet THEY never tell each other to f*ck off or peruse the apartment section in their local paper thinking that any house would be a dream house if the other person wasn't in it. Over the years, earlier turd-flinging notwithstanding, we have gotten better at fighting fairly and working toward common goals. We thought we were doing pretty well. We assumed we were just a regular couple, doing the best we could, each trying to avoid emptying the recycling bin.

Maybe not.

I also read that the planets associated with Taurus and Scorpio are Mars and Venus, which we all know are famous for how peacefully they co-exist.

My text chimed. Finally, the man formerly-known-as-the-love-of-my-life texted me back that I should hurry home because our youngest child peed, but he couldn't find it.

I bet Barbie never has to deal with missing piss.

I went to check out with the Barbie convention staff, and found Karen trying to move a 6' tall, extremely heavy antique Barbie mannequin by herself. This Barbie was wearing a thick pink choker and a white and pink floral dress and had a Twiggy haircut, so I'm guessing she was from the 1960's. I helped Karen load her onto the dolly to move her into storage for the night. Sorry. Rather, I helped

Karen load her onto the *dolly* dolly (high five) to move her into storage for the night.

As we rolled it across the threshold into Barbie storage, things went south. Barbie's giant head came off her neck, bounced off my foot, and rolled across the floor! It turns out that pink choker was holding her head on like that scary story we used to tell around the campfire. I was mortified, and certain that Karen would be upset that I'd decapitated Queen B. She reassured me that it wasn't even that valuable of a 6' giant Barbie Twiggy mannequin, as far as they go. Oh, good. With relief, I joked that it must be hard on Ken if Barbie 'loses her head' a lot.

That's when Karen dropped the bomb. She said, "Oh, I don't think Barbie and Ken are together anymore."

Say hu-what now!?!?

She went on to tell me, conspiratorially, that Barbie and Ken actually had a very tumultuous relationship and were off and on from the 1960s through the early 2000's when Mattel announced that they had split up. After that, Barbie dated 'Blaine,' the Australian surfer, for a while.

I'm sorry, what?! THERE'S A 'BLAINE,' THE AUSTRALIAN SURFER???

According to my experts, Karen and [Wikipedia](#), a few years after 'Blaine,' happened, Barbie and Ken "were hoping to rekindle their relationship after Ken had a makeover." I blinked. What kind of makeover? Did Ken transition? Is that what they're implying? Still, whether or not Ken was blessed to find his true identity, the general consensus in the fan base is that he and Barbie never worked it out and they are no longer together.

Head reeling, everything I had come to understand about the world that night destroyed, I stumbled to my car. What did this all mean for me? I'm a regular gal with control issues and dairy intolerance. Barbie is happy without any mood stabilizers, has a slammin' rack, owns a DreamHouse, a piano-playing horse and a panda bear, drives a pink Corvette convertible, and is both a flight attendant AND a pilot! She has everything! She doesn't have to worry about love handles or job satisfaction!

What did it mean for my marriage? She and Ken are Pisces and Pisces. They're #2! My husband and I once fought over a Christmas ornament for thirty full minutes! Our stars hate us! Our planets hate us! The universe thinks we are a storm best measured by how much devastation it wreaks. How are we supposed to be able to make it work, if Barbie and Ken, the perfect, peaceful couple, could not?!

I drove away, pondering the absurdities of life and love and the universe. Maybe the stars are full of star shit. What if the tornado-type love that my husband and I have works for us because we both like the strong winds? We are big and loud and passionate, and not afraid of taking out a cow or fence pole along the way. So what that we argue? Doesn't that just mean that we care? That makes more sense to us than being pleasant, I guess.

Also, apparently, passive, pleasant, plastic Pisces don't always p-work!

When I arrived home, by way of the self-care cookie aisle at the grocery store, my husband had found the pee, but lost the child. He looked like he'd seen some stuff that night, so I took pity on him and jumped in to usher the whole kid circus to bed. After the bedtime carnage, we talked through our earlier disagreement, and rude names called in anger were redacted. We curled up on the couch with the snacks I had bought to watch "Archer" until we fell into a pair of comas.

He asked me how the event had been.

"It was fine."

"I got some weird texts from you there at the end..."

"Oh, yeah. Well, I thought we'd have to break up, but then it turns out there was a Blaine."

"A Blaine?"

"Yes. He's an Australian surfer."

He nodded. Cool, cool.

I pulled out the Pina Colada flavored Oreos I had bought, glad to be checking another one off my new Oreo flavor bucket list. My husband made gagging noises. He thought this flavor combination was disgusting.

Getting philosophical, I said, "You know, I've learned some things today. It's OK for both parts of a...cookie...to be bold and challenging...flavors. Even if they sometimes call each other names and threaten to murder one other. They might *seem* like they don't match, but maybe they actually go together perfectly! Like Mars and Venus. Or oil and water."

I smashed a giant stack of Oreos into my face and gazed languidly at him, preparing for him to tell me how wise I was. He instead pointed out that oil and water actually do NOT go together, they stay separated, just sort of floating along next to each other in the same container.

It took me some time to safely get all those Oreos down, and as I chewed, I thought, maybe that didn't sound so bad. Instead of being the same and passively combining, we can remain who we are and just float next to each other in the same container. I also thought, 'Shut up, you turd. I'm making a lovely point here and you're screwing it up.'

The cookies were pretty terrible. We agreed on that. We have fortitude, though, so we ate them anyway. I bet Barbie and Ken would have just given up and thrown them away in a fancy pink trash can or would have traded them for a BLAINE.

Not us. We destroyed them like they'd been hit by a tornado.

Boom.