

Sex *NOT SO* AND THE SINGLE GIRL

I'm ready to tell all

New relationship columnist Jo Usmar is overcoming last-minute jitters... and they're not all hers



PHOTOGRAPH ANTONIO PETRONZIO. HAIR AND MAKEUP VICTORIA BARNES. STYLING JARED GREEN

My boyfriend Ben finds me in our living room, head down the back of the sofa, bum in the air. I've just started the nightly hunt for my runaway glasses. 'You're not going to use my real name in your column, are you?' he asks. 'Of course I am,' I mumble, reversing out of the sofa like a truck. No glasses, but I have found a slightly hairy Milky Bar. 'So you're not going to use a fake name, like Dan or Mark?' he continues, pacing back and forth. 'Or even Peter? I'd make a good Peter.'

Up until this moment, he has been remarkably calm about me starting a column documenting our relationship. This is a man who's so private that when someone he didn't know started following him on Twitter, I had to talk him out of changing the locks at home. He had, however, been so nonchalant about the column that I'd begun to suspect he hadn't read the issue of *Cosmo* I'd given him as an example. Which, of course, he hadn't. I found it filed away beneath a battered old copy of *Time Out's Top 100 Turkish Restaurants* under the bed. Now he'd finally read it, his internal panic-ometer was ready to explode.

'I'm not sure that I want everyone to know my private business,' he explains. Until now, I didn't know people outside of Dickens novels ever actually wrung their hands, but Ben is definitely giving his an extremely good squeeze. 'What are

you worried about? You're lovely. You'll come across really well,' I reassure him.

To be honest, though, his hand movements are contagious. Never mind him, what if *I* don't come across well? What if you can tell just from my picture that I laugh like an asthmatic seagull and once snorted so loudly that I woke up next door's kid? Am I ready to reveal that Ben now does all the cooking because I once dropped a bloody plaster in a bacon quiche? Instead of nodding sympathetically and muttering, 'Been there...,' what if you all start thinking he deserves better? Someone who keeps their Milky Bars hairless and their soiled plasters out of the baked goods?

And what if my family reads about how I break into the running-man dance whenever Jason Derülo comes on the radio and are so ashamed they disown me? (Although they might struggle to pass me off as a rogue 'Usmar'. I knew having a surname that people commonly mistake for Osama would pay off. Thanks, Dad.) And what if my friends who have asked me to mention them hate what

I say and never speak to me again?

I suddenly realise I've eaten half the hairy Milky Bar. 'Will you tell them I'm amazing at cooking steak and thinking up puns?' Ben asks, looking a little more cheerful. 'Yep. And I can tell them how I feed next door's cat whenever it comes into the garden so they'll think I'm nice,' I reply. 'See? It'll be fine! Fine!'

We both sit down and tentatively stop wringing our hands.

• Read Jo's Sex And The Not So Single Girl blog at Cosmopolitan.co.uk/blogs

'Am I ready to reveal I once dropped a plaster in a bacon quiche?'

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