Is honesty really the best policy when it comes to a fledgling relationship? Hell no, says Samantha Rea, who keeps her flaws well hidden.

**WALKING AWAY FROM** the tiny hotel shampoo and bijou bar of soap, instead of scooping them into my suitcase, felt like an acute pain – a bit like that scene in *The Sound Of Music* when Julie Andrews wrenches herself away from the Captain and his seven children. But I did it, because I was at the start of a new relationship. It was our first mini-break and I knew that, in Jonathan’s eyes, taking those cute little hotel toiletries would be tantamount to scavenging in the bins at the back of a fancy restaurant. It simply wasn’t the time to be myself. Yet.

It was a familiar feeling – just another in a long line of temporary adjustments I’ve made to try and make an initial good impression, so a fledgling relationship might flourish. You see, I’m well-practised at the art of the hideaway. I once removed the lightbulb from my bathroom so a new boyfriend wouldn’t be able to see the state of it. And I bet you’ve done it too – does your man of six weeks really know you had to go halves for that dinner on your credit card because you’ve reached the bottom of the abyss that is your overdraft? That you have a shortcut to wipe your internet history so he doesn’t see that you’ve been googling wedding venues when you’re only on your third date? Or that you’re going commando, not because you’re feeling sexy, but •

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**What’s YOUR dirty little relationship secret?**
because only your big beige pants are clean and you’ve whipped them off in the toilet out of shame? Or maybe you’ve just moved in with your boyfriend and haven’t revealed that you don’t always wash the dishes straight after dinner, or indeed even the previous night’s dinner...

Obviously, in the early days of any new situation, we all want to make a good impression – we wouldn’t go into a fresh workplace boasting about our hangover – but dating is supposed to be about finding out if you like a person... the whole person. My artifice, in trying to get a relationship off the runway, seems to be at odds with society’s current compulsion to put it all out there. ‘I’m just being me!’ says every blogger with a millimetre of cellulite and celebrity posting an apparently-no-make-up selfie, in a statement that’s half humble-brag, half cue for applause.

And I know I’m not the only one to hide certain habits – it seems we all have peccadillos we’d prefer to conceal.

When my friend Abi first met her now-husband, she decided that she needed to censor her swearing for months, especially avoiding the c-word. But she couldn’t hide it totally away – and one day, in particularly trying traffic, it all tumbled out spectacularly. She’s carried on swearing since and says, looking back, the boundaries she created were all her own. ‘I don’t know why I thought it would be an issue,’ she laughs.

Katie was more concerned about bathroom business. ‘I’m quite a gassy person,’ she revealed, as if the rest of us are motionless Barbie dolls. The first time she stayed at Simon’s flat she left early, just to avoid using the bathroom next to his bedroom. ‘I really liked him and I didn’t want to leave, but I was so uncomfortable – I had to go home,’ she admits. They now have two children and Katie is beyond even closing the door when she goes to the loo.

Remi, meanwhile, won’t let her man near the bathroom when she’s getting ready, mainly because she’s busy plucking her eyebrows – and that one stubborn chin hair. ‘I worry this is a hideaway that might have to go to the grave that might have to go to the grave that might have to go to the grave that might have to go to the grave...’

Of course I just wake up looking like this...”

Kristen Wiig (Annie) in bed with Jon Hamm (Ted) in Bridesmaids

with me, we all need some mystique,’ she says. Lucy also had to minesweep her flat before her latest Tinder date came back, for fear he’d see her bookshelf of relationship self-help books. ‘Hopefully I’ll be able to take them to the charity shop if it’s all going well in a few months,’ she laughs.

That’s the thing with the hideaways – we then have to decide when the big reveal happens, because if we’re ‘successful’ in igniting the relationship, the little lies will inevitably come out on the back of her legs when she gets up from under the duvet to go to the bathroom. Not one boyfriend has ever commented on her cellulite, but instead of thinking men don’t care and giving them credit, she puts this down to the fact they don’t get to see it until a relationship is established. ‘Men are shallow until they’ve emotionally connected – maybe my “delay-display” means they’ve got to like me as person, so it doesn’t matter as much to them as it might have at the start,’ she explains.

But if you were hoping to get comfort from experts telling you to ‘be yourself’ because that’s what will make someone love you’, then I’m sorry. Relationship and dating coach Jo Hemmings says that there’s no harm in holding back at the beginning and that it can actually help, because you don’t want to be defined by something early on that later could be seen as insignificant.

‘When you meet someone you like, you become hyper-aware, so at least trying to hide things means there’s chemistry or attraction there,’ she says. ‘It’s OK to hold some things back until you know each other better and know that they’ll accept things as part of a bigger, lovely whole of you – rather than viewing something in isolation.’

I don’t feel sad that I have been liberal with my truth – it’s liberating, like an initial Instagram filter and part of normal new relationships. Things would be boring if you could just download someone’s whole personality on a first date. ‘I’m glad to hear I don’t need to feel like a fraud for making a boyfriend use the bathroom in the dark or going cold turkey on the miniature beauty products.

Anyway, must go, my new guy’s coming over soon and I’ve got a sink full of dirty dishes that need hiding behind the shower curtain.

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