

Chapter 2

My Gallery of Imperfect Gems

I no longer believe in love at first sight,
but I carry on pretending I do.

Filled with naïve optimism – and probably under the influence of too much magnesium – I've decided to sign up to a dating site. New life, new mindset, fabulous new bloke. So I've posted my personal ad: carefully thought out, not too long, just mysterious enough to intrigue, and not too out there so as not to come across as a bit of a nutter.

☒ Avoid spiritual references right from the start.

Come on, girl, let's get this over with, and quickly. Dating sites aren't really your thing, so:

- ☐ 1 personal ad,
- ☐ 1 initial contact,
- ☐ 1 date,
- ☐ 1 single goal: 1 real meeting.

Come on, don't beat about the bush. No waffle, get straight to the point. Be brave, cheer up! Boldness pays off! Let's go, my darling!

A lucid and vulnerable confession about my collection of imperfect gems.

RARE MODEL! LIMITED EDITION!

My presence is unforgettable!

- ☒ Original bodywork.
- ☒ When moving forwards, my chest leads the way.
- ☒ When reversing, my bottom warns me of obstacles.
- ☒ I was the hand double for snow shovels.
- ☒ My eyes don't always agree on where to focus.
- ☒ My hair embraces its freedom of expression: airy and bohemian.
- ☒ My smile excuses everything: neither white nor straight, just genuine.
- ☒ My skin is magnetic: you can't have it all!

A genuine gem

Free and grounded:

- ☒ I'm a living gallery of unapologetic self-deprecation.
- ☒ Lucid and tender—respect is a must. But only in writing.
- ☐ When speaking, I'm completely unfiltered. I have less time to think.
- ☒ I live with a permanent time lag.
- ☒ My comebacks often come at dessert time.

Apart from that,

If you think I'm flawless, you're mistaken.

But let me reassure you straight away: I don't own up to all of them.

Non-negotiable bonus:

- ☒ I'm over fifty. COLLECTOR'S ITEM
- ☒ You'll meet my parents.
- ☒ With me, it's serious.

A little hidden clause

That nobody wants to read in the contract:

- ☒ I suffer from an incurable allergy to being controlled and to unsolicited advice.

Selective, I only meet:

- ☒ On REAL-LIFE DATES

And if you fancy setting off on a journey with me, I'm more into:

- ☒ Long-haul trips...

Absolutely inevitable:

- ☒ I come out with goofy punchlines.

I look forward to meeting you, so we can smile together as we gaze out at the sea.

Because if you change your angle, you end up facing the road.

☑ 1 personal ad.

Right, that's done! Let's go!

Operation: Let's meet up!

I start scrolling...

After two hours, the verdict is in, and it's final: national depression.

Out of 100 per cent of profiles:

90 per cent: 0 comments! Is introducing yourself a paid feature?

5 per cent: 1 word! 'Hello', 'Hi'... thank you, poetry of life!

2.5 per cent: 1 sentence! 'I love life.' 'Me too.' Instant connection!

Where have the remaining 2.5 per cent gone? I was hoping for... at least one full sentence!

And suddenly, right in the middle of this emotional and literary desert... a photo.

Boom!

No, seriously, the sort of photo that makes you feel a rush of heat, even without air con.

BOOM!!

Yet, nothing out of the ordinary, just a face... but... one that intrigues me.

I take a closer look: one eye that's smiling, one eye that's hiding something... something really deep! I need to know more. I click.

At last, a long text! Yes!

... in a completely unknown language... No!

I check to be sure... No, not English, not Spanish, not even a dialect that vaguely resembles German. A Martian language.

I think to myself: fake profile. It's got to be. Unless it's a Baltic spy on a mission?

Too dodgy. I close it. No energy for a geopolitical love conspiracy.

And I start scrolling again... until I'm mentally exhausted. I close the app with the grace of a soufflé collapsing. Drained, limp, my soul shrivelled up.

I need to...

☒ getsomeair. Round 1.

I head to the Presqu'île du Sel, opposite Île du Croco. The sun, the sea, life, happiness! I come back feeling revitalised! Right, I'm off again! The very same day, yes, I know... emotional weakness. But I've made a commitment to myself: to persevere for at least 48 hours before declaring love definitively dead.

And then, a sign of fate or the magic of the algorithm? The same photo pops up again!

And BOOM!

OK, Universe, I see you...

Yes! This time, the text is in English!

A revelation!

It's deep, intelligent, sensitive. A real human, with a brain and a heart. A species now protected. I should point out that ChatGPT doesn't exist yet. Well, actually it does, but nobody's using it. Well, actually they are, but not me. So I write to him in English, using two fingers, sticking my tongue out slightly – casual but charming (well, I hope so, anyway). And I suggest we meet up: on such-and-such a day, at such-and-such a time, at such-and-such a well-known place.

☑ 1 initial contact. Todo va bene!

...

No reply.

Right, fine. I refuse to mope about whilst I wait. I book two more dates, just on principle. You shouldn't put all your eggs in one basket. I close the app and get on with my life...

☑ getsomeair. Round 2.

Two days later... Bling!

☑ 1 notification!

— Sorry, I was celebrating my birthday yesterday... Blah blah blah...

Long story short: it's all sorted for a meet-up at the beach this Friday, late afternoon.

☑ 1 date.

Perfect!

☑ 1 summer date, the sun sets at 11 pm.

☑ 1 plan B all sorted just in case:

☑ 1 live gig, just a minute away, right by the water's edge
– brilliant!

☑ Dignity intact.

Worst-case scenario, I can always...

☑ getsomeair. Round 3.



LÉGENDE

Si vous pensez que je n'ai aucun défaut, vous vous trompez.
Mais je vous rassure, je ne les assume pas tous.

COMMENTAIRE

Au plaisir de vous rencontrer, pour sourire ensemble face à la mer.
Parce que si on change d'angle de vue, on tombe sur la route.



The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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