

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.

The Hammock and the Hummingbirds

A novel by Karine Baridon



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