

16  
**SWIPES**  
NO BREAKFAST

MARK POWELL

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NO BREAKFAST

Ignites a journey through an infamous “DATING APP” and how to laugh at the often ridiculous outcomes.

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*Dedicated to all who surf Tinder...  
in hope of getting get breakfast.*

And to all who inspired this book,  
I'm a better person for our encounters  
and I hope you're all better off for them too

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## POEM TO LOVE LOST (A SONNET)

*To my very special girlfriend, on this very special day,  
I'm writing you a sonnet for there is so much I want to say.*

*Thanks for thinking I'm funny, handsome and smart,  
even though I'm not, and though I hardly say it,  
I think you're hot.*

*Thanks for being with me and seeing what others do not,  
for saying you love me, even when I do not.*

*Thanks for taking me to places that I couldn't have gone  
alone,  
and for always making your place feel just like my own.*

*Thanks for always being there, to make sure that I'm okay.  
I know that when I need you, you are just a buzz away.*

*Thanks for all the good times and the ones that are to come.*

*Thanks for always listening, to all that I have to say.  
I hope that one day you will be mine to stay.*

*Now this is all fine, and well, a dream to be sure.  
So first, I'll need to find you, please be on Tinder.*

## INTRODUCTION

### To Date or Not to Date

When Tinder first launched in 2012, it was an instant success. The now infamous dating app made over a million matches in less than two months, becoming an overnight sensation. From college campuses to office towers in every city, and everything in between, the application gained recognition from tech's most elite.

In the six years after its launch, the company is valued at around US\$3 billion and is one of the highest-grossing apps of all time. With a pedigree that good, it was good enough for me to give it a shot.

If you're genuinely single, divorced, separated or widowed, and ready to start again, looking for love, companionship or just benefits of a physical kind, after a hibernation, then dating apps like Tinder offer an ideal way to find others just like yourself. As for me, I have

been amicably divorced for over a decade, and it's taken me five years after that divorce to feel ready to start over, and then another five years to figure out that I'm utterly useless at dating.

So this book bears testament to my adventures – or more often than not, misadventures – coming out of a period of solitude and neck deep into the dating scene. The fact is that it is not easy to take the plunge into this whirlpool we call dating and doing so in your fifties is just harder. We tend to be set in our ways and sometimes less adaptable in our older years. Or maybe we are still boys who have not grown up and should know better.

But fret not, for there are many people in the autumn of their lives who have entered the dating scene for one reason or another. So stay hopeful and it may just work for you.

I thought long and hard about whether this book should be written and couldn't decide until a female friend – over lunch one Sunday – listened to yet another hilarious account of my roller coaster of an online dating experience on Tinder, and commented that it was a story that needed to be told. That was the moment I felt compelled to write this book in the hope that my

experiences will help others. By 'help', I mean it could confirm that you are sane and need no professional help, or if you had made the same mistakes, then so reading my accounts will make you feel better and not so alone.

Interestingly, women seem to enjoy my stories more than men and looking back at these now, I have no idea how I survived the many challenging experiences.

To set the backdrop, I had long given up sharking around bars or clubs for suitable dates, perched on a bar stool eyeing up ladies in hope that they would smile back. In the rare instance that they actually did smile back, they were usually the type of lady who would leave a meter running. Please note, I'm not so desperate as to need to pay for companionship. At least not yet.

I also deduced that blind dates set up by well-meaning friends is a no-go zone, to avoid potential awkwardness should the date end in disaster. Imagine arriving at the agreed venue looking for the sporty, athletic, well-groomed, social extrovert that was described, only to meet someone who can't make eye contact and has not seen the insides of a gym. This goes both ways – I was once described as 'a man long past his prime' and 'too full of himself'.

Feedback is always good, if not hard to accept at times, so, I turned to Tinder for quick, effortless results – all I had to do was swipe right and engage in some light-hearted banter if there were a match. The stage for romance would be set and I just had to sail through the sunset. Perfect, it sounded so easy.

Many experiences later – and I’ve honestly lost count – here I am writing this book. These are sixteen of my most memorable Tinder dates. It would be fair to say that I had gone on these dates with too high an expectation, which is probably why most of my encounters were an epic failure. My simple advice now, don’t set any expectation at all.

Just so that we are clear, I am just as much to blame, if not more so, than the other party. So names and places have been obscured to protect all parties. These stories are meant to be entertaining for you, albeit at my expense, and also inspirational. Today, I’m happier than ever being single, living alone and in the company of good friends. My dating days are over for a while, fate will either play its hand or not, and life will be life. These dates have made me a better person and I hope it is so for those involved as well.

The dictionary defines ‘online dating’ as “*A way of starting a romantic relationship on the internet, by giving information about yourself or replying to someone else’s information.*”

If only things were as simple as they seem. Then again, where would all the fun be if it was.



## SWIPE 1

### Upon a Spiral Staircase



It was a perfect Tinder Sunday when the first encounter took place – the monsoon rain was pouring torrentially down outside with bouts of thunder rumbling in the distance, I was comfortably stretched out on my sofa at home with a mug of steaming hot English Breakfast tea. What better time and place for a bit of *private* Tinder surfing?

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Top Tip #1: I place an emphasis on the location and time being private because I'm shocked at how many people surf Tinder when they are out on a date. Check it out next time you are in a bar or restaurant – look over a few shoulders, you may be surprised.

So, from my safe place, I fired up Tinder and began swiping. What do you know – I had twenty-four likes! Feeling rather flattered by this, I decided to explore

those first. I'm not sure what the general hit rate is, maybe twenty-four is actually a norm, or even low, but my ego loved it!

Anyway, one by one, those ego-inflating likes were reviewed, considered and deleted. In my defense, when there are no profile pictures, a man has nothing to go on and would only wonder why. *Why would you not want to display a photo on a dating website? Something to hide? If there isn't a biography, then maybe she has nothing interesting to say. Awkward pictures, like one of a dog licking your face, makes me feel a tad queasy. How does one interpret that?* Whilst a banner with a quote about how spiritual you are makes me nervous. All of these made me question the supremacy of Tinder over the more traditional ways of finding a soulmate.

Next up, I carefully reviewed the new faces on offer. Mixed among these were the prominent fake profiles and catfish. To my knowledge, Jennifer Aniston was not seven kilometres from my location, and I'm also sure that Sandra Bullock can spell.

*"hI my name Sanadra, I want a man for long relationship.  
See my good hart."*

Yes, that is an exact account of a profile bio tagged to a photograph of Sandra Bullock. Besides, I don't think Sandra Bullock resides on the tiny island of Batam, Indonesia, and if she did, and had such poor grammar choices like our *Sanadra*, the tabloids would probably be all over it. I also avoid endless feeds of pictures with cute ladies posing in military combat uniforms who later claim to be on assignment in the Middle East – one of the most telltale signs of a scam.

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Top Tip #2: They are male and often from Nigeria. All US military personnel have a unique email address, issued to them by the US military. So should you get as far as wanting to exchange emails, when you are given a Gmail or Hotmail account ... run!

Shouldn't finding love and companionship in the digital age be easier than ever? Call me an incurable utopist (or cautious optimist), but after five years of solitude, Tinder seemed like a dream come true.

Next came a variety of Eastern European ladies and various others offering tantric massages or selling other such services via their provocative profile pictures. Mixed in between them were genuine ladies looking for a real connection.

A point to reflect on for the genuine people out there, many of the profiles now contain acronyms like 'NOS', 'NSA' or 'NO SCAMMERS' and it is kind of sad that a lady has to state all of this up front and really only gets one or two words left for herself.

I continued swiping left until I reached a lady originally from the UK, who was now living in Singapore and working in marketing. My finger hovered over her profile for a few seconds as I eyed her physical form – green eyes, a half-smile, shoulder-length blonde hair tied back in a neat ponytail, reasonable skin for her claimed 51 years of age (you never really know the truth do you, and it's not like women are like trees. You can't count the rings.) There were also no apparent signs that some downloaded app had smoothed away years of sun damage, trimmed her cheeks to make it look like she had taken a sharp intake of breath through a hosepipe, or made her nose pointy or widened her eyes to look like an elf on drugs. I was also pleased to see that she had not put animated rabbit ears or a dog tongue onto her headshot. Some may find this cute, but really ladies? Not cool on a woman of a certain age.

With only a mugshot to go on, everything below the shoulders would have to remain a mystery until we met in person. The thing is, we all shop with our

eyes, right? My selection would have to rely on basic instinct and the things I find most attractive. This may be shallow but that is how dating apps work. It is how we all judge people on such dating apps. Sad maybe, but it is reality.

Besides the lack of filters or fillers there were a few other positives. This lady had a written profile! And no acronyms in sight. True revelation in the sea of unspoken Tinder profiles. Many don't attempt to write anything at all to promote themselves. This is fine, but a few lines of introduction goes a long way.

People, please, Tinder serves the purpose of helping you find that person you want to hold hands with, go to the movies with, grab a dinner and have long talks into the night with, so why choose not to write something fun and eye-catching so that the right sort of person can take note of you? Makes sense right?

Anyway, this lady's profile promised a fun-loving, outdoorsy person who was into photography, fitness, and travel. The only thing missing from her beauty pageant worthy profile was a solemn wish for world peace. Yes, the profile may be a little cliché, but at least she had bothered to convey something about herself.

Better still, her profile picture did not contain a palm tree-lined beach at some exotic locale, a bunch of flowers, a plate of tasty food, or worse, some mangy old one-eyed dog or cat. Seriously, men want to see you, not your Instagram portfolio. Some folks understandably do not want their family, friends or colleagues seeing them on Tinder, but your potential dates really do.

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Top Tip #3: If your family and friends find you on Tinder among the thousands of faces, it means they are on it too. In reality, no one cares for it is now part of the new social media lifestyle.

So, with my mind made up, my finger swiped right, and boom, we were a match made in Tinder heaven! A few days of playful, getting-to-know-you banter ensued, and we finally agreed to meet.

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Top Tip #4: You can gauge whether a profile is 'real' from good ol' conversation. The simplest of questions can expose a fake. For example, if someone claims to live in your city and can't describe the area they reside in that you yourself know, be warned! Kind of obvious really.

A week after the match – and the exchange of one pleasant phone call to hear her voice and ensure she was genuine – the night for the first meeting arrived.

I went all out – showered, did my hair, put my favorite shirt on (a slate grey casual shirt made of the softest sea island cotton, thanks for asking), applied a decent smelling aftershave, and summoned a taxi to whisk me off to the venue.

I had selected a small wine bar with warmth and character, located in an old part of town with an appropriate level of romantic charm. I arrived at 6.50pm for our agreed 7pm meeting and settled myself by the bar. Fifteen minutes later – a fashionably appropriate lateness for a lady – Miss UK arrived. She will be known, going forward, as “Jane”.

I ordered a decent bottle of wine – a Pinot, in case you’re wondering, and yes, made sure that it was a product of Australia. I thought Jane would appreciate my thoughtfulness and I would score brownie points. So, the scene was set for romance. What could possibly go wrong?

Unfortunately, many things did go wrong. Ten minutes into the conversation, it was hijacked and swiftly became all about Jane’s recent and very bitter separation – she spared no details. Call me weird but I don’t want to hear about your ex on our first date. I completely understand that these things are traumatic but is not ideal to share such private details with someone you just met.

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Top Tip #5: Don’t subject your new date to negative things about your former partner. They don’t know whether to trust you and will wonder, “Is this what she will say about me if I fail to live up to expectations?”

Casually dressed in a white blouse and blue faded jeans, Jane looked great. So visually I was happy. So, despite being used as a divorce counsellor, I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and managed to change the subject to more general matters. All seemed good again as we started to talk about the UK, when she had last visited. What she missed most (not the 52 per cent tax rate for sure) and how she spent her weekends.

That was, until the persistent attempts to grab my hand and hold it started. While I’m into romance and passion, I do need my personal space. Moreover, I’m respectful and genuinely wanted to get to know her first. The hand grabbing persisted and I kept pulling my hand back.

Jane eventually asked why I wouldn’t hold her hand. To which I replied honestly, that I found it too much for a first date and that she was about as persistent as Donald Trump was on the denial of Russian involvement in his presidential election. I hope that provides you with some context as to how pushy she was. She also had

very sweaty hands and which reminded me of wet fish wrapped in cling film.

Jane did not take very well to my explanation and she stood up, ready to leave. So with that I requested the bill. As we were leaving though, she had a change of heart, stopped in her tracks and apologised. She then asked if we could stroll about for a bit. I agreed, not wanting to leave the date on a bad note and thinking that some fresh air would help us to relax. And yes, she grabbed my hand as we walked and I decided to just go along with it.

Upon reaching a quiet corner, Jane stopped dead in her tracks again, turned and proceeded to kiss me. Not just an amorous peck on the cheek, but square on the lips and with full tongue. I withdrew like a frog from boiling water and may have even had said “Yuck”. Yes, I think I did. Now, in my defense, if I’m that uncomfortable linking fingers, it’s not likely I’ll be okay entwining tongues.

Jane, who was clearly annoyed by this, walked off around round a corner and vanished off down a dark alley. The alleyways running behind older shop houses in Singapore, while sometimes quaint with peeling paint and cool graffiti art, are more often full of rats and garbage. So I followed on foolishly, instinctively

wanting to be the good male protector. That, and a bad feeling that the date was going so disastrously wrong I had to try and fix it.

This was the moment I wondered if I had somehow been teleported to this reality from the prudish 1950s.

But there Jane was ... perched on a step in the stairwell of a stone spiral staircase with her jeans off, smiling at me like a hungry fox, followed by a wink. What she said next is forever etched in my memory.

“Come here and take me,” was all she said.

In utter shock, I pivoted on the spot, walked right back around the corner and waited for a few minutes while she, I hoped, will get dressed and reappear fully clothed. She did reappear in about five minutes with her jeans now back in place. My turning away, and rejecting such an open offer to mount her on the stairwell had clearly detonated her anger. Red-faced not from embarrassment, she narrowed her eyes, glared at me and left.

I thought that was it. Call me old-fashioned, but I like to be a little reserved on a first date and, in all honesty, the sexual chemistry was not flowing for me that night. But a few days later, she messaged to ask if we could

meet. She was concerned she had been too forward (You think?) and wanted to apologise for her actions. Being a gentleman – or a complete fool, on hindsight, I agreed.

We met a few days later for a lovely walk along the beach – mindfully avoiding stairwells and not holding hands. All seemed to be normal at last.

So after a decently successful second date, I invited her over to my place for some wine and cheese. I pride myself on my cheese platter. Upon arrival, she made a point of apologising again for how forward she was on our first date. She insinuated that I needed to relax and let my guard down but laced it with something that set me on edge. Her therapist, she claimed, was coaching her about the same thing, and She had discussed me with her. According to her therapist I needed help overcoming trust issues.

When anyone mentions to someone they barely know that they are seeing a therapist, alarm bells will start to ring. In my case, those bells were about the size of Big Ben.

Even more of a surprise, she had brought with her a significant gift, a painting she had done herself of herself in a naked pose. Between arriving and announcing that I needed to relax, she proceeded to recommend a place

for it to be hung. Not wanting to be rude, I accepted – at least the abstract painting was colourful, though as a dating technique, it left a lot to be desired.

After a few glasses of wine, and the painting looking better through one eye, she kissed me and invited me to my own bedroom. Reaching my inner sanctum, she sent a shiver down my spine when she proclaimed, “I love you, Mark.” By shivers, I don’t mean the good kind, for her eyes were so intense that they were scary. A bit like looking into the eyes of a shark.

“You love me, really?” was all I could muster.

It had only been three dates. So, I retreated speedily to the sofa and explained that I didn’t have protection (hoping she wouldn’t go through my drawers and find the multiple packets). I then lied and suggested that perhaps we could continue the next time she came over.

Thankfully, that worked.

At that point, the question of children and her future came up. She made it very clear she wanted to find a man that would love her kids and move back to the UK with her. More alarm bells rang for me. I hinted that this conversation was a little premature for us. Bad timing

on my part because she started crying and thumping the sofa with her fists. She then got up and left.

That was it, I thought. But, the evening was not over for me. I climbed on a stool to take the painting down, forgot that my steel ceiling fan was turned on, got whacked by the spinning blades and knocked myself out cold. I had twelve stitches to the head for that – Jane had left a lasting impression. The sad thing is, it was the second time this had happened to me. Not that I want to live through that date again either.

A few days later her ex-husband arrived and announced that he was to collect the painting that Jane had bestowed. It was his and he wanted it back. Yeah, let us not go there.

Not wanting any issues, and still carrying a sore head from the ceiling fan incident, I carefully wrapped the painting up for him. That was it! Case closed. I was glad for I didn't really want that reminder of her hanging on my wall and not wanting to be selfish, her ex-husband could enjoy it all to himself. I assumed I would never hear from her again.

I was wrong.

The next day a barrage of messages and emails came in, all stating that I was selfish and a dullard. The final blow came in the twentieth email where Jane said she had been seeing her ex-husband the entire time she was seeing me, and the sex she had with him was terrific. (I assume that he must enjoy exotic stairwells.) She then proceeded to ask if I had any form of venereal diseases as she didn't want him to catch anything. A strange question, since we didn't sleep together. I gently suggested that she may have confused me with someone else and to seek professional help.

This barrage of insults continued for three weeks, which was longer than the amount of time we spent dating. I kept my cool every time, politely asked her to stop, not to waste her time, and mine, and to move on. Eventually, after blocking her messages and sending her emails to spam, she finally left me alone. Though her emails offered excuses for her behavior, the damage was done. It was time to get back to Tinder and try again.

I do still keep my front door double-locked and think of her whenever I see the blades of that ceiling fan.

## SWIPE 2

### Fleeced Like a Sheep



My next match worthy of a mention was with an attractive and classy Asian lady in her early fifties, one who oozed class from every pore. With just the smallest of squints, you may even think that she resembled the actress Michelle Yeoh. Her profile pictures had her in elegant dresses in natural poses; with silk animal print scarf tied around her neck and patent black leather Louboutins. No photos of her smugly crouching over a drugged tiger in Thailand, suggestive lip pouting or pictures of her slouched under a man's arm like a drunk teddy bear in some seedy nightclub. All good.

Finally, I may be getting somewhere. A couple of days of message exchanges piqued my initial attraction even further. She was aligning to my own passions – a love of art, travel, reading and cooking. These were all

conveyed in well expressed text messages free from any grammatical errors. Oh joy!

It concluded with us agreeing to meet. Joanne selected the location and venue for our first date. I had heard of the restaurant she selected but did not have the chance to dine there so I was very pleased, if not a little apprehensive, knowing it was highly ranked in the system. It added to my view that Joanne was indeed a woman of culture and class.

I arrived right on time, 7pm at The Tippling Club, a contemporary, artful spot, offering an inventive, gourmet tasting menu and ambitious cocktails with names such as 'Bloody Cologne', 'Osmanthus Blossom' and 'Blush of Roses'. Its reputation as one of Asia's Top Five restaurants preceded it. This fact alone should have rung my alarm bells. How many nights here – or elsewhere – with Joanne would it take to bust my credit card?

I took a seat at the bar and amused myself by people watching and wondering if they too were on Tinder dates. I'm sure I had swiped right on the lady seated to my left. But clearly she hadn't on me. The look she gave me was most definitely a visual fuck off. Fair, given the Greek god she was seated with now.



It wasn't too long before I switched my focus to the starched white-aproned barmen taking the form of an alchemist with all the shaking, stirring and pouring. That was, until he tossed his shaker a bit too high and took out a light fitting. Whoops!

Cocktail after cocktail found its way to the doe-eyed couples seated around me and I hoped I would soon be somewhat doe-eyed sitting across from my own date. However, Joanne didn't seem to be in a hurry to meet me. As the minutes and the cocktails went by, my mouth started to turn dry, so I ordered a glass of mineral water. It felt rude to start drinking before She arrived, silly notion really, but that's my style, old school. Not an easy task with a dozen or so of Gin Fizzes, Dirty Martinis and Whisky Sours passing right under your nose. But I steeled my reserve and clung on sipping my water with bated breath.

By 7.30pm, I was starting to get anxious, albeit I was at least very well hydrated. Joanne was looking like a no show. This has happened to me twice before and it's the worst feeling ever. I held my fingers to my forehead right that instance to form a subtle 'L'.

As if spying on me from behind a potted plant, Joanne's message came in just as I was about to leave, with a

"Sorry, running late, leaving home soon."

Not exactly the message I wanted to get when I was that excited about this meeting. To me being late indicated that I was not that important to her and that I would be sitting there for at least another twenty minutes just waiting for her arrival. My initial excitement had all but evaporated and I was still contemplating walking away.

My personal rule is to wait for thirty minutes. If I receive a text message, or better still, a phone call, with an apology and explanation, I relax and give it another thirty minutes. But an hour late? I don't care if you're Heidi Klum or Kate Moss, I'm on my bike or in a taxi.

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Top Tip #6: Be polite and respect the other party's time. Plan ahead to reach your destination on time. This respect goes a long way to make a positive first impression.

The other couples in the bar had noticed me sitting alone by then and were probably thinking that I had been stood up or worse I was some lonely guy sitting there hoping to meet a woman. Which I was kind of. Even the woman who had not swiped on me looked more sympathetic. The staff at the bar offered me another glass of water, only this time spiced up with a slice of lemon and a sympathetic smile. Feeling rather sulky, I turned to my

trusty friend – Tinder – and started surfing away.

But by 7.55pm, even Tinder was failing to soothe my bruised ego, so I got up and made a beeline for the door ... just as she waltzed in. Joanne, cool as a cat, had entered the building.

“Sorry, traffic,” was all I got as a reason for being that late. No peck on the cheek, no hug, but a formal handshake, like I was there for a business meeting. I was in two minds, pondering if I should just walk out on her. But she was dressed in an all-white jumpsuit with a large gold necklace. She looked good, and that, at least, was something. So I foolishly decided to swallow my annoyance and led her to the bar.

Once we made ourselves comfortable, I politely asked how she was, fishing somewhat for a plausible explanation for why she was so late. Joanne explained that she had a golf lesson that afternoon, fallen asleep when she finally got home and woken up distracted by a news channel on TV, before she remembered that she was meeting me. So she proceeded to quickly throw on an outfit and found herself stuck in traffic.

You can imagine how special I was feeling by that point. To make things worse, during my time alone at the bar,

I had scanned the traffic situation of several routes from where she had departed on my phone, and noted that they were all clear. Was she lying to me or is this now the textbook response for being late?

As she spoke, I became aware of her putrid bad breath. It was a stench that struck me like an axe and then lingered like a green fog around my head. To share with you, it was that stale coffee smell produced from too much caffeine and no food, mixed with stomach bile. I know you may appreciate the share. I reeled back on my bar stool, almost falling off and tried not to gag. By that point, I was thankful she hadn’t offered a kiss on the cheek. I would have far preferred for her to show up in track pants and spend the time taken to get ready brushing her teeth and gargling with mouthwash.

Joanne would have to drink what I ordered as I needed something to sanitize her foul breath. Without delay, I summoned the waiter and ordered two drinks. I just jabbed my finger on the menu and hoped it wasn’t coffee. I couldn’t bear for her to dither over the cocktail menu, which was longer than the *Magna Carta*, while I inhaled in the noxious fog.

Two olive martinis arrived and I all but necked mine down in a shot and encouraged her to do the same. At

that point, she proclaimed to be starving and gestured for a menu. A short while later, we found ourselves seated at a counter top facing the kitchen, observing the chefs at work and waiting for the five-course tasting menu with paired wines and cocktails. I point out here that Joanne had demanded this menu.

My first mistake was not leaving, my second mistake was buying her a drink and the third was agreeing to have dinner with her. The date was officially a disaster long before I realised it.

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Top Tip #7: Having body odour or bad breath make a killer first impression ... literally.

Each course arrived along with a passionate introduction speech by the Korean sous chef, and every dish was a work of art. Unique servings of fish, lamb, shrimp, green stuff, black stuff, crispy stuff, all in miniature, were placed before us accompanied by a paired wine or cocktail.

All that would have been wonderful, had Joanne not develop a sudden deafness and asked the chef to repeat each verbal introduction at least three times. The kitchen did make some noise, given we were seated at a bar facing the cooking action, and yes, the chef did

have a strong Korean accent, but even I could hear and understand him, and I'm really half-deaf.

As the meal progressed, she complained more and more, putting down the master chef and proclaiming that she expected more "colour balance" with each dish. An all-out war began as the chef challenged back by reeling off all the colors in the rainbow that were evident in the recipes and cocktails. It was like I was having dinner with Gordon Ramsey with a dose of Picasso.

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Top Tip #8: Complaining is a sign of insecurity or rudeness. It does not impress anyone unless done at the right time, in a nice tone and with good intentions.

We finally got to the end of the meal, thankfully. In fact, we were the last two people in the restaurant, and the kitchen was in full scrub down. Every other couple, still doe-eyed, had moved into the cocktail bar. I was not joining them. I called for the bill and, maybe it was just me, but it arrived in nanoseconds. A clear signal that the staff wanted to be rid of us. As my brain tried to process the numerals – \$798 – amid the halitosis, I thought that I would be needing CPR in a bit.

Joanne may have suffered some challenges with her hearing that night and may have suddenly become

colour blind, but there was nothing wrong with her eyesight. In this day of gender equality, and given that we barely knew each other, my expectation was that we would split it. Don't get me wrong, I try to be a gentleman most of the time. But between her arriving late and the unending complaints about the restaurant that *she* had selected, not forgetting the terrible breath issue, what she said next sent me spiraling into shock. What she said still haunts me today.

"I take it that you'll be the gentleman here," followed by a smile that made her look like a cat who had just gotten its prey. I could feel the eyes of the waiter burning into me like laser beams, telling me not to be a prick and just pay to get her out of there. I reached for my trusty American Express and paid. We left and went our separate ways.

You'll not be surprised to hear that there was no second date. Oh Joanne tried, by inviting me for breakfast a few days later. But given that her invitation was framed with a 'I can spare you an hour as I have golf', I declined. I had again learned a valuable lesson. Trust your instincts and leave when your mind is telling you to. It is also best not to have your first date at an expensive place, just in case your date is a Joanne. I'm still paying off that mortgage.

## SWIPE 3

### For Whom the Phone Rings



Jan – a Singaporean Chinese lady in her thirties working in Software Sales. I was hoping to get third time lucky. Her profile picture displayed an attractive lady with long raven black hair, full red lips, and eyes that would melt ice. Jan, I reckoned, ranks a 9 out of 10 in the natural looks department, so I was feeling great about her.

We started to text each other and I noticed how slow she was in her responses. I guess some people are spontaneous while others prefer to take a day or two to reply. But lured by her attractive looks, I persevered. Her replies were a little dry and a tad serious, but hey, we can't all be comedians. After a week or so of messaging, I indicated my desire to meet face to beautiful face.

I selected a cool wine bar, set in the quaint shophouse-lined Emerald Hill district of Singapore for our first meeting. For those who have not yet visited Singapore, a shophouse is a quintessential part of the island's heritage and architecture, and stands as an icon of the nineteenth century trade routes and where spices and such were traded on the ground floor and the shop keepers lived above. They ooze with natural charm and character, with many now preserved, restored and converted into residential homes or commercial premises. It was the perfect spot.

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Top Tip #9: Don't expect the perfect venue to guarantee the perfect date. In the end, all that matters is the person you are with.

Upon arrival, I selected an alfresco table for two given that the evening was, on this rare occasion, cool in temperature. What a relief not to have to surreptitiously check if I was displaying sweat patches for once. The vibrancy of people milling around outside added to the atmosphere. Beside me, a group of four ladies were already on their third dirty martini. They announced it loudly for all to hear with a degree of pride. I smiled politely and settled in wait of Jan to arrive.

Perched on a pair of sky-high heels, she tottered in slowly and stopped about ten yards away to give a small wave.

She had an earpiece that was plugged into a cell phone while her free arm supported a large designer handbag in the crook of her elbow. She smiled and then looked to the ground. Besides the fact she was already twenty minutes late, her call took another ten minutes to conclude.

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Top Tip #10: Run if your date arrives still on the phone! It's a warning sign that you will never get their full attention, not now, not ever.

Jan finally approached after concluding her call. We kissed each other on the cheek, exchanged pleasantries and she took a seat without so much as an excuse or apology for being late. We ordered glasses of Merlot and all seemed well until her phone started buzzing, just seconds after the wine arrived. Rather than ignore the call, Jan plugged back in and announced herself to the caller. She then mouthed a 'sorry' and proceeded to listen to the call.

I let my eyes wander around the scene, trying to take some cheer from the four ladies and people strolling past. Eventually I looked back at Jan and then animatedly at my watch, noting that fifteen minutes had ticked by. It was another five minutes before she hung up the call and turned her focus back to me. She explained that she had a series of conference calls and offered an apology. At this point I was wondering why she had agreed to

meet in the first place, given that she was clearly so busy. But I let it slide and we chatted for a few minutes about her day. Dressed in a dark suit and white blouse, She was certainly good to look at and I was visually entertained at least.

Not that it lasted long. Just as I started to talk about my day, her phone went off again. This time she stood up and walked away from the table. While my day had not been that exciting, what I'd said certainly didn't merit that reaction.

The four Martini ladies were now laughing at my expense. One of them announced, "Join us, love, we don't have our phones on," followed by howling laughter from all the others. I must have been good entertainment for them. But I smiled through gritted teeth, sorely tempted to take up the offer to join them, and looked back at Jan, who was by now, fully engrossed in her call. Feeling somewhat like a third wheel at a wedding, I ordered some food – spring rolls and tempura fried shrimp. Maybe the smell of food would lure Jan back to our table.

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Top Tip #11: Eating alone sucks.

Five or ten minutes later the food arrived, I ate half of it, and Jan finally ended her call and took a seat. At that

point, I decided to give her an out and said, "Look, if this evening is a bad time, we can rearrange?" She pondered for a moment, sipped her wine and announced that she was now all mine and there would be no more calls to disturb us. Her smile beamed, I melted, and we started to chat about her life for a good five minutes ... until her phone went off again. She apologised and wandered off.

By then, the four ladies were very much enjoying my obvious torment. I gave them my best what's-a-guy-to-do look, to which they responded with a pantomime 'aww'.

At least I had some spring rolls to finish. So thirty minutes on, with my wine glass drained, I requested for the bill and paid.

Jan was still on her phone call, so I went over to pass her the handbag – it was the only gentlemanly thing left to do. She paused her call and looked at me in surprise. I informed her that I had paid and was leaving. "Why?" she enquired. I doubt I had ever looked more gob smacked.

"Call me sentimental, but I prefer having someone's attention on a date," I said before leaving. My saintly patience had worn out and the women on the next table had commandeered Jan's wine.

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Top Tip #12: Leave earlier than I did. She had sent the signal that I was not important the moment she arrived.

A day later, Jan dropped a message asking how I was and why I had left that evening. Really? Did she not know? She then suggested we meet for drinks the next evening. Not being one to hold a grudge, and thinking the first date may have just been bad timing, I foolishly accepted.

A suitable venue was selected, and the meeting was on. I arrived a few minutes early. Jan arrived on time, but was again plugged into her phone. After fifteen minutes of waiting, I got up, waved goodbye, and blocked her messages thereafter.

I'm still amused at how anyone can think that it is acceptable not to value another person's time, especially when that someone has afforded them the same courtesy. So although she was super attractive, and I am sure plenty of other men would put up with her constant phone calls, it wasn't right for me.

Time to get swiping again.

## SWIPE 4

### The French Connection



I was seated at a small table for two, just big enough to take two tiny cups, a bottle of water and maybe a side plate of snacks. It was dressed with a yellow tablecloth and two comfortable wicker chairs, perfectly designed to keep the occupants comfortably seated for several hours. The French styled café was situated on the edge of the pavement on Singapore's Orchard Road, a retail mecca of all things nice, packed with the constant ebb and flow of shopping bag laden people, both local and tourists.

I savoured every sip of the awesome coffee – freshly roasted beans, lovingly ground and filtered to produce this cup of heaven – while observing the streams of people parading past. Loving couples hand in hand,