

# 16 SWIPES

NO BREAKFAST

*16 Swipes* takes you on a journey of discovery through a rinse cycle of Tinder dates, personal encounters, and struggles, as author Mark Powell navigates the sea of online profiles in search of his soulmate.

Through a fair number of swipes and a very unfair number of breakfasts, you'll smile, split your sides laughing and be thankful to have dodged these yourself.

Beyond the humour, you will gain insights into the relationships to avoid, situations to extract yourself from, and the women you should never get serious with. Mark candidly shares his own mistakes so you gain valuable dating lessons and identify with the near misses.

You will sympathise, empathise, and maybe even recognise your own situations as Mark – with his old-school values – embarks on a wild ride in our modern dating scene.



*Mark Powell is a British novelist, playwright and screenwriter, who writes boldly and with refreshing authenticity. Visit him on Instagram: Markpowellauthor2*

*"Written with respect and humour, 16 Swipes is a must-read. Mark bears no ill will against the individuals who inspired this book and takes full responsibility for his own actions. This book is a guaranteed way to get reassured, enlightened, and learn more about how you may handle the same situation."*

*— Juliet Tan, Dating Coach at Elite Connections, LA*

★ ★ ★

*"His brutal honesty and authenticity will amaze you."*  
*— Terry Evens, Book Critic*

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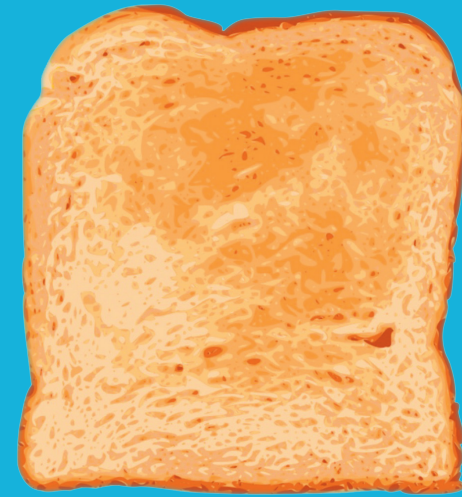
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# MARK POWELL



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

For Review Only

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

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## 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 was 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

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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 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 the hope that they would smile at me. In the rare instance that they actually did smile back, they were usually the types of ladies who would leave a meter running. Please note, I'm not so desperate that I 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'.



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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 was a match. The stage for romance was set and I just had to sail into the sunset. Perfect, it sounded so easy.

Many experiences later – and I’ve honestly lost count – here I am writing this book. These are 16 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: Don’t set any expectations 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 24 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 defence, when there are no profile pictures, a man has nothing to go on and would only wonder: *Why would she 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."*

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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: Online scammers are often male and from Nigeria. All US military personnel have a unique email address issued by the US military. Should you get as far as wanting to exchange emails and is given a Gmail or Hotmail account ... make a run for it!

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 to describe 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, 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

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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 and 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 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.

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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 it 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 faded blue jeans, Jane looked great. So visually, I was happy and despite being used as a divorce counsellor, I decided to give her the benefit of the doubt and managed to switch the topic 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 on to it started. While I’m into romance and passion, I 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

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

Jane did not take my explanation very well and she stood up seemingly 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 take a stroll. I agreed, not wanting to leave the date on a bad note and thinking that some fresh air would help us to relax. Although she grabbed my hand as we walked, 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 a peck on the cheek, but square on the lips and with full tongue. I withdrew like a frog from boiling water and may even have said "Yuck". Yes, I think I did. Now, in my defence, if I'm that uncomfortable linking fingers, it's not likely I'll be okay entwining tongues.

Jane, who was clearly annoyed by this, stormed off round the corner and vanished down a dark alley. The alleyways running behind older shophouses in Singapore, while sometimes quaint with peeling paint and cool graffiti, 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 teleported into this reality from the prudish 1950s.

But there Jane was ... perched on a step along 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."

In utter shock, I pivoted on the spot, walked right back round the corner and waited for a few minutes, hoping she would get dressed and reappear fully clothed. She walked out 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. A few days later, she messaged to ask if we could meet. She was concerned she had been too forward (You

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think?) and wanted to apologise for her actions. Being a gentleman – or a complete fool, in 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 had been 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

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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 ceiling fan was turned on, got whacked by the spinning steel 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 also 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 that sex with him was terrific. (I assume by 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 asking 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 an animal print silk scarf tied around her neck and black patent 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 for 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 bugger off. Fair, given the Greek god she was seated with now.

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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 one 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 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.

"Sorry, running late, leaving home soon."

Not exactly the message I wanted to get when I was that excited about this meeting. 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 to arrive. My initial excitement had all but evaporated and I was still contemplating whether or not to walk 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'll be off 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.

By then, the other couples in the bar had noticed me sitting alone 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

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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 was 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 her noxious fog.

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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 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 portions, were placed before us accompanied by a paired wine or cocktail.

All that would have been wonderful, had Joanne not developed 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.

Thankfully, we finally got to the end of the meal. 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

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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.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Powell is a British-born novelist, playwright and screenwriter who lives in Singapore. An explosive writer and storyteller, Mark delivers brutally realistic fiction and non-fiction alike with strong characters and compelling plots. His preferred genre is action/thriller, with published novels: *Quantum Breach* (2009, Marshall Cavendish), *Deep Six* (2010, Marshall Cavendish), *The Somali Sanction* and *The Broker*. He has also published a young adult novel, *The Adventures of Danny Dare*.

His dark comedy stage play “The Banker” was tagged for London’s West End Production by the renowned Sonia Freedman, and one of his screenplays, “The Wax Men” – an intense political thriller inspired by a true story – has been optioned for production in 2020.

His latest book, *16 Swipes No Breakfast*, takes a humorous look at the world of online dating, and demonstrates his versatility, sensitivity and humour as a writer. He has also started on a sequel, *16 Swipes: The Other Perspective*.

An active conservationist, motorcycle adventurer and climber, Mark holds a Psy.D. in Organisational Psychology and obtained Art and History degrees at Sussex University.

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