

50 Ways to Find a Lover

Lucy-Anne Holmes

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Extract

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Find a Lover*

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♥ *one* ♥

I'm single. A spinster. Alone. Unloved. Unwanted. Rejected. Solo. Mono.

I feel like an old Fiesta, locked up in a garage, rusting. The advert in *Auto Trader* isn't getting any interest. There is a disarming number of newer models who have had just the one careful owner. Sadly I've had a few very clumsy and mentally unstable owners. I'm twenty-nine, or more to the point nearly thirty.

I am also an out-of-work actress with a hangover. I am pointless, embarrassing and I smell. I am like a yeast infection.

I think someone is trying to kick their way out of my skull and molluscs might have fallen asleep in my eyes. Why couldn't I have woken up still drunk? Waking up still drunk is much more fun than waking up with a hangover. Then you can do the pint-fry-up-back-to-bed routine, which rarely lets you down. My extensive research of hangovers has led me to the conclusion that only two things can save you:

- 1) a small glass of port
- 2) sex

Both remedies are out of the question today. I drank all the port in the flat last night and I haven't had sex for 325 days.

All I can do is lie here as still as possible, with my eyes glued together for the whole day. Please, God, don't let Simon discover me. Simon is the anti-hangover. He is also my flatmate. He has got more energy than a hyperactive toddler on speed. He is currently training for the London Marathon so is always on a natural post-run high. I live in fear that he might explode with endorphins at any moment. It would be messy if he did, as we live in the smallest two-bedroom flat ever converted in Camden Town, London.

I shall just try to open my right eye and see what the time is: 10.14 a.m. Perhaps it is not so bad being an out-of-work actress today. My mobile phone is vibrating in my hand. It appears as though I passed out last night, fully clothed, in my single bed, holding my mobile phone. I disgust myself. Frequently.

Please, God, let it be my agent. Last week I had two auditions for the role of a feisty shepherdess in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *As You Like It*. I made the brave decision to read for the part of the shepherdess with a Welsh accent. I reasoned that there are a lot of sheep in Wales. I read for the part with a Welsh accent, which sadly went to Jamaica, then Lithuania, before settling for the most part in Kent. The director looked incredulous for a long time when I had finished and then insisted that

the play was set in Somerset. I thought I had committed audition suicide, but they recalled me, which means that I am in with a very good chance.

I want this job like a tabloid paper wants soap-star sex scandals. If I get it, I will go to Stratford-upon-Avon, and then I will also do a tour of the USA. Please, please, God, if it is my agent saying that I got the job, I promise I shall be nice about American people while I am away. (I went to a convent school. For thirteen years I was marinated in Catholicism. Now I talk to God frequently. I say 'talk to', but really I just ask him for things. He ignores me.)

'Morning, sunshine.' Ignored again. It isn't my agent. It's my best friend, Julia. I think Julia has lost some hearing faculties by dancing next to nightclub speakers over the years. She always shouts as though she is standing next to an amp.

'Ssssh,' I whisper.

'How are you today, sunshine?' She sounds very concerned about me.

'Mh, h, mmh' is the only pathetic sound I am able to muster.

'Come on, Sarah, he's not worth it. He's a wanker.'

'Ahhhh!' I wail.

It comes back to me in hideous waves. I start weeping and remembering. As I weep and remember I move my head, and as I move my head the bastard who's been trying to get out of my head suddenly gets angry and buys a hammer.

‘Come on, Sare, you’ll be all right,’ she murmurs.

I love Julia but I won’t be all right. Last night I asked a man out. He works in my local pub. I have liked him for ages. I am not saying that he’s marriage material, but he is a heterosexual man of a similar age to me, with a pulse. I don’t meet many of these so I may well have got over-excited. I thought he liked me. I sent him a text message to see if he fancied meeting up for a drink. I got this response, instantly:

Soz, I wanna watch the Narnia movie on DVD.

I think it was the ‘Soz’ that did it. Although it could have been the ‘Narnia movie’. Whatever it was, I drank a bottle of port, ate seven slices of peanut butter on toast and cried all night.

‘The Narnia movie’s shit anyway,’ says Julia lovingly.

‘I’m too proud for this rejection,’ I moan.

‘Oh, bubba, you kept saying that last night.’

I don’t even remember talking to Julia last night.

‘I’m serious though,’ I snivel.

And I am. I can understand that the use of the word ‘soz’ in a text message of rejection may not seem like much to most. But to me it’s a big issue. I don’t do love. Love is the route to misery. I have been single for three years and nine months. I am known for saying, ‘I don’t want a man. I want a career.’ I am known for mouthing the words ‘It’ll end in tears’ when I see happy couples kissing. However, I’ve just spent five long months plucking up the courage to ask out a balding man with a paunch who works in my

local pub. I offered him myself and he said he would rather watch the Narnia movie on DVD. My pride has not just been bruised, it's been disembowelled. And it hurts, it really does.

'Cock and balls! Did you hear that clunk?' shouts Julia shortly after I hear a loud mechanical clunk. Julia drives a turquoise Mercedes-Benz. It's massive and ancient and she bought it on eBay for £177. She calls it Big Daddy. It is impossible to imagine a more unreliable vehicle than Big Daddy. However, Julia loves this car in the way a lot of women love roguish men who let them down at embarrassing and inopportune moments. She won't hear a bad word uttered about Big Daddy and she'll never trade it in for something better.

'I'm sorry, sunshine. I need to pull over and put some water in the radiator or something. I'll call you later.'

'I'm not sunshine today,' I cry, 'I'm drizzle.'

I return to lying very still. I must be positive. I try to think of one thing I'm good at. It's not easy. Then it dawns on me that the only thing I'm good at is creating cellulite, and I start to cry again.

Simon bursts into my room. Simon bursts in my room every morning after his run. He throws my post on my unopened-post pile, and then checks the definition of his muscles in my full-length mirror.

I met Simon twelve years ago in a dreadful nightclub called Winkers (Stinkers or Wankers if you were local). He danced up to me and said, 'Please shag me, go on, it won't

take long.’ He had already said this line to three of my friends. I didn’t shag him but I did laugh and we have been friends ever since. Simon spent most of his twenties in South America, taking rich people on daredevil adventure holidays. The company he worked for went bust a year ago, so he came back to London and moved in with me. Now he is trying to make money so that he can set up his own business doing the same thing. This means that now if you ask him what he does he will tell you that he’s an entrepreneur and then he will try to sell you something that you don’t want. At the moment this will be either a BMW with low mileage or a cross-trainer in fabulous working order. He is thirty. He has dark hair and a fantastic body. Julia recently saw Simon without his top on and the sight rendered her speechless. I have known Julia for fifteen years and have never known anything to render her speechless.

Today he stands in my doorway, a hand clutching a leg behind him in a quad stretch.

‘Oooh, you look and smell like a duck’s arse.’ He winces, dropping an official-looking white letter on to the pile of other unopened official-looking white letters on my floor.

‘Please, please fuck off . . . quietly,’ I moan meekly.

‘I can’t believe Baldy blew you out!’ He tries to say this with sympathy, but I see the corners of his mouth twitch.

‘How do you know?’ It hurts to voice words so I mouth them.

‘Sare, you spent fifteen minutes in bed between me and

Ruth, wailing about rejection. You kept burping peanut butter, it was gross. You don't remember, do you?'

I shake my head like a snotty lost child.

'Your dad phoned earlier. He sounded very excited.'

Simon then does something I shall never forgive him for. He opens my bedroom curtains.

'You need a pint of water and a protein shake and then you need to get up and seize this beautiful day.'

I crawl to the landline phone, with Simon shouting, 'Mention the cross-trainer, I'll do it for him for £225.'

My dad is perky at all times; even his snore is jubilant. He is recently retired. Now he plays golf on fine days and calls me on rainy ones.

'Have you heard about that Shakespeare job?' he sings loudly.

'Not yet,' I whisper.

'Speak up! I think I've found you the perfect acting role, Sarah. I want to read you an article that was in the local paper. Now where are my glasses? Val! Val! Where are my glasses?' This is my father's trademark. He has never been known to have a telephone conversation without calling out at least five questions to my mother. It is deafening. 'Val! Val! Oh, got them, not to worry, love. Now then, I think you could be the next Kate Winslet.'

'More like Dame Thora Hird. Go on, tell me what it is,' I croak.

'Listen to this: "Are you between twenty-five and thirty-

five, single, extrovert and looking for love? Reality TV show will help you find your Mr Right.”

‘Dad, it’s an advert for a reality TV show.’

‘How do you mean?’

My dad is from a sweet bygone era when production companies in the UK made intelligently scripted dramas and charming comedies. He’s probably never even heard of Jade Goody.

‘Reality TV, Dad. It’s the birthplace of evil; created to ridicule the individual for the pleasure of the early-evening viewing public. They don’t want actors, Dad, they want real people. Thank you for thinking of me anyway.’

Then the food blender starts as Simon begins to make my protein shake. I’m sure he’s turned the volume up. I give him the look of disdain I perfected playing Goneril in an amateur production of *King Lear* years ago. It might need some work because he looks at me indifferently and mouths the word ‘cross-trainer’.

‘The thing is, Sarah, I emailed the producer.’

‘You did WHAT?!’ I howl.

‘I emailed the producer. I said, “Dear Whatever-her-name-was, I think my daughter might be what you are looking for. She’s nearly thirty—”’

‘Ahhh,’ I holler, cutting him off. ‘I’m not nearly thirty, I’m twenty-nine!’

‘Let me finish. “She’s nearly thirty, an extrovert, often to her mother’s embarrassment, and she’s a terrific actress so this would be the perfect part for her. She’s been single for

years and we, her mother and I, worry that she'll never find someone to share her life with. She claims that she doesn't believe in love. She says she doesn't want anyone but we think she does really.”

‘You sneaky toad. Oh well, loads of women will want to do that sort of thing. I doubt we’ll hear anything.’

‘Um, the thing is, Sarah, they called here this morning and had a long chat with me and your mum. They think that you sound perfect for this.’

‘Dad!’ I whine. ‘I know you want me to be happy. But I am already happy. I don’t need a man. And I definitely don’t need to be on a bloody reality TV show. I need to focus on my career.’

‘Think about it, Sarah, it’ll give you good exposure as an actor and you may well find a nice young man to spend your time with. Anyway, they’ll be calling you at eleven o’clock this morning. I’m just warning you.’

I don’t know what to say. So I do what I often do when a situation is frustrating and I don’t know what to say. I make the sound ‘urgh’ as loudly as I possibly can. I have never attempted this in such an extreme state of hangover. I won’t again. The passion makes me feel very ill. I lurch to the loo and stick my head down the toilet. I curse myself for never having given Simon a lesson in using the toilet brush. I am there a long time, flushing and retching and thinking. ‘Soz’ text messages, reality TV shows, no news on the Shakespeare audition and vomiting. It’s not the best start to the day.

Simon knocks on the bathroom door. I poke my green face out.

'I've put a new quote on the noticeboard,' he tells me proudly. Simon and I have a noticeboard in our hallway on which we leave messages for each other. These used to be CAN YOU LEND ME A TENNER? OR I PUT THE BINS OUT OR YOU SMELL, but recently Simon has discovered a man called Eckhart Tolle, who is a master in positive thinking and now Simon leaves me daily, badly spelt motivational messages. I look at today's epistle and shake my head. STEP OUT OF YOU'RE COMFORT ZONE. I pick up my retort-writing pen from the block of Blu-tack on the wall. I correct his spelling and grammar. I am writing the words SATAN'S INSIDE YOUR HEAD when I hear something. The phone. It's eleven o'clock.