



The DATING DETOX

GEMMA BURGESS

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**The Dating Detox: A laugh out
loud book for anyone who's
ever had a disastrous date!**

«HarperCollins»

Burgess G.

The Dating Detox: A laugh out loud book for anyone who's ever had a disastrous date! / G. Burgess — «HarperCollins»,

‘A laugh-out-loud funny take on modern dating for lovers of Paige Toon and Adele Parks. Perfect to read while you're detoxing in January!’ Closer Magazine
A supremely unlucky in love, late twenty-something living in London decides to leave the whole sorry business of dating behind – at least for a while. Dating is a dangerous sport. So after her sixth successive failed relationship, romantically-challenged 20-something Sass decides she's had enough. The Dating Detox is born. No men, no break-ups, no problem. The result? Her life – usually joyfully/traumatically occupied with dates, clothes and vodka – is finally easy. Chastity rocks. No wonder nuns are always singing. Everything falls at her feet. Especially men. Will Sass break the rules? Why does fate keep throwing her in the path of the irritatingly amusing – and gorgeous – Jake? Will she ever roll the dice and play again? Or is a love-free life too good to risk losing?

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A V O N

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Dedication

For Anika and Paul

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Prologue

Nine months ago

I knew the second I walked into this party that it wouldn't be any fun. Every person here looked around when we walked in. Then they welcomed Rick and ignored me. That was two hours ago and now here I am, in my stupid librarian costume, sitting in the kitchen alone, trying to enjoy myself and failing. Very. Badly.

My friends aren't here, which doesn't help. They're all having dinner together in a pub in Westbourne Grove. I wish I was with them. But I have to be here. My boyfriend Rick is here. He is friends with the guy who's throwing this party. Or he knows a guy who knows him. Something like that.

Where the hell is he, anyway? I haven't actually seen Rick in ages, but I don't want to be one of those socially-needy girlfriends. Especially after last night. Hell, people at this party are unfriendly. Perhaps they don't get that I'm dressed as an ironic geek.

The theme is 'Come As Your Childhood Ambition', and I'm surrounded by sexy nurses and Pink Ladies and ballerinas and air hostesses. (Aspiring to jobs that don't come with a revealing/girly costume doesn't seem to have occurred to these women as five-year-olds.) I should have come as Prime Minister or something. But I really did want to be a librarian. The men are dressed as Indiana Jones and Luke Skywalker and knights and things like that.

For God's sake, I'm 28 years old. I can handle an unfriendly party, can't I?

We're in a large flat just off Kensington Church Street, and it's packed. It's just the kind of party I usually love. Lots of people having loud conversations and being funny and silly. I don't know anyone, so I ought to just flick the insta-banter switch, go forth and jazz-hands myself around the party, conquering friends. I tried to do that earlier, but they just seemed to not hear me, or look through me. Or something. So I don't want to try again. If only my friends were here.

I wonder how much longer I can sit in this stupid kitchen, pretending to read and send non-existent texts. This is so not me.

I wish I didn't look so dowdy. I'm wearing a tweed skirt and carrying a pince-nez and a stack of books. I felt terribly chic and witty when I was getting ready, now I just feel drab and lost. I could go home. But that might upset Rick. Plus, they're his friends, and I would really like to get to know them better. I've never really met any of them before.

Seriously, where the sweet hell is Rick? He seems stressed tonight. I know his work is crazy at the moment. He was texting me about it the other night. Seeing him less is probably good for our relationship anyway. I just hang out with my best friends when he's busy. Or hang out by myself in the kitchen at parties where everyone's a bit weird and unfriendly. That's good fun too. (Sigh.)

'Are you a teacher?' says a guy who just walked into the kitchen. He's dressed as a cricketer. (How imaginative.)

'Librarian,' I say, and add, in my best librarian tone, 'Shhhh!'

He frowns slightly, gets a beer out of the fridge and says 'Freeeeek...' under his breath as he walks away.

See?

I repeat my mantra ('posture is confidence, silence is poise') to myself and smoke another cigarette.

That's it, I'm going to look for Rick. Kitchen, living room, dining room, balcony, second balcony...no, no, no, no, no. Just people who look around at me, see that I'm not interesting enough to bother with, and turn back to each other to keep talking. Fuck me, I hate this party...Sheesh, this place is packed. So many doors. He wouldn't have left without me, would he? Maybe he's near the front—oh, here—

Oh my oh my oh my oh my God.

Rick, on a bed, with nothing on but his judge's wig, straddled by a near-naked Pink Lady. It's Frenchy. I can tell because she's still wearing her Pink Lady jacket and it's got 'Frenchy' embroidered on the back.

They're having sex, holy shit, they're having sex. It takes a few seconds before they even notice I'm standing in the doorway. Then they both look around at once. (People look so odd when they're having sex. No wonder I've never understood the whole porn thing.)

'Fuck!' says Rick, and then lies back on the bed, pushing the girl off him. She giggles and nearly falls off the bed.

I need to get out of here. I need to get out of here now.

I back out of the doorway as quickly as I can, stack of books and pince-nez in my left hand and my dull little librarian's bag over my right shoulder, and dash for the front door.

I feel sick. I can't breathe. How could he? How could he do that to me? I've got to get out of here. As I open the front door, I hear people behind me whooping. They must have seen him with the Pink Lady too. They're all laughing. I hate those people. I hate them.

How could he do that? Is he even going to follow me? Is he even going to say anything? How could he do that? When I'm here, I'm at the *same fucking party*? How could Frenchy do that? She was always my favourite Pink Lady.

That's not a rational thing to think. Be rational, damn it. Pull yourself together.

How the hell do you get out of this mansion block shithole? I feel sick. I feel like throwing up. I am definitely going to throw up. Where can I...ah, a plant pot. Lovely.

I lean over the pot, bend the plant out of the way, and start dry-heaving. Up come my three vodkas and the peanut butter sandwich I ate before I left home. I can see my teeth marks in the bread. Gross. I must chew my food more.

I stand up and wipe my mouth. My hands are shaking and tears are running down my face. How could he, how could he? Why hasn't he followed me? Has he even called me? I'll check my phone...no, nothing. What happened between us arriving at the party together and him shagging someone else? Did I do something wrong? Who the hell shags at parties anyway? She must have seduced him. I hate her.

I'm going to call him. Maybe it's a huge mistake and he's hammered and thought she was me. That would be...no, that would not be good either. Please, please let this not be happening.

He doesn't answer the first time I call, so I try again. On the seventh ring, he answers.

'Yes?'

'It's me...I'm...How could you do that, Rick?'

'Pretty easily,' he says, and starts laughing. His voice is muffled. What is funny about this? What? Is he talking to someone else?

'Who is she?'

'No one you know.'

Is he even going to apologise? 'I'm so upset...' I say. He doesn't say anything. 'Did you plan this? Why did you even...' (I start crying, but try to hide it) '...ask me to the party?'

'I didn't ask you to the party. Don't give me that shit. You asked what I was doing and assumed you were coming too.'

I'm still crying silently, trying to quieten my shaky breathing. Typical lawyer, trying to point score even when completely in the wrong.

'I...I...' I can't talk. 'How could you d-d-do this to me? It's so h-horrible of you...'

I hear him sigh impatiently. I don't know what to say now and my stammering seems to have kicked in, so I don't say anything. Please, please let him apologise. I want to go back in time and stop this from happening. Dear God, if it is even the tiniest bit possible, please send me back in time right now to stop this from happening.

Or just make him ask me to forgive him.

Or even say sorry. Once.

Instead he just says: 'I can't deal with this. I just...I don't love you and I don't want you anymore...I gotta go.'

You know when you jam your fingers in a drawer and you know a split second before the pain hits that it's going to hit, and your chest has that weird icy seizure? That's what I have right now. And then he hangs up, and the pain hits me, and I'm standing outside some mansion block on Kensington Church Street with a stack of books and my pince-nez and my handbag and I squat down—which isn't easy in heels, you know—and bury my face in my hands. I can't breathe. I want to vomit, but nothing is left in my tummy. I can't bear this. I can't bear to wake up tomorrow and have this as a memory.

Fucking, fucking, fucking bastardo. Never again. I will never let this happen again.

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