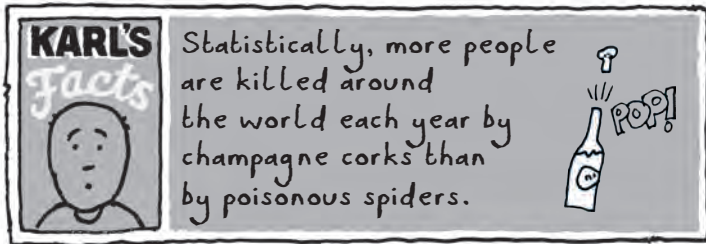


## THE WEDDING CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

People think it's odd that I hate weddings and don't want to get married to Suzanne, even though we've been together so long. They think getting married and having kids is what life's all about. I don't agree, but I was travelling to the wedding capital of the world to see if I might change my mind.

Over 115,000 people travel to Las Vegas every year to tie the knot. My flight was full of single blokes going there to gamble and couples going to get married, which you could say is a different sort of gamble. The couple sitting in front of me were from Newcastle and they were with their friends and family. That's something else that winds me up about weddings: when the happy couple say they're gonna get married abroad and they seem to think it's reasonable to ask you to take time off work, and pay for flights and a hotel just to see them say 'I do'. Well, 'I won't'. The Geordies were drinking champagne, which is always dragged out at weddings too. I've never been a fan, as it gives me heartburn and I don't like the way it doesn't come with a proper lid. Once the cork is out it has to be drunk. Even Pringles supply you with a proper lid.



I went for the healthiest options on the flight to get some roughage in my system. On my last trip to America I travelled down Route 66 and I ended up feeling fat and bloated after just a few days, as I couldn't find many places that served vegetables. The fact that they call fruit machines slot machines in the US just goes to show that fruit and veg aren't that popular.

Twelve hours later (five bottles of champagne for the Geordie couple) we landed in Vegas, which is said to be the brightest place on Earth from space. We got to the hotel, and it was massive. There was a huge casino on the ground floor. I've heard that these places try all sorts of tricks to keep people gambling. They have no clocks or windows so you don't know what time of day it is, and they pump the place with oxygen to keep everyone awake. At the hotel casino all the machines have comfy chairs in front of them to make people stay longer. I'm not sure how successful this is, though, as my dentist's chair is pretty comfy but I don't stay for extra fillings. As we were checking in I watched as old people sat there, feeding their life's savings into the slots. Some of them looked like they could be in their 90s.

The oxygen being pumped into the room was probably the only thing keeping them alive. Maybe they were trying to win enough to pay for a taxi back to their rooms, the place was that big. All the hotels are big here. They boast in Vegas about having seventeen of the world's twenty largest. Even the bellboy who helped carry my luggage to the room seemed a bit lost. The distance he must cover in an evening, he's more of a Sherpa than a bellboy.

After sending him on his way back out into the maze of corridors I made myself a cup of tea. On the tea tray there was a tin labelled 'Intimacy Kit', which contained a condom and some mints. Hardly a 'kit', is it? You get more in a Kinder egg. There was a note in the bathroom asking occupants to re-use towels to help the hotel be more environmentally friendly, which was a bit of a joke considering the amount of energy the bulbs outside were burning up.



The next morning jet lag kicked in and I woke up early. I went down to breakfast and a few people were still trying their luck on the slots. Even though there are no clocks, they must have known it was morning, as the smell of bacon from the restaurant was filling the air. I had the full works – bacon, eggs and a breakfast muffin, which is basically a cake. No wonder obesity is a problem in the US if people are having cake for breakfast.

We drove around Vegas to see what it looks like without all the lights on. It's not half as fancy-looking in the daytime. It's like a Christmas tree – without the lights on, it's just a tree in your lounge during the day. It was pretty quiet too. Vegas is all about the evening; the people are nocturnal. As well as casinos, there are lots of chapels in Vegas. Our first stop was the Little White Wedding Chapel, where they offer a drive-thru wedding service.

The sign boasted that Michael Jordan and Joan Collins were married there. I didn't even know they were an item. We pulled in to take a closer look. You have to drive under a hoarding painted with little naked cherubs. I've always found cherubs a bit sinister. The idea of winged babies flying around with no nappies on seems like an accident waiting to happen. There would be shit everywhere. If I saw a cherub flying about in real life it would terrify me, whereas a Cyclops, which is another mythical being, wouldn't scare me at all, as it's just a bloke with one eye. He'd be registered disabled and get a decent parking space in today's world.

I like the idea of a drive-thru wedding. Minimum fuss. I don't know why this hasn't made it over to the UK when most things from America do. In the main reception area a woman was tidying up a glass display cabinet. It was full of garters. What are garters, anyway? They featured a lot in *Carry On* films, and I know they are supposed to be sexy, but what are they actually for? I've always presumed they're a sort of sweat band for a fat leg.

The woman who owns the place, Charolette, came into reception. She grabbed me, dragged me into the chapel

and started walking me down the aisle. I told her that I wasn't married and wasn't planning on getting married, but if I was then the drive-thru option would appeal to me. She explained how it came about.

**CHAROLETTE:** I saw so many people coming, and they were handicapped, and they had their little children with them, and the children would be crying, and it was hot, and they just wanted to hurry up and get married.

**KARL:** Do they use it often?

**CHAROLETTE:** No, it's for anybody. Now everybody comes and I don't see any handicap people.

I think it's good how something that was designed for the disabled can be used by the able. I got told off by someone in a wheelchair once for using the toilet that was for them. The queue was massive for the loos and my guts were in a bad way, so I didn't see the sense in not using an empty disabled cubicle when all the other toilets were busy. The bloke had a chair to sit in while he waited, so I don't know what his problem was.

**CHAROLETTE:** I'm not married.

**KARL:** Why is that then?

**CHAROLETTE:** Well, because my husband went to heaven.

**KARL:** Oh, alright.

**CHAROLETTE:** He was the only man I wanted. When he left this earth, I wasn't the same. But I knew that I never wanted anybody else and I never went out and looked for another man.

If Suzanne left me I don't think I'd bother looking for someone else either. I would drive them up the wall always talking about Suzanne and how she used to do things a certain way. Charolette said it took around ten minutes to do a drive-thru wedding. You wouldn't even have to turn the engine off. You can wait for a Filet-O-Fish for longer than that at McDonald's. Normal weddings can go on forever, and there's so much talk and planning that go into them too. And I've no idea why people get engaged. Either get married or don't. What's the point of celebrating the idea of possibly getting married? It's just another card you have to buy someone. So many things are dragged out these days, not just weddings. Even though we're living longer I'm convinced we're not actually doing more, we're just waiting longer. It annoys me that when you buy a sofa these days, you have to wait six weeks for it to arrive. Why does it need to be made to order? They should have more than one in stock – make three, sell one, get another in. It's not a kidney I'm looking for, it's a sofa!

Charolette took me through the procedure as we stood by the drive-thru hatch.

**CHAROLETTE:** We're gathered here today at the Little White Chapel Drive-Thru Wedding of Love. Karl, will you take Suzanne to be your wife, and will you promise to love

her, and honour her, and respect her, and keep her all the days of your life?

KARL: Okay.

CHAROLETTE: And, Suzanne, will you take Karl for your husband?

KARL: Yeah.

CHAROLETTE: Will you promise to love him and honour him and respect him and keep him all the days of your life?

KARL: Yeah.

CHAROLETTE: Love is a choice. You have chosen this beautiful lady because you want to be with her. She's on your mind, she's in your ears, she's in your eyes, she's on your lips, and she's in your heart. And she's in your arms. She wants to be loved by you. And you want to be loved by her. It's no accident that you met. It's no accident that you're together. God doesn't make mistakes. God has a purpose for your life to be with her. Not to be angry with her, not to be upset with her, to love her, to understand her, to hold her if she ever has a temper or something . . .

KARL: Is this still the speech?

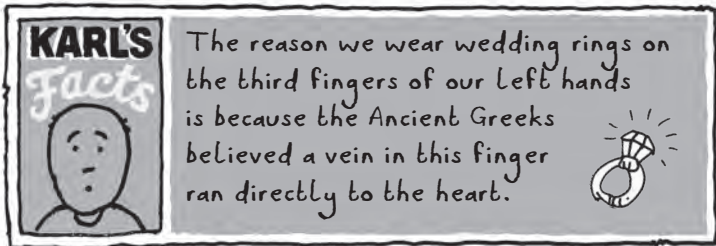
CHAROLETTE: Yes. Just hold her, and love her, and just tell her you want her. And the wedding ring . . .

KARL: Oh, you still do the ring?

CHAROLETTE: Oh yes. The wedding ring is a symbol

of marriage, it's a circle that is endless, to represent your endless love.

I find it odd that we've named a finger the 'ring finger'. It just goes to show that we have too many fingers. I reckon we'd get by okay if we had lobster hands. People say it's good to wear a wedding ring, as it reminds you of your partner, but you should remember them without that. The rapper Nelly went through a phase of wearing a plaster on his face, and people said it was supposed to be a reminder of his brother who was in prison. He stopped wearing it after a while, so either he invested in some Post-it notes or it fell off in the shower and he forgot all about his brother.



What I like about the drive-thru wedding is it's not about showing off. Take wedding bells: they only exist to show off. People who need to know you're getting married will know about it, so why make a load of noise? It's noise pollution, and there's no need for it. I've never understood why people on *Relocation*, *Relocation* won't buy a house near a main road cos they don't like the sound of traffic, but think living



near a church in a village is idyllic. Virtually every weekend in the summer those bells are gonna be ringing. If it was a car alarm people would complain.

Charolette gave me a quick tour of her selection of wedding dresses before we left. That's another thing that puzzles me – why buy a wedding dress instead of hiring one? You won't need it again, and it'll just end up being shoved in the loft. I'm sure that's why wedding dresses have got ridiculously big over the years – if it's gonna be stuck up in the loft it may as well double up as insulation. I saw a wedding dress in the *Guinness Book of Records* where the train was 1.85 miles long! The bridesmaids could hardly say they were invited, as they were almost two miles away.



When I left I thought back to what Charolette was saying about how she lost the man in her life and hasn't bothered to replace him. If something happened to Suzanne I don't think I would want to go through with finding somebody else either. I'd feel quite lost without her. It would be like separating Siamese twins, as we've been through everything together. Which can also be handy, as my memory isn't what it used to be, so I use hers as my back-up memory drive. I suppose a little bit of it comes down to laziness too. Meeting someone new would be like getting a new phone. You have to start again, input all of your information into them while trying to get to know their functions. But if I did want

to try and find somebody new I don't even know how I'd go about it. I've never been one for chatting up women. It's not so complicated for animals. I've heard male pandas attract the female by showing off how high they can piss up a bamboo shoot! It's like some sort of challenge blokes would do on a stag do. The problem is, I'm not the romantic type and I don't agree with trying to charm people. That isn't the real me, so they'll only end up disappointed. I blame romantic films. They set women's expectations too high. In films, when the man puts a coat on a puddle for a woman to walk over – why would you do that? Especially with the way the weather is these days; the rain never bloody stops. Add to that the amount of potholes, I'd be working day and night just to pay my dry-cleaning bills for my wet, muddy coat. And why is the woman walking in puddles all the time anyway? Am I dating a woman or a frog?



## THE ART OF PICKING UP WOMEN

I went to meet Vinnie, a professional pick-up artist who was supposed to help me learn how to approach women, should the need ever arise. He runs a boot camp for people who lack confidence to teach them how to do it. The boot camp was in Nipton, a small town in the Mojave Desert about an hour away from Vegas. There's not much to say about Nipton other than it has a population of sixty, one café and a few desert tortoises. Even though tortoises live for a hundred years, I doubt they've seen much change around Nipton.

By the time I got there Vinnie was already in full swing. Vinnie was a forty-five-year-old Italian fella. Not your stereotypical tall and dark Italian, Vinnie was small, dark and pink. If his neon pink hair didn't grab your attention, his earrings, eyebrow ring, chin ring or tattoos might. He explained how his look is carefully put together to attract women and is known as 'peacocking', which is basically making yourself stand out from the crowd like a peacock showing off its feathers. I've always thought of them as earth's natural drag queens. There were five other blokes at the boot camp. I got in line.

**VINNIE:** In the 50s the rules of dating were well defined. You would go to a dance, approach a woman and dance with her. Then came the 60s, and women realised that they had a form of power. We call it PUSSY POWER. Right, grab yourselves. (*grabs crotch*) This is your social workout. If you don't exercise it now, it's probably not going to happen,

because, gentlemen, remember, we are real men here. IT'S NOT GONNA SUCK ITSELF!

**BOOT CAMP MEMBERS:** It's not gonna suck itself!

**VINNIE:** Come on, grab it! IT'S NOT GONNA SUCK ITSELF!

**BOOT CAMP MEMBERS AND KARL:** It's not gonna suck itself!

**VINNIE:** If you wait for it to happen, it's probably not going to happen. When was the last time you heard a knock at the door, and they say, 'We have girls here, they want to talk to you'? No. If you want it, you got to go get it.

Vinnie could talk. But none of what he was saying was making sense to me. It was like watching a trailer for a film that's exciting, but you haven't got a clue what's going on. I'm the sort of person who needs one-on-one training. This is why school didn't work for me.

Vinnie told us all to grab a piece of wood and then explained that he wanted us to chop it in half using our bare hands. This was to teach us how not to fear tackling the unknown. I wasn't keen. I damaged my right wrist when I was a kid and it's not been right since. It aches when I plunge the toast in the toaster, so smashing it against a bit of wood didn't seem like a good idea. He told me to use my left hand instead.

**VINNIE:** In life we sometimes have a tendency to make things harder than they are. Each of those boards has a slight natural curve. You want to make sure that you're going

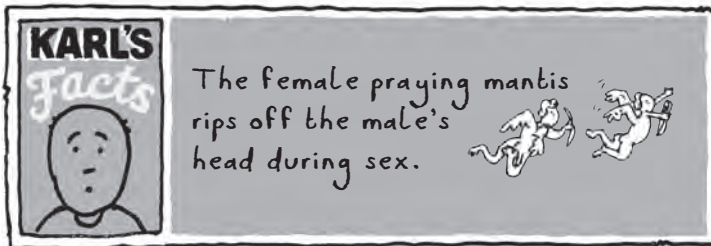
to hit that side, because there is no point in making things harder in life.

**MALICK (BOOT CAMP MEMBER):** Yeah.

**VINNIE:** Now, there's nothing worse than the sex going down the drain because then it's only logistics, you're just running a household. Nothing will keep a woman more interested than amazing sex, and it'll make you feel good too. Research has demonstrated that men who have great sex do better at all levels. So pick a board and identify the side that should be facing. Does that make sense?

**EVERYONE:** Yeah, it does.

Don't get me wrong – the sex thing, it's alright. But I'm not a great believer in going at it all night. Get it done, get to sleep; it's not something you should drag out. I've had neighbours who do that, and it drives me up the wall. To me it's like getting a sofa through a doorway: you can wobble about and try different angles, but you just want to get it into the hole, just get it done. I say be like a pigeon. They don't mess about, they just jump on the back of another pigeon and it's done in about two seconds and then they wander off again to find a bit of KFC chicken.



One by one we took it in turns to smash the wood. I broke it in half with no problem. It made me feel quite good. Left hand as well. I passed the test. Though I didn't need to break any wood when I met Suzanne. I wasn't looking to meet anyone at the time, as I was busy working. She worked in a newsroom at a local radio station in Manchester where I was doing some work in the evenings. I wanted a hot chocolate but had no money, so I asked her if I could borrow 20p. She said yes and then never asked for it back, so I thought 'she's alright' and I've been with her ever since. I know Disney wouldn't buy my story to make into a romantic cartoon, but I think our relationship is built on what's important. Romantic films have got to be responsible for most divorces – people are trying to live in a make-believe world. Suzanne buying me that hot chocolate is certainly a better reason to be with someone than that bloke who went out with Cinderella cos her foot fitted a glass slipper he found on the street. Isn't picking someone based on the size of their feet a bit of a gamble? I mean, a slipper suggests she does very little, anyway. And a glass one at that. The noise alone would do my head in. Then there's the fact she lost it. I don't want to be going out with someone who's constantly losing shoes.

Vinnie went over a few different ways to approach chatting to a woman using Alice, his assistant, in the role-play.

**VINNIE:** If you don't know what to say, tell her, 'I got no clue what to say, but you're really cute.' When you do that, they've got to at least say hello. (*Alice chuckles*) No, seriously. 'I'm Vince, what's your name?'

ALICE: Alice.

VINNIE: Alice, you have a strong handshake. Oh, let's play who's got the most bracelets! Let's see, how many bracelets do you have?

ALICE: Seven.

VINNIE: Seven? Ah, too many to count. You're cute. So, anyway, it will come, because when you're closer to her she may talk to you, and you will notice things you can talk about.

I couldn't do this sort of thing. It's just not me at all, and I reckon women would see right through it. I wouldn't approach a woman who is wearing a load of bangles, anyway, as the jangling noise would get on my nerves. It would be like going out with a bloody wind chime. Also, if I was a woman and the only word that could be used to describe me was 'cute' I would not be happy. Things that are 'cute' are usually also useless – they're 'cute' because they've nothing else going for them. I'm sure that's why babies are cute; otherwise most people wouldn't have them, as they don't bring much else to your life for years. I'm sure the only reason we try and save pandas from extinction is because people find them 'cute'. The Cape stag beetle is on its way out, and no one gives a shit, as it's not cute, is it?

Rather than chat-up lines and false charm I would get someone interested by telling them good animals facts like:

- Bats hang upside down even when they're dead, as their claws automatically close.

- Wombat poo comes out in squares.
- A lot of koala bears have bad backs, as they sit up all day even though their spines aren't designed for it.

At least then, if they don't like me, I haven't totally wasted their time. They go away with a little nugget of information that they'll remember, which also means they'll remember me.

Next, Vinnie told us we were going to be walking on fire.

**VINNIE:** Why would we walk on fire? Well, most men see women who they want have goals and dreams, and they hesitate. So this is symbolic for charging forward. Interacting with women, you see her in the distance – what comes first? Foot first, everybody. What comes first?

**MEN:** Foot first.

It didn't seem like a sensible thing to do, but neither did smashing a piece of wood with my hand. But I'd done that, so I thought I'd give this a go. Plus, I'd had a few verrucas of late from staying in hotels where the bath hadn't been cleaned properly and I thought this might help get rid of them. While we took off our shoes and socks, Vinnie continued talking. It was relentless. He could do his speech in his sleep, that's if he had time to sleep between all the having it away. If he wasn't talking to us he was kissing Valerie, his French girlfriend.

I'm not a fan of people kissing in public either. Fine if it's a quick peck, but when people are all over each other



it does my head in. They seem to think it's okay to do what they want because it's 'love'. Again, in the films when some bloke holds a plane up to get on board to propose to some woman and all the passengers cheer – it's ridiculous! I wouldn't feel like cheering. We'd probably have missed our take-off slot and we'd then be waiting on the tarmac for another forty-five minutes. Selfish, that's what it is. It's the same with Romeo and Juliet. She was shouting to him from her balcony, yet no one ever considers the person who lived in the ground-floor flat who might have been trying to sleep. As it happens, on this occasion I didn't mind Vinnie kissing Valerie, as at least it meant he couldn't speak.

Shoes and socks off, I joined the queue to fire walk. I was in agony. Not from walking on fire but from walking over to the fire. The ground was covered in sharp stones and bits of twig that I'm still removing from my feet now. Vinnie got us to chant 'Sex NOW, Sex NOW' as we waited in line. It came to my go. I don't know what the fuss is about, as it actually didn't hurt that much. Nowhere near as bad as walking over the ground to the fire. Once we crossed the coals everybody high-fived each other, and Vinnie told us we were ready to put what we'd learned into practice.



Vinnie had rented an apartment where we all met up at 7 p.m. It was a bit of a bachelor pad. Lots of black and red, dim lights, a round bed that rotated, and a shower that could

fit fifteen people with a pole in it. I didn't want to ask why you would want fifteen people in a shower cos I know for a fact that it isn't because Vinnie wanted to be environmentally friendly. I don't think I've ever had fifteen people in my house at the same time, never mind in my shower. And what is it with pole dancing? I don't understand it. It seems like a wasted skill to me. Has anyone ever told one of them women who do it that they could probably make a fortune putting up scaffolding? They'd be able to do it in no time.

We headed to the Strip in a huge pink Hummer limo. It was stupidly long, like an aeroplane with the wings taken off. Inside, music was pumping. As we were driving about, Vinnie showed me some YouTube clips of him doing his thing around the world. Basically, videos of him going up to strangers and kissing them, and I'm not talking just a peck on the cheek either. It was like a front cover of a Mills & Boon paperback.

It was a cold night, and as we wandered about on the busy sidewalks Vinnie kept getting us to chant 'Some will! Some won't! So what!', which must have been taught on another day of boot camp, as it was new to me. It has a bit more substance to it than the classic 'It's not gonna suck itself!' Vinnie was also dishing out advice on how to approach girls.

**VINNIE:** Look both sides, be strong, you gotta go for it, start sooner and start stronger. What is it? Sooner and . . . ?

**MAN:** Start stronger.

**VINNIE:** Sooner and stronger, alright. Walk first, foot first, faster. Okay, now you're ready.

**MAN:** Yeah.

Vinnie kept using the expression 'she's hot', an expression I've never used. Vinnie was in his element, but I couldn't help thinking he could put his skills to better use by becoming a charity collector. A lot of those blokes in bibs collecting for endangered species seem to use it as an excuse to chat up women, anyway.

Alice, Vinnie's assistant, asked me what my 'type' was, but I don't really have one. It's not a battery I'm looking for. I'm sure there are loads of different types of people I could get on with, but I wouldn't go for someone who is knocking around the busy streets of Vegas at this time of night, as I don't live that sort of life. I'd prefer to be at home with a Twix watching the telly. And I don't believe that 'opposites attract'. Whenever I think of that phrase I always think of the film *King Kong*. When the big monkey starts fancying Naomi Watts, people in the cinema were crying and wondering, 'Will they or won't they get it on?' As if it was ever going to work out. He was a bloody hundred-foot gorilla! You know every love story has been done when a gorilla is trying it on with a woman. Anyway, Alice wasn't giving up.

**KARL:** Have you heard of Kim Wilde? The singer?

**ALICE:** No.

**KARL:** Right, well, in the 80s she was alright. In the 90s it was Patsy Kensit. Have you heard of her?

ALICE: Maybe?

KARL: In the late 80s Kylie Minogue was vaguely popular. She was in *Neighbours*, have you heard of that? Now, I didn't like her in that, but, come 2000, I thought, 'She's alright.' So it just goes to show, your tastes change.

Thinking about it, I reckon haircuts attract me to women. I've had arguments with Suzanne when she lets her hairdresser do what he wants and she comes back with a daft haircut that I then have to put up with until it grows out. Nice hair is important. Look at cats, nice and cuddly. If they were bald they'd have died out by now.

ALICE: Any situation where you're trying to convince someone to do something, whether it's to buy a product or to go out with you, whatever it is, the 10-10-80 rule applies. So 10 per cent of people will say no, no matter what. I mean, you can offer them everything under the sun and they'll say no. Ten per cent will say absolutely yes. You could walk up to a girl with a sign that says 'Will you sleep with me?' and they'll go for it . . . even if you are absolutely disgusting. But the remaining 80 per cent, they're sitting on the fence, and all the techniques that the pick-up artists will teach you, everything applies to that 80 per cent, because it's a matter of how skilled you are as to what level you can pull towards you. Those skills – practice really does make perfect, so when you do find that beautiful woman you're already gonna have that ability.

As much as some of what Alice said made sense, it's just not the way I work, so I left Vinnie and his followers to it. People who I've gone out with have been friends of friends who I've got to know over time, so there was no going up to strangers and trying to chat them up needed. I didn't even like a couple of them that much to start with, but then we ended up getting on over time. It's like my relationship with olives. They were always plonked on a table when I went out for dinner even though they were not requested, and I didn't like them. Couldn't see the attraction. I didn't even look at them. But over time I got used to seeing them, tried them one night, and now I love them. This is the way it works for me. Each to their own, though.

'Nice hair is **IMPORTANT.**  
**LOOK AT CATS,**  
*Nice and Cuddly.*  
**IF** they were  
**BALD** they'd have  
**DIED OUT** by now.'

## THE SCIENCE OF ATTRACTION

One of the main problems with trying to find a partner is that we leave too much of the decision up to our eyes. Too much is based on looks. So I was curious about where I was going next on my trip. It was a pheromone party at a bar called Los Globos in LA. This is a new way of meeting people using your nose. Rather than the way people look, you go for their smell. There must be something in this concept, as it's going back to basics and using other senses to find the right partner, just like the cavemen and -women must have done.

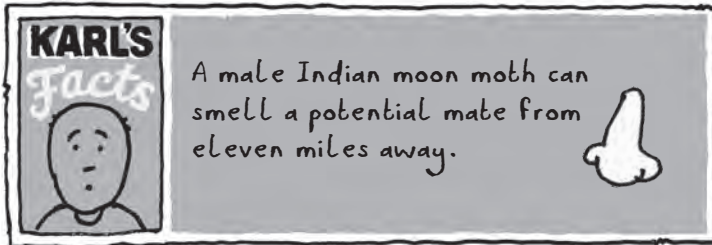
The smell of someone isn't something you ever think about, is it? On the way out to Vegas I watched the film *Frankie and Johnny* with Al Pacino and Michelle Pfeiffer. I thought she was quite attractive, but she might really stink, for all I know. All these good-looking Hollywood types – Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon – they could all stink to high heaven. It makes sense now. We see all these showbiz stunners splitting up from each other all the time and we think, 'God, why aren't they happy, she's really nice.' It's probably cos they stink. If someone stinks, how can you live with them? If you've ever had dogshit on your shoe, you'll know you can't think about anything until you get rid of the smell. You can trust your nose more than your eyes too, as eyes don't focus on the right things. The number of times my eyes are busy looking at my phone or the newspaper and forget to check on the toast, it's the nose that says, 'Your toast is burning!' My nose never gets tired

either. After fourteen or fifteen hours eyes need to sleep, yet the nose keeps going.

The T-shirt I had been wearing since I left London was placed in a plastic freezer bag with the number fifty written on a Post-it note. Blue Post-it notes for men, pink for women. Everyone there was sniffing bags searching for a pheromone match. If you found a smell you liked, it meant you were attracted to that person's pheromones.

**WOMAN ON FRONT DESK:** Pay close attention to the screen, because women who like your scent will take your bag and hold it up, and if you'd like to go and talk to that lady, go and talk to her.

There were plenty of bags on the tables as well as a few cups of coffee beans. These were there to be sniffed between each bag to reset your nose senses. A bit like a palate cleanser, like a sorbet. It wasn't long before I found a smell that I liked, so I went and had my photo taken with it like the woman on the front desk told me to. I went back to the table and found another. Either there were quite a few women who were well suited to me, or I'd just found out that my nose is a bit of a slag.



It's funny how smells stay with you and bring back memories, even horrible smells. The mustiness of one bag I smelled reminded me of a woman from the estate I grew up on who was known as Scruffy Sandra. She used to get a full seat to herself on the bus cos of her smell. The thing is, though, sometimes women wear so much perfume it makes me wonder what they are trying to hide. It makes me suspicious. My favourite smell is fresh air. When Suzanne has been out and comes in I like that smell. And it's free. Or when she's cooked a Sunday dinner and her hair smells of lamb chops.

**MAN:** The first one is better than the second one?

**KARL:** Yeah, because that was forced on me when the woman sort of said you've got to smell this. I was expecting something better.

**MAN:** Right, right, right, yeah, that kinda turned me off too.

**KARL:** Oh Jesus, that should be binned.

**MAN:** Do you go for guys too?

**KARL:** No. Oh, is that a bloke's?

**MAN:** Blue Post-it is guys.

**KARL:** Oh yeah . . . Forgot. Jesus. It wants bloody burning that does.

Getting a whiff of another bloke's T-shirt made me think I was in with a good chance. I don't smell that much, as I don't really sweat, so I've never had to cover myself in aftershaves or



spray. I've never bought aftershave in my life; it's always been a gift. Same applies to underpants and tea towels. Suzanne recognises my smell, though, and she says she keeps some of my clothes around when I'm away so it smells like I'm there. It's probably just an excuse not to get the washing done.

I didn't feel any stress at this event. If a girl doesn't like you because you're boring or ugly it could be quite hurtful, but them not liking the smell of me doesn't seem so bad.

I pulled out shirts and blouses and had a good whiff. I found my eyes started to interfere by looking at the size of the garment. I suppose that's where there is a bit of a flaw in this scheme. It's not that I find bigger women unattractive, it's the cost to run them that worries me. Food isn't cheap.

A woman came over after seeing me hold up her number.

**KARL:** Which one were you?

**WOMAN:** Twenty-nine. What did you like about it?

**KARL:** Can I have a smell again, or I could just smell you?

**WOMAN:** You don't remember?!

**KARL:** Well, I've had me nose in a lot of stuff.

**WOMAN:** So you've just been willy-nilly choosing shirts that you smell, just like 1, 2, 3?!

**KARL:** No, I wasn't! I wasn't picking willy-nilly. I picked three. I smelled it for like twenty seconds. I'm not . . .

**WOMAN:** You picked three. So how many have you smelled? Three out of how many?

**KARL:** We're not getting on, this isn't happening.

**WOMAN:** No, it's not working.

**KARL:** Listen, you smelled nice. You were me favourite.

**WOMAN:** I would be complimented if you even remembered which one I was.

**KARL:** I liked it at the time.

**WOMAN:** Okay, which one was it then?

**KARL:** Twenty-something . . . twenty-three?

**WOMAN:** No, sorry.

**KARL:** So that's it?

**WOMAN:** Yeah that's it. (*walks away*)

**KARL:** Jesus!

She might have smelled okay, but I guess smells don't warn you about mentals. I think she was being a bit unreasonable. I'm human, not a bleeding police dog. A bigger woman came over. She looked like Velma from *Scooby Doo* – all curly hair and glasses. She told me I smelled 'chocolatey'. Which was probably about right as I'd been eating Minstrels for about twenty-four hours.

**KARL:** Has anything ever come out of these events as a relationship?

**WOMAN:** Well, yeah. I mean, Judith who created this party tracks what happens to people, and relationships come out of it.

**KARL:** Well, that's good then, ain't it? Can't knock it.

**WOMAN:** It's no worse than any other singles party. It's instinct. We're animals.

**KARL:** Well said. See, I thought just chatting and showing knowledge helped attract people. Do you know what a wombat is? When a wombat has a shit, it's square.

**WOMAN:** Really?!

**KARL:** Yeah, is that good?

**WOMAN:** (*laughs*) I do like that you know that, cos I like animals a lot myself. Did you know that when koalas are born the way they get their gut to digest eucalyptus is by eating their mum's shit?

**KARL:** I haven't heard that, no . . . I wasn't aware of that.

**WOMAN:** I like facts very much, but I don't always find that gets me a lot of dates.

**KARL:** It's a start, though.

**WOMAN:** I haven't found it to be a start so far. I was raised with the belief that guys don't like smart girls. 'Men don't make passes at girls with glasses' and stuff like that.

**KARL:** No, that's a myth. Glasses are like a bit sexy in rude films. There's always some sort of secretary with glasses on. It's something to take off, isn't it?

The woman who moaned at me earlier came by again. She told me I had good taste but that my brain was soft. I told her she was doing my head in. And, on that note, I left. I still think there's something in it, though. There's no point just going for looks, as they change as you get older. You lose them, and your body doesn't look good forever either. I'm sure I've heard that we're constantly shedding skin and it is totally replaced every seven years. So every seven years you're a different person. That's why people get the seven-year itch and stop getting on with their partner – it's because they're a different person.

