



SWIPE RIGHT, STAGE LEFT



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Prologue — Prelude to Performance

Before anyone can fall for you, six photographs and a short biography must agree on who you are.

The photographs suggest you're frequently outdoors. The biography establishes that you don't take yourself too seriously, a claim now in its fourth revision. A friend has advised removing "*fluent in sarcasm*." You're reluctant to lose a language.

You want someone to like you for yourself. First, you need to establish which parts of yourself are likely to get a response. The evening spent selecting evidence of your spontaneity runs past midnight.

At last, the profile is ready: relaxed, engaging, open to whatever happens. You check how it's performing before brushing your teeth.

Act I — The Profile Masquerade

The hiking photograph was taken three years ago, on a walk you complained about throughout. It remains the strongest evidence of your adventurous nature. Beside it goes the dog. The dog belongs to your sister, but the affection was real.

A group photograph establishes that other people tolerate you. Crop carefully: one of them is more attractive, and another is your ex. Both have already contributed enough.

The biography requires greater discretion. You enjoy food, travel, and laughter. This distinguishes you from nobody, but admitting what occupies most of your evenings would involve mentioning the couch.

You're looking for someone who can challenge you. Someone who disagrees with your account of the breakup is unlikely to qualify. "*Ask me anything,*" you add, beneath a list of subjects on which the answer must already be correct.

Review the finished profile. Nothing in it is quite a lie. Each detail has simply been relieved of the circumstances that would make it informative. Somewhere, a stranger is doing the same. You hope they're being honest.

Act II — Selection as Destiny

You've asked to meet someone unexpected. The filters should help prevent that. Set the age range, the distance, the height. You're open-minded within a 12-mile radius. A person 13 miles away would need to offer something exceptional, such as parking.

The profiles arrive. Too earnest. Too pleased with himself. Apparently lives on a mountain. You dismiss someone for saying they enjoy laughter, having used the same word yourself. In your case, it conveyed warmth.

Then a match. For a moment, mutual approval feels like evidence of compatibility. You both liked the photographs. The rest can presumably be established over drinks.

You inspect the profile again, now looking for reasons the match makes sense. A shared taste in music becomes promising. An interest in cooking suggests a future dinner you've already begun furnishing.

They haven't said hello. While you wait, you continue browsing. It would be foolish to invest too much in a stranger. Someone more attractive appears. You revise your position on distance.

Act III — The Scripted Serenade

The opening message should sound like something you'd say, provided you were considerably better at saying things. *"Hi"* seems insufficient. A compliment risks sounding generic. A question about the hiking photograph could commit you to discussing hiking.

You consult a friend, then an AI assistant. Between them, they produce a playful observation you don't quite understand. You send it because it sounds confident. The reply is encouraging. You return for help. Soon, two people are enjoying a conversation neither would be equipped to continue without a charger.

Timing requires equal care. You've seen the message, but answering immediately might suggest you were waiting. You were waiting. That's

precisely what must be concealed. After a suitable interval, you send *"Sorry, hectic day!"* from the couch.

By Thursday, you've established an easy rapport through extensive consultation. They suggest meeting for a drink. You agree, then reread the conversation to find out who you'll need to be.

Act IV – The Great Unmasking

Your date arrives looking enough like the photographs to make disappointment difficult to justify. They smile. You smile. Both of you have used your strongest opening material already.

Without time to revise, conversation becomes less impressive. A story wanders. A joke needs explaining. You discover that your date says *"absolutely"* when unsure what else to say. By the appetizers, they've agreed emphatically with the weather, your parking difficulties, and a question about siblings.

You decide they lack the wit you'd enjoyed in their messages. Your own contribution has consisted largely of asking whether they've been here before.

They mention a difficult week at work. It's a reasonable thing to discuss over dinner, though it hadn't appeared in the preview. You begin to suspect they're less carefree than advertised.

When they ask about your hiking photograph, you say you haven't had much time lately. *"Absolutely,"* they say. A silence follows. You could ask about something they've mentioned. Instead, you assess whether conversation should require this much effort. Your phone lights up beside the plate. For the first time all evening, you know exactly what to do.

Epilogue — The Exit Swipe

Your date asks whether you'd like another drink. You mention an early morning. They signal for the check. You open the app beneath the table.

A new profile catches your attention. Funny. Adventurous. Doesn't take life too seriously. You can already imagine how much easier the conversation would be.

"We should do this again," your date says. *"Definitely."* No one expects a straight answer.



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