

I've created a secret identity for online dating

Katie's ready to start looking for love again, but she's going undercover

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PHOTO CREDIT: Jooney Woodward

I decide I need a fake name for dating. Martin thinks this is ridiculous. 'You're not Madonna,' he says.

Still, I want a fake name, not because I am famous, but because I want to be anonymous. When I started exposing my private life in this very column, it didn't occur to me what I'd do if I met someone on a dating website who googled me, revealing my terrible recent personal CV. Everything I'd done this past year, including – but not limited to – leaving my fiancé, having a breakdown at Land's End, putting on two stone and accidentally becoming celibate for a year (the last of which might be the most embarrassing).

I don't know how Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City* would manage social media – perhaps in the comeback we'll find out. Samantha would have relished it. But I decide a fake name will level the playing field. And a fake phone number to go with it.

I go to Wells, a pretty cathedral town which, when I was young, I considered a place for Old People. Now I am 40, I find it charming, with gently beautiful architecture. A stream runs down a high street populated by grey hair and choristers from the Cathedral School. In the EE shop I am greeted by an angel-faced teenager. 'I need an anonymous mobile phone that isn't linked to my real identity in any way,' I tell him. He looks concerned and calls the manager.

I christen my new phone 'The Boy Phone'. 'The Sex Phone,' Martin says, sniggering when it vibrates.

On Tinder, I give myself a new name. 'You're going to look mad when you have to tell the person you're seeing you've lied about your name,' says Martin. I wish that was all I worried about revealing.

With my new secret identity, I start making dates. In Somerset, the dating scene is richer than Cornwall. Fewer farmers, more hippies writing 'No Tories' on their profiles. I chat to an art dealer in Bath, a carpenter in Langford, a plasterer in Salisbury and a leftie activist in Bristol, on a swipe-happy tour of Somerset and its neighbouring counties. One man I match with turns me down immediately: 'I don't want a girlfriend more than 30 minutes away.' I'm glad for my pseudonym as I swipe past my ex (divorced), my friend's older brother (bald) and a teacher from my old school.

On a sunny day I drive to Weston-super-Mare for a date with an accountant. We share chips sitting on the mud-sand beach as he talks about introducing me to his mum. In Bristol, I go on a dog walk with a teacher and have coffee with a Turkish economics professor, who talks at me for hours about Turkish economics (they're doomed).

As it happens, I never have to worry about any dates asking my real name because the men I meet don't ask me very much at all about myself. They are content spending most of our dates talking about themselves, and don't seem especially interested in me – definitely not enough to establish my job or ask what my full name is. As it happens, this suits me.

Then I meet a very, very, very tall man who is funny. Almost as funny as me. He makes me laugh, which is all I am looking for in a relationship. Everything else I can do myself, except perhaps plastering.

We talk about cars, and politics, and stand-up comedy, and his work. Then, several dates later, he texts asking my full name. I tell him. An hour later he texts back: 'So, you haven't had sex for a year.'

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