

Girlfriend

by Saskia van der Linden

If Martin Cooper hadn't invented the mobile phone, Kate would have. And if he or she hadn't invented it, she'd now feel as if something were missing in her life. But of course, she wouldn't know what.

As a rule, she calls me whenever she's waiting for her train or bus. 'Hiya... How's life-' she starts off sweetly. Even though I should know better by now, I can only respond in the same old way. I'll say: 'Hi Kate!'. Next, I'll try to tell her about the day that's passed, to analyse all events and people involved and to present them in a way that'll keep Kate interested. But most of the time all I get to say is: 'Hi Kate!' For then she shouts: 'Sorry, sweetie, my train's coming!'. And she's off once again. I keep falling into the same old trap every time she calls.

Sometimes I try to evaluate our friendship. Then I wonder if I should keep my emotions as clean as my house and throw Kate out with the old newspapers. But often after I've cursed Kate and mobile telephony in one breath, she'll come up with something so sweet that she's secured her honorary place among my friends for the next millennium or two.

It happened again a couple of weeks back, after I'd just completed my novel. I'd spent the past two years working on it outside office hours. 'How nice for you!' was the general response from my friends on both sides of the North Sea. Kate was the only one who asked if I could send her a copy by email. She even started reading it! That evening she sent me a text message to say: 'I'm now on page 53'. She went on to write that she just couldn't put the book down. My vanity wasn't strong enough to stand up against such a compliment. A couple of hours later, Kate emailed me to say that she was 'head over heels in love with the leading man'.

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The next day I read on my display that she'd finished reading the novel in two nights. A funny card followed (in Kate's world the equivalent to a message in a bottle), addressed to 'the new J.K. Rowling'. What a fantastic friend she was! I had to cherish such a person, I thought. The old newspapers had to go, but Kate could stay.

Some weeks later we were on the phone again. She was describing a situation at work and I laughed that her colleague was a dead ringer for Ross 'The Boss'. 'Who's he-' Kate asked absent-mindedly. 'One of the characters in my book,' I said with an effort. 'I don't remember that name,' she replied confidently. 'Not to worry. He's only mentioned around thirty times,' I mumbled incoherently into the receiver. 'Oops, gotta go,' Kate suddenly yelled. 'There's my bus!'

