

Jambon

Jacques78 is at it again. Mister-know-it-all. Henri usually lets it slide but this time it's a bit too much. Excuse me, he pounds on his keyboard, but you really can't build a portcullis out of wooden twigs. I mean you can try, while I sit back and laugh. It will break the first or second time you try to haul it up. His comment receives a couple of thumbs-up. Joel54 adds that his best attempt at building a portcullis ended up with him sawing the cat's transport box's door to the right dimensions. Jacques78 snaps, why didn't you build a cat-sized castle then? That wouldn't be the most ludicrous thing you've ever done. And, might I add, a portcullis on a model castle is not meant to be *hailed*. You may have enough time on your hands to make every single detail work like the real thing, but I am afraid I cannot say the same.

Henri imagines Jacques78 mocking them from the living-room of a gigantic mansion, a 2000-euros computer on his lap and a beautiful blonde woman sitting next to him on the leather sofa, running her delicate fingers through his leonine white mane. He imagines that Jacques78 has a fireplace, and a fluffy cat or a patient dog. He is drinking Château-Latour or Château-Morgon, what difference does it make. Or maybe smoked whisky, in one of these incredibly expensive glasses he saw once in a glass-maker's workshop, paired with a Cuban cigar that smells of earth and leather. No wonder he builds model castles "for decorative purposes". One for each room, probably. Why there must always be a snobbish twat to ruin the fun for the rest of the gang is beyond him. In his ten years on castle-lovers forums, it's always been like that. It's all sound advice and good fun until someone comes along to make you feel like a bunch of good-for-nothing school-boys.

Henri's eyes are tired and dry. He blinks several times, rubs them with the chubbiest part of his palm and stares for a while in the space just above his computer screen. He's

forgotten to turn his desk lamp on and the room is bathed in a blue twilight that is giving him a headache. He's also forgotten to eat dinner, and to change. He looks down on the old T-shirt he has been wearing for at least three days; the food stains have now dried and are encrusted in the fabric. Henri gets out of his chair with a groan, stumbles to the kitchen and finds in the fridge a chicken-pasta ready-made dish that he pops into the microwave oven for three minutes. The room fills with the smell of creamy mushroom sauce, and he shakes off the idea that it's what puke also smells like. He eats the chicken and pasta standing in the kitchen, some parts are still cold and some are so hot he burns his palate and feels the skin peeling off inside his mouth. He chugs down a glass of water, opens a lukewarm beer.

Time to call René. He always says the same thing and that comforts him more than anything. René you old bastard! How are you? And the missus? You have time for a little job this week? It's my best work so far, I swear you'll get a kick out of it. René's eyes are not so good anymore, and his hand not so steady, but he's still the best damn model painter Henri's ever worked with. That's because he does it with love. You can tell right away. Nothing like these amateurs who smudge every single detail in cheap paint they buy from the supermarket — the supermarket! — and try to pass the whole thing off as true craftsmanship. But if there are idiots out there who are ready to pay for such a lousy job, my word, let them have it. Of course Henri wouldn't know for sure if René really is the best. To him most colours are one or another shade of grey, but that sits well with the fact that medieval castles are grey anyway. Anne used to describe them to him when they went on tours in the French countryside. Grey ramparts, grey machicolations, grey crenels, black portcullis, arrow slits like menacing black eyes, ditches full of grey murky water. What she could not tell him was what colour the costumes of the archers and the standards and pennants were supposed to be, because she did not know enough about history. At some

point she got tired of the castles and said she was going somewhere more colourful. That was before he could Google all of that. Now he knows that in heraldry “gules” means red and that Richard Lionheart introduced the blazon with three golden lions at the start of the 12th century; he also knows that France’s own blazon was royal blue and studded with golden fleur-de-lis.

Henri lets himself fall onto his busted old couch. He finds René’s number in his phone and calls him up. He lets it ring until the answering machine politely asks him to leave a message. He hangs up and tries again. Still no René, just the nice voice of the voicemail lady who must also be blonde and have long, slender hands — but Henri doesn’t have any hair anymore for her to run her fingers through. Growing old is a bitch. Henri looks down on his belly and strokes its round shape, always so comforting, always there for him. If there’s anyone in this world who will never leave him to go somewhere more colourful it’s his belly bro. Henri sighs. Well, Jambon, René is not picking up. That’s very unlike him. What do you suggest we do? Henri grabs his big fat belly and squeezes it between his thumbs and forefingers until his belly-button is a mouth and his bulges are slanting eyes with no beginning and no end. He moves his thumbs up and down and his belly replies in a higher-pitched voice, matching the movement of his fingers:

Well I don’t know, Henri, maybe he’s gone where the king goes alone?

Ha, you must be right, Jambon! That outta take time. That old carcass is a least a hundred years old.

Ho! Ho! Ho!, goes Jambon, imitating Santa’s laugh to perfection.

Henri lets go of his belly and sighs. I’ll try again in a minute. He contemplates replying to Jacques78, let his blood boil a little bit. Sometimes he enjoys the rush of energy that goes with a good old-fashioned Internet fight. His cell phone chimes. It takes him a little

while to locate the origin of the sound, his tired eyes scouting the screen until finally he sees the red “1” on the MakeFriends app. Some woman named Marion just sent him a message. *Sorry, I don't think this is going to work out. I wish you a nice life!* and a winky face. He starts to type back but his fingers are too big and painfully slow, they hit three keys at a time, *Wgy ho so soon dera Mairon?* He groans, gets up from the sofa, sits down in front of his computer and logs onto the app's website. *Why go so soon, dear Marion? We haven't even gotten a chance to chat. Can I tell you a little bit more about me?* She's still online. *Not interested, sorry, winky face. Well it's a shame, you seemed like a perfectly nice young lady; I guess I shouldn't have judged the book by its cover. Maybe don't put up a profile on this site if you don't want to make friends?* Ha, she's hooked, she replies instantly. *I am here to meet people, I'm just not interested in you. Don't get all passive-aggressive on me.*

Henri cracks his knuckles and dives in head first. *I am just wondering, dear Marion, how you can know that it's "not going to work out" when we have never even talked. You don't know me, I don't know you, maybe give us a chance to be friends?* She writes back, *I don't have to justify myself to you. Learn to take a blow, it'll prove useful on the Internet, trust me.* He replies *Sorry I snapped. I just had this impression that we could really hit it off and I was disappointed.* She sees the message. He waits for her reply. One minute, two minutes. He sends a winky face. One minute, two minutes. His cell phone rings, it's René, he sends him to voicemail. He types in a question mark. One minute, two minutes. *Well that's not very nice, Marion. Can't we talk like two reasonable adults?* He picks up his phone and goes to the kitchen to fetch another beer. The phone chimes. She wrote *Please stop harassing me or I'll block you.* He types *Wow ww wow, dont get on yr high horses, I dn't mean to harsas you, I just want to be friends. I would love to I eat you out for dinner sometime.* She's apparently found the capslock key. *OMFG WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY??? WHAT KIND OF A PERVERT ARE*

YOU? I TELL YOU I DON'T WANT TO BE FRIENDS, YOU DON'T RESPECT MY CHOICE AND THEN YOU GO AND SAY SLEAZY DISGUSTING STUFF TO ME? SEXIST PRICK!!! It takes Henri a few seconds to understand what happened. *Oh no oh no oh no, so sorry, I meant TAKE you out, I'm so sorry, oh no oh no,* he frenetically tries typing apologies but he can't anymore. She's blocked him. What kind of a bitch does that? Leave without giving him a chance to explain himself? Assuming that because he is a man he must only have filthy thoughts when he talks to a, by the way, not-so-attractive woman? He wishes he could send an avalanche of poop emojis for good measure (Joel54 taught him how to make them just last week).

Henri walks angrily, making uncomfortable twists and turns in his cramped living-room. He really feels like punching something, or someone. Jambon is back.

Well, Jambon, what a bitch, huh? Are all women like this?

I don't know, Henri, do you remember the last time one of them was nice to you?

Well, there was the lady at the bakery who smiled at me and bade me a good day, but that doesn't count, does it?

No Henri, it does not count. Do you know how many times they've called you a loser or a jerk or a pathetic old dude or a good-for-nothing fatso? Do you?

No, Jambon, I haven't counted, but don't get all mad at me. I'm not the bitch here.

Well you certainly are the whiny loser who has to hide behind his computer screen and cannot get ONE woman to talk to him for more than two minutes. When are you going to man up, Henri? When are you going to stop letting them walk all over you?

Boy, Jambon is out of control. Jambon leads Henri back to the chair and the computer. He makes him look for tutorials on how to set a YouTube channel. He makes him choose the name BADASS_JAMBON. He makes him turn on the webcam. He makes him adjust the

screen so that only his belly is visible, with its bellybutton-mouth and its slanting bulge-eyes. Jambon is on the warpath. Henri's hands grab his belly and start moving.

Losers of the world, unite! Fat-heads, book nerds, castle-loving geeks, 50-year-old virgins, helplessly shy motherfuckers, good-for-nothing warriors, rise! The day has come to say “no more” to the self-entitled bitches who feel like they can belittle us and walk all over us because they've been given a set of saggy boobs and a slimy vagina. “No more” to these sorry excuses of human beings who keep DEMANDING that we respect them and treat us like we're no better than the dog poop under their shoe. It ends now. Whenever one of them insults you, mocks you, blocks you, humiliates you, speak up! Write a blog post, make a video, go on a forum, share as much information on her as you can gather, so that they know that they can no longer do these things to us without punishment. Marion, this one's for you. Stupid little bitch who shares selfies and pictures of her dog and her girlfriends from her Instagram account and her brain-dead tweets on her MakeFriends profile. Time to pay, slut! See what the “sexist pricks” of the world are capable of! Personal information of Marion the good-for-nothing cunt in the description below. Have fun, guys!

Jambon takes off. Henri sits on his chair, dazed, exhausted. He has no idea how he managed to publish the video and then share it on a reddit page. He's never been there before. Someone has already given him Gold, whatever that means. Comments start pouring in so fast he doesn't have the time to read all of them.

Jambon you're the best, you're fucking hilarious man! says MightyPadawan.

Doormats of the world, unite! rejoices AlphaMale666.

Fucking cunt outta be killed, you did right my friend. I'm telling you though, it's high time you beta bitches learned how to stand up for yourselves: meninist01 does not mince words.

Welcome to the other side dude, your blue pill days are over! acclaims fuckoneitis.

Henri doesn't understand half of what they say. He's confused, he's tired, the lights are still not on in the living-room and a throbbing pain bursts in his head. Dizzy and sweaty, he slams his computer shut, gets up and stumbles towards his couch, where he collapses and falls asleep instantly.

Henri wakes up in the dark living-room, dimly lit by the yellowish lamppost outside his window. It takes him a while to recognise the objects around him, the menacing armchair like a beast about to jump at his throat, the curtains flowing as if they were the home of a thousand bats, the computer screen with its bleeping blue light like that of a UFO coming to abduct him. Henri's phone vibrates furiously on the floor. It's three in the morning. He's received about a dozen messages from René and twice as many calls. He rubs his eyes with the chubbiest part of his palm and remembers that the computer light has made him think of something. He hauls himself up on his feet, goes to the desk and switches the computer back on.

It all jumps at his face like an army of deranged children. On the reddit page that he's left open there are now thousands of comments and images. Jambon's hairy, weird-looking face is on countless pictures barred with aggressive white lettering. SEXIST PRICKS FTW. HIDE YO' KIDS, HIDE YO' WIFE, THE TALKING BELLY IS COMING TO RAPE YOU! Jambon wears a photoshopped crown on a picture captioned BADASS JAMBON KING OF THE WORLD. Jambon stars in a video that makes it sound like he's singing a furious and ridiculous anthem, with shrieking electronic music in the background. Jambon has inspired dozens of other dudes to share videos of their own angry bellies threatening to rape and kill the women who have broken their pride. Jambon has become an actual warlord.

Henri's heart races and pounds in his chest. His migraine is back, he feels nauseous and anxious and excited at the same time. He wonders what the guys on the castle-lovers forum would think, if they knew. He wonders if Jacques78 would respect him now, bow before him and avoid pissing him off. His phone rings, it's René again. Henri lets him go to voicemail. Jambon gurgles with contentment.