



# HADJAR BENMILOUD

## Überpuber

These days every adolescent has an opinion, rights, an iPod, a sexual relationship, traumas, talents, a dealer and a criminal record. You get what you want whenever you want it. This goes especially for überpuber Hadjar Benmiloud. Shameless, gutsy and without being in the least politically correct, she shouts her arrogant opinions at all and sundry. She attracts praise and threats. She certainly provokes a great deal of discussion.

**Hadjar Benmiloud** (1989) started writing at the age of fifteen for e-zine *Spunk*, with explosive enthusiasm. Her columns were also published by the quality daily *NRC Handelsblad*. *Überpuber* is a selection of the best.

Following the publication of *Überpuber* she was asked to write a bi-weekly column for the free daily *Metro*, which has one of the largest circulations in the Netherlands.

Hadjar Benmiloud lives in Amsterdam and is currently working on a novel.

### Readers' reactions:

'There's no difference between Hadjar's column and the election manifesto of a political party.'

'You are absolutely fabulous!'

'Hadjarlujah!!'

'She may be able to write a few words, but she is definitely the most stupid, weird and hated person in town.'

'Out of my way, Hadjar!'



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## Out of reach

I'm sixteen and a half years old. And you know how it is: there's not much I haven't seen, done, felt, thought, moaned about or puked up. And, worldly wise as I am, I saw the Truth long ago: boys are depressingly simple to fathom.

Like every other girl, I've spent ages doing my head in, analysing their behaviour to death. I used to subject every movement, every sentence and every text message from my targets to intense scrutiny, particularly when things weren't going so well. I liked to discuss my increasingly cock-eyed conclusions with a full jury of girlfriends. That was until I realised that willy-wagglers are happy enough with a warm hole for their lust and a cold beer for their thirst. And all you need to get their attention in the first place is a nicely filled bra. So, as long as I don't have my boobs chopped off, I know I won't have the slightest difficulty attracting any normal boy.

When I received this deep insight, I knew that I had a choice to make: should I just give in and throw myself at a boy like an insignificant lump of meat and end up in an apathetic marriage with him? Or should I keep on looking for a real challenge? With a chance of real love, all-conquering love, fatal love, classic love, battlefield love, incredible-but-true love, love that makes you grin a triumphant smile your whole life long? Decision made. So there's just one thing to do: where do I find a boy who doesn't like me?

Swaying my hips so frantically that it's giving me muscle cramp, I sashay over to the table where the boy is waiting patiently. Until just recently, he seemed so out of

reach. I put our drinks down with a bang. I'm a panther and I can do anything. My prey just sits there, looking tasty. He's like one of those guys in the adverts, the sort of boy whose studied nonchalance and chiselled jaw line has prompted many a stupid slapper to buy some useless product or other. A boy who could have anyone. A boy who could effortlessly double your street cred. A boy I want to lead gently from places where everyone can see us to places where nobody can see us. A boy who never tries his hardest for a girl. In short, a gay boy.

The timing's crucial. Before I can pounce on Prey with a growl, I will have to make a long and careful study of the best method of attack. I've watched National Geographic often enough to know what I have to do. The great bum-wiggling has commenced.

An unintentionally chaotic clinking of glasses, with the drink splashing onto the table, is followed by a moment of silence. Then we both start talking at the same time: 'So,' we say in unison.

Yes, that's right, so... I'm sitting here with my new best friend Sophie's big brother. Prey has been the direct object of all of my moist fantasies for what must be a year now, so you can imagine how happy I was when I found out that he had a sister of my own age. But winning her over was no easy task. Particularly when she already knew my name from the steamy text messages on her ex Damien's mobile. But by telling her about how Damien had broken my heart too (and keeping quiet about the fact that we still have regular nocturnal encounters), I got there. Girls are so stupid. Once I'd infiltrated her domestic territory, all of the lies turned out to have been worth it. Prey was instantly crazy about me.

'What's your favourite colour?' I ask him, all nice and spontaneous. In my experience, airhead questions like that always work well with boys. They think stupidity's sexy – it's all to do with the theory of evolution or something like that. Usually they start laughing and say that I'm 'sooo sweet' and give me an affectionate pinch on the cheek – or, to be honest, my bum. Prey doesn't do that, but then he's gay. He seems to be considering it very deeply, as though a lot depends on his answer, and then he says, very seriously: 'Bordeaux.' Which I decide to see as a proper heterosexual answer. If he'd said 'pink', it would have been a lost cause.

I fire more questions at him, as though it's an interview. Once I've found out all about his 'favourite' everything, and have answered the questions myself with my carefully prepared responses, I decide that it's time to go into greater depth. 'Okay then, what's... the first time you fell in love?' I arch one eyebrow, which I think makes me look uncompromising, self-confident and most alluring. There's quite a lot riding on this answer. In my opinion, there are the real gays, who thought getting changed for gym was the highpoint of the week even way back in primary school, and then there are the trauma gays, who have suffered serious dents to their ego because of some bitch or other. If Prey belongs to the second group, I will do everything in my power to rectify his inclinations. And you know I mean absolutely everything.

It was a girl. I'm on top of the world. I'm dealing with a macho gay who – sweet Jesus, let it be true! – doesn't even like shopping. The little darling still has absolutely no clue. Give me just a couple of hours and this boy will be straight, I purr to myself.

When the opening bars of my favourite song of all time start playing in the background, I become aware of the outside world again after what seems like hours

in a whirl of excitement. I think that I lost my hunting instinct somewhere deep in his green eyes. Prey and I are sitting together, on a natural high, taking a crazy trip from one wonderful cliché to another, and we couldn't care less. We're not quite holding hands yet, but we're drowning in each other's eyes so frequently that I'm sure something's going to happen soon. I listen to the music and analyse the situation. Either the alcohol is starting to win its illegal race through my veins against the white and red blood cells, or I'm finally feeling something like being in love. Maybe even actual love itself. And, to be honest, a bit of lust as well.

Without any embarrassment, I eye him up, from top to midriff. He's relaxed and he's clearly having a good time, slumped in his chair, just staring at the inside of his eyelids. I don't mind his eyes being closed. Perhaps he's simply blinded by my beauty. I'm sure he feels the same: there's a smile playing on his perfectly formed lips.

Very gently, I run my nails over his hand. This is what I've been waiting for. Finally, all the misery in the world no longer matters, just for a moment. Finally, everything's perfect. And so I know that I really have to say something right now.

I clear my throat and can feel my heart beating in places where it shouldn't be. Quickly. Think of something. Don't be nervous. It doesn't matter what you say. Just as long as it's provocative, witty, sweet, poetic and we can use it in our future marriage vows. So, anything will do...

He beats me to it. 'Don't you think this is the most wonderful song of all time?' he says in a voice that's sultry and still just a teensy bit gay. His fingers play along with the guitar chords. Before long they'll be playing me. We have a song. Smells like teen

spirit. And I know for sure that he knows what I know, feels what I feel, and, together with me, he can feel his entire identity being gently smashed to smithereens. 'Really does smell like teen spirits, eh?' I say, wafting my bottle under his nose. It's a stroke of genius. Prey cracks up.

When he's got his breath back, he suddenly grabs my hand and gives me this incredibly sweet look, deep into my eyes.

'You know, Hadj, I feel really comfortable with you. I really feel as though I can tell you anything, you know? You're such a great girl.'

Struck dumb by his flattery, I just gawp at him. Even though I've rehearsed this very scene so many times.

Prey carries on: 'I've been thinking a lot recently about being gay and that ...'

He says the word without any hesitation, but I still suck down an uneasy gulp.

'I've been having some doubts that I haven't told anyone about. But I think that I've changed, that I've grown up a lot, and that I should follow my heart. And I'd really like to know what you think...'

Too weak to answer properly, I give him an encouraging squint and let him continue. His voice quavering a little, he blurts out, 'I think that I'm ready for us to live together.'

Kapow. Whoosh. Blam blam. Fireworks go off in the bar, people break out into a tap dance and I suddenly have the desire to blast out notes from the very top of the scale. Living together. Oh, why not? We were meant for each other. Our love is sure to go down in history, although I'm not quite sure exactly how as yet.

'Of course, it's completely insane, and I'm far too young, but I know that it's real love.'

My insides are quivering with happiness. Prey continues, 'You've known for a long time, haven't you? And that's why I'm telling you now. I think you're the only one who realised I was in love, even though I'm so good at keeping things hidden!'

Finally, my vocal cords appear to have regained their strength. I lean over to him and whisper in my most understanding tone, 'I could just sense it.'

'Clever girl. But then you and Damien have been close for quite a while, haven't you?' And he gives me a juicy wink, as though my entire history with Damien is merely incidental. But I feel dizzy. He knows everything! And yet... I don't understand. Could it really mean that he's not falling for the act I'm putting on, but is more interested in all the intrigue and scheming that lies behind it? That could mean only one thing. Wow. He actually likes the real me.

'It's a bit soon, but we've already got our eye on a really nice little place. It'd be great if you'd come along to check it out!'

The fireworks are drowned out by an ominous thundering. Pieces of jigsaw puzzle come pelting down, all falling into just the right place, spookily enough. The pink haze lifts and the picture finally becomes clear: Damien. That grubby little perv. I should have realised when he kept wanting to take me from behind. After what seems like an eternity, I can look at Prey's happy face again. I don't give it a slap. I don't consider for a moment playing along with his game and I absolutely refuse to confess the whole story under the pretext of strengthening our connection. No. Instead, I knock back my flat drink, get up, swing my bag over my shoulder and just walk away. 'I don't think so,' I say as a parting shot.

Let them think I'm a woman of mystery.

Look at me

Swaying on my metal stilettos, I haul myself up the endless staircase. The sweat is steaming off my forehead and my heart is beating at an even faster rate than the beats per minute that are battering my eardrums. The place I need to be is on the top floor of this listless building. Babs is celebrating her birthday and she's managed to squeeze more money out of her parents this year than ever before. And she wants her party to demonstrate the meaning of decadence to every teenager within a twenty-kilometre radius. So, of course, she went for the most expensive penthouse in Zutphen, in a historic building without a lift, and as far as I'm concerned that's a very good reason for me to curse her with heartfelt emotion.

When I've finally emerged victorious over the final step on the staircase, I'm confronted with a gorilla in a suit. He stinks of mouldy sweat and just lets out a snarl by way of greeting. Although the guest list is even longer than the death list at Auschwitz, I'm certain that his name's not on it. Babs would never invite such a freakazoid to her party. I'm totally overcome by panic and I race through my options.

I have to make a run for it down the stairs right now or the evening could come to a sticky end. My foot is hovering over the third step down when the thug growls at my retreating back. 'Ticket.' He would appear to be the doorman. I can feel the heat rising in my cheeks and thrust my invitation at him. The double doors swing open.

Party!

The club is packed with people of my age. After scanning the crowd and attaching the necessary labels to everyone there, I walk my sexy walk over to the bar. There

are very few people who score higher on the scale of Cool. I sit on a stool and try to attract the barman's attention with my sulky stare, but it doesn't work. It is pretty busy though.

Ten minutes later, not a trace of my good mood remains. To be honest, this is exactly the kind of party I don't like. I know that as Babs' bosom buddy I should look really happy and I should be bouncing around with joy at the free drink and the DJ, who I chose myself. But I'm not. The thing is: it's her birthday. And the problem with birthday parties is that it's often extra difficult – in this case, maybe even impossible – to be the centre of attention. But this evening I have no other choice than to allow everyone to put me in the 'best friend' pigeonhole.

A little later, the other 'friends' and I do our act like good little girls. Our gang is a bunch of annoying girlies, you know the type, giggly little twats. We're constantly squealing about how fabulous everything is and laughing super-loud at everything, just so everyone knows how much fun we're having. And, of course, we talk about sex at the most inappropriate moments, snog each other when we're dancing on the bar and get boys all hot under the collar (preferably bashful little studenty types), only to reject them mercilessly later on. Yes, that's the kind of girls we are and I'm just not in the mood for it tonight.

I wearily suck at my straw. Something has to happen.

The gang watches in surprise as I grab the birthday girl, who's already rather tipsy, and pull her to her feet. Her assertiveness has been drowned in alcohol, so she follows me in a straight line to the toilets. To my relief, the girly paradise, with its

scented candles, is deserted. 'Whaaa we dooin?' Babs giggles, putting on a whiny voice. 'Come on, I've got your birthday present,' I whisper, tempting her into my cubicle with a shiny parcel.

I firmly lock the door and put the present in her eager hands. A few seconds later, she slides a ring onto her finger, full of awe. This is the ring we've been searching for in musty old shops for years, the kind of ring you can put something in. Ceremoniously, I demonstrate how to open the hidden compartment. 'A stamp?!' she squawks when she sees what's inside. 'Shhh!' I say. 'It's not a stamp, you daft cow. It's LSD. Split it in two, slip it onto our tongues and whoosh! We'll be in Disneyland.' And that's exactly what we do.

Then we make a beeline for the speakers. It's our party. We dance on either side of the DJ, Babs on the right speaker, me on the left. But slowly I realise that no one is looking at me.

I really go for it. My hips are pumping to the beat, my hands are running over my body, and I'm tossing my head around like a wild thing. I'm damn well doing my stinking best. But everyone's looking at her, the birthday girl. Birthday bitch.

I slide down from the speaker, defeated. No one sees me slipping out of the room. I stab my dealer's number into my phone. My nose needs a little self-confidence.

A thumping sensation in my side. Someone tugging at my hair. I'm lying under a pile of aggressive maggots. They're gnawing at my ears, swarming all over my body. And then they suddenly turn into monkeys.

'Evolution...' comes a vague echo in my head. But I don't quite understand why.

They're jostling and jumping. 'Ha ha ha, come and look at this!' and 'Hadjar, wake up!' they're screaming. Suddenly they're sounding kind of panicky. I feel two hairy hands taking hold of my head. 'Oh noooo, Hadjar doesn't feel too good!' the monkey shouts. Smart arse. Through my half-closed eyelids, I see more and more monkeys coming to stand around me. I want them to go away, but they're trying to pick me up. I shake as hard as I can. Maybe then they'll go away. Suddenly I'm rolling around in something warm, something sticky. And the demonic monkeys are roaring with laughter. I blink really hard and realise that the monkeys aren't monkeys at all, but my friends, people from school, from work, my rivals. And the sticky stuff I'm lying in and that's all through my hair is my own puke. And my beautiful skirt is now completely gross.

And everyone's looking at me.

Everyone's looking at me.

I do my best to sound sorry for myself, but inside I'm smiling a gleaming  
Prodent smile.

'Oh no,' I groan, looking up at them. 'Everyone's looking at me...'

## Barking and biting

So, I'm not exactly a champion of human rights.

Actually, when it comes to having a social conscience, I'm about as gifted as a rabid panda. What scientists refer to as 'the superior intelligence of the human race' I just see as superfluous drivel. My motto is: 'Don't babble, just bite.'

Call it autism. Call it misanthropy. I'm just not all that keen on people.

This may sound like crap, but I'm happily married to myself. I'd rather spend this short life perfecting and defending myself than keeping everyone else happy.

Some people function as a social lubricant and they're actually proud of the fact. They're despicable people-pleasers, devoting their lives to remembering people's birthdays and dishing out compliments as required. Why should I? I've got enough on my plate dealing with myself, so why should I have to fathom the ulterior motives and unspoken opinions of other people too? I think it's totally antisocial of those people to expect others to devote any energy to sifting through the workings of their unremarkable brains. It's not my problem if they're not assertive enough to say what's going on with them, is it?

People are often shocked by my direct comments, which aren't always entirely subtle.

Nearly every week I end up in my headmaster's office explaining what I've been shooting off about with my big mouth this time. And I stand there looking down at my feet, with a guilty expression on my face, acting as though his authority actually bothers me. Give me just a couple of years, I think as I'm standing there, and I'll waltz

right past you and your sad little office. All that etiquette, all of that stuff about good manners. Forget it.

There are so many damn fakes out there.

I think that everyone should be like me. And so I'm starting a new religion: Barkology.

What I'm calling for is an honest, open society. A bit like the way we say the Netherlands is, but actually for real this time. No more subtle hints, no polite smiles in the street. Complete freedom of expression, where your comments will not only be free from legal repercussions, but also from any social fallout. We should be able to say honestly what we think and feel without losing any social status. We're ready for it. I'm ready for it.

My first throng of followers will soon see the benefits. The Barkers will have all the time and money in the world at their disposal. They will no longer have to wait hours to receive text messages or fiddle about with the illogical constructions of application letters and flirtatious e-mails. They won't have to spend an evening buying expensive cocktails for a potential one-night stand. They won't ever have to lie awake at night worrying about what subtle, pointless hints they can give people to let them know what's bugging them. They'll know that they can just be direct and anyone who doesn't agree can sod off. The number of Barkers will soon grow and before long Barkology will be accepted as an international philosophy and the population of the whole world will submit to Barkology.

Then, of course, the effects will be seen on a much larger scale. It'll be difficult for a while, but everything serves the higher goal. A lot of jobs will become superfluous

and disappear, or even be banned. Relationship therapists and spokespeople will have to register with the public cleansing department, but the downturn won't last long. The problem of overpopulation will also soon be solved, because the welfare system will collapse without good little taxpayers. All of the sick and old people will die, and that's just as well, because we don't want any weak links in our Barkologist society.

The same applies to all those tiresome, long-winded political debates. If Barkers don't agree about something, they'll massacre each other. And the strongest will win, just as nature intended.

And what will be the outcome of this drastic revolution? Everyone, or least everyone who survives, will be rich and happy. Confrontation and war will be part of the past, because murder will have become far simpler and will no longer have any complicated long-term consequences. That's what I call harmony.

I'm certain to be awarded the Nobel Prize for world peace if I manage to carry out my plan. I think they'll probably abolish the prize afterwards, because there's no one out there who's in the same league as me.

Although this plan is obviously brilliant, I'm sure that a few pesky Christians will try to put a spoke in the works. They'll start going on about the Devil and act as though there are demonic impulses behind my dominion. Which is of course ridiculous, because all I'm after is honesty. If you bark, you should dare to bite. I actually don't like Christians all that much anyway. Perhaps I'll organise a big Jesus festival and infect them all with salmonella. And I'll send invitations to any old people who are still

left as well, because they just stink and whine all the time. Same with poor people, because they stink too.

What I hate most of all though is people who say, 'You know, maybe you just hate yourself.' We'll stick them on a glacier in Antarctica.

It'll be a wonderful world, that's for sure.

And of course I will be the absolute sovereign. Then I can act all mean and antisocial, because I still want attention, of course.

So there we have it, the actual point of my political system.

I've already said that I don't care very much about other people.

So, population of the world, Martians and all other beings, I order you: Revere me, hate me, talk about me, gossip about me, look at me, adore me, envy me, but, above all, pay me a goddamned huge amount of attention. You'd better be sure to keep out of my way though.

I bite.