

Fated To Fall In Love

Adele Geraghty, 62, a writer from New York, never imagined that a misspelled email address would lead to romance

Twelve years ago, I was living outside New York City when I saw a newspaper column asking for local writers to send submissions to an email address.

I sent off my submission and the next day I got a response that would change my life.

'Dear Adele, I'm sorry but this is the third email of this kind I've received in a week and I think someone might be using my address illegally. Could you please tell me how you came by it?'

As it turned out, the newspaper had switched the digits in the email address round by accident.

I wrote back explaining what had happened and the person on the other end – Phil Sidebottom – thought that was so nice, he instant messaged me when he saw I was online. I didn't use chat rooms and I'd never received an instant message from a stranger, so I was dumbfounded when it came up on screen. We ended up chatting for 20 minutes – it felt like talking to somebody I already knew.

Within a month, we were talking for five hours a day and I was constantly thinking about him offline. We rarely missed a chance to chat. Phil's computer broke down once and he ran out in a snowstorm to buy a new one! Several months after our first conversation, he had a heart

attack and as they were wheeling him into intensive care he asked, 'Do you have email?' Then I hurt my back and could barely walk, but my son raised my bed and moved it over to the computer screen so I could type to Phil with one hand.

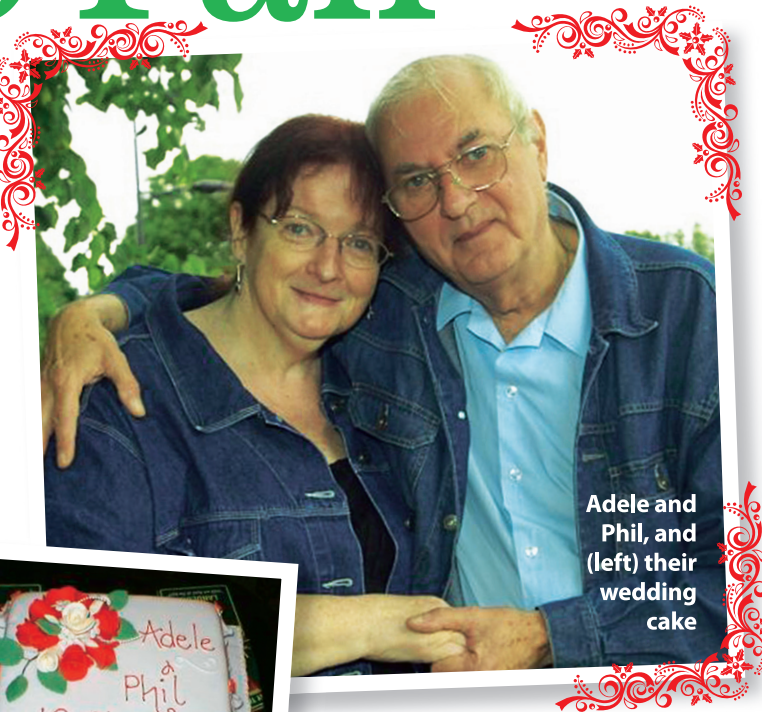
By this point, I wouldn't have cared if he looked like Quasimodo. I knew him from the inside out and that's who I fell in love with.

My family thought I was crazy – my brother's wife warned me that Phil could be an axe murderer, and my eldest son kept insisting:

'It felt like talking to somebody I knew'

'This is a cyber relationship; it's not real!' Phil's children were equally bemused. But we decided we had to meet and, one year to the day after I'd emailed him by accident, I landed in England. I stood in arrivals and Phil spotted me right away. He made his way through the crowd, tapped me on the shoulder and exclaimed, 'You're real!'

We loved each other immediately. Strangely, I hadn't felt nervous on the plane – only worried that he might see me and decide he didn't like me after all. But we both had an instant feeling of total contentedness: we'd worked



Adele and Phil, and (left) their wedding cake

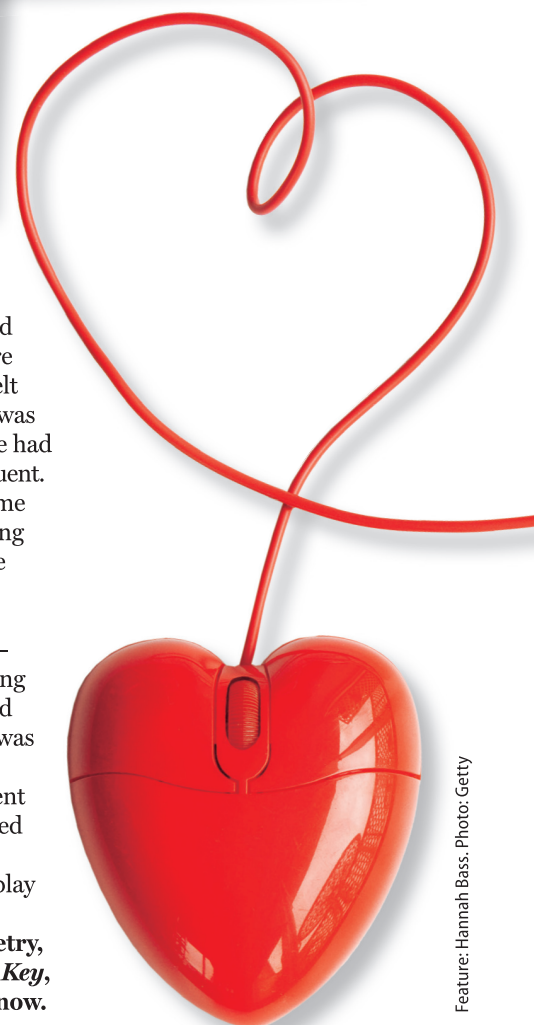


towards this for a year and we weren't disappointed.

I fell in love with the country, too – my family had moved to US from Yorkshire in the 19th century and it felt like coming home. Parting was horrible, and we realised we had to make our visits more frequent. After a few years he found me a house, and I started moving my life over to Sheffield. We married in 2007 and I got British citizenship in 2012.

We really are soul mates – everyone says that us meeting must have been fate. If you'd told me 12 years ago that I was going to end up marrying a British man I met by accident via an email, I'd have laughed my head off and said, 'That would make a great screenplay – go ahead and write it!'

● Adele's collection of poetry, *Skywriting In The Minor Key*, (£9.99, BTS Books) is out now.



Feature: Hannah Bass. Photo: Getty