



You're
amazing
just the way
you are!

So many of us keep a mental list of all the things we "should" be doing better—a running record of all the ways we think we fall short of perfection. But no one's perfect! It's time to throw out that old list and begin a new one. Start tallying your fabulous qualities instead of your "flaws," and you'll find out how many more there are!



Romantic Fiction

Love is in the air

The world looked beautiful to Daphne and Rick as they floated over it in the hot-air balloon . . .

You've got to be kidding," Daphne looked up from her birthday card at Kate. "We're going on a hot-air balloon ride?"

"My best friend's thirtieth birthday has to be commemorated in a big way!" Kate said.

"But you're terrified of heights. You won't even change the bulb in your ceiling light!"

"I know," Kate said. "Joe can't believe I'm doing this, either. But you've always said you wanted to go up in a balloon."

"I knew you were cooking something up. Thank goodness it's not another one of those double dates!" Daphne laughed, hugging her friend.

The big day arrived, clear and calm—perfect ballooning weather. Kate had scheduled the excursion for late afternoon, and Daphne became more and more excited as the day wore on.

At 4 o'clock, they met at Sky's the Limit Balloon Adventures.

Daphne took in his tousled brown hair and dark eyes

Daphne walked to the field behind the office and saw the balloon stretched out on the ground, ready to be inflated. Kate was standing next to the balloon, talking to a man. "Hi there!" Daphne said as she approached.

The man turned to her, and Daphne instantly took in his tousled brown hair and dark eyes. "I'm Rick. And you must be the birthday girl."

"Daphne. I'm so excited about this." She lowered her voice. "How's Kate?"

"A little shaky, but once she gets up there, she'll be fine," he said.

It was impossible to talk over the sound of the generator that was inflating the balloon. As they watched it rise, Daphne stole a few glances at Kate, who was looking very nervous. After a few

minutes, the balloon was fully inflated, silhouetted against the clear blue sky.

"Now, use this step to get into the basket," Rick instructed.

Daphne started toward the basket, then glanced back. Kate was frozen in her spot.

"Daphne . . . I don't think I can do it."

"Oh, Kate, you can. I'll be right there with you!"

"I'm so sorry, but I—I just can't." Kate really wasn't looking well. Daphne was disappointed, but she had to respect Kate's feelings.

Waiting next to the basket, Rick looked at Kate. "No?"

Kate shook her head. "You go ahead. I'll be fine."

"You're sure?" Daphne asked.

"Yes. Have a fabulous time!"

Rick looked at Daphne, and she nodded. She gave Kate a quick hug and stepped into the basket, holding on to Rick's extended

hand. Daphne's pulse quickened—she didn't stop to think whether it was because of the balloon ride or the electricity of Rick's touch.

The basket wobbled slightly as the balloon left the ground, and Daphne looked at Rick. His reassuring smile made her



relax. "This is amazing!" she said as she waved at Kate's diminishing form.

"I never get tired of it." Rick pulled the handle that released a rush of fire up into the balloon. Daphne couldn't help noticing his muscular forearms as she felt the warmth from the flame. "So," Rick was saying, "how do you like your birthday present so far?"

Daphne watched the countryside glide beneath her. "I love it."

"Kate knew you would, even if you ended up going alone."

"What did you say?" Daphne turned to Rick.

The color rose in his face. "I mean, you know—"

"Did Kate know all along she wasn't going?"

"No! I mean, not exactly, although she strongly suspected she wouldn't make it." Daphne noticed that he was cute when he was flustered. He sighed.

"You've got me. I've known Kate for a while. We go to the same gym. She set this up because she wanted us to meet. And she knows you hate fix-ups."

"I can't believe this!"

"Are you mad at her?" Rick asked.

"Yes! I mean, no." Daphne smiled at Rick.

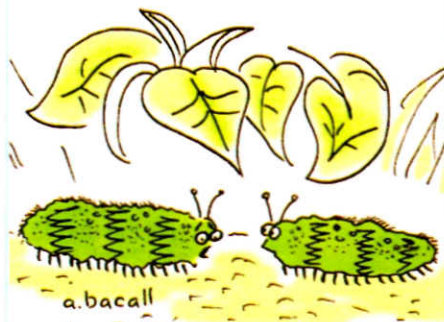
"Not even a little."

"Good." Rick smiled back.

Daphne looked down as she soared over the tree-tops, knowing that eventually she'd have to come back to Earth. But not yet.

—Krista Weidner

Take a happy break!



"My feet are killing me. I have twenty corns and thirty bunions."