

Sex and the...

... single girl

When **Laura Jane MacBeth** went 'exclusive' with her man, she was suddenly in big demand

Intuition. Like buying presents, texting straight back and enjoying salads, it's not something men are generally good at. But every so often, blokes seem to have a sixth sense about dating: they pick up that you're off the market, and suddenly everyone's texting/asking you out/sending flowers. Okay, so no one's actually sending flowers (please send flowers), but still, they couldn't be any more insanely interested than *you* could be less available. It's maddening.

And so it has been since The New Guy and I got together. We'd barely had the chance to explore disgustingly coupley behaviour (PDAs on our commute, gratuitous snogging in restaurants), before a swathe of men registered their interest.

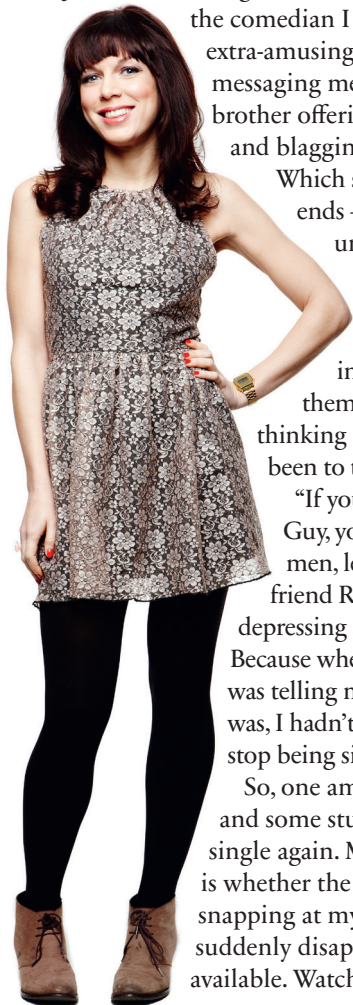
There was the actor/director who, having gone off the radar in June, was inviting me to see his new play (slight swoon); the comedian I met through work sending me extra-amusing texts; the DJ friend-of-a-friend messaging me for a date; my mate's hot brother offering me his lap in lieu of a seat and blagging my number.

Which should be where this column ends – me dusting off these unsuitables and skipping off into the sunset with The New Guy, stopping only to snog periodically en route. But instead I found myself mulling them over, imagining flirty chats and thinking it *had* been a while since I'd been to the theatre. I had a problem.

"If you were really into The New Guy, you wouldn't even notice these men, let alone contemplate a date," my friend Rachel pointed out. And, mildly depressing as it was, I knew she was right. Because when I tuned into *my* intuition, it was telling me that, as nice as The New Guy was, I hadn't met the person I was ready to stop being single for.

So, one amicable phone call and some stuff-swap later, I'm single again. My only worry now is whether the men who've been snapping at my heels will suddenly disappear now I'm available. Watch this space...

PHOTOGRAPHS ANTONIO PETRONZIO. *NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED



... not so single girl

Jo Usmar's spending Christmas at her boyfriend's mum's. And she's terrified...

Normally all I want for Christmas is to wake up relatively sober in my single bed under my old *Alice In Wonderland* duvet. Every year I put on my fluffy cow slippers and drag my sister downstairs to sit on the floor, stare at presents and pick pine needles out of our bums. My dad will insist we all drink some fizz at 9am while he sings, "It's beginning to look a lot like Present Time," and does a little jolly elf dance. Ah, festive bliss.

This year, however, for the first time ever (we've been together seven years), I'll be spending Christmas at Ben's mum's, as my family are bugging off on holiday separately with their respective partners. They're going to be lying on different beaches around the world, sipping Santa's Sambuca Spritz cocktails, while I'll be... well, I have no idea.

Terrified, I asked friends what they do (or did) for Christmas when in relationships. "I went to my boyfriend's once for Christmas Eve. His dad got drunk and kissed me on the lips. In front of everybody. I never went back," Natalie* announced. "My mum's friend once stripped down to her bra and knickers during charades," Kim* revealed. "My boyfriend guessed *Striptease* and she hugged him, semi-naked. We didn't last long after that."

Christmas is about peace and goodwill. But it's also about weird family traditions, rude old people, sherry-throwing rows and inappropriate charades. I know Ben's close family, but what if his long-lost aunt accuses me of stealing her eggnog? What if I have to sit at the kids' table on a rickety old fold-out deckchair brought in from the shed? What if Ben reverts back to his teenage self, gets an undercut and starts smoking roll-ups? What if they don't watch the *EastEnders* Christmas special!?

I've decided I'm just going to have to throw myself into it. I'll put on my novelty Pat Butcher-style Christmas earrings and banish my inner Grinch. As long as I can take my *Alice In Wonderland* duvet with me, all will be fine. Oh, and my fluffy cow slippers.

