

## Before I was your mother: extract from *Boyfriends We've All Had (and Shouldn't Have)* by Mandy Nolan

I have used men like countries. If my heart was a passport, then the pages have been inked with the names of lovers ranging from the wild to the wondrous to the downright weird. These aren't, however, just a list of hopeless and failed relationships; these are the stamps of the places I have been. From the amazing weekend mystery flights to the holiday in hell. Two months in 'Richard', a nervous yet artistic chap who gave me chlamydia and a love of Marcel Duchamp, a year in 'Frank' who was so nice I wanted to poke out my own eyes with a recycled fork (he was an environmentalist) and one crazy week with junkie 'Gerald' who showed me how to make instant cash by raiding Vinnies bins and selling the confiscated loot at weekend garage sales. I decided early on that it was possibly best not to trust a man who was willing to drop his 6 year old son into an industrial bin for a scavenger hunt.

My love life has been like an audition for *Australia's Got Talent*. There were some candidates that were booed off stage (mainly by my mother), others that had you gasping 'what the hell were you thinking?' and those special few who received standing ovations. From my teenage years until my late twenties, love was only the means to my g-string clad end.

Like most girls I knew, I was in love with being in love. But it wasn't just the passion of fresh romance I was attracted to. I was also in love with falling out of love. I loved pathos as much as I loved eros. I was in love with the idea that while I was in love with someone, I would soon be loving someone else. It was the X factor. If you weren't ex material, then you didn't factor. From my first kiss until well into my thirties, my love life was like a relationship tag team. Just as one chap checked out of Motel Mandy, another bloke would be tethering his trusty steed to my lady gate. I barely had time to brush my teeth and change the sheets. In fact I rarely did.

I have never understood women who complain that they can't find men. Men

are everywhere awaiting consumption. So many of my drop-dead-attractive and desperately single girlfriends constantly moan about the alleged man drought. 'It's so hard to meet a man,' they whinge, 'they're either married, gay or stalkers.' What reductionist bullshit. On behalf of men all over the world I'd like to tell women to stop being so bloody fussy. It's not hard to meet men. There's the bald guy at the servo who picked up your wallet when you dropped it, there's the old friend from school who made contact on Facebook who you used to call 'lady arse' and there's the creepy guy at work who keeps asking you out. It's not hard to meet men. It's just hard to meet rich, handsome, super-intelligent ones with huge cocks. Or as we came to know him in our Cinderella years, Prince Charming...

Prior to my first boyfriend I didn't really have much experience of the unfairer sex. Having no father figure (he died when I was six) and dogging the efforts of any man who attempted to move in on my mother by insisting on a constant supply of chocolate and lemonade, boyfriends were the only opportunity for me to know and understand men. After growing up in a world dominated by women, from wilting co-dependents to fierce matriarchs, men seemed so uncompromisingly simple while at the same time entirely unfathomable. And, as such, were a constant source of fascination. In the mysterious world of men I was as curious as David Attenborough in the Galapagos.

*'Here he is in his natural habitat, the lounge room. The man can spend hours every day just lying here, in his boxer shorts. Watch how he clutches the television remote to his chest! He prides himself on asserting dominance over the channel selection. See how difficult he finds to settle on any one choice? And there he is enjoying his own muskiness, scratching his testicles and sniffing his nails.*

*'To the onlooker he is a man watching football. But in fact he's engaged at a far higher level. Here is homo hominis*

*indulging in his favourite pastime – the pursuit of nothing. See the female in the background with the vacuum cleaner becoming agitated? She, the seeker of all, the champion of everything, becomes enraged at the sight of her mate doing "nothing". She who only understands "everything" will continue to agitate his "nothing" until he does something. Even if it is just putting the bin out. Then he'll crack the shits and go to the pub where he can once again commence his eternal quest for "the "nothing".'*

Men amazed me. They were so easy to manipulate, but surprisingly control resistant. Men smelt different. They thought differently. Their bodies came in all shapes and sizes, some hard and hairy, some smooth and soft, and others pock-marked with the craters of adolescent acne. And to top it off, men were a constant amusement for a girl who liked to laugh – men are not just generally funnier than the average girl, they are just hysterical in the nude. There is nothing funnier than the sight of a nude man running. Were streakers to be introduced to all major public functions, I believe that the community happiness level would triple. It could be the cure for depression...

Love was a surprise... I found the whole thing jolly good sport, and falling in and out of love was the most amazing way to find out about people and, most importantly, myself. I sought love, I now realise, not because I was a diehard romantic desiring union with my soul mate, but because I lusted for knowledge about me. I was amazed at how many different people I could be... Like most women with poor self-esteem and little self-worth I especially loved bad men. It was no surprise: I'm a text book case of the unfathered daughter, forever seeking her daddy. It's so obvious now, it's embarrassing....Perhaps that is why I needed to give so many a spin on the great boyfriend wheel of misfortune...