

The Sydney Morning Herald

Entertainment

# Second-hand girl comes up smelling of roses

April 27, 2014

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Reviewed by Candida Baker

Bitter experience with various lovers over the years prompted Australian comedian Mandy Nolan to put it all down in a women's manual on what to look out for in different types of men.

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Always optimistic: 'It's in our relationships that women learn and grow,' says Mandy Nolan.

## BOYFRIENDS WE'VE ALL HAD (AND SHOULDN'T HAVE)

Mandy Nolan

Finch Publishing, \$24.99

It was the Giorgio perfume that first aroused comedian Mandy Nolan's suspicions about the boyfriend who was always giving her expensive gifts.

"I'm a self-confessed gift slut," she says, "so I didn't want to look too closely, but it did occur to me it didn't smell like it should. It seemed watered down and it hadn't arrived in a box."

But it was the Chanel dress that Mr Cheaty Pants, as he appears in Nolan's book, *Boyfriends We've All Had (and Shouldn't Have)*, gave her a few weeks later that clinched it.

"I wore this gorgeous dress to a party," she says, "when this woman, much the same height and build as me, came up to me and said: 'Beautiful dress. I used to have one just like it', and as she walked off, I could smell the Giorgio perfume."

Nolan returned the dress and walked home in her underwear.

"It was a dramatic way to end the relationship," she says, "but it felt good."

Many years later, we are in the kitchen of the house that Nolan and her third husband, John Stevens, recently built to house their tribe - Nolan's eldest two daughters by her first marriage to Rhett Hutchence (brother of Michael Hutchence), her son, Charlie, by her second marriage, John's daughter, and their daughter, five-year-old Ivy.

Nolan admits that in her wilder, younger years, when she was unwittingly "researching" her future book, Stevens would not have even blipped on her radar.

"He would have been way too normal for me," she says, "but I've realised that to a greater or lesser extent, all women are in love with love, and

it's in our relationships that women learn and grow.

"I've evolved and so has he. In fact, I would say we found each other at a time when we were ready to actually work on the whole concept of relationships and intimacy."

Rather than write about individual men in an accurate and possibly libellous way, Nolan tried to think about the kind of stereotypes women are drawn to, which is how she came to the idea of an adult version of the Mr. Men books.

Nolan's book includes men such as Mr Messy, Mr Can't Commit, Mr Married and Mr New Age for starters. Having lived in the Byron region of NSW for 25 years, she says there have been plenty of the latter. "I could cope with the hemp pants and crystal amulets, but he gets you in the bedroom and there's 400 candles in there, and then he wants to look in your eyes for hours ... and when the sex isn't up to scratch, he says, "You're a lesbian, aren't you?" and I go, "Well, yes I am now."

That is a censored version of the story, which is delivered with Nolan's brazen cheerfulness.

Her optimism and ability to rise above her detractors go back to her early days of comedy at the University of Queensland. "I'd have 500 people heckling me and throwing things at me, and I'd go back to my rooms and say to myself, "Wow, that went really well.' I just seem to have an ability to plough on regardless."

As if performing stand-up, writing and parenting were not enough, she also teaches comedy, paints, has created a humour therapy course for people with dementia, and writes a weekly column for the local paper.

She is also educating her girls so they don't have to do the same amount of "research" she did.

"My daughter said to me the other day, 'I'm not going to marry until I find the right dress,' and I thought, 'Wow ... nothing to do with the man at all.' Now that's a girl who's got her priorities right."

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