

## Slummy mummy Lucy Sweeney

*'I've slept under canvas in Africa,' says Yummy Mummy No 1. 'I know how to rough it. In an NHS waiting room I'll be fine'*

In an unexpected turn of events, Yummy Mummy No 1 offers to accompany me

to a hospital appointment. "Are you sure?" I ask. "Won't you miss Bikram yoga? Or reupholstering class? Or extra-plumping?"

"You make me sound so shallow," she sighs. "You forget I am the queen of the charity-lunch circuit."

"It's a very kind offer," I say. "But I think you'll get bored."

"We can have coffee in Marylebone High Street afterwards, Lucy," she says. "Which end of Harley Street is your appointment?"

"It's an NHS hospital. In North London," I point out. "Not a private clinic. And by the time they see me it will probably be lunchtime. Or teatime. Or even tomorrow."

"Gosh," she says. "I don't think I've been in one of those." She stops and steels herself. "I've done ethical tourism. I've slept under canvas on safari in Africa. I know how to rough it. It will be fine." She pauses for a moment. "And I was at the opening ceremony of the Olympics. All those nurses jumping on beds. Looked jolly good fun."

She meets me outside the hospital at the appointed hour wearing a lurid padded embroidered jacket and a long hippy dress.

"What do you think?" she says, spinning round. "I tried to go for a relaxed look that exudes a calm but controlled bedside manner. Florence Nightingale meets Alice Temperley."

"It looks like you're wearing a duvet that's

taken too many hallucinogenic drugs," I say.

We go into the hospital and head to the blood room. "The blood room?" asks Yummy Mummy No 1 anxiously. The line of people queuing to have blood tests snakes out of the waiting room and round the corner. Some folk have brought their own fold-up beach chairs. We join the end of the line.

"Why is everyone standing around reading last year's copies of *Heat*?" asks Yummy Mummy No 1 as she absorbs the scene.

"Because they've been here since summer 2012," I joke.

"This is worse than Luton Airport," she says. "Can't we do speedy boarding or something?" She pulls a £20 note from her handbag and heads to the front desk.

I see her arguing with a nurse and someone pointing at a sign about being aggressive to staff. She comes back looking shaken.

"What did they say?" I ask.

"I told them that my husband works for Goldman Sachs and that it would be shut down if it treated its clients like this," she says.

"What did she say?" I ask.

"She said there was a shortage of nurses to take blood because of government cuts following the credit crunch, which was in part caused by the greed of people like my husband," she replies. ■



## Things you only know if you're single

Hannah Betts



...that Ritalin may be required.

A certain degree of attention deficit disorder is attendant upon the single existence. Indeed, it may be considered politic. To everything there is a season, and all that. They come, they go, then on, on to the next shiny plaything, the next erotic distraction. Memories are best kept goldfish-short, imaginations fevered, focus necessarily short-lived.

By and large, the optimal means of dealing with heartbreak – such as it is – will be to vault back into the saddle. Meanwhile, endearments such as "darling" and "sweetheart" are less thespian affectations than staunch pragmatism, saving on those testing moments when one really can't reach for a name.

In time said ADD becomes less expedient, more pathological. In one's teens one can blissfully wallow away in a crush for years. In one's twenties, one may allow six weeks to a couple of months. By the mid-thirties, a pash of a working week might be considered an indulgence, while past the yardarm of 40 one is lucky to muster 48 hours.

A fortysomething correspondent writes: "It's not that I no longer get excited about people, it's just that said excitement occurs for ever decreasing periods of time.

"Text is the perfect medium for this, of course. So long as the other party is literate, one might be able to summon interest for a good four hours, a night even; 24 hours tops. And, then – well – one tires. Reality enters into matters. The shine goes off the matter. Idealism is so much easier when it is based entirely on ignorance." ■

## I don't give a monkey's...

Carol Midgley



...for office dining.

Do you eat your lunch slumped at your desk? Then you are disgusting. Not my word, reader, but that of a government minister.

Anna Soubry reckons everyone should stop spraying egg-buttie germs over their rancid keyboards and take a proper lunch break, which only a fifth of employees now do. Well, it's a lovely idea, Minister, but the reason that

most workers are so terrified for their jobs that they have learnt to speed-wee and haven't taken a proper meal break for six years is because the economy's flatter than a flounder. And that's partly the Government's fault. So apportion blame a little closer to home.

Not that she isn't right. It is disgusting. You should be able to use a computer without your fingertips dripping in staphylococcus. But that's not the only downside. Office eating also breeds pettiness. And hostility.

Guess what always tops surveys of colleagues' most annoying habits? 1) Eating smelly food in the office, 2) eating it noisily, and 3) not washing up afterwards. It's a recipe for office meltdown. And that's before we start on food stealing and the territorial politics of

the office fridge. There are websites now dedicated to stopping workmates stealing your packed lunch. How pitiful is that?

Passive-aggressive e-mails and food-labelling often aren't enough, apparently. You must play dirty. Which is why some workers put plastic containers in the fridge and label them "urine" or "stool sample". Or set up secret cameras or buy those fake mouldy sandwich bags that make your panini look like it's covered in green fungus – an own goal because you'll be revolted by your own lunch.

But since people increasingly can't afford to buy lunch out, we can assume that guerilla tactics will only get worse. From here on, thieves, it's wise to assume that all sandwiches in all work fridges have been spat on. ■