

Slummy mummy Lucy Sweeney

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therapist. Somewhere uncomfortable'*

Alpha Mum calls a meeting to discuss plans for the annual school fête to be held at the end of the summer term.

"Might this be a little premature?" I tentatively ask. "I've only just nailed down what we're doing this weekend."

"The key to life is early preparation," says Alpha Mum. She asks us for ideas, using phrases that make us wince such as "out of the box" and "blue sky thinking". We all stare at her blankly.

"I never thought I'd say this, but I just wish we could go with the Roman theme again," sighs Celebrity Dad. "I've still got the Bash the Dormice kit. And my Roman outfit."

"I know you're content with playing the same role over and over again, but we want to be breaking new ground," insists Alpha Mum. "And you won't fit into that costume now."

Celebrity Dad looks hurt.

"Have a couple of enemas the week before and you'll be fine," whispers Yummy Mummy No 1, trying to comfort him.

"Can you please get back on message," barks Alpha Mum. There is a long silence.

"Maybe the early preparation neutralises our creative potential," I say bravely. "Perhaps we could just have a nice chat today and return to the subject in June."

When no one comes up with anything, Alpha Mum proposes we all write the first word or phrase that comes into our head on a piece of paper and then have a brainstorming session.

"I feel as though I'm back at drama school," says Celebrity Dad. "Or with our marriage therapist. Or working with one of those theatre directors who does immersion. Somewhere deeply uncomfortable anyway." He pleads with me to give him ideas.

"My Tent or Yours," I suggest, glancing down at a racing page from the newspaper in front of me. I duly note down Dodging Bullets, because it is a good description of how I feel when I'm with Alpha Mum.

I push the racing page towards Yummy Mummy No 1 and she opts for Countrywide Flame, because it reminds her of her gardener.

We hand our crumpled-up suggestions to Alpha Mum and she writes them on a piece of paper, which she hangs on the back of a chair.

"We're not leaving until we've come up with a firm plan," she warns.

As I stare at the words, a vision of a ranch in Montana comes to me.

"I've got it!" I say. "It should have a cowboy theme with different stalls all related to the Wild West. We can have a shooting range, a lassoing demonstration, a rodeo bull and serve buffalo burgers. And play Bash the Mongoose."

Alpha Mum claps her hands in glee.

"Oh God, Lucy, what have you done?" asks Celebrity Dad. ■



Things you only know if you're single

Hannah
Betts



...that love is (facilitatingly) blind.

News from the People Who Take an Interest in This Sort of Thing – on this occasion, YouGov as commissioned by eHarmony, that bastion of internet dating for the middle-aged and middlebrow. Men issue declarations of love significantly speedier than women: an average of 88 days to the fair sex's 134. Moreover, 39 per cent of chaps proffer "I love you" within the first month of seeing someone; 23 per cent of women. Britain, it would appear, is in the grip of an epidemic of premature ejaculation.

One's first response to such information is: "Who are these mooks?" Second: "Actually, this makes perfect sense." A flood of love is commonly chemically confused with the first flush of sex. Besides, it is terribly easy to love someone one hardly knows. How charming, polite and box-fresh they seem, how refreshingly straightforward their psychologies. Behold, narratives yet to tire, foibles yet to grate, thrills yet unwilted. In glancing intimacy there is so much potential – everything to play for, nothing spent.

And easier, so much easier, to love oneself, reflected back by this paragon. For here is an opportunity to recast oneself as the slightly more captivating star of somewhat more captivating dramas, to wheel out finely tuned witticisms, and to edit where previous material has ceased to work. Damn it, some new individual finding you hot makes you feel hot. Why, you're almost in love with yourself.

Flash-forward six months and a certain ennui may have started to set in. Not so clever now, are we? ■

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

Carol
Midgley



...for bow-tie "chic".

Bow ties, we keep hearing, are "back". You can buy them for £8 in Topman. I've even seen a teenager in a T-shirt bearing the words "Bow ties are cool". Oh dear. Will you tell them, or shall I? Kids, bow ties are not and never will be "cool". Neil Hamilton wears them. That kills it stone-dead, right there. In *EastEnders*, Frank Butcher once turned up on

Pat's doorstep naked save for a Ratners gold chain and a motorised bow tie, which span round to indicate how "excited" he was to see her. These are facts.

It's a free country, obviously, but I often wonder why anyone would choose to wear a dainty bow that looks like it would be at home on a Yorkshire terrier's head. Or round the neck of Coco the Clown. I know it's striking a blow for anti-vulgarianism, and I can't deny that at black-tie dinners (and only there) some men can cut quite a dash. But these men tend to be a) George Clooney or b) James Bond. Most others, no offence, put me in mind of Eighties nightclub bouncers or male strippers. There's nothing like the rueful, defeated expression of middle

managers at a work do, forced against their will to succumb to the dicky.

But while black-tie occasions are excusable, wearing multicoloured ones with ordinary clothes to say "I'm wacky" – no. Just no. Behind your back, people may be calling you a different word beginning with "w".

Am I being unreasonable? I know it's only clothes and, hey, live and let live. So I ask a friend what he thinks of, say, wearing a novelty bow tie with a woolly jumper. "It's the attention-seeking mark of a tool," he says. Right. Another friend says the message she'd get from this look is, "Spank me." Well, I think that concludes today's discussion. Here to help. ■