



HOW DO YOU DIM THESE LIGHTS?

Karen Glaser hoped to find new love but there was one thing about dating again in her forties that filled her with panic...



Separated from my partner of 15 years, the thought of being intimate with another man sent me into a mild

panic. I was 43, had two young children and hadn't been on a date since my late twenties. The wobbly tummy, the badly maintained bikini line, the not-so-perky breasts – how on earth could I ever get undressed in front of someone again?

In fact, in the twilight years of our relationship, I hadn't even disrobed in front of my ex. Not fully, anyway.

And not with any romantic intent: like many women in their middle years, I had stopped fancying the father of my children. My libido split on me, as David Bowie put it in his song *All The Madmen*. We had become more like brother and sister than Mr and Mrs.

And, like many siblings, we fought like cat and dog. But the things we argued about were far from familial, they were the classic gripes of long-haul coupledom: housework, childcare and lolly. In the end, the brawls became so unpleasant, so frequent and so personal that I bit the big bullet and asked for a separation. On 1 May

2010, he left the family home and returned to his native Spain.

In the event it was, thank goodness, a relatively cordial separation – in fact, when my ex comes to see the children, he stays at my place. But it hardly needs stating that I felt (and still feel) very sad for my daughter and son, then aged nine and two. And horribly guilty too. When I had planned a family, this wasn't how I imagined the plot would turn out.

But I also felt tremendous relief. It felt so damn good to be single again. To have no one to argue with. To go to bed on my own. To wake up on my own. To sit on the loo

without – gasp! – having to lower the toilet seat first. All this, plus the alarming thought of baring all in my mid-forties, meant that finding another man was a very faraway project indeed.

So, two years of singledom later, I all but ignored the flirtatious Boltonian who had recently moved into my block of flats.

Well, I say flirtatious. The truth is that when we bumped into each other on the stairs and he would stop to compliment me on an item of clothing, or notice a new haircut, I wasn't entirely sure if my attractive downstairs neighbour was flirting, or just being Northern and friendly. The creeping years and my creeping waistline meant that I didn't really see myself as fanciable any more.

But Steve did. He is a French polisher and when the grand wooden staircase of our Edwardian mansion block needed restoration, he was the obvious man for the job. Which, in turn, led to several weeks of after-hours meetings at my kitchen table, discussing the competing merits of shellac and hard-wax oil on mahogany banisters: fervent conversations that were ostensibly about work, but which were really thinly disguised dates.

“How could I get undressed in front of another man again?”

since having my daughter 11 years before. My long somnolent sexuality was slowly waking up.

Still, deciding what to wear on The Date was not easy. I might have finally shed some baby weight, but head-to-toe Spanx remained a tempting option. But what if things progressed and I had to peel off the body suit? Hmm...

In the end, I opted for a tight, but “slimming” knee-length denim skirt, a floaty black top that covered my meaty upper arms (my biggest body hang-up), but which revealed some of the décolletage I had spotted Steve stealing glances at over the past weeks. Footwear? Nothing less than black stiletto boots. I also paid for some aggressive depilation and painted my toenails blood red. I hadn't looked so girl-about-town since I was one in the late 90s.

The big night itself was a total blast. We went to Soho in London, quaffed icy beers, rode around in a rickshaw and had dinner in a tucked-away Chinese restaurant that Steve knew, where he ordered ginger lobster with scallions and fed it to me with his fingers. We were quite clearly building up to the First Kiss.

It finally happened on a furious main road at 1.30am while we were

waiting for a cab to take us back to north London. Not the most intimate of locations for my first post-relationship snog, but no matter. It was long and emotional and, after being a bachelorette for ages, I had reached a big milestone. I was back in the grown-up world.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

Later that night, I was back in a grown-up bedroom – his. It was one of my ex's bimonthly visits to the UK to see the children, so they were at my place, with their daddy. This was good because we didn't have to talk sotto voce for fear of waking them up. But it was bad in that during the few minutes when Steve popped to the kitchen to fix us a pre-sex tippie, I had to somehow master his bedroom's complicated touch-screen lighting system. I am spectacularly bad at operating anything that could be described as a machine – and, boy, did I need to work out how to dim those overhead lamps above his bed. Or, even better, turn them off completely.

When Steve came back into the room with a couple of Balvenie whiskies, I was still fumbling away.

“It's a bit bright in here,” I said, trying to sound nonchalant, but appearing, I am sure, fretful. “Can you turn a couple of the lights off?”

He did, and it helped me relax, but here's the thing. In the heat of the moment, men don't actually notice your cellulite or road map-veiny thighs. Or, alas, your carefully painted blood-red toenails.

And what he did notice, he was very complimentary about: Steve said lots of flattering things about my 45-year-old body that night. And one year on, he still does – every day.

Next month we are off to Tel Aviv for our first holiday together. It is a seaside town, so I'll be packing a bikini. When I separated from my partner of 15 years, the thought of wearing one would have sent me into a mild panic. **w&h**

THE BIG DATE

And then he asked me on a proper one. We were halfway through the bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape he had brought and I had just asked him to pass the peanuts.

“Only if you come out on a date with me,” came the cheeky riposte.

It was a Wednesday evening, and I set The Date for two weeks that coming Friday; I wanted a good fortnight to intensify the exercise programme I had been on for the three weeks since our nocturnal trysts began. I had already lost half a stone, and was feeling fitter and more attractive than at any time

AND WHAT MEN WORRY ABOUT...

HAIR Lack of... at the front, the crown or just all over their heads.

SIX-PACK Lack of... even though Rolling Stone Keith Richards showed off a pot belly at Glastonbury, it's still not sexy.

PERFORMANCE Lack of... even a prescription for Viagra can't totally dispel the ultimate male anxiety!

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