



THE DEMISE OF DATING

Two writers on what has happened and who's to blame.

she says...

“I can’t remember the last time a man asked me out.”

Briony Smith laments the lack of male initiative.

● “Men are the worst.” The decidedly unladylike decibel level of this last belated word causes a few heads to turn at the boutique hotel where we’re eating brunch. “I never get asked out,” says Milo, pointedly spearing a piece of her chorizo. “Ever.” Another friend, Mina, sits

across the table. I pose the same question to her. “Honestly,” she responds, “I can’t remember the last time I went on a date.”

Sure, this might make sense if the pair were obnoxious and uninteresting. But Milo is a tall, pillow-lipped 25-year-old with a great laugh and impeccable

he says...

“I may still be single—but it’s not for lack of trying.”

Andrew Wallace defends a dying breed of good guys.

● Three important facts to start: I’m a guy, I ask women out, and there are other men just like me. Take my best friends as living proof: Ryan, a 30-year-old economist with a love of rock ‘n’ roll and the best sideburns this side of Memphis, asked Kate out more than a handful of times before she

finally acquiesced and today they’re happily married. Ryder, a former varsity basketball player who never met an abstract idea he didn’t like, met co-worker Rebecca while in his early 20s. She was an older woman, no less, but he got down on one knee in Paris this spring. And ▷

taste in music. Mina is a gorgeous, curvy 24-year-old brunette with pin-up good looks and her own vintage clothing store. In other words, they're babes—men should be approaching them in droves.

As for me, I can't remember the last time a man asked me out either. Like my friends, I always seem to be taking the initiative. I sent Tristan an invite to a Woody Allen flick via Facebook. I emailed Jack for brunch. I saw Charlie and Ethan at group outings until we finally fumbled our way into something resembling a romance.

So here we are again, another Saturday afternoon and another meal spent wondering what's wrong with men today, and apparently we're not alone. A 2010 Prosumer report titled *Gender Shift: Are Women the New Men?* found that women

she says...

“I ALWAYS SEEM TO BE TAKING THE INITIATIVE.”

are significantly more likely to think that men should take the lead in initiating courtship. No real surprise there. But here's the rub: The study also found that men mostly rejected that very same notion.

Back at the breakfast table, we were getting similar intel from the other side. Milo had gone for coffee with her ex, a tech

professional in his mid-30s, and asked him what the deal is. “I don't have to ask girls out because they do all the work,” he told her. “I just wait for them to come to me.” He sounded like, well, a chick. How did it all come to this?

For one, points out Rebecca Rosenblat, a certified psychotherapist, relationship therapist and sex-talk-show host, the dating world has been turned upside down. “Dating has changed so much that we barely hear that word anymore,” she says. “Since the traditional roles and rules have all but vanished, it's much harder for people to know how to act. Now, lots of people can't be bothered to even try.” The scripted scenarios we grew up with—boy meets girl, boy asks girl out—live on only in romcoms and cheesy adverts. In the real world, everybody seems just a wee bit confused—men, in particular.

Part of the problem is that, oftentimes, the millennial man doesn't have a meaningful career, lives at home and generally doesn't have much direction. According to that same Prosumer report, “Women in general are seen as being on an upward trajectory, while men are perceived to be moving in the opposite direction.” Adding insult to injury, movies, TV shows and commercials are filled with

Oliver, a 29-year-old globe-trotter who knows his way around a kitchen, met Lindsay at a Vancouver veggie joint, where they talked into the wee hours. Last month, he asked her to be his wife. In all three cases, the guy made that all-important first move.

As for me, I may still be single, but it's not for lack of trying. At the end of last summer, I took an eight-hour bus trip to Montreal just to have dinner with Charlie, a gorgeous girl with a wicked wit (not to mention an undying love of all things Harry Potter). Six more bus trips, four train rides and a bad bout of mono later, all I have left is a broken heart and a romantic story to tell—but at least I went the distance.

Yet, by many accounts, my friends and I are a dying breed. A rash of literature lamenting the state of the modern man has sprung up in recent years, sparked in large part by American writer Kathleen Parker's suggestion that one of the unintended consequences of new-wave feminism is that men have become purposeless and hopeless in matters pertaining to the opposite sex. According to Parker, passive, emasculated men are the result of a culture that too often embraces the notion that the Y chromosome is to blame for all life's ills. “In fashioning a more female-friendly

world,” she writes, “we have created a culture that is hostile toward males, contemptuous of masculinity and cynical about the delightful differences that make men irresistible.”

Though Parker was actually advocating for reclaiming a more traditional idea of masculinity, the damage had been done.

he says...

“MY FRIENDS AND I ARE A DYING BREED.”

Headlines trumpeted “How feminism destroyed real men” and asked “Where have the good men gone?” Books with titles like *Manning Up*, *Man Down* and *Men to Boys* now populate Indigo's shelves.

But dating and courtship guru Helen Fisher says that all this simply isn't true. A professor of biological anthropology at Rutgers University in New Jersey and the chief scientific adviser to the online dating service Chemistry.com, Fisher calls the man-as-wimp thesis a myth. “We know that men are just as eager to commit as women,” she says. “I don't think men are wimps, and I don't think they're waiting around for women to ask them out. But women don't want to hear that!”

To her point, online dating behemoth Match.com recently polled thousands of North American singles and returned ▷

silly man-boys and neunter buffoons stuck in eternal “pre-adulthood” or perennial uselessness. It all amounts to a modern man who sometimes feels like

she says...

“TEAR YOURSELF AWAY FROM THE GIRL PACK.”

he has nothing to offer the contemporary woman.

Christine Hart, an author and the owner of the website Your Date Coach, says the effect is that men are in a kind of existential crisis when it comes to courtship. “It’s all causing new behaviours, and these insecurities come out in a lot of ways, including not approaching women at all,” she says. And if, as feminist Gloria Steinem famously put it, women are “becoming the men we wanted to marry,” what’s a dude to do?

Think about it: Women aren’t exactly making themselves available these days. We go out in giant girl-powered packs and spend hours trash-talking men. I know that my own posse is guilty as charged. “Women don’t seem to want to be approached,” says Hart. “They don’t need a man, and they make this really clear.”

My friend Mina agrees. “Sometimes you go out telling yourself that you just want to have fun with

your friends,” she admits. “That way, the pressure is off. But if someone approaches you, sometimes you’ll blow him off because it’s less stressful than dealing with him.”

So maybe *we’re* the worst?

Either way, the result is a vicious cycle. The truth is, if we really want

to bring back dating, men are going to need our help. Essentially, says Hart, we have to make it easier for men to ask us out. “You have to learn how to drop the hanky again!” she says, laughing.

For starters, that means tearing ourselves away from the girl pack. A smile and a little eye contact go a long way. No hands on hips or arms crossed either. It sounds easy, but it’s those things that are missing from the dating scene today.

As for me and my girls, we’re trying—and it may even be working. Mina and I went to the bar the other night and, instead of wielding my usual stern “back off” face, I actually smiled. It finally dawned on me that when a guy told me he liked my glasses, it wasn’t an offhand comment to shrug off; it was his “in.” I was learning. At the end of the night, a tanned, tall man even asked me for my number. Maybe there’s hope after all.

some rather surprising results. The data showed no signs that women are taking the lead in the courtship process while the men stand idly by. The survey—the largest of its kind—revealed that 89 percent of female respondents hadn’t asked a guy out in the past calendar year. “Men have been asking women out for four million years,” exclaims Fisher. “In that particular aspect of courtship, the traditional form is well intact. It’s still men who predominantly do the formal asking out.”

I know *I* do. When I ask a girl out, I want her to know I’m into her—a half-hearted approach just won’t do. I know it’s a risk, but I’d rather feel the sting of rejection than suffer through the agony of regret. A gorgeous, confident, intelligent woman deserves a little romance, and part of the initial magic is making the first few dates feel just a bit larger than life.

Of course, that’s not to say that I—like every other guy out there—don’t need all the help I can get. Making that all-important first move is an intimidating prospect every time.

“The woman plays a very important role in the pickup by making herself available: getting dressed up, smiling, asking him dumb questions or doing

whatever she does to let him know that she’s available if he wants to make move,” says Fisher.

The truth is that women are just plain better at their part of the bargain and sometimes—most times—guys need a little push in the right direction. A coy grin at a silly joke or an oh-so-subtle touch can be the small signal we need to ask a girl out. (Yes, I know we screw this bit up all the time.) Whether we want to admit it or not, both sexes have an important role to play in the dating song and dance.

But here’s the catch: My friends and I aren’t the best-looking guys at the bar. We aren’t the most interesting on first

he says...

“I’D RATHER FEEL THE STING OF REJECTION THAN REGRET.”

pass and we definitely won’t approach you with that one witty line you’ve been waiting all your life to hear. We’ll probably flash you a friendly smile, walk up with a confident stride and simply say hello. Really, we’re not much more than a bunch of everyday guys looking for a little love. Give us a shot the next time you meet us—you might just be surprised. □

on the web

How does real-life dating compare to the Hollywood romcom version? Briony and Andrew square off on their favourite fictional dating men at ellecanada.com/June.

