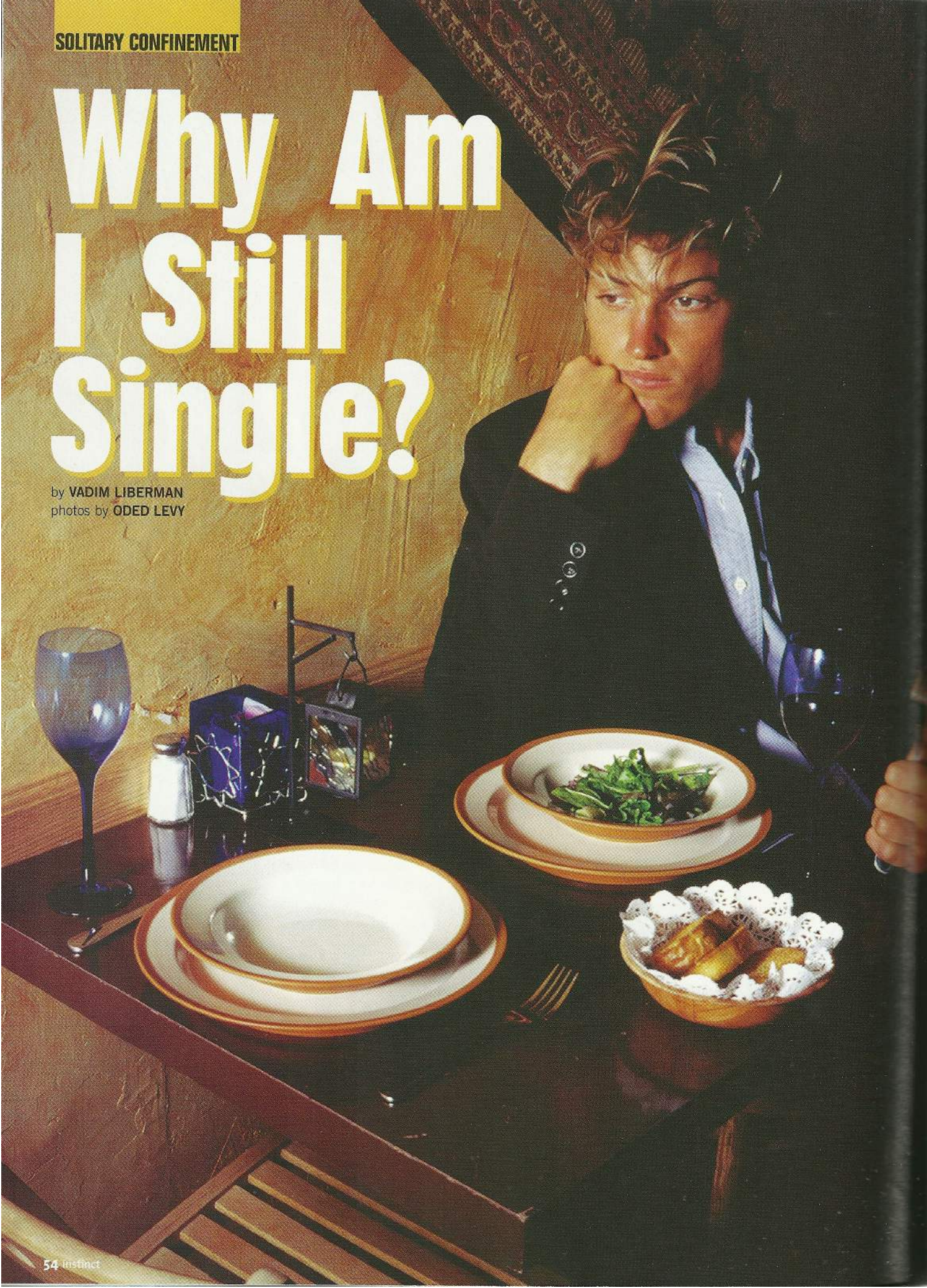


SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Why Am I Still Single?

by VADIM LIBERMAN
photos by ODED LEVY



amn it! All these queers strolling down the street, holding hands, locking lips, flaunting their alternative lifestyle. Enough already! I'm tired of seeing them each time I leave my home. Instead, I want to be one of them. I want a boyfriend.

So why the hell am I still single? Can't the homos I meet see that I'm sexylicious? I'm the nicest person I know (some say I should get out more often), I'm intelligent (I know Prada from Gucci), and I write for *Instinct* (so I can't afford Prada or Gucci). Plus, when a drag queen asked a room full of faggotry if anyone thought I was cute, people applauded. (Okay, so they were my fag hag friends.) Could there be something wrong with me? Am I doomed to remain single forever—until I'm 30? Perhaps you, too, wonder why you have boy friends, but no boyfriend. So I sought psychological help. On behalf of single fags everywhere, I whined to a couple of therapists: "Why don't I—and maybe you—have a boyfriend?"

Ready or Not?

Maybe I don't really want a boyfriend. Maybe I'm not ready to give up a single life filled with many men whom I can date for an hour or two. As Milt Haynes, a New York-based psychotherapist for 25 years, points out, "A relationship requires patience and self-understanding."

Yeah, well, here's what I understand: Searching for a boyfriend requires patience. Nonetheless, Haynes persists, "Guys in their mid-to-late 20s are into having fun. They're not ready to do the hard, painstaking work that a relationship demands."

While he doesn't rule out the possibility of having a relationship at my age (26), he believes that most men in their 20s aren't ready to be monotonous—er, excuse me, *monogamous*. Explains Haynes: "Anthropologically, men are hunters. You need to get some of the promiscuous, hot-blooded stuff out of your system so you can eventually tone it down and start a relationship." Great, so my need for Viagra will signal that I'm ready for a boyfriend.

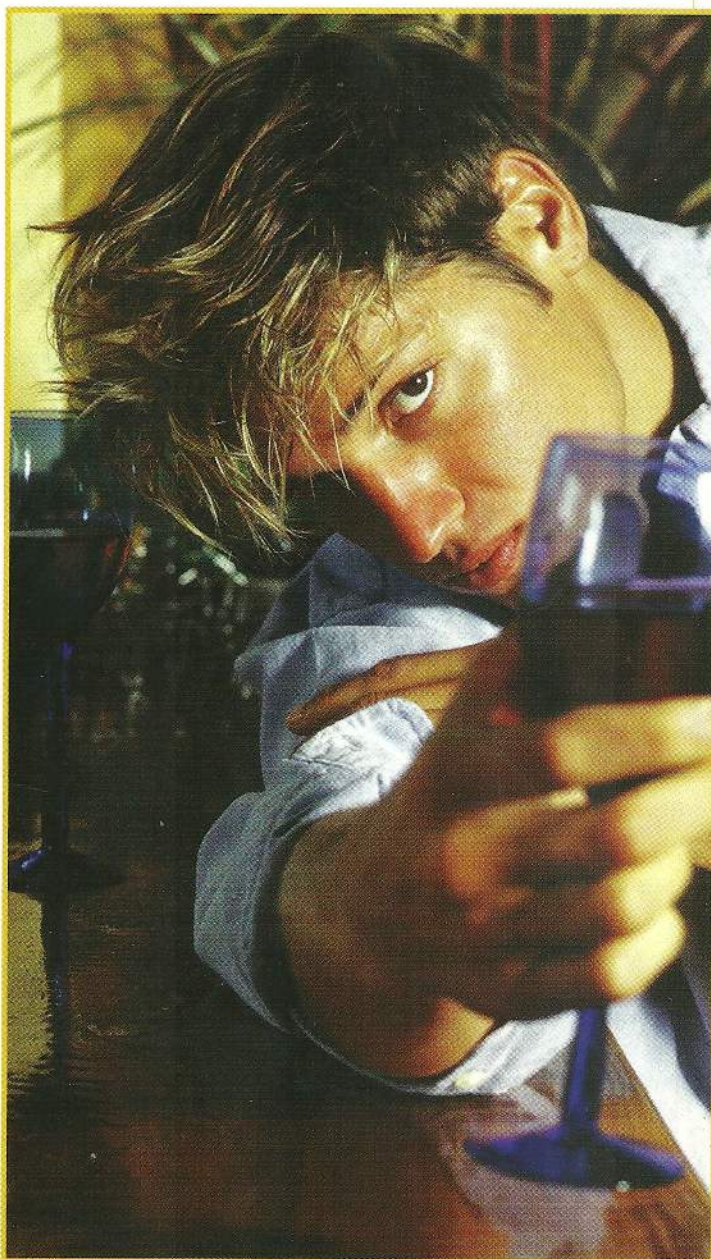
Also, a boyfriend won't solve all your problems. Says Orlando Outland, author of *The Principles: The Gay Man's Guide to Getting (and Keeping) Mr. Right*, "A man cannot fix your life. A man cannot give you a life. A man cannot complete you." Can't he at least hold my hand? "Just because two people think holding hands on the street is wonderful," continues Outland, "does that really give them anything in common?" Yes, neither of them is holding *my* hand. Neither of them is showering me with the little drops of romance—like handholding—that are naturally part of a relationship.

But romance isn't the goal in a relationship—it's the result of one. Haynes proclaims, "A lot of men want romance, candlelight and music playing in the background, not the inevitable fights over sex, other people and getting enough attention. You need the maturity to deal with these issues." Hey, dude, I'm mature!

Just Picking or Just Picky?

I'd like someone hot, funny, smart, hot, nice and he should be hot. Yeah, I know, a million other fags crave the same. To get your dream guy, list specific characteristics you want him to possess. Okay, so add a large cock to my list (all right, still probably not specific enough). Now awake from your dream and concoct a more realistic, less super-ficial list.

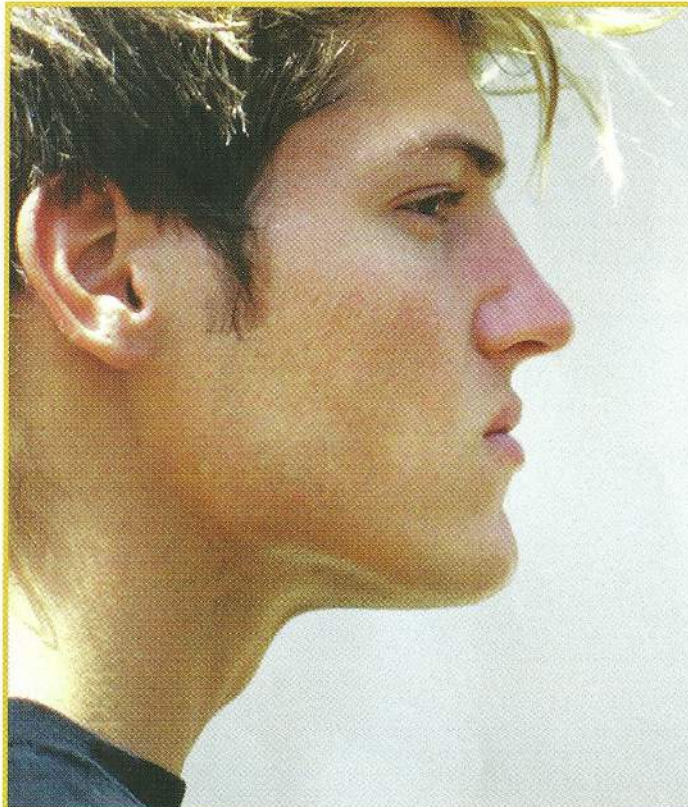
"People have fantasies that are hard to meet," says Bruce Dorval, a New York-based psychologist of seven years. "They set themselves up for failure. Even if you find someone physically ideal, you still need a



match of personalities to make a relationship work." I know you date a personality—not a face, body or penis. But can't I have my cock and eat it too?

Some friends insist that I'm too picky—as if there's a queue of cuties dying to date me or I'm holding out for my favorite porn star. Really, I'll settle for a fluffer. "If one's too picky, one isn't ready for a relationship," explains Haynes. "And being picky is often an excuse used to avoid opening oneself up to another person and possibly getting hurt." Not for me—I love getting spanked.

Furthermore, Outland suggests that you accept 75 percent of what you're looking for in a man. Too often, guys search for what's wrong rather than what's right with someone. Consequently, they're always on the lookout for someone cuter and with bigger biceps. Admittedly, despite knowing that there's an endless menu of men who'll top and topple each other, I'm constantly questing for a savorier stud, partly to impress others (yes, I realize this stems from insecurities). Yet, ironically, I'm not sure I'm secure enough to date a hunk who gets cruised more than the nearest highway. Dorval comments, "Someone who can't handle being with a good-looking guy will also be very critical of himself or other people, so he can't be satisfied in any way." Whatever. >>



Why You? Why Not?

I have brilliantly blue eyes (thanks to contact lenses), I'm a writer (the gays love that), and I hail from the former Soviet Union. Doesn't anyone want to taste a white Russian? Sure, I don't boast a six-figure salary or six-pack abs, but I can down six vodka shots in less than 60 minutes and remain fun and coherent (see, that's because I'm Russian). Consequently, I'd date myself. Would you date yourself? To find out, list your positive qualities. What can you offer physically, mentally, socially? Your ideal mate shouldn't be some other man; he should be you. People are attracted to and by the good qualities they possess.

"The best way to meet Mr. Right," explains Outland, "is to be your own Mr. Right: If you want someone fit, successful, at peace with himself, active, fun-loving and adventurous, then do what it takes to become such a person." But pretending to like sports when the only ball games you play are in bed will ensure that you'll strike out.

"Until you're happy with yourself, you won't have a happy relationship," a supposedly happy friend proclaims about me. Right now, someone who makes me laugh, makes me meals and makes me come would make me happy. "It helps to be happy, but who of us are without considerable unhappiness?" asks Dorval. "It's more about putting yourself forward in a constructive way."

Have Any Change?

Fortunately or unfortunately, nature established a food chain, whereby every man wants to devour one who's bigger, better and hotter. We can't all reign on top of the food chain; some guys will always be bottoms. Furthermore, men usually date within their level and go out with those with bodies similar to their own. Therefore, consider reevaluating the type of guy you're looking for, lowering your expectations and accepting some smaller body measurements.

And lambaste this magazine for presenting images of studs that make you feel inadequate. Sadly, I might never grace *Instinct's* cover, so I can complain about my limitations, live in denial or work with the beautiful blue eyes I put in every morning. As a self-assessed 7.38

on a flaming scale (10 being Richard Simmons), I know the sequined shirt I own blinds people from seeing my studliness. While I won't change some aspects of myself, I have taken steps, like joining a gym, to claw up the food chain so that I can eventually suck on sweeter eye-candy.

Therefore, list your negative characteristics, too, and don't assume that someone will like you for just the way you are. "If you're going to be in a successful relationship," says Haynes, "you're going to have to change. It's a function of maturing."

Pass the Bar?

Rather than spending nights transfixed by the Home Shopping Network, shop for a boyfriend by networking outside your home. And what better meet market than your local club or bar? However, don't go out with the primary purpose of meeting guys; go out to have fun.

"That's not why you really go out. You're out to pick someone up," a friend accuses me, even though he's been boyfriend-less since I've known him. So I love drinking, I love men and I refuse to segregate the two. Big deal!

Since love is a battlefield, getting out is only your first strike in capturing a boyfriend. Bars are crawling with men eager to pick up other men by looking like they're not eager to pick up other men, so you're going to have to make the first move—by smiling. It's the most underrated pick-up method.

So keep smiling, keep shining, knowing you can always count on friends to get hit on more than you do. Thus, is it better to hang out with better- or worse-looking individuals?

"In any group of friends, roles are naturally assigned to people," explains Haynes. "This may frustrate the person that doesn't get the guy, but that's his role in life." Apparently, my role is that of the loser who snacks on the plankton overlooked by my cuter friends. Why can't guys come up to me instead?

"Why do they have to come up to you?" asks Haynes. "If you see someone you want, hit on him." I thought queers didn't engage in >>

inter-level dating. "You never know. Assertion involves the risk of rejection. You might not get what you want every time. But, eventually, you'll get it. You need balls."

No, I need uglier friends to ensure the spotlight shines on me. That's what friends are for.

Friends or "Friends"?

Here's my dilemma: I meet a guy. He totally sucks. I totally swallow (my insecurities). So we go out, and maybe hop in the sack. Still, I never know whether he's looking for friendship, "friendship with benefits," or what? Assuming I'm prepared for the answer (I'm not), should I ask how and why he resists my sexyliciousness?

"No," says Dorval, "this is when the enjoyment and mystery of some kind of relationship comes in." But I hate mysteries, especially the one behind where guys would rather hang out than go out with me. Continues Dorval, "If you can't tell what someone's interest in you is, then have dinner with him a few times. Let it be ambiguous. Time will tell. It shows respect to let him have his privacy in that way."

If guys are turning you away, perhaps you're coming off as too pushy or needy. The stud you met last night doesn't suddenly become your boyfriend. Don't immediately plan your wedding after the first date. And gushing to him about his looks will only push him away. As Outland illustrates, you wouldn't discover a wallet packed with cash and scream, "I found a wallet full of cash!" Why behave similarly around a desirable man? It'll only make him feel higher up than you on the food chain, eventually leaving your plate empty.

In addition, clarifying your intentions primes you for rejection. "Your problem is that you play up the friendship angle because you're scared of rejection," says a friend who rarely deals with rejection (damn him!). True, and I also don't get rejected—often because I don't express what I want. Still, at least when a guy rejects me, I don't continue hitting on him. Instead, I fill him up with tequila until he can clearly see what he's missing out on.

Now or Never?

That moment when your eyes lock with his, when you're drawn to him, when you realize he's a top—it must be love at first sight. Or you've seen too many movies. Don't discount guys just because there's no initial spark that sets your heart or loins on fire.

"In the most fortunate circumstances, people recognize each other as prospects," says Dorval. "But if it doesn't happen, don't give up the ship. Some are just slow to make those kinds of decisions." Therefore, allow for the possibility of love at second, or third, sight. "People don't always necessarily know exactly what attracts them. Give a chance for people to grow on you."

I often give guys the chance to "grow" on me in bed. They may even view me as a potential boyfriend, but then think—*gasp!*—that I'm a horrible lay. Yeah, like *that's* really a possibility. Still, if two men discover that their first hookup doesn't recreate the steaminess of a porn scene, should they call it quits immediately?

"This isn't a killer," remarks Haynes. "Everybody's going to have issues in their sex lives, especially gay people because so much of our culture is based on sex and sexuality."

Dorval adds, "It's unrealistic to think that you could have a good sexual experience with someone you don't know well." (Um, define "know well.") That's why I never go home (anymore) with a guy on the first date—unless, of course, I consume a seventh vodka shot.

As Outland points out, love is like a lottery. Everything you do to find love is like buying a ticket. Purchase enough, and your odds go up. Well, most people never win the lottery—so much for that line of thinking.

On the other hand, there's nothing worse than pessimism. Who cares if the glass is half full or half empty? As long as there's alcohol in it, I'm ready to pick it up, go out and have fun, and hopefully bring a guy home, too. ■

