

PART ONE

solo

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# 1

## dalliancing

I'M ENJOYING MYSELF

A lot of people are afraid to say what they want.  
That's why they don't get what they want.

—Madonna

Some diarists are extremely good at being solo. You know these people in your own life: the friends who come out of a relationship and they seem, well, fine. And years later, after they've been playing the field for a while and nothing sticks, they're self-contained and, well, fine. That's because they are fine. The first Diarist in this chapter could be their mascot. "I must say, I have plenty of love all around me," she writes. "My family, exes, my crushes, dates. I do what I want. I am the love of my life, and it feels *really* good."

I point this out because every day, I read soloists who are fixated on the fact that they want a partner, and don't have one. Rest assured, most soloists who want a partner eventually find a great partner. But it typically takes years; longer if their personality and relationship needs are a rarer match. In the meantime, the reality is that many diarists spend their teens, twenties, and (among certain demographics) thirties primarily solo, pausing for a few years here or there in relationships; not to mention the years spent alone later in life after a divorce or the

passing of a partner. Throughout their many solo years, they still need to fulfill the sexual, emotional, and financial needs that previous partners once met. Being alone truly is the default state, returned to again and again. And so this chapter looks at soloism on its own terms, not as a setback, but as a frequent and normal state of being where diarists happily meet their own needs, and engage in dalliances with others when it makes sense.

This happy solo concept tends to confuse people. While I was writing this book, I read a *New York Times* article about the CEO of Zappos, Tony Hsieh. His friend told the reporter that Hsieh “has a lot of close friends and he loves a lot of people.” The reporter inquired about this and Hsieh, to his credit, replied: “I don’t usually define dating or not dating. I prefer to use the term ‘hang out.’ And I hang out with a lot of people, guys and girls. I don’t really have this one person I’m dating right now. I am hanging out with multiple people, and some people I hang out with more than others.”

Let me summarize: He’s a soloist. He likely had sexual ties with more than one person, but that’s really not the point; he was fundamentally meeting all of his own emotional, sexual, and daily needs, in the combination of his choosing. He may be a soloist forever, or not. His relationship status was confusing to the reporter only because she was looking at it in terms of sex. And sex is just one of many needs that relationships can fulfill.

Every diarist in this chapter is sexually active and loosely seeking a relationship partner. So why are they solo in the first place? Because of their priorities. They either want to continue meeting their own needs, or their personality/sexuality/relationship priorities are more selective. In the diaries ahead, it’s quite obvious which diarists will likely remain solo for the longest: The Photographer seeks a partner with a specific constellation of personality traits to fuel a relationship of intellectual and sexual exploration, which will probably take her a while to find; The Pretty Mom seems to fall in love with any man who walks slower than she does, so she’ll likely transition into Partnership imminently. Whether or not diarists find partners is a fairly predictable game of numbers.

It's also a predictable game of nonmonogamy. Every diarist in this section is a monogamist, and yet their path to finding a monogamous partner is the precise opposite: rampant, nonmonogamy. Overlapping is the norm. Despite this, soloists spend most nights alone. They can easily rack up a handful of lovers in a few months and dozens of flirtations and kisses yet point to consistently empty beds. Cohabiting diarists later in the book have much more sex, because it's fairly easy to get laid when sharing a bed. Soloists have more variety. We begin in a happily empty bed in suburban Detroit

## The Photographer Home for the Summer, Breaking Hearts

35, Suburban Detroit, Michigan

SATURDAY

9:00 a.m.: I've temporarily moved back home following a stint on reality TV. I am currently *very* single, though my biggest fear is that because I'm happy and not looking, someone will find me and I'll end up settling down in my hometown. Oh, no no no!

10:00 a.m.: Facebooking gorgeous guy from the TV show. I Internet-stalked him after I got the boot from the show, which required a lot of craft as I didn't know his last name. Not sure what I am expecting, as we live in different states.

3:00 p.m.: Off to a photography class I'm taking. I love being single. I have all sorts of interesting trysts that my partnered friends don't.

8:30 p.m.: Went to a party with Brian, a guy from my class, and we made out. I've also developed a crush on Jake, a coworker at my new waitressing job, and he is attractive and tall like me and much younger. Eleven years younger. His casual touches are electric.

8:32 p.m.: It should be noted that my best relationship was with a man a decade younger. It was a year of good sex, we enjoyed each other's company, and he inspired me creatively.

10:15 p.m.: Home. I love living with my mom and sister, who are rad. Though I have to be much more on the down-low about masturbating and staying over at men's houses.

## SUNDAY

9:06 a.m.: Trying to figure out what I want to wear on my date tonight. Nothing too sexy, as I'm not that into Brian. Staying focused on where I see myself in six months, which is in New York City with a photography job, and lots of urban men with long-term dating potential. In the meantime I want to have as much fun as I can.

10:15 a.m.: Pass a giant store called House of Bedrooms. All sorts of interesting thoughts pass through my mind.

11:00 a.m.: Waitressing. Looking at the schedule to see when Jake and I work together next. Not at all this week.

12:30 p.m.: A creepy, bald 75-year-old man at one of my tables keeps giving me the once-over in a very voyeuristic way. Creeping me out.

3:00 p.m.: Work is over, but don't want to drive all the way home and back. Decide to nap in the employee parking lot, hoping to run into Jake who works at 5.

4:30 p.m.: No Jake. Call Brian about our date plans. He wants me to come out between 7 and 8 p.m. I am annoyed.

7:00 p.m.: Killing time in my car. I suspect Brian has hepatitis B. He's been very ambiguous. He says he has antibodies but doesn't know if he had it or just had the vaccines (he travels). Decide to steal some wifi from my car. Google says it can be transmitted from making out. I AM FREAKING OUT. I AM A HYPOCHONDRIAC.

8:00 p.m.: Arrive at Brian's apartment, and we head to a wine tasting. He looks nice but not attractive to me. He's short and pudgy and poor. I don't look for stability in men. I look for ambition and wit and the ability to be taken in by the moment. I'm thinking about right now. Isn't that what the future is based on anyway?

10:00 p.m.: Talking to another guy at the wine tasting for twenty minutes. He's kinda cute, and I can tell Brian is annoyed, but doesn't come over.

3:00 a.m.: We are out at an illegal after-hours bar with three of Brian's guy friends, talking about exploits. I've always gone with whatever turns me on. I've been with girls, and in a threesome with two men. Also went through a sex-in-public phase.

3:30 a.m.: It comes out that he used to shoot drugs when he was 20 (he's now 35). I remember from Google's note that 60–80% of IV drug users have Hepatitis B. I AM FREAKING OUT. Maintain even keel.

4:00 a.m.: Brian wants me to stay over. I say NO. Will have to bring up this Hep B thing when we are both sober.

#### MONDAY

11:30 a.m.: Woke up with a splitting headache, said hi to Mom, took two Advil, had a glass of water, and ate a strawberry. Immediately got back into bed and masturbated while thinking about Jake. Sleep.

3:00 p.m.: Finally up with no headache. Cranky though. Brian left a voicemail making sure I got home alright.

3:15 p.m.: Thinking about how far I have come, leaving a relationship that was a vexing black hole. I think it was karma, a payback for my previous dating wrongs. You get what you give.

3:17 p.m.: He was a musician, and I would be so happy to see his face after he came back from traveling, even when I was furious with him. He made me joyful in a way that wasn't logical.

4:00 p.m.: Returned Brian's call, hoping for voicemail. No dice. Said I had fun (well, I sorta did). He sent me some links on new chemicals I'm working with in printing my photography. That was nice of him. I hate nice guys.

7:00 p.m.: Called my friend Jack. He was my first boyfriend when we were 16; now we're friends. Seeing what he's up to tonight. "Nothing." Code for "I have no money."

7:02 p.m.: I wish I had more girlfriends. All the girls I grew up with moved away, and I don't connect with many women my age.

10:00 p.m.: Saturday night and I'm watching *The Incredibles* with my mom and sister.

#### SUNDAY

6:24 a.m.: In the makeup room to model in a bridal show. All the women—makeup artist, hairstylists, models—are talking about what they drank last night and who they hooked up with. I don't mention that I watched a Disney film with my family.

7:00 a.m.: One of the other girls just went into the bathroom and puked. She says she has the flu. She's like 17, and is hung over and afraid to say so.

1:00 p.m.: Bored. Sitting around waiting for the show to start. I want to leave. We all look so cheesy. Hair in big curls, lots of pastels and ribbons. Everyone else thinks this looks good. For real, they do.

1:15 p.m.: Kinda regretting saying no to Brian's brunch invitation. He lives right around the corner. I don't like seeing men more than once or twice a week in the beginning. Though I'd love to get away from the lameness I'm currently experiencing.

6:00 p.m.: At the restaurant training. Alex, the tall, attractive cook, caught me looking at him and smiled.

8:00 p.m.: Pushing my coworker for info about Jake. She says he's moody and doesn't like working here. His last girlfriend was a model.

8:15 p.m.: Alex started up a conversation. I don't want to sound mean, but he's not that smart. Bummer.

9:30 p.m.: In the manager's office making my schedule for the next week. Jake next works on Tuesday. Funny, that's when I say I can work next.

## MONDAY

10:00 a.m.: Facebook message from the ex-girlfriend of my black hole ex-boyfriend. She wants to know if I'm going to see him in Brazil, where she is visiting now. Says it's beautiful and I should. Life is funny. My answer: NO WAY.

10:03 a.m.: Message from Jack, apologizing for not going to the Hamtramck music festival. He says he's stressed about money. That's cool, I get it.

10:05 a.m.: I must say, I have plenty of love all around me. My family, exes, my crushes, dates. I do what I want. I am the love of my life, and it feels really good!

11:49 a.m.: Let Brian go to voicemail. It's my day off and I want to work on my photos. Don't want to think about men.

2:12 p.m.: Break to masturbate. Jake is in my head.

3:00 p.m.: More self-loving. Jake comes to mind. I've been anxious lately and this is my release. I'm afraid that I'm going to get to know

him and the crush will implode. But right now the fantasy person I have created is nice.

6:15 p.m.: Finally listened to Brian's voicemail. He tried a photo technique I told him about and was happy with the results.

9:30 p.m.: Just sat and talked with Brian outside the darkroom for two hours about art, literature, screwed-up people, and strippers. Then we spent another hour in the darkroom. He helped me figure out the enlarger. I helped him choose prints. I like how his mellow vibe makes me feel.

## TUESDAY

8:00 a.m.: Awake. It's those lazy moments in the morning that I miss most and long for.

8:30 a.m.: Brian emailed about hanging out with him on his birthday. I hate spending occasions with boyfriends until we are serious.

3:30 p.m.: Working a double shift. Went to a temple on my break to meditate. I'm not very thrilled with my job and everything doesn't seem so great today. It's just a bad day. Need some perspective.

5:00 p.m.: Back at work. Jake is working. Sweet. He looks cute.

7:00 p.m.: The hostess mentions that Jake and I would make super tall babies. Inappropriate, but I secretly love it. He said, "Hmmm-mmm. Maybe we should try it." I laughed.

7:15 p.m.: Another server walks up and totally out of the blue says that he didn't know that Jake was dating Chrissy, a fellow server who I really like. I am bummed. And confused. Jake has been rather boldly flirting and never mentioned it.

8:03 p.m.: Still bummed by this news.

8:30 p.m.: Jake totally just gave me that sparkly eye when we passed in the hall. He and Chrissy must not be serious.

9:15 p.m.: Jake and I are in the manager's office, and without my asking, he volunteers to contact an ex of his who might be able to help get me shooting work. I like this guy.

10:02 p.m.: Standing out back, when the busboy asks when we are going out on a date. Is he serious?! He offers to walk me to my car. He's a nice *kid*.

## WEDNESDAY

12:00 p.m.: Catch myself thinking about Jake. When he trained me last week, it seriously felt like we were on a date. A good one, too.

2:22 p.m.: Okay. I feel foolish that I've been thinking about my coworker and masturbating, especially now that he's dating a coworker. I feel tricked.

3:30 p.m.: This doesn't keep me from continuing to do it. Three times in one hour.

10:00 p.m.: Long talk with my mom about relationships. She thinks it's natural for older woman to date younger men, and brings up director Katherine Bigelow, and her 21-year-younger boyfriend. She also says I don't have my standards too high, and when I find the right one, I won't have to think about it. I'll just know. I love my mom.

10:13 p.m.: She also advises me to stay away from Jake, unless he has another job on the side. She's so funny. And right. \*\*\*

## How to Be a Happy Soloist

The previous and next diarists, along with the hundreds of happy soloists I've read, share a few common features:

*They know what their current needs are, and they meet them.* Both women have looked at their next 6–24 months, and determined which relationships would make them happy on a week-to-week basis *until* they meet their next partner: lots of friends, and when it makes sense, a casual lover. The Pretty Mom takes great glee in her online lover who obviously fills a need while she's single. The Photographer is in close contact with her vibrator. They see their solo time not as a means to an end, but a chapter in itself.

*They're flexible in the many roles lovers can play in their lives.* Both women build casual relationships with men they know will never be life partners. Diarists more experienced at dating are often much more open-ended in the many happy roles potential lovers and friends can play in their lives. It's the younger diarists, like The Single Virgin in the next chapter, who tend to be much more

conservative in their relationship structures, prone to toeing the line of heterosexual monogamy with every potential partner, simply because it's the only path in their minds.

*They fill their lives with "friend families" of interconnected friends and relatives who fulfill many of their needs.* You'll see it throughout this book. The Photographer spends Saturday night watching Disney with her family; The Pretty Mom—who is still recovering from a years-old heartbreak—spends the same Saturday dancing with loose friends. There is a Buddhist concept that there is only one "right now," so it's best to enjoy it. And the diarists who enjoy their "right now," no matter how sexless or Disney-involved it may be, are contented people. It's the diarists who pine to be in someone else's arms "right now" who are miserable. "Having wonderful friends is in many ways similar to being in a relationship," writes The Pretty Mom. She is right.

## The Pretty Mom with Many Suitors and a Meticulous Sexual Memory

37, Ventura County, California

SATURDAY

7:40 a.m.: Fell asleep last night thinking about Nathan, a single dad who's had a crush on me for about a year. Again. He likes me, but he's too entangled with his new divorce. Come on Nathan! I want you to be my bunny slope back into love.

7:50 a.m.: A "bunny slope" is exactly what I'm looking for. I want a practice run before getting too involved with a man again; a long-term lover who can rebuild my sexual confidence. Nathan is my first choice, although my kaleidoscope of possibilities is vast these days.

7:54 a.m.: Voicemail from Philippe. He sang me a message. Philippe was my first foray back into dating, a year ago. He smells better than any man I've ever met. He plays guitar better than anyone. Too bad he knocked up that other girl, or else we'd still be lovers. We are still dear friends. Maybe we'll be together again in 10 years or something.

9:51 a.m.: Making plans for a big dance party this evening with my friends, my weekly evening out. Being a single mom is limiting, but my mom helps me a lot since my five-year-old son's father, Carlos, is a jackass and has totally disappeared. I'm almost over that disaster, though it's hard to look into my son's eyes every day and see Carlos.

10:10 a.m.: Off to work—I'm a language teacher. I have a big crush on one of my students. He is 22 and from Switzerland. Young. Flirtatious. Hot. He looks deep into my eyes and smiles and makes me blush. I wonder if my other students notice. I have never had an affair with a student, although I have come close.

1:10 p.m.: Just finished class, and Swiss Guy tells me to give his regards to my husband. I tell him I don't have a husband, and he smiles at me slyly.

8:57 p.m.: Just dropped off my son and am getting ready. There are a few men I'd like to run into, and only one I'd like to be with: Nathan. The rest are simply too young or far from my reality. I plan to just do as I always do and have fun with whomever I connect with and dance.

2:10 a.m.: At the party. I am asked, as I always am, why I don't have a boyfriend. I look 28. I have amazing legs, great hair, nice skin, a beautiful face. The only reason I can think of is that I'm not ready. Carlos hurt me really badly. I am still recovering.

4:00 a.m.: Just home. Most definitely danced my little heart out. A Scorpio ogled me and asked me out, but he was drunk. His wife showed up after he passed out and my feelings passed quickly. Met a French boy whom my friend invited, apparently for me. He was sweet, and all over me. I had to walk away from him to leave, exhausted. I can't stop thinking about Nathan, and how I wished he was there.

## SUNDAY

10:40 a.m.: I never feel better than after a night of dancing. I love the person I am when I dance: bold, flirtatious, spiritual, and sparkling.

10:46 a.m.: I check my email every morning for news of my son's father. I wish I could forget. We met as housemates while living a bacchanalian life in Europe. We were together nearly three years—it was passionate and tumultuous, with a dynamic sexual attraction like no other I've had. We lived to make love to one another. But when I got

pregnant, we were breaking up. He was so angry at me for keeping the baby. I may still be in love with him. I know for sure that I think of him every day. It's too bad that I haven't heard from him in five months.

11:27 a.m.: I remember the first time we made love, after we had confessed our love for one another. We started kissing in the hallway outside of my bedroom, and he tore off my skirt and pushed me against the wall and we had sex right there in the hallway, while our other housemates slept. Then we moved into his bedroom and made love as if we'd known each other all of our lives. We kissed and touched and licked and sucked and felt and grinded every part of our body, until the next day when I had to pack my things to go back to the States. No wonder he followed me to the U.S.

3:18 p.m.: I didn't date at all for four years, save one or two one-night stands, and many close male friends. I am still recovering. The anger, at least, is gone. It wasn't until I moved here last year that I began to blossom.

7:00 p.m.: At dance party number two this weekend, with my son. It's a celebration of music and dancing, a bit of a hippie love fest. Great music. Lots of eye candy. Groovy.

10:40 p.m.: Home. A single dad named Martin was there tonight, who I had a little thing with a while back. I also met a single dad who I've seen at the park who seems nice. And the Scorpio was there. I've been having so much fun lately, giving off and getting so much sexual energy.

11:29 p.m.: Looking for El Greco online. He is my cyber lover. I'm in the mood for some cybersex with him. My friend introduced us, and he moved away before we could get to know one another. We broke each other's Internet cherries a few months back. Now it's kind of a tradition. He is so hot. Cybersex is the best masturbation ever, because you are truly not alone—you know that someone is thinking about you, you read their words, and they are doing the same thing.

#### MONDAY

8:24 a.m.: Son woke me up, of course. Today Philippe and his pregnant girlfriend are getting kicked out of their house around the corner. I was quite jealous at first—she got pregnant to trap him—but

now it's normal to stop by their place, and I've come to enjoy them as a couple. Out of it came a very solid and beautiful friendship that has helped me grow more than most others I've had.

9:30 a.m.: Ostensibly helping Phillippe move, but really remembering my first night in bed with him. He said he wanted to know who I was before we had sex. It was so enlightening and sweet. We couldn't stop kissing.

6:07 p.m.: Sometimes I surprise myself with how brazen I can be. Two of my men are coming over right now. Single dads with daughters. Both at the same time. Lovely.

9:22 p.m.: So, that was interesting. Martin came over with his daughter, per my son's request. I'm not sure how I feel about Martin these days. Our kids get along really well. Nathan came too. We hang out pretty much every Sunday, but he is in the beginning stages of divorce.

10:38 p.m.: Bed. I'm having crazy fantasies about my Swiss student this evening. After all of the men, I'm thinking about him! He is so sexy to me. . . mmmm. I think it may be time to finally quench some of my sexual hunger that has built up from this weekend.

10:48 p.m.: I am lucky to have had some wonderful sex. I like it kind of rough. I like to be dominated. I like a man to push me against a wall and tear my clothes off. I like to be grabbed and fucked wherever we are—an elevator, on a trail, in the car. You get the picture.

## TUESDAY

6:01 a.m.: Getting up this early is so difficult. Damn. With a schedule like mine, who has time for a sex life?

6:22 a.m.: Showering, thinking about when I fell in love for a few hours last month. I was visiting friends in the Bay Area, and met a guy who looked like Jakob Dylan. It was as if we were very old friends or soul mates. The energy and connection was ridiculous. We hung out for a few hours, then he walked me to my car, arm in arm, like a gentleman. He grabbed me and held me as we giggled. I was anticipating the kiss. But the kiss never came. He had been seeing someone for a month. I was stricken. I had truly thought that I had finally met

someone who met all of my criteria. He kissed me slowly and sweetly on the neck as I got in my car. And that was all.

10:48 a.m.: Working. Boring so far. Feel like I'm still waking up. Not even any fantasies.

11:46 a.m.: I think that being Catholic has greatly contributed to my insatiable attraction to Jewish men. Jewish men are my fetish. Sometimes I have no idea that someone is Jewish, and find out later. That happened with Philippe.

3:42 p.m.: Oh boy. That Swiss student is undressing me with his eyes. It's clear that I'm giving back his energy, and I don't want the class to notice. But I can't help it. He has such beautiful lips. I want to be completely alone with him in the dark, to push those amazing lips into mine, tangle my fingers in his hair, and wrap my body around his. Oh, boy. This is a student I'm talking about.

5:39 p.m.: Texting Nathan. Texting makes flirting easier, much less intimidating.

8:56 p.m.: Home from a friend's birthday dinner. I love my community here. I have such a great circle of friends who really nourish me and make me happy. Having wonderful friends is in many ways similar to being in a relationship.

9:57 p.m.: I'd like to meet a certain Swiss man in the park, late at night, under a full moon. I want his hands to creep under my shirt as we kiss, perhaps pushed up against a tree in the darkness, and find my nipples. I want to feel his breath in my ear, on my cheek, on my chest. I want to run my tongue all over his body, taste his skin, smell his hair, feel his skin on my skin, longing and pressing. I want it to feel forbidden and wrong, and very exciting. I want to not be able to stop, to be swept away by uncontrolled lust. I want him to fuck me standing up, holding me up by my open legs, as he kisses me until we both orgasm.

10:13 p.m.: Actually, something very similar happened to me not long ago. I ran into a guy I'd met a couple of weeks earlier. We started talking and hung out the rest of the night and, carried away by our sexual urges, had sex in the bushes, standing up, he holding me up by my open legs. It was one of my hottest sexual experiences in years. We remained lovers for a couple of months, and then it faded.

## WEDNESDAY

6:13 a.m.: Woke up thinking about Carlos. It's shocking to me that he would not want to know about his son.

9:56 a.m.: I feel blue today. I'm wondering if I will ever find love. I'm tired of meaningless sex, which is why I stopped it after my last little evening a few weeks ago. I am quite happy with all of the friendships I have with men, and the love I feel for them, but none seem to be able to commit to me. It's frustrating.

10:00 a.m.: I am only thinking of the most important man in my life today: my son. Just toured the local public kindergarten.

11:35 a.m.: Swiss student wearing glasses today. Lord help me.

2:46 p.m.: Fantasizing about another instance of brief love. Ten years ago I met a Peruvian guy in Spain. I ended up in his bed at around 2:00 a.m., and stayed until 8:00 p.m. the next day, sleeping, drinking beer, eating very little, kissing, playing guitar, talking, licking, sucking. He had these orange drapes which danced in the breeze. Honestly, I cannot remember how many times we had sex. We couldn't stop. I went home and we drifted apart. But I'll never forget those hours.

10:33 p.m.: Jeez. You'd think by all of my entries that I never sleep with Americans.

10:39 p.m.: Going to bed with memories of the Swiss smile. Tomorrow is a new day. And I have no doubt that I will find him, one day. He is out there waiting, just as I am waiting for him. . . my next fabulous, fantastic love.

..... **Diary Insight** .....

A sex trick for you: Why does The Pretty Mom enjoy chronically good sex? Because good sex is a mind-set. Psychologist Leonore Tiefer posits that great sex requires a "symbolic investment" to provide the necessary mental spark. The Pretty Mom invests meaning into all her sexual activities, such as the one-night stand in Spain that she recasts as *Eighteen Hours with a Stranger in a Strange Land with Orange Curtains Blowing in the*

*Sun.* Without that infusion of meaning, the exact same sex would be ho-hum. And then there's our next diarist who does the opposite: he doesn't invest, and thus, is not particularly wowed by his encounters. . . .

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## Diarists Considering Not Being Solo

The Eligible Guy and The Outdoorsy Guy answer a key question you might have: *What the heck is he thinking?* The Eligible Guy is *that* guy you know who inexplicably has a small harem. The Outdoorsy Guy is the smart, early-30s male with many admirers and commitment phobia.

First, the harem. The book's resident lothario, The Eligible Guy, is searching for a wife, a task he accomplishes through volume. He uses text messages to interact aloofly with a large number of women, and is rather extreme in his soloist refusal to allow the women in his life to meet any of his emotional needs. He is emotionally detached because he hasn't vested enough needs to a partner to warrant attachment. It's cyclic—by continually meeting his own needs, he doesn't provide his partners any way to meaningfully enter his life, so he has all the problems of partnership and few of the benefits beyond sex. He wakes up to an empty bed and writes, "I am completely dissatisfied with my personal life."

Not surprisingly, he hurts many women. His blunder is common in the diaries—he confuses honesty with responsibility. He is truthful with partners about his sexual activities, but he is not remotely honest with himself about the priorities of his partners, nor how he is emotionally affecting them. The result is crying partners. He's wielding a negative power dynamic over them.

Why are these diarists, both many months into serious relationships, in the solo chapter? Because relationships are a state of mind, and the diaries reveal that the first year of a relationship is, quite typically, not really a relationship at all in the sense of people meeting each other's needs. It's two soloists spending time together and having sex, continuing

to meet their own needs. Most diarists continue ceaselessly functioning as individuals 6–12 months into serious relationships, meeting their own financial, emotional, and sexual needs. The same handholding and lovey-dovey nuzzling that, from the outside, looks like a definite partnership, is experienced on the inside as an almost staunch phase of soloism. In fact, some relationships stay in this stage forever. It's not unusual to see diarists, particularly men in their twenties and thirties, who have *never* left solo. They tend not to realize this detail.

Why is the transition from solo into Partnership so fraught? It's risky. Entrusting a partner with one's needs equates to emotional vulnerability. Translation: the breakup will be painful. Which is why solo is a state of mind that lags far, far beyond the visual signs of coupledness. It's a shift that's largely invisible from the outside, yet a universal shift in the diaries. You'll see the diarists ahead navigating three major psychological shifts, each of which have caused lesser ships to wreck:

1. Identity. The diarists are shifting from seeing themselves as individuals to one-half of a partnership.
2. Needs. Whether cooking dinner or resolving arousal, the diarists are no longer handling every need alone. Some needs fall through the cracks.
3. Priorities. The diarists are choosing their relationship priorities—and seeing whether their needs will align.

Both diarists ahead express frustration at their girlfriends, not realizing that the transition they are experiencing is largely within themselves. The Outdoorsy Guy complains repeatedly, saying he wishes he “felt more free and open” in the relationship. Whenever diarists blame their partners anywhere in this book, it's a red flag that their own needs are not getting met.

As with most diarists, sex distorts the picture. The Outdoorsy Guy is amusingly upbeat about his girlfriend in the 12 hours of each post-coital glow, writing, “This relationship is so unique! I forget how special our bond is.” This is a third of the time. And yet his brain just can't quite buy that he has a girlfriend named Alyssa.

## The Outdoorsy Guy Feeling the 7-Month Itch

31, Portland, Oregon

### FRIDAY

11:38 a.m.: I am at work and haven't been thinking about relationships or sex today. Only about data.

11:41 a.m.: Yikes. Thinking about the fantastic little clip of lesbian porn I watched on the Internet last night. It reminded me how much I like to give cunnilingus, and at the same time, I'm reminded of how I don't really like to do that with Alyssa.

12:12 p.m.: Just got a random Gchat from Lauren, an older coworker I dated briefly. She is crazy, but I loved going down on her.

3:46 p.m.: Just got back from a walk with Lauren. Our dating ended because she just wasn't that into it. I can't say exactly why, but it had to do with her having different priorities.

4:00 p.m.: Not excited about hanging out with Alyssa tonight. This feeling is furthered when she says that all she wants to do tonight is hang out with me. We have been dating for seven months, and she moved from another state to be with me.

6:11 p.m.: Still at work, an hour later than I need to be, working and listening to music. Friday night. Lamesville.

11:00 p.m.: Had a frustrating evening with Alyssa and her roommates, hanging out and eating dinner. Alyssa and I watched a silly movie and are now going to bed. Friendly, not intimate.

### SATURDAY

12:18 p.m.: Just got home from Alyssa's house. Talked a little about how I wish I felt more free and open in our relationship. She didn't say much. Most mornings she has sex on her mind, and doesn't really listen to me. (Ha.) I was sort of in the mood, so we had sex and it was fun. Mellow breakfast. Alyssa is great most of the time.

4:22 p.m.: I think of myself as being bad at relationships, like there is something I don't get. My primary issue now is my desire to have multiple casual partners, as opposed to one committed, closed

relationship. Why? Because I am not fulfilled sexually in the relationship I'm in.

6:13 p.m.: Alyssa is very patient and forgiving, and has never broken up with a boy. She is a peacekeeper. Were it not for me, I imagine this relationship could last forever. It seems like I need to get over some hurdle if I am to avoid tearing this relationship down.

9:42 p.m.: On the topic of sex and other women, tonight I am pleasantly annoyed by all the uninteresting girls out with us, and content and glad to have Alyssa.

9:45 p.m.: I have an inability to date or stay in a relationship with women who are not smart, or those who cannot at least act intelligent and articulate most of the time. This is a fantastic juxtaposition to my vanity and desire for attractive women. These two things make me very picky. And an asshole.

12:30 a.m.: Fun night. Got a little drunk with friends, including Alyssa, and went to a reggae show. Broke into new territory with her. We smoked pot together. She *never* smokes and doesn't like it when I do. But we talked about it and she demonstrated an amazing ability to push her boundaries. We had some good talks, were silly.

1:00 a.m.: Fun late-night bike ride home and some pretty great sex before bed.

## SUNDAY

9:15 a.m.: Woke up enjoying Alyssa's warm body and snuggles.

12:21 p.m.: She just went home. This relationship is so unique. Alyssa is so unique. It's certainly new territory, and I forget how special our bond is. Sometimes I feel like our relationship right now is not necessarily what I want, but it might be exactly what I need. I'm never quite sure what I need.

12:30 p.m.: I should say that I am happy that I am "in a relationship," as opposed to being "not in a relationship," and that my relationship is very free and open and fun and loose. However, I would prefer my status to be: "in a relationship." It seems like there's no asterisk option. If after the next several years I still haven't learned how to relax and accept an intimate relationship for what it is, I imagine I will be a curmudgeonly old bastard, all alone.

1:02 p.m.: Brief thoughts pertaining to sex with strangers: Never tried because it has always seemed wrong. Immoral. But I am growing more and more keen on the idea of going to Craigslist's Casual Encounters and meeting up with a complete stranger and acting out some sexual fantasy. I still feel like that kind of thing is not within the realm of healthy, normal people. And then there is the issue of going behind my girlfriend's back.

10:44 p.m.: Spent the evening with roommates. Two short conversations with Alyssa on the phone, of no significance. Just checking in, talking about plans. No pressure to sleep together tonight. Feels nice.

10:47 p.m.: I'm on the Internet and I will probably look at a little bit of porn. Or maybe I'll be good and just pick up a book and read till I fall asleep.

#### MONDAY

9:51 a.m.: Reflecting on my relationship with Lauren, then recalling several years back with Gillian. I have a fondness for these relationships that is odd, and I think what they have in common is that: 1) I liked who I was in the relationship, and 2) I didn't see the relationship really going anywhere, and neither did they necessarily. When there is pressure to "make this work," I seem to fall apart, I get grumpy, I don't really like myself as much.

11:06 a.m.: Work. I feel like I have been wandering aimlessly, doing very little in my life, not going anywhere. I realize that most people probably feel this way, like they should be doing something differently.

12:00 a.m.: Alyssa is sleeping over, and there is zero intimacy. She got a little upset and almost left because she wanted to have sex, and I was tired and not in the mood. I don't know what it is, but I am an incredibly sensual person who thinks about sex all the time, yet when it comes to having sex with my partner, I'm just not that excited.

#### TUESDAY

10:26 a.m.: I really like a skinny waist, with round breasts in my face. Alyssa is boxy, narrow hips, thick torso, broad shoulders.

11:17 a.m.: It's gotta be fairly common for people to just want to bone down, right? Maybe that new girl with that big ol' booty in my office is one of those.

11:19 a.m.: I hold honesty as the highest virtue. And yet today I am considering going behind Alyssa's back. Why can't I be honest with her? This is the very first relationship where an affair is even remotely possible. In all previous relationships, my faithfulness was never even close to being an issue.

4:58 p.m.: Just got back from lunch with older ex-girlfriend, Gillian. We often meet up for coffee and chat. We have become pretty good friends since our breakup two years ago. Alyssa does *not* like that we are still friends.

5:22 p.m.: I will always love Gillian. That relationship was a landmark. It was the only time I've really had my heart broken, like crushed. It's the only relationship where I was all-in, from the beginning. It was what I thought I always wanted, dream girl stuff. I value growth, and there was tons in that relationship.

6:58 p.m.: Alyssa wants me to come over to her house and give her a kiss. That doesn't really float my boat. I wish it could be a quick passionate fuck.

9:00 p.m.: Lied to Alyssa when she asked, "Oh, did you go out with your coworkers?" Even though we just got a bite to eat, and it was purely catching up, I know that she wouldn't approve. I never outright lie like that, but this is the second time now, both having to do with an ex. I hate this.

## The Eligible Guy with the Pick of the Litter

29, Camden, New Jersey

THURSDAY

7:40 a.m.: Up earlier than usual, thinking about a conversation last night about how I always end up sleeping with my female friends. Girls talk to me, sleep with me, then fall for me. While these girls all tell me that they are all right with our casual relationship, they talk about me behind my back to my roommate and our mutual friends. It gets a little out of hand.

7:50 p.m.: I am in love with two women, and at least three others love me. Just so you understand: I am a handsome African-American

with a master's degree. So basically, I have part of the market cornered. I get pressure from everyone to make a decision. And I just feel like I need to because I'm getting old. I'm gonna be 30. But I'll be in my next relationship for a while, and I don't wanna make a wrong decision.

7:00 p.m.: Long day at work. I work in the inner-city, usually 9–7.

8:00 p.m.: At a bar with my roommate. He has a way with relationships. It's "we're together when you're around." And his current girl lives in Maryland.

9:45 p.m.: Drinking. I think I may give in and sleep with someone tonight that I have no business sleeping with. It's Tonesha, who's still an undergrad. She's always hitting me up—"What are you doing?" "Wanna hang out?" She lives nearby. No chance I'll ever be in a relationship with her.

11:21 p.m.: Well, I am proud of myself. I could send a text and be in the midst of some passionate fulfilling sex. I'll just rub one out.

11:22 p.m.: I exist only in the gray area, in every aspect of my life, but especially in my personal life, which is utter chaos.

## FRIDAY

8:39 a.m.: I am completely dissatisfied with my personal life. That is the thought I woke up to in my empty bed.

9:00 a.m.: Off to work. Thinking about how I am going to get myself into a deeper hole this weekend. My situation is weird because a lot of the girls I deal with don't live within 45 minutes of me. Monique lives in New Brunswick. And Jennifer lives in New York.

2:00 p.m.: I think I finally figured out why I can't settle down. When I see a female, the first thing that crosses my mind is, "What are my chances?"

7:22 p.m.: Just finished BBQ'ing for two hundred people at a community event. Sometimes I think I'm too busy at work to settle down—that, and helping out my family financially.

8:00 p.m.: Amanda just came over. I've been trying to withdraw from her, but she lives a couple blocks away. She asks what I'm doing, and I say nothing, so we watch a little TV. That's usually how it happens with her. It's not like we go to a romantic dinner and then make love.

10:00 p.m.: After going for pizza, I walk into an afterparty that's apparently at my house. Tonesha's here. My roommate is mutual friends with all my girlfriends, so they get invited to stuff even if I don't want them there.

10:15 p.m.: It's me and these five other dudes, and Amanda and Tonesha. And basically all the guys are playing video games, and all the girls will stay late to see who's going to leave first.

1:00 a.m.: Amanda isn't leaving. She says, "I'm drunk and I don't wanna go home." Which I probably shouldn't allow. But I have this thing where I can't say no if I'm not in a relationship. If a chance presents itself, I'll sleep with a girl. I rationalize it.

2:15 a.m.: Amanda's asleep. The sex is always pretty passionate. It's never no kissing or something. And she usually sleeps over. Their leaving isn't an option for me. And generally, the girls I sleep with, for the most part, I like in a very endearing way. Except Tonesha. She has extra-annoying friends, and doesn't think clearly about stuff, and we always get into these crazy arguments.

## SATURDAY

10:14 a.m.: My married brother calls to tell me that I'm "living the life." He doesn't understand that I feel like I have four wives. I tell him to watch *Big Love*.

11:45 a.m.: Uh-oh. Voicemail from Jennifer. She called at 11:00 p.m. We first hooked up three years ago, but I was seeing my high school sweetheart, who I dated for nine years on-and-off. We reconnected six months later. She's white. Race always plays a more important role in my decisions than it should.

12:00 p.m.: State of the Relationship talk with Jennifer, which we have every two weeks. Basically, she doesn't think I give her enough detail of where we're at. I say, "I'm close to making a decision." She says, "I've been patiently waiting, and I'm sick of this," and I'm like, "You gotta do your thing," and she says, "Why don't you just break up with me?" I tell her about all of them—she knows more than any of them. She says, "At least you're honest." By the end of the conversation, she's somewhat reassured, and she loves me again.

12:02 p.m.: I'm sure everything will be fine for a few days, then something will happen again, like I won't call her, and she'll get upset. It's not like I'm ignoring her—she didn't call me! And then we'll do a State of the Relationship again.

2:00 p.m.: Train to New Brunswick to see Monique. I met Monique my senior year in class, and thought she was fascinating because she was a Latino female. Fast forward to three months ago: I'm back for grad school and we became intimate.

4:00 p.m.: Picnic in the park. Just she and I, and a long make-out session.

7:30 p.m.: We're getting a hotel room. She knows that I've slept with most of my female friends, but whether she knows I still do? Who knows? We're in the gray area, and there haven't been any parameters set.

9:00 p.m.: We just had hot sex, and I'm taking a moment to check my messages. I generally have sex as if I am making love, if that makes any sense. I rarely have bad sex.

9:10 p.m.: Really torn between Jennifer and Monique. Both are smart, attractive, and sweet. Monique's got some sass to her, and I don't get none of that from Jennifer—she's more laid back. I haven't really had the full range of sexual experiences with Monique yet, and that worries me; sex with Jennifer is satisfying, if not spontaneous. She gives very good oral—some of the best I've ever had. She could lose a pound or two here or there, but she is beautiful.

9:36 p.m.: I am what one would call a sexual thinker. I think often about sex and my sexual experience and my recent relations.

11:00 p.m.: Good night.

## SUNDAY

10:22 a.m.: Train home. Other girls who are in love with me right now include: B, a law student I met through her roommate. She is definitely in love with me, and she is white. And L, who I met at school. She is African-American. She has liked me for five years. She is kinda annoying and definitely in love with me since we hooked up two years ago. And D. I met her in grad school and she is also African-American. She acts like she is not in love with

me and maybe she is not, but she likes me a lot and I can have her whenever I want. Then there's my high school sweetheart. I still have some feelings for her and could have her back. We haven't hooked up in a while.

10:26 a.m.: If I don't have sex tonight, I'll rub one off to one of them.

11:34 a.m.: Heading to my cousin's birthday party. I often find myself fantasizing about older women, mid-40s.

6:00 p.m.: All day at the party. I did get this girl's number—31, African-American, lives in Philly. My cousin was trying to hook me up. If a girl gives me her number, I take it. I probably won't call her—I do that often.

11:35 p.m.: D, L, and B are all very good in bed. D and L give phenomenal oral. D is great all around. But with Jennifer there's that emotional connection. Maybe the difference is how I feel when it's over and I am looking in their eyes. It's either, "Damn, she is great in bed," or, "Damn, that was good, I love her."

## MONDAY

1:07 p.m.: Work is killing me. It would be kinda cool to have sex in my office with a coworker, but my coworkers are generally unattractive.

4:00 p.m.: Graduation ceremony for my master's degree. Thinking about one of my professors. She is not attractive but she is so nice and is such a great professor. If she came to me I would probably sleep with her. Don't ask me what that means.

6:00 p.m.: Post-graduation drinks. I'm not really celebrating, but Amanda's over.

11:00 p.m.: Amanda just left. She was sitting around, waiting for me to make a move and I just didn't make one.

11:49 p.m.: Mostly I am scared that I will lose my friendships with the females I have been intimate with. Outside of the sex they provide unbelievable support. That's a big issue. An outsider could call them "ego feeders," but if you knew them, you would know they are just sweet girls. Monique, B, my high school sweetheart, and Jennifer are all awesome girls. L and D, a little less, but they have their moments.

## TUESDAY

3:33 p.m.: No sex + long work hours = suicidal thoughts.

4:19 p.m.: I am an African-American and this plays a huge role in my decision-making and I hate that it does. If I decided to be with a white girl long-term, I worry about how I would be perceived in the African-American community.

6:00 p.m.: Sexting back and forth with Monique.

7:35 p.m.: Monique told me that one of her fantasies is to have sex in a store dressing room. Ever since then, I have been daydreaming about it. I imagine I am in the dressing room and I text her to pick out something sexy. She chooses a backless dress (her back is unbelievably sexy), and I grab her wrist firmly, turn her around, press her against the wall, and kiss her neck. One hand would make its way up her thigh and the other massage her breast. With the one hand I rip her pantyhose off and rub her clitoris as she rubs my penis through my pants. I would take my penis and stick it in her vagina from behind, stroking her until we both climax.

10:00 p.m.: Worked until late, then board meeting. When I'm around educated young people, there are a whole lot of opportunities for me in terms of young females. I definitely could have a lot more sex.

11:00 p.m.: Jennifer on the phone. She's upset because we didn't talk very long. But sometimes I'm really tired, and I don't feel like calling, and I don't feel like texting.

## WEDNESDAY

8:00 a.m.: Decided that I'm probably not going to sleep with Tone-sha and Amanda ever again. Amanda is so nice and sweet. I've gone long periods without sleeping with her. Like a month. I know she's gonna end up getting hurt, so I'm trying to withdraw.

10:15 a.m.: Text from D: "What you up to? You haven't called. I'm worried." She's upset because I don't keep in touch. I had sex with her three weeks ago, and she's told my roommate all this stuff she knew he would tell me.

1:47 p.m.: Trying to work and just got into a disagreement with Jennifer on instant messenger. She has given me plenty of opportunities to walk away. More than anything I worry about regrets. I hate regrets.

1:50 p.m.: Jennifer asks what is holding up my decisions. Is it that she's white? Is it the other girl? Or is it that I don't feel I can make her happy? I tell her the other girl is the main reason. She gets upset, and tells me I should just be with her. I told her I do not like that reaction, and I do not need her advice. This could be the end. I am a little scared to call her.

8:01 p.m.: After watching porn for much of my life, I've gotten a false sense of the average penis size. I've come to the conclusion that my entertainment tool is larger than average. And I am pretty good with my tongue. I think that helps.

8:09 p.m.: I just want to chill in bed for a whole day with a beautiful woman. Maybe have sex like four times. I just told Monique that I want to sleep with an Asian and an Indian before I settle down.

10:12 p.m.: To my credit, I have been nothing but honest with the women in my life. Nevertheless, I believe I have hurt them unintentionally. In a year I will be engaged, and in a decade married with five kids, biological and adopted. I just don't know who I will be with.

10:56 p.m.: In the end it is going to be Monique or Jennifer, unless someone comes through and blows me away (figuratively and literally). Joking. I think I'm close to making a choice. I think within the next two weeks.