

THE RELATIONSHIP

M A G A Z I N E

AUGUST 2026

COVER STORY

DESIRE Special Issue DESIRE

in the season of sunscreen
and school
holidays

How to
feel desired
when nobody's
watching

THE SINGLE AND SENSUAL

How to feel desired
when nobody is
watching

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The people behind The Desire Issue

Independent voices. Honest conversations. Free every month.

EDITORIAL

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Iysha Barrett Morichon, Donna Braden and Lara Asous

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You do not have to earn your way back to yourself

A gentle invitation to feel seen, safe and at home in yourself again.

NATALIE JANE | FOUNDER AND EDITOR IN CHIEF

Hello beautiful people.

I have been thinking a lot lately about how easy it is to lose sight of ourselves while we are busy being everything to everybody else. It rarely happens in one dramatic moment; more often, it happens quietly, through the appointments we remember, the feelings we hold, the problems we solve and the hundreds of small ways we make life easier for the people we love.

Then, somewhere in the middle of all that caring, we realise that we have stopped asking ourselves how we are actually feeling.

*Tenderness was
never something
you had to earn.*

If you recognise yourself in that, please do not turn it into another reason to criticise yourself. It does not mean that you are broken, weak or somehow failing at life; it may simply mean that you have been carrying too much for too long, while becoming so used to placing your own needs last that listening to them now feels unfamiliar.

That is why I wanted this issue to feel less like advice being handed down to you and more like an honest conversation between women. I did not want to tell you how confident, sensual or healed you ought to be, because most of us already live with enough pressure to become a better version of ourselves.

I wanted to create somewhere you could pause, recognise parts of your own experience and perhaps feel a little less alone in it.

Desire is part of that conversation, although not in the narrow way it is so often presented to us. It is shaped by whether we feel emotionally safe, how we are spoken to, the relationship we have with our bodies and whether there is room for us to be honest without being judged, dismissed or made responsible for somebody else's reaction.

From the Editor

Sometimes desire is about sex, and sometimes it is about wanting to feel alive, connected, confident or at home in your own skin again.

The women who have written for this issue explore those experiences with warmth and honesty. Iysha brings sensuality back into ordinary life, Lara looks at the way attachment follows us into intimacy, and Donna writes about single women, desire and the shame we are still expected to carry for wanting anything at all.

Her Marbella story offers something lighter too, while still reminding us that finding ourselves often begins when we stop asking for permission.

Read this issue slowly and take from it what feels useful. If something touches a tender place, you are allowed to put it down and come back when you feel ready; there is no prize for forcing your way through healing, and there is certainly no correct timetable for returning to yourself.

If I hope you carry anything from these pages, it is the reminder that tenderness was never something you had to earn. Your needs, boundaries, pleasure and voice belong to you, and you are allowed to build a life in which love feels safe enough for you to remain fully yourself.

Always with love, Nat x

A NOTE TO YOU

SEEN | SAFE | YOURSELF

*Tenderness was never
something you had to earn.*



Permission, not another thing to do.

Iysha Barrett Morichon

“Motherhood, desire and the seasons of a woman’s life.”



I

Iysha Barrett Morichon writes about motherhood, desire and the changing seasons of a woman’s life. As the author of this month’s cover story, she explores the space between the woman a mother was before her children arrived and the woman she is now. Her work honours the small, private ways desire survives busy family life and gives women permission to notice what still feels good.

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Donna Braden

“Single life without the scripts women are usually handed.”



D

Donna Braden is a writer and columnist whose work brings honesty, humour and warmth to modern single life. In this issue she contributes two features and the fiction story. Donna writes for women who have a libido, standards and a sense of humour, and who are tired of being asked to justify any of them. Her voice is candid, relatable and refreshingly free from the usual scripts.

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Lara Asous, MA, RMFTI, CCTP

**“Attachment, emotional safety
and sexual connection.”**



L

Lara Asous is a marriage and family therapist and trauma informed clinician. She works with couples around attachment, emotional safety and sexual connection. Her writing draws on the patterns that appear in the therapy room, where a disagreement about frequency can reveal a much older question about whether it feels safe to be vulnerable. Her article closes with reflection questions couples can explore together.

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Dr Claudia Molnár

“The interval between relationships is not empty time.”



C

Dr Claudia Molnár writes about the value of taking a deliberate pause before dating again. Her contribution explores what genuine space can return to a woman after a relationship ends. Claudia challenges the idea that time alone is something to endure or rush through, showing how a thoughtful pause can help a woman enter her next relationship as herself rather than as a reaction to the last one.

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Natalie Jane

“Raw and real conversations about love, conflict, intimacy and healing.”

N



Natalie Jane is a counsellor, certified somatic trauma informed coach and narcissistic abuse specialist. Her work blends professional training with lived experience, helping women and couples understand trauma, rebuild emotional safety and find their way back to themselves. Natalie is the founder of LoveFlix and Editor in Chief of The Relationship Magazine, creating honest spaces where difficult relationship conversations can be held with warmth, humanity and hope.

FIND OUT MORE

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Keeping It Juicy

Desire in the season of sunscreen and school holidays

WORDS BY IYSHA BARRETT MORICHON



SUMMER, BODY, DESIRE

The heat is already here.

There's a heat that has absolutely nothing to do with the weather. It's the summer holidays, the days have lost their shape, full of snack demands, late nights, and sibling wars.

As a mum you become more of the logistics manager, maybe packing for holidays, then unpacking and washing. Then we fall back to reality with a bang as we soon realise we have small humans demanding soft fruit snacks that we have to remortgage our houses to provide, if you know, you know.

Within all that, how do you remain also a woman, with desire? This year has also seen heatwaves throughout the UK and Europe, bringing high temperatures and low water levels, and frankly this either adds to your stress or ramps up the inner heat.

Keeping It Juicy



SUMMER, BODY, DESIRE

Summer is also a time of nostalgia for many of us, as we may reminisce about our carefree days, full of summer flings, sexy escapades and those nights sipping sangria whilst dancing barefoot.

Longer, lighter days, looser rules: it's a cocktail that really should spill JUICY through every seam, yet you find yourself overwhelmed and further from your desire, sex and juice than ever.

The heat, adventure, and the shift in routine can reignite something. It is a private, flickering thing you tend in the gaps of your days. A held look with your partner over the heads of squabbling children.

A memory of a holiday fling from years ago that still, if you are honest, makes something in you stir.

Or we may find that our nervous systems struggle with this shift and find it threatening. The ordinary miracle of still wanting, even now, even tired, even sandy, even sweaty, even in the sweltering heat.

The novelty stimulates our nervous systems: the bare skin, the scents and smells, the shift in rhythm, the slowness of mornings and evenings. It arouses our systems; it can create a certain aliveness.

Keeping It Juicy

Do not wait for the holidays to end, for the routine to return, for some future version of yourself with more time and less sunscreen on the sofa, to feel sensual again.

The heat is now. The body is now. The trouble is that as mothers, we are often so busy managing the logistics of summer that we forget to let ourselves feel any of it. We are present for the children's adventure and absent from our own.

You are allowed to be a mother managing packed lunches and a woman who still knows how to want things, in the very same breath, in the very same sweaty, glorious, unglamorous summer days.

So let this be the answer: you do not need the children asleep, the house tidy, or the six weeks over, to belong to your own desire. You were never supposed to wait that long. The heat is now. The body is now.

This is not a piece telling you to squeeze in more, unless, of course, you're squeezing in more lovemaking sessions, and that is definitely a yes. You do not need another thing to try to optimise.

What you need is permission to notice the heat that is already there, in your own skin, and let yourself feel it, own it, and enjoy it. That might look like ten minutes with the door closed while the children watch something loud and colourful, just you and a cool flannel and your own breath.

It might look like putting on the dress that makes you feel like a sexy woman as well as a mother. It might look like touching your own arm in the sea and noticing, actually noticing, that it feels good.



The heat is now. The body is now.

Or it might be figuring out how on earth you can schedule in some more sexy time with your significant other. Desire in this season is not always about grand gestures or a return to who you were before children took up residence in your days. It is smaller and stranger than that.

Your questions, answered honestly

Three readers. Three honest answers. No judgement and no performance.

ASK NAT



ASK NAT

Warmth, honesty and no judgement.

READER QUESTION 01

I have been single for three years and I have stopped bothering. No nice underwear, no perfume, no effort. My friend says I have given up on myself. Has she got a point?

She has, although I would put it more gently than she has, and then I would put it more firmly.

What you are describing is not laziness and it is not depression by another name. It is the very common belief that presentation is something we do for an audience, and that with no audience present the whole exercise becomes silly.

The trouble is that your body is not waiting in a cupboard for someone to come and collect it. You are living inside it every single day, and the way you treat it is a message you send yourself repeatedly, whether or not anybody else is watching.

Start smaller than you think. Not a project, not a transformation, one thing. Wear the perfume on a Tuesday for no reason at all. Notice, honestly, whether you stand differently. That is the whole experiment, and if the answer is yes, you have your evidence and you can build from there.

Your questions, answered honestly

01

SELF

02**Three readers.
Three honest answers.**

INTIMACY

03

STARTING AGAIN

*Wanting is not
something to apologise
for.*

READER QUESTION 02

My husband and I have not had sex in nearly a year. We are affectionate and we get on well. Every time I try to raise it, it turns into a row and then we do not speak about it for months.

The row is the important part, and I would look at it before I looked at the frequency.

When a couple who genuinely like each other cannot hold a conversation about sex without it detonating, it is almost never the sex that is detonating. It is that the subject sits on top of something more frightening for one or both of you, usually rejection or inadequacy, and the argument arrives to end the conversation before that feeling can surface.

The row is doing a job.

Your questions, answered honestly

So change the conditions. Raise it outside the bedroom, at a neutral hour, and open with what you want rather than what is missing, because those two sentences land in completely different places.

If it still detonates, that is your answer about needing a third person in the room, and a couples therapist is not an admission of failure. Read Lara Asous in this issue first. It will give you both a language for this.

READER QUESTION 03

I am 46, recently divorced, and I want sex more than I have in twenty years. I feel ridiculous, like a teenager. Is something wrong with me?

Nothing is wrong with you, and I would gently query the word ridiculous, because I suspect somebody else handed it to you. Desire returning after a marriage ends is extremely common and it is not a crisis.

Some of it is hormonal, some of it is the simple return of privacy and choice, and a great deal of it is that wanting tends to come back when you are no longer spending your energy managing somebody else's moods.

What I would watch is the difference between wanting the experience and needing the reassurance. Both will get you into bed with someone. Only one of them will leave you feeling better on Wednesday.

Have standards, keep your boundaries, and do not let anybody rush you into treating your own appetite as a problem to be solved.

Your question could be answered in the next issue.

ASK NAT

Your question could be answered in the next issue.

HELLO@THERELATIONSHIPMAGAZINE.CO.UK

Wanting is not something to apologise for.

- 01 Send as much or as little as you like. A paragraph is enough.
- 02 Every published letter is anonymous and identifying details are changed.
- 03 Natalie reads every letter personally.
- 04 Ask Nat is a magazine conversation, not private therapy.
- 05 If you are in danger, turn first to Where to Find Help on page 41.

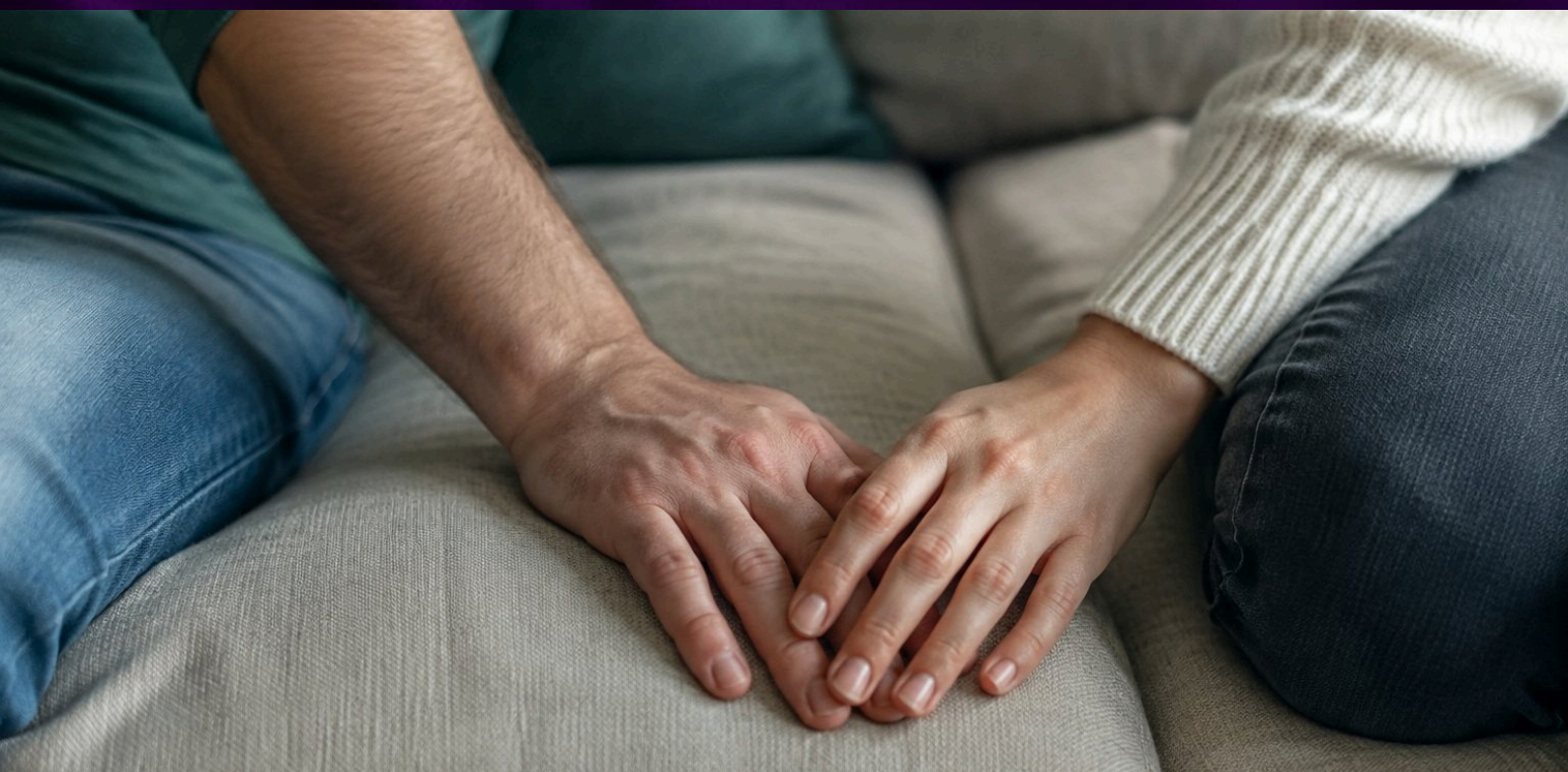
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Because You Were Always Worth Loving



**When love feels hard,
start with the conversation.**

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Relationship support you can return to whenever you need it.

When Attachment Meets Intimacy

Why emotional needs matter in your sex life, and what the body is really asking for

WORDS BY LARA ASOUS, MA, RMFTI, CCTP



Sexual intimacy is rarely only about sex. Beneath the physical connection, many couples are asking much deeper questions: Do you still want me? Am I important to you? Can I trust you?

Are you emotionally here with me? Do I matter? Those questions can become especially powerful when attachment needs are activated.

The way we learned to experience closeness, reassurance, vulnerability, and separation can influence how we respond to our partner, not only during conflict, but also in the bedroom.

Attachment is, at its core, about connection and security. We want to know that the person we love is emotionally available, responsive, and safe enough for us to be vulnerable with.

For some people, sex becomes a pathway to emotional reassurance. For others, emotional disconnection makes it difficult to feel desire at all. One partner may reach for physical intimacy to feel close, while the other may need emotional connection before their body feels open to intimacy.

Neither person is necessarily wrong. They may simply be speaking different emotional languages.

When Attachment Meets Intimacy



Start outside the bedroom.

When that sense of safety is shaken, sexual intimacy can change too. Consider a couple caught in a familiar cycle.

One partner feels lonely and reaches for affection or sex. The other feels pressured, criticised, or emotionally overwhelmed and pulls away.

The first partner experiences the withdrawal as rejection and reaches harder. The second partner withdraws further.

Eventually, what began as a need for connection becomes a painful pattern of pursuit and distance. This cycle is often less about who wants sex and who does not.

Underneath it may be two people trying, in very different ways, to answer the same question: 'Are we okay?'

For someone with more anxious attachment tendencies, distance can feel especially threatening. A delayed response, lack of affection, or change in sexual frequency may be interpreted as evidence that the relationship is losing its connection.

The person may seek reassurance, initiate more often, or become preoccupied with whether their partner still desires them.

When Attachment Meets Intimacy

For someone with more avoidant attachment tendencies, intense emotional demands can feel overwhelming. They may protect themselves by creating distance, becoming less expressive, or avoiding difficult conversations. Sexual intimacy may also become complicated when closeness feels emotionally demanding rather than safe.

Of course, attachment patterns are not fixed labels, and people can show different patterns in different relationships or seasons of life. Stress, trauma, health changes, parenting, resentment, grief, medication, body image, and relationship conflict can all influence desire and intimacy.

Emotional needs can explain a sexual pattern, but they should never be used to pressure a partner into sex. No one owes sexual access in exchange for reassurance, love, forgiveness, or emotional security.

So how can couples begin changing the pattern? Start outside the bedroom.

Build emotional connection in ordinary moments. Ask your partner how they are doing and actually listen. Offer affection without expecting it to lead to sex. Express appreciation. Repair after conflict.

Make room for vulnerability. Learn what makes your partner feel emotionally safe.

Then talk about sex without turning the conversation into a performance review. Instead of 'Why don't you ever want me?' try: 'I miss feeling close to you. Can we talk about what helps you feel connected and desired?'

Instead of 'You only care about sex,' try: 'When sex comes up during conflict, I feel pressured. I want us to find a way to talk about intimacy that feels safe for both of us.'

These conversations shift the focus from blame to curiosity. Couples can also become more intentional about separating affection from expectation. A hug does not have to become sex. A kiss does not have to become an invitation. Holding hands can simply mean holding hands.

When affection becomes safe again, partners may have more freedom to experience desire rather than feeling that every touch carries an obligation.

When Attachment Meets Intimacy

This is why asking, 'Why aren't we having more sex?' may be less helpful than asking, 'What is happening between us emotionally?' Sometimes the missing ingredient is not attraction. It is emotional responsiveness.

A partner may say, 'I need more sex,' when what they are longing for is affection, reassurance, appreciation, touch, or a feeling of being chosen. Another partner may say, 'I need you to stop asking,' when what they are really communicating is, 'I need to feel emotionally safe and free from pressure before I can experience desire.' Neither need should be dismissed.

Healthy sexual intimacy requires consent, mutuality, and room for both partners' needs. Beneath many intimacy struggles is not simply a question of frequency. It is a question of connection.

Sometimes, couples need to look honestly at the emotional injuries underneath the sexual struggle. Unresolved betrayal, repeated rejection, resentment, shame, criticism, body image concerns, or years of feeling unseen can create distance that cannot be solved by simply scheduling more sex.

The goal is not to create a perfect sex life. Intimacy is not only about being physically close. It is about feeling safe enough to be emotionally seen.

The goal is to create a relationship where both people can be honest about their needs without fear of punishment, rejection, pressure, or humiliation. When emotional safety grows, intimacy can become more than a physical act. It can become a place where two people experience closeness, playfulness, vulnerability, desire, reassurance, and connection.



Start outside the bedroom.

Sometimes the path back to sexual intimacy begins with sex. But often, it begins much earlier, with the moment one partner finally says, 'I miss you,' and the other is able to hear the vulnerability underneath those words.

When couples learn to recognise the attachment need underneath the behaviour, they can stop fighting each other and start working together against the cycle.

How safe does your body feel with your partner?

Six questions to answer quickly and honestly.

THE QUIZ

Six questions drawn from Lara Asous's piece in this issue. Answer quickly and answer honestly, because the first answer is usually the true one.

When something is wrong between you, what happens first?

I go quiet and wait to be asked

I raise it straight away, sometimes too sharply

I tell myself it is not worth mentioning

How do you feel in the hour before you might be intimate?

Warm and unhurried

Slightly braced, watching for the mood

Absent, as though I have left the room already

If you said no tonight, what would happen tomorrow?

Nothing. It would simply be tomorrow

A coolness I would have to work to fix

I am not sure I would say no

When your partner turns towards you, your first feeling is

Pleasure

Pressure

Calculation

After sex, do you talk?

Usually, and easily

Rarely, it feels awkward

Only if it went badly

Who knows what you actually like?

Both of us

Me only

Neither of us any more

Mostly first answers. Your nervous system reads this relationship as safe. Desire here is a matter of time and

attention rather than repair.

Mostly second answers. You are managing rather than resting. Look at what you are bracing for, and start the

conversation outside the bedroom.

Mostly third answers. Something has gone quiet in you that deserves proper attention. This is worth taking to a

therapist together, and worth taking seriously on your own.



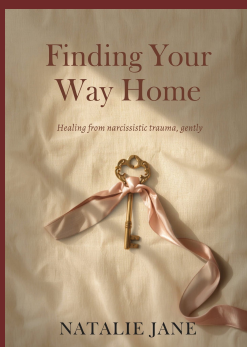
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SCAN TO BEGIN

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with Natalie Jane

Write your own answers first, before comparing them with your partner.

Lara's piece closes with questions written for couples. Write your own answers first, because the answer you give when nobody is reading over your shoulder is the one worth having.

5. What would I ask for if I knew it would be met kindly?

How to Feel Desired When You Are Not in a Relationship

Feeling desirable is not something another person grants you.

WORDS BY DONNA BRADEN



DONNA BRADEN

Sexy, whether seen or not.

Stop Confusing Being Desired With Being Chosen

This one took me a while to understand. Being chosen by someone can feel wonderful, of course it can. Having someone look at you and think, I want her, is a rather lovely little ego boost.

But being chosen isn't the same as being desirable. There is a particular kind of nonsense we women are fed about being desirable. Apparently, desire arrives in the form of another person.

A man looks at you a certain way. Someone slides into your DMs. You get asked out for dinner. Someone tells you that you're beautiful. And suddenly your brain goes, Excellent. We have received confirmation.

How to Feel Desired When You Are Not in a Relationship



SINGLE AND SENSUAL

Fully yourself. Fully alive.

Desirability is something you can experience for yourself.

DESIRE WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

No external confirmation required.

We are officially hot again.

You can be deeply desirable and still be single. You can be gorgeous and not currently dating. You can be sexy, funny, intelligent, fascinating and emotionally available and still have nobody in your inbox asking what you're doing Friday night.

That's not a contradiction. That's life. Sometimes the right person hasn't arrived. Sometimes you're taking a break.

Meanwhile, when you're single?
Crickets.

And if we're not careful, that silence can start sounding an awful lot like rejection. But here's the truth nobody tells you often enough: You do not stop being desirable because you are currently unpartnered.

How to Feel Desired When You Are Not in a Relationship

You haven't been taken off the market by some cosmic HR department. Sometimes you're rebuilding yourself.

Sometimes you're simply enjoying being alone. And sometimes the dating pool is so bloody awful that you'd rather spend Friday night eating ice cream in your PJs than listen to another man explain why he's 'not really into labels'.

You haven't expired. You haven't become invisible. And you certainly don't need someone else's attention to prove that you are worthy of being desired.

The trick is learning how to experience your own desirability rather than waiting for somebody else to validate it, and yes, darling, that is a very different thing.

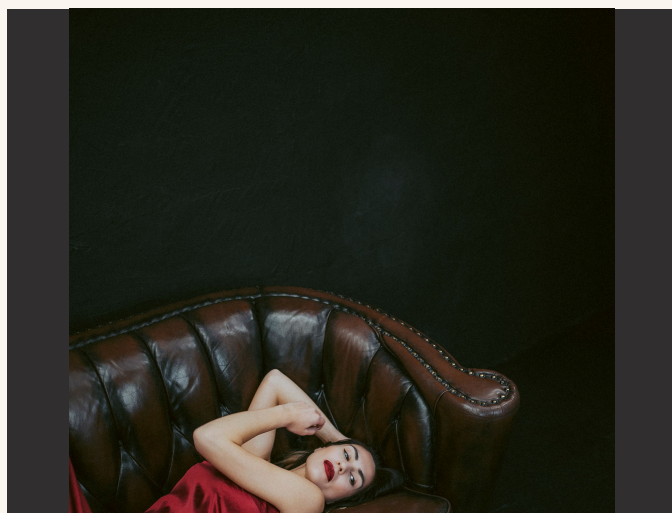


*Desirability is
something you can
experience for
yourself.*

I Feel Guilty About Wanting Sex When I Am Single

Wanting sex when you are single, and why that is not a crisis

WORDS BY DONNA BRADEN



DONNA BRADEN

Desire needs no apology.

Let me get this straight. I'm single. I'm an adult woman. I have a pulse. I have hormones. I occasionally look at an attractive man and get fanny flutters. So why the bloody hell do I feel guilty for wanting sex?

Apparently, somewhere along the way, we decided that a single woman is supposed to choose one of two personalities.

Option one: heartbroken spinster, wrapped in a blanket, eating ice cream and waiting patiently for Prince Charming.

Option two: independent, empowered woman who has transcended the need for sex altogether and is far too busy drinking green juice and manifesting her future. Well, I call bullshit.

Sometimes I want romance. Sometimes I want cuddles. Sometimes I want a meaningful conversation over a glass of wine. And sometimes? I want sex.

There. I've said it, and guess what? Nobody fucking died.

Wanting Sex Doesn't Mean You Want A Relationship

I Feel Guilty About Wanting Sex When I Am Single



Desire is not an emergency.

This seems to be the bit that confuses people. You can want sex without wanting a boyfriend.

You can fancy someone without wanting to marry them. You can enjoy physical intimacy without immediately mentally redecorating their spare bedroom. We're not handing out gold stars for how horny you are.

And you can have a perfectly happy, fulfilling single life while still having a libido that occasionally wakes up and starts banging on the door demanding attention. Sexual desire isn't a relationship status.

It's part of being human. Being single doesn't magically switch it off, and quite frankly, if yours does occasionally switch itself off, that's fine too. You get to decide what you want to do with it.

The point is simply this: you don't have to justify your desire.

Why Do We Feel Guilty About It?

For women, sex has historically come with an enormous suitcase of baggage. Too much and we're called names. Too little and there must be something wrong. Enjoy it and apparently we need to explain ourselves. Don't enjoy it and we're told we're frigid. Want sex without commitment? Oh, heaven forbid.

I Feel Guilty About Wanting Sex When I Am Single



*Desire is not an
emergency.*

Apparently we're expected to have a twelve page emotional business plan before we admit we fancy someone. Men have been allowed to have uncomplicated sexual desires for generations. Women? Well, we're still occasionally acting like admitting we have a libido requires a parliamentary debate. No thank you.

And yes, deciding what you want might mean doing absolutely nothing. It might mean dating. It might mean casual sex. It might mean masturbation. It might mean exploring what turns you on. Or it might mean deciding that right now you'd rather have a takeaway and watch three episodes of something terrible. All perfectly valid. The important thing is that the decision is yours.

But What If I Want Sex And Nobody Is Available?

Welcome to the single woman's greatest logistical challenge.

You can have all the confidence in the world, but unfortunately handsome men don't come with an Amazon Prime delivery option. Sometimes the person you fancy isn't interested. Sometimes they're unavailable. Sometimes they're emotionally complicated.

Sometimes they're attractive until they open their mouths. And occasionally the dating apps will serve you a photograph from 2017 followed by a man who describes himself as 'alpha' and expects you to congratulate him for owning a barbecue.

At which point, solitude suddenly feels absolutely bloody wonderful. Wanting sex doesn't mean you have to lower your standards to get it. This is important.

I Feel Guilty About Wanting Sex When I Am Single

You Can Be Empowered And Still Want To Be Wanted

This is another one we need to talk about. Being independent doesn't mean becoming emotionally bulletproof. Being confident doesn't mean you never want someone to fancy you. And being comfortable alone doesn't mean you don't sometimes want another body next to yours.

I love the idea that women can be completely fulfilled on their own and still enjoy intimacy. Those things aren't opposites. I can pay my own bills and still enjoy being taken out for dinner. I can make my own decisions and still enjoy being kissed. I can live alone and still occasionally think, You know what would improve this evening? Exactly. We're grown-ups. Use your imagination.

Your Libido Didn't Get The Memo

Sometimes women genuinely believe they shouldn't feel sexual because they're single. They stop dressing in ways they enjoy. They stop flirting. They stop exploring their sexuality. They start thinking of sex as something that belongs to couples.

But your sexuality belongs to you. Nobody else gets custody of it because you're in a relationship. You don't hand your libido over at the altar and collect it again if you become single. It is yours.

You are allowed to fancy someone. You are allowed to feel horny. You are allowed to enjoy your body. You are allowed to explore your sexuality. And you are absolutely allowed to decide that being single doesn't mean putting your pleasure on a fucking waiting list. You don't need a relationship to give you permission to feel sensual.

You don't have to hand your body to the nearest available man simply because your hormones have started sending strongly worded emails. You can want sex and still have boundaries. You can be horny and still have standards. Honestly, that might be one of the most empowering things you can learn.

Sex Isn't Proof That You're Desirable

And here's where I want us to separate two things. Wanting sex is one thing. Needing someone to want you so you can feel worthy is another.

If you're using sex to prove you're attractive, lovable or still 'got it', you might find yourself accepting situations that don't actually make you happy.

You don't need a partner to prove you're desirable. And you certainly don't need to apologise for having a libido. You're a grown woman. You've survived heartbreak, questionable dating decisions, family dramas, hormones, bills and probably at least one man who thought sending 'u up?' at 1.17am constituted courtship.

I Feel Guilty About Wanting Sex When I Am Single

You've earned the right to know what you want. You deserve better than that. Have sex because you want the experience. Because you enjoy intimacy. Because you're curious. Because you're attracted to someone. Because you fancy a bloody good time.

But don't use another person's desire as a measuring tape for your worth. You were desirable before they arrived. And you'll still be desirable if they leave.

So own it. Enjoy it. Be sensible about it. Have standards. Have boundaries. And for heaven's sake, stop feeling guilty for being a woman who occasionally thinks: 'Oh, he's fit.' Because sometimes that's not a crisis. Sometimes it's just Tuesday.

Let's Stop Making Female Desire Weird

Women are sexual beings. Not all women, not all of the time, and certainly not in the same way. But some of us enjoy sex. Some of us want it frequently. Some occasionally. Some only with deep emotional connection. Some are perfectly happy without it.

There isn't one correct way to be a sexually confident woman, and that's the beautiful bit. Your sexuality doesn't have to fit anyone else's expectations.

You don't have to be wild. You don't have to be reserved. You don't have to explain yourself. You simply need to know your own boundaries, respect yourself and make choices that feel right for you.

The Final Word



Desire is not an emergency.

So, if you're sitting at home thinking, I'm single. Surely I shouldn't be feeling like this? Darling, you are allowed to feel exactly like this. You are allowed to want sex.

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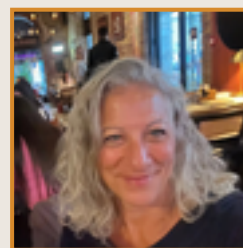
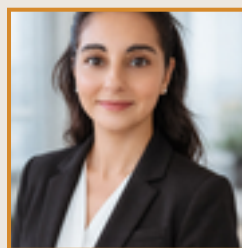
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One Night in Marbella

Four days of sunshine, nobody else's agenda, and a woman who went looking for herself

FICTION BY DONNA BRADEN



CONTENT NOTE: EXPLICIT ADULT FICTION | 18+

Maddie had always believed that holidays were for making sensible decisions. That was her first mistake. The second was ordering the second cocktail. The third was smiling at the ridiculously handsome man sitting three stools down from her at the bar. By the time she realised she had made all three mistakes, she was already having far too much fun to care.

She had come to Marbella for four days of sunshine, sea air and absolutely nobody else's agenda. After the spectacular implosion of her last relationship, her friends had decided she needed a holiday. Maddie had decided they were probably right.

So she'd packed eight dresses, four swimsuits, entirely too many shoes and the sort of confidence that had been missing from her wardrobe for the last two years. She was determined to come home feeling like herself again.

The first two days had been glorious. She'd meditated on the beach, eaten lunch overlooking the water, bought things she didn't need and taken photographs of herself without immediately deleting the ones where she didn't look thin enough, young enough or perfect enough. Tonight she'd dressed for nobody but herself.

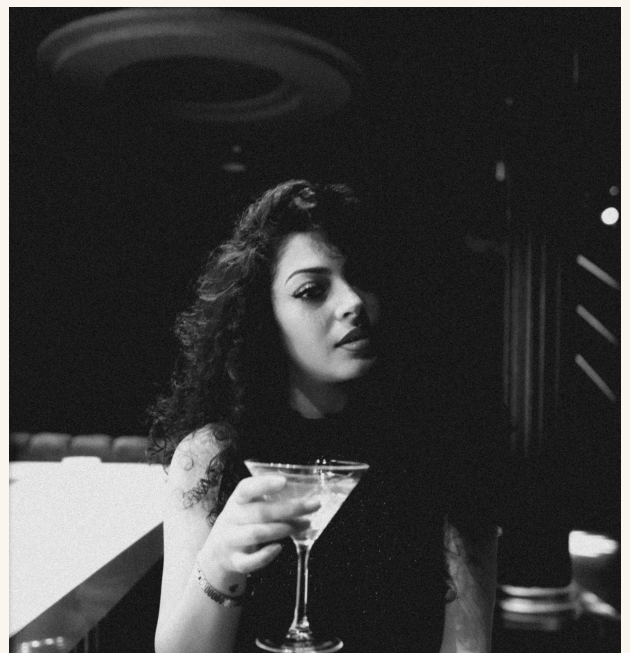
One Night in Marbella

A black dress. Bare shoulders. Heels she absolutely didn't need. Lipstick that said I have made questionable decisions before and survived them. She'd looked in the mirror before leaving the hotel and smiled. 'Fuck me, Maddie. You are one hot badass bitch.' She looked good. Not good for her age. Not good considering she'd had a difficult year. Just good. Full stop.

Then she'd walked into the bar. The man three stools down looked up and smiled. Maddie smiled back, then immediately looked away. Because apparently she was fifteen. 'Nice evening for it.' His voice was warm. She looked over. 'Is that your opening line?' He laughed. 'No. I'm warming up.' 'Thank God. I was worried I'd have to leave.' 'I'd hate to be responsible for ruining your evening.' 'You probably couldn't.' He raised his glass. 'I'm Daniel.' 'Maddie.' They shook hands.

It should have been ordinary, but it wasn't. There was something about the way he looked at her that made her suddenly aware of her own skin. Not in the uncomfortable way she'd become used to. In the oh, hello way.

They talked about Marbella, travelling and terrible dating experiences. About the fact that both of them had apparently reached the age where their knees made more noise than their sex lives. Maddie laughed so hard at one of his stories that she nearly spat out her drink.



One Night in Marbella



Four days, nobody else's agenda.

They left the bar shortly after midnight. The streets were still alive and music drifted through the warm air. Daniel suggested a walk. Maddie agreed. Taking off their shoes, they wandered barefoot along the beach, sand between their toes, talking about absolutely nothing and somehow everything.

At one point he stopped. 'So,' he said. 'So?' 'Tomorrow you go home.' 'Yep.' 'And I'm heading the other way.' 'Yep.' 'So this is probably where sensible people say goodnight.' Maddie smiled. 'Sensible people sound exhausting.' He laughed. 'Agreed.'

Somewhere between the third cocktail and the fifth terrible joke, she realised she was flirting. Properly flirting. Not because she wanted anything from him. Not because she was looking for a relationship. Just because it felt bloody brilliant.

'You're different,' Daniel said eventually. 'Different how?' 'You seem...' He paused. 'Happy.' Maddie looked at him. 'I am.' She surprised herself with how easily the words came. 'I think I forgot what that felt like.' Daniel looked at her. 'Nothing is wrong with you.' And perhaps that was exactly what she needed to hear - not because a man had said it, but because, for the first time, she believed it herself.

There was a pause - the kind that isn't really silence, the kind filled with possibility. He stepped closer. Maddie didn't move away. He kissed her slowly, tentatively, giving her every opportunity to change her mind. She didn't. For a moment, the entire world seemed to disappear.

One Night in Marbella



Four days, nobody else's agenda.

Maddie was wet and hungry for his tongue to explore her. Instead, he picked her up, carried her to the bed and gently laid her down, kissing up her legs from her ankles to her inner thighs, teasing her with his hot breath each time he came near her.

They returned to the hotel. The night continued behind a closed door, wrapped in laughter, kisses and the kind of chemistry that didn't need a future to make it worthwhile. There were no promises, no declarations and no pretending this was the beginning of some grand love story. Just two adults choosing to enjoy each other.

Daniel slowly slipped off Maddie's dress and was slightly shocked to see she wasn't wearing any panties. As her dress fell to the ground, he began kissing her neck and shoulders, then gently cupped her breasts, kissing one and then the other.

He stopped and looked into her beautiful emerald-green eyes, mesmerised by her. He continued kissing down her body until he reached her smoothly waxed pussy.

One Night in Marbella

Eventually he had to give in. The sweet smell of her juices each time he came close was too much to resist. He devoured her pussy with hungry enthusiasm.

Yearning to be inside her, Daniel flipped Maddie over and gave her peachy bottom a playful slap before slowly entering her. She gasped; she had never felt anything so thick and meaty inside her. He held her hips and built up a rhythm.

Maddie knew she wouldn't last long and pushed back against Daniel, matching his rhythm as it began to quicken. Her legs began to shake, sending Daniel over the edge. Maddie tensed around him, holding him tight as they came together. They both collapsed into a sweaty, hot mess.



EXPLICIT ADULT FICTION | 18+

*Pleasure without
promises.*

One Night in Marbella

The next morning, Maddie woke before her alarm. Sunlight spilled across the room. For one delicious second she didn't remember where she was. Then she turned her head. Daniel was asleep beside her, and she smiled.

She slipped out of bed quietly and stood on the balcony. Marbella stretched out beneath her. The sea glittered in the morning sun. She breathed deeply. She didn't feel guilty. She didn't feel embarrassed. She didn't feel as though she'd done something reckless or shameful. She felt... fucking fantastic.

Daniel appeared behind her, wrapping a robe around himself. 'Coffee?' Maddie turned. 'Definitely.' 'Breakfast?' 'Absolutely.' 'Then what?' She smiled. 'Then I go home.' He looked surprised. 'That's it?' Maddie laughed. 'Darling, what did you expect? A joint mortgage?' He laughed. 'Fair point.'

They had breakfast together and exchanged numbers. There was a possibility they might speak again; there was an equally strong possibility that this would remain exactly what it was - one beautiful, unexpected interruption to ordinary life. Maddie was perfectly happy with either.

At the airport later that afternoon, she sat with her coffee and watched planes come and go. Her phone buzzed. A message from Daniel: Last night was pretty special. She smiled and typed: It really was. Then she put her phone away.



Four days, nobody else's agenda.

That was when she realised the best thing about the night hadn't been the handsome man, the cocktails or the kiss. It hadn't even been waking beside someone in a hotel room overlooking the Mediterranean. The best thing had been discovering that the woman she'd thought she had lost somewhere inside her last relationship was still there.

She was still capable of flirting, desire and spontaneity. Still capable of making her own choices. Still capable of walking into a bar alone and leaving with a bloody good story. She hadn't gone to Marbella looking for a man. She'd gone looking for herself, and somewhere between the second cocktail, the midnight walk and one very unexpected kiss, she'd found her. She was fucking fabulous.

If any of this issue sat too close to home

If you are in immediate danger, call the emergency number where you are. The services below are free. Outside the UK, use the international directories for verified local phone, text and chat support.

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

0808 2000 247 | Refuge | open 24 hours

Samaritans

116 123 | free emotional support at any hour

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327 | Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

National Helpline for LGBT+ Victims and Survivors of Abuse and Violence

0800 999 5428 | Galop | Monday and Tuesday, 9.15am to 8pm; Wednesday to Friday, 9.15am to 4.30pm; closed 1pm to 2pm daily and at weekends

Rape Crisis England and Wales

0808 500 2222 | open 24 hours

Women's Aid

womensaid.org.uk/information-support/

Reading outside the UK?

findahelpline.com

befrienders.org

Control can arrive as concern or helpfulness. You do not need to have been hit for it to count.

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01 What repair actually is, and why an apology is not it

02 The six weeks after you finally say the true thing

03 Rebuilding trust when the person who broke it is still in the house

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05 Where to find help, every issue, at the back



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