

girl, travelling on Holiday

Looking for a casual weekend of fun, **Helen Croydon** finds out playing golf can get quite serious.

Summer teaches us many things. You know – don't leave the house without an umbrella no matter how blue the sky in the morning; light-colour clothes show stains; bodily injuries are harder to conceal with clothing; holidays shouldn't be taken with part-time lovers.

Since writing last month's entry, I fell down some stairs at Baker Street Tube and was left with a sprained and bandaged ankle for three weeks. Aside from the pain and added minutes onto each day because I couldn't run for buses and trains, I was restricted to long maxi-dresses and bell-bottomed trousers. To rub salt into this ankle injury, it happened right after my monthly pedicure and wax, meaning I wasted nearly a whole four-week cycle of fresh toes and smooth legs, forced to cover them up with long clothing.

Even more annoyingly, in the midst of this bandaged-ankle-hiding phase, I was invited by my most recent beau to go for a spa weekend. He had actually mooted the idea of a holiday – a proper kind with airports and planes – but the very thought of being in the company of one person in excess of forty-eight hours with no easily accessible escape route nearly made me fall off my crutches.



Before meeting him at Kings Cross for the 7.14 train to Luton Hoo Spa, I had gone for post-newsroom work drinks (add that to my list of lessons of what not to do, will you?). I turned up late (7.13), half-drunk and with red wine spillage. Not the best impression, I thought, as I dragged my mini-case along behind my bandaged ankle. Or was I dragging my ankle behind my mini-case? I can't remember but it wasn't a good look. I hadn't told my beau about the ankle injury yet. I foresaw comments about my drinking habits that I would not have liked to. So I decided to put on another long maxi-dress to cover up the bandage bulge (white and pink which blended beautifully with the red wine spill). I thought I'd casually mention it once we'd already set off. We're going to a spa, I thought, it's not like we're going trekking around golf courses.



My beau – I should mention – is another Cupid offering from another well-meaning married friend who wants to inflict her 'happiness' onto me. He was divorced recently. He was married to a crazy Brazilian woman who didn't let him out of her sight – kept him like a caged animal and pretended she was pregnant every time he tried to leave. I had detected he was quite fragile when I first met him. But he'd be safe with me – there is no risk of over-crowding there.

"Sorry I'm late." It seems to be my standard greeting.

"They've closed the platform. That means... good grief, what have you done to your foot?"

I lifted up the bottom of my maxi-dress to expose the off-white bandage, as though rewarding him with a peek for being observant. "Fell down some stairs at Baker Street." We both carried on looking

down at it in silence for a good half-minute. I sensed that this unattractive white bulge on the end of my leg was being seen as an unwelcome obstacle to this weekend away.

Luton Hoo – set in generous acreage of lush green golf courses, the rooms spread out in beautiful original stone outhouses – was spectacular enough to soothe our interrupted arrival plans. And thanks to a porter, who spotted my hobble and ferried my beau and I in a golf buggy to our room, we made up enough time to catch dinner.

“So you’re drinking red I presume?” My beau pointed right at the red spillage mark on my white and red dress.

“Work drinks.” I ineloquently spluttered. In my head it was an explanation.

“And they drink fine Claret I take it?”

“Well, this is going very well isn’t it?” I jibed, burying my nose in the wine list. I could feel the bars of commitment phobia slamming down around me. I am trapped in the middle of a country golf course spa, I thought, with no black cabs to take me home in the middle of the night should I feel the need.

“Goodness, madam, would you like a stool for your foot?!” exclaimed a startled passing waiter. He stared down to where the pink and white maxi-dress was riding up and not doing a very good job of concealing the bandage.

“No, thank you.” I smiled. But the waiter didn’t move, looking down at it for a good half-minute.

“What did you do?!”

“Fell down the stairs at Baker Street.” Still he stared down at my ankle. “Can I get a glass of the Meursault?” I attempted.

“No stool madam?”

"Just the wine please."

Once the waiter and a short conversation about the ill design of stairways in Baker Street Tube had moved swiftly on, my beau dropped his tones of sarcasm and remarked that wasn't it nice to get out of London and give each other our full attention, instead of just snatching only the odd night together here and there. "It makes me feel like, you know, we're more serious."

I spluttered on my Meursault, sending another splash down the dress. '*Serious?*' I grabbed a tissue and mopped it up, which was actually a dual gesture because the pressure I was applying to the new stain was also felicitous in stopping a small hernia erupting in my abdominal region.

"Oh I don't want anything *serious*," I almost shrieked. "I couldn't think of anything worse." I didn't realise how that sounded until after it had come out. "What I mean is, we're both busy with lots going on in our lives and well..." It would have been fine if I'd just stopped there. But there is something about a silent face that urges one to go on. "...it's too much of an invasion of time." Still he stayed silent. So on I went, digging away, until I was virtually swimming in a borehole. "I don't want to end up watching DVDs with you every other week night."

"And so this weekend is an invasion of your time?"

"No. Yes. No. Of *course* not." How the 'yes' slipped through my conscious tongue there I do not know. I spent the next two glasses of my Meursault justifying my desire to keep this beau-ship low-maintenance.

This is a recurring problem. Any man worth his sexual salt, I find, either goes for total detachment – two hours in a hotel room after a wink in an elevator type thing – or they demand a full package of commitment, with ownership rights. What I want to procreate is 'the serious lover' – his company and his affection is based on a genuine bond but he doesn't demand exclusivity. And he never, under any circumstances, includes himself in my weekends, unless by prior arrangement.

Men are creatures of extreme. If they allow their emotions to go far enough to stay around a woman for breakfast then it seems they need to justify this sudden feeling of attachment with full rights to her company five-times a week.

“What *do* you want then, if you don’t want to get serious?” asked my beau. I took a deep breath to explain, but then I paused and sipped my wine instead. I didn’t think he would get it. I wanted to say: Yes, it’s the way you grab me to the floor as soon as you get me behind a closed door, it’s the perfect pressure with which you clench my buttocks, it’s the way you run your hands up my thighs. It’s all that, but it’s also the excitement of the dinner date beforehand, the giggles, the wine spilling – the continuity. It’s the joy of putting on 5-inch Manolos and musing in the mirror if you’ve seen that pair on me yet. Or was that the other beau? It’s the knowledge that you look at a photo of my favourite red lace underwear when you sneak out of meetings. Yet knowing we are still free to wander through the other fascinating corridors of life, without worrying that we’ve got to get back.

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But I didn’t say all that because I knew it would fall on deaf ears as quickly as I fell onto the hard Baker Street stairs. Men, it seems, don’t like to teeter on the edge of sex and attachment. They want either in or out – in the metaphorical, not the erotic, sense, of course.

So instead I said. “What do I want? Well we’re on a golf course, maybe we should play golf tomorrow.”

“But you have a sprained ankle.”

Ah yes, the ankle. My new status as ‘injured’ hadn’t quite seeped through into my conscious mind yet. Sitting and sipping Meursault,

I assumed myself to be my usual able-bodied self. I suppose that makes me a hypochondriac.

"Never mind," comforted my beau. "We can stay in the spa. There're plenty of opportunities for golf another time. We could even do a golfing holiday if you like it that much? Next year maybe?"

I think I spilled my glass again. Based on two dates per month that is roughly 25 meetings away. I reached for a tissue to dabble up the wine, and press again on the hernia that was beginning to erupt in my abdominal area. ✿

