

Helen Croydon

GIRL, TRAVELLING

A proponent of long-term singlehood and low-maintenance dating, Helen Croydon shares her monthly exploits



Last week I missed not one, but two flights in the space of 21 hours. I am not proud, especially as it did not involve any all night alcoholic indulgence, nor was it at the expense of a delectable sexual tryst worthy of a separate entry in this magazine. No, I was just late. “Too late”, according to Air China ground staff at Beijing airport, to check in. Stranded, alone with 30 kilos of dirty laundry in a battered suitcase and no ticket home, I irrationally purchased, on the spot, a jaw droppingly overpriced standby ticket which could still get me back to London that day. It would reroute me through Rome. Fine, I said, still tearful, and handed over my credit card.

Eighteen hours later, waiting for said Rome connection, I found a wine bar, strategically positioned myself opposite a dark, dashing Italian looking stallion in a Versace suit, ordered a glass of Tuscan Montepulciano and started making playful eye contact. Then I remembered, I had neither slept nor washed since waking up the previous morning in Beijing.

Before I flirt, I thought, as I finished my Montepulciano, I had better make a stop at the duty free, en route to the gate, and apply generous lashings of their samples of lip gloss. Those damn no-liquids rules; they sounded the death knell for airport liaisons

There was no time for make-up counter samples however, since I soon discovered the gate was a 20-minute mono rail ride away. That little oversight made me miss my connection. Yes, the connection of my *replacement* flight. Two arguments with two different airlines over ticket reissuing rules and another discord with baggage control over the international whereabouts of my suitcase later, I was waiting for the airport shuttle

bus to take me to the Rome airport Hilton.

In front of me, like a mirage, danced the most delicious, tall, toned, tanned, chiselled, charming, innocent-yet rugged-looking young man.

“Is this the bus for the airport hotel?”

“I bloody well hope so,” I replied.

“I want the nearest hotel. I missed my flight and the next one isn’t until the morning.”

“Me too!” I enthused.

“I haven’t slept for 24 hours because I came from Asia.”

“Me too!”

“And I only have hand luggage because my bag is on the flight I missed.”

“Me too!”

“And everyone at this airport tells me it’s someone else’s *problem*.”

“Me too!”

My new ally revealed himself to be a Portuguese male model who had been in Japan ‘on a shoot’. He was – bless – just 21 years old. It was an impressive introduction, far greater than mine, which had as yet revealed only that I had a vocabulary of two words. Thankfully though he seemed to be more enchanted by the fortuitous circumstances which had led us to find a companion in a spookily similar pickle. We stuck together.

So evident was our relief that when the moody Hilton receptionist quoted the room rates, we turned to each other and, without a blink, suggested we share a twin room.

That was more awkward than I’d envisaged. Luggageless, we had no nightwear, no clean underwear, no clean clothes and I, very few clean thoughts. There was one hotel-supplied travel toothbrush. He let

me have it. He'd use his finger, he said. I bet he used the brush after me though. Men - if I may call a 21-year-old that - don't care about things like that do they?

A shower and an evenly divided ration of Hilton body lotion later, we lay face up on our respective single beds, not knowing whether to give in to sleep deprivation or torture our minds with wakefulness for one hour longer with good talk. Sharing a room with a 21-year-old Portuguese male model, you may think was a lucky reprieve in a 21-hour run of bad luck. But I rather thought of it as another tormenting near miss, which, like missing both my flights, offered a cruel reminder of how, but for one small thing, the situation could be so much better.

You see, the fact that he was male was *obviously* a reprieve, the fact that he was a model was a darn fine bonus too. But it was the 21-year-old part which ruined this gift horse. Younger men don't, and have never, done it for me. I can look at their toned torsos and youthful skin with almost a-sexual disinterest. I've always found a man's mind the most powerful agent for seduction. The mind of a 21-year-old is self-indulgent, liable to drain its elder of knowledge and offer nothing back. And they are exhaustingly over optimistic about their sexual encounters, believing every experience to have a depth of emotional meaning. Younger men fill me with a maternal urge to sit them down and gently explain the harsh realities of adult life.

Yet despite my sexual apathy, I couldn't help but wonder what the touch of a 21-year-old Portuguese model would be like. Awkward probably? Rushed most likely? Or maybe he would turn out to be a refreshing change? Maybe he would be gloriously free of age-induced preconceptions about a woman's pleasure and for a change, go with a natural rhythm, instead of a learned ritual which more experienced men, unfortunately, seem to adopt. I've heard the young ones require very little stimulation

and can up to go six times in the night.

All I'd have to do, I thought, is steer the conversation to relationships, to girls, to romance, to sex. Then all it would take would be a gentle leaning over, an outstretched arm in his direction...Damn it, my sleep thirsty mind crept away from this pleasant thought and headed into its own dreamland. Suddenly I was in a departure lounge again, furiously screaming at a flight attendant to hold the plane. I was just five steps away but I was dragging a 100kg Louis Vuitton suitcase, which everyone knew was a fake, and it wouldn't move. I could hear the gate staff laughing. "Stupid *Inglese* girl," they jibed. "She's missed two flights already." Then I could hear beeping, which was the sound of the gate closing. Noooooo, not again! I woke up in a cold sweat. Thankfully I was still in the Hilton. The beeping was not the sound of me missing another flight but of the 21-year-old male model logging on to Skype.

"I am sorry to wake you, I have to speak to my girlfriend." He was sitting, cross-legged, bare torsoed on his bed. Good grief. What did I say about not liking younger men? Perhaps I could rethink that. Every inch of his brown satin skin clung tightly around a shapely muscle. He had not one scar upon his body, no hairs peeping out of moles, no red bumpy patches. His washboard stomach revealed six perfectly formed muscles in a square, like an ice cube tray. His smile and his unstained teeth were delightful.

I enquired about his girlfriend. Out of curiosity. "She is very beautiful. Here is her picture." She was indeed very beautiful. But at 18, who isn't? "I think she is perfect for me. We are both young but I already know that I have met The One - My One." When did he meet her? "We have met only once, before I went to Japan. But I know this will be something very special." I may have to rethink my rethinking over younger men. What a frightfully hard job it would be to mentor the heart of a 21-year-old. Thank goodness sleep deprivation had got the better of me.