



My search for a SUGAR DADDY

Fresh out of a stifling relationship, Helen Croydon set out to explore her fantasy of dating an older man. But behind the glamour she found a world where men pay for girlfriends – and soon she crossed the line herself

I've always been attracted to older men. At 18, my first boyfriend was 32. My first crush was on my 40-something science teacher, and as a teenager I remember lusting after suited-and-booted executive types. Physically, I find a seasoned face attractive. Emotionally I'm drawn to an older man's expressiveness.

Until four years ago, I was embarrassed about this sexual preference. But when I broke out of an unhappy three-year relationship, I decided to explore my fantasy.

My ex was the same age as me – 29 – and I'd ended the relationship because I felt suffocated. He wanted to do everything together, but I valued my independent social life. He hated being alone, I craved it. He didn't have a regular job and so, living in my flat, he paid rent only when he could afford to. Although we'd agreed this, I'd started to find his lack of ambition unattractive.

After the split I felt a huge sense of freedom. I was working as a broadcast journalist at ITN but was frustrated at my

slow-moving career, and that added to my thirst for a new adventure. I bounded on to the dating scene, but all the guys my age left me uninspired. I found their stories churlish, and many of them put me off with their eagerness to get into a long-term relationship. I fantasised about someone older, wiser and more self-assured.

One evening, home alone with a glass of wine, I guiltily Googled 'older men, younger women, dating'. I ended up joining SugarDaddie.com – a dating website that

describes itself as being “where the classy, attractive and affluent meet”. I never intended it to be anything more than a few glamorous dates, but it soon became an addiction.

My first date was with a 45-year-old property lawyer. We met at Vertigo 42, a decadent champagne bar on the 42nd floor in London’s financial district. He was handsome, intelligent and interesting... and married. Although I wasn’t looking for a committed relationship, I certainly didn’t want to be part of anyone’s secret life, so the evening went no further than dinner.

I made sure my next dates were single. One of those was an insurance firm CEO – off work while he was being investigated for fraud. He took me for a champagne breakfast as a first date because we couldn’t find an evening when we were free. We drank Bollinger from 8am until noon at The Langham hotel on London’s Regent Street, and spent the afternoon in his hotel suite. Another man took me to a five-star spa the day after we met. I never saw him again – I didn’t want to. There was a stream of interesting, often high-profile men on the website, and I thrived on the excitement of fresh encounters. Casual sex had never interested me before – in fact I’d always been a bit of a prude – but now, no-strings sex in decadent settings gave me a new thrill. I was turned on by meeting men in a higher social league to me, and fascinated by their high-flying lives.

After a couple of months, however, I became aware of a sub-culture where men offer gifts or financial support in return for a girl’s regular company. My dates told me that around half the women on the site make references to ‘monthly allowances’ or ‘rent’ in their opening messages. I was propositioned on several occasions, with a typical message reading: “Like your profile. Am looking to meet 6-8 times per month. Can help with tuition fees/rent etc.”

I was naively shocked at first, and deleted such messages. But slowly I became more curious. One day I got a message from a French man inviting me to dinner at The Mandarin Oriental – a top London hotel. He wrote: “I assure you I am a genuine Sugar Daddy and our first meeting will just be dinner. To assure you, I will deposit you £500 for your time.”

I went. I felt ignoble, but excited at the thought of doing something forbidden. A retired investor, he was in his late fifties. But although handsome, I didn’t find him sexually attractive – he was too old, even for my tastes. As promised, he gave me an envelope full of £50 notes. We had a pleasant

dinner and he sent me home with a peck on the cheek. I couldn’t believe my luck.

A few weeks later, a Canadian man invited me to New York to accompany him on a business trip. Feeling bold, I agreed. He flew me first class; I remember putting the seat back, sipping champagne and glowing with a sense of self-worth. A man was paying for all this just to meet me! He took me shopping and insisted we go into designer shops. I felt awkward, unsure of how much I should accept. We spent three hours in Prada, where I tried on outfits I’d drooled over in glossy magazines. He bought everything that I said I liked.

With each experience like this, my moral boundaries relaxed and I became desensitised to any sense of scandal about accepting gifts from men. I still didn’t want a serious relationship, but I did want sex. It seemed logical that if I was to carry on pursuing flings with older men, I might as well look for a paid fling – since so many of them seemed happy to offer that. Once I’d made

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that mental leap, I joined another website, which had an even more risqué title – SeekingArrangement.com.

After about four disappointing dates, I eventually met someone I did fancy. He was a divorced 49-year-old banker from New York. He had those classic American chiselled features. He was staying at The Dorchester on Park Lane. We drank dirty martinis in the hotel piano bar, chatting about the forthcoming US elections and the economy, and laughing about American-English anomalies. Suddenly he asked how much it would be for us to carry the night on, and before I knew it, I had accepted money to spend the night with him – although we didn’t actually have sex. He held back because he said he wanted to see me again.

He became my first ‘sugar daddy’ – the term for a man who funds the lifestyle of his younger woman. He visited London about four times a year, and on each trip I would spend at least one night with him – always in a fabulous hotel and always preceded by a dinner full of laughter and stimulating conversation.

After that, it was easy to open other negotiations. I had broken through my own boundaries. It seemed to me that many men came to the website because they viewed it

as the price for convenience. Most were genuine men looking for companionship, but who were too busy or travelled too much to pursue a full-time relationship. A cash allowance was merely a replacement for what they couldn’t afford to invest in time and emotions.

I formed two more ‘compensated relationships’. One was with a London-based lawyer who suggested a generous pre-paid Selfridges store card. We met once or twice a week and had occasional trips away – we went skiing twice. Then there was my Indian sugar daddy – a deeply philosophical man who I came close to falling in love with. He was a wealthy, divorced factory owner from Mumbai. We saw each other every three or four months, and each time he would leave me with an envelope full of cash.

But the more I received, the more detached from the idea of a genuine relationship I became. I dismissed any man outside of the website who expressed romantic interest in me. What was the point? Love looked like a hindrance, which I did my best to avoid. Friends were concerned by my growing ‘anti-relationship’ attitude. I attempted a couple of conventional dates, but they bored me and I was irritated to have wasted an evening. Then I felt disgusted at myself. When did I become arrogant enough to think that I should always be compensated for my time? I knew I had to stop.

I hadn’t visited the SugarDaddie.com site because I wanted Prada and free tickets to India; my motivation was a fascination with older, powerful men. The gifts and envelopes of money were fortuitous side effects – but once the novelty of the dating faded, my motivation had shifted to material gain. I’d convinced myself that relationships were deflating, constricting chores. That way, I could justify staying in convenience-based relationships defined by money.

That was fine for a while and I have no regrets. I stopped not because I changed my view, and felt that paying for a relationship was wrong – because there are many cases where this suits both parties. I stopped because what I wanted had changed. I may have travelled the world first class, been taken to high-brow parties and eaten at nearly every Michelin-starred restaurant in London, but I can’t help having an overwhelming urge to try something that I never had with a sugar daddy – love.

Do you think what Helen did was irresponsible, or are you secretly intrigued? Would you even try it yourself? We’d love to hear what you think at easyliving.lifestyle@condenast.co.uk