

“Guyatus” by Francesca Serritella from *I Need a Lifeguard Everywhere but the Pool*

I’m on a hiatus from men, a *guyatus*, if you will.

I’m taking a break from the man-hunt to focus on my writing and certain professional goals, maybe three to six months to finish revisions to my novel.

I was single before I decided to make it official, but the intentionality of it was so freeing.

It meant giving myself a break from feeling guilty for turning down a party invite just because some single guys *might* be there.

It meant taking the daunting task of making an OK Cupid, Hinge, and Match.com profile off my plate.

It meant giving myself over to the universe. If a great man fell into my lap in some stroke of Rom-Com serendipity, I’d be open to it.

But until then, I have work to do.

No biggie, right?

That’s what I thought.

But I can tell I’m freaking people out. It’s as if I’m swearing off men for life.

A family friend learned I was single and asked, “So, you’re seeking male companionship?”

Such quaint, pre-Craigslist skeeziness in that phrase.

“I’m single, but I’m not actively looking at the moment.”

Her eyes narrowed. “And how old are you?”

“Thirty.” Thirty years younger than you.

She flared her eyes at me.

I tried not to roll mine.

Sometimes it gets to me. An older woman whose career I

really admired admonished me, “You girls need to apply the same ambition and focus to your careers as you do to finding a husband. Otherwise, you wake up at thirty-five, and it’s too late.”

It broke my heart a little. Not that I was blowing my husband chances, but that a woman who built a successful career and family over decades thought thirty-five was too late for anything.

I suppose I understand this perspective from older women—they grew up in a different time! But when women my age do it to me, it bums me out.

I was at a childhood friend’s bridal shower, seated with her law-school friends, nearly all of whom were engaged or married. Somehow it came up that I was single, and the very next question was:

“What are you on?”

I frowned in confusion, not realizing the correct answer was: not enough drugs to get this party going.

She clarified. “I mean, what apps?”

They have an app for drugs?

When I told her I wasn’t on any dating websites or apps, she looked appalled.

“You’re not doing *anything*?”

I lost my nerve. They succeeded in making me feel embarrassed about it, so I defaulted to my usual defense mechanism: humor. I launched into a one-woman show about all the terrible first dates I’ve been on, embellished here and there.

I killed. Had ’em rolling in the aisles.

Catching her breath, one girl exclaimed, “God, I’m so glad I’m not dating anymore. I mean, no offense.”

I smiled.

Turns out you can feel cheap even without a bad date!

I was mad at myself. I'm not ashamed of being single, I have a lot of great things going on in my life without a man, why couldn't I own it?

Being single is a status, it's not an urgent problem in need of remediation.

I say "I'm single," and it's like people hear, "I have a broken faucet."

What are you going to do about it?

Have you looked online?

Can you call someone?

Sticking with my home analogy, being single should be like, "I have green shutters."

Do you want green shutters forever?

Maybe, maybe not, but they're all right for now.

When did finding love become a homework assignment?

Whatever happened to "You Can't Hurry Love"?

I thought it was good not to try too hard.

Is it only bad because I'm not trying on purpose?

Men put their love lives on hold for professional ambition all the time.

Is it because I'm a woman?

I genuinely wonder if men get this sort of reaction for being too busy to date. To a certain degree, I'm sure all benevolent-auntie types pressure young single people of both sexes to settle down.

They're equal-opportunity single-shamers.

But there's a degree of alarm when we talk to women about finding a partner that is totally unwarranted.

All single women are not miserable, or even in danger of

being miserable.

Big dreams are not the exclusive province of men. Women too have great curiosity, and passion, and ambition that demand to be explored.

Go into any law school, medical school, or art school, and see the notably not-sad young women there. They're busy training themselves for the life of their dreams.

Think it's only the young women with time to spare? Stop by a small business, a research lab, the kitchen in a fine restaurant, and see women of all ages engrossed with work that means something to them.

Look in my window on a Saturday night and see me at my desk, lit by the glow of the computer screen.

I'm not in my bathrobe, weeping into a pint of ice cream, wishing a boy would call.

I'm thinking. Considering the emotions of a character I created, puzzling out a plot point in a world of my own making, perfecting the rhythm of the words in a sentence.

I'm not getting paid for it. I'm there because I want to be. And there's nothing radical about it.

I'm just a person working hard on something I care deeply about.

That's love.

“The Bottom Line on the Bottom-of-the-Line” by Lisa Scottoline from *I Need a Lifeguard Everywhere but the Pool*

Having said how empowering it is to drive a truck, I neglected to mention how disempowering it is to bargain for one.

Is there anybody in the world who likes haggling over price? Not me.

I hate it.

Why?

Because I usually want what I'm bargaining for.

Plus I want to be liked.

This would be the double whammy for negotiators.

Let me remind you that I was a lawyer in a former life, and I negotiated all the time. I was a badass negotiator, back then. Because I wasn't fighting for myself. I was fighting for you.

It brought out the mama bear in me.

But when I'm fighting for myself, I'm a kitten. And not one of those kittens that scratches your hand. One of those kittens that hooks its flimsy nails into your sweater and won't let go.

You have to declaw me to free yourself from my love attack.

So what happened was I went to my Ford dealership, because I liked my old bottom-of-the-line truck and I wanted to replace it with another bottom-of-the-line truck. By the way, don't think I'm being cheap. The truck is my second car, and I use it mostly to plow snow, pull horses, and tool around the block when I need self-esteem.

But the Ford dealership didn't have a bottom-of-the-line truck for me to test-drive. They offered to order one for me, but only if I promised to buy it first, without seeing or even driving it.

That struck me as a pig in a poke, truck-wise.

So I went home and started comfort-eating in front of the TV—and lo and behold, I saw a commercial for a Toyota truck, which was a bright blue like an M&M.

And I thought, why not?

I like that color and I love M&Ms.

Also, maybe I'm in a Ford rut?

I get that way with cars, food, and clothes.

The only thing I don't get that way with is husbands.

I have no problem changing things up in the Marriage Department.

But chocolate cake and I will be together forever.

To return to point, I used to think that way about Ford and I couldn't give it up easily, so I went to another Ford dealership, where they happened to have one bottom-of-the-line truck, in white. I drove it around, and the Ford guys were super nice and I liked the truck okay, but I kept thinking about the blue Toyota in the commercial.

My head had been turned.

Then I did some research into Toyota trucks and I learned that they're built in the USA, which matters to me.

So on a lark, I went to a Toyota dealership, but they didn't have the bottom-of-the-line. The only truck they had was middle-of-the-line—in the M&M blue.

I test-drove it and fell in love.

And I wanted it, even though it was nicer than I needed. Let the bargaining begin!

I never know how to start haggling, so I asked simply, "Isn't there anything better you can do on the price?"

"I have to talk to my manager," the salesman said, then went away and came back. He had taken something off the price, but it wasn't very much, and since the truck was the nicer model, it made sense that it cost more than the bottom-of-the-line Ford.

But I didn't want to give up.

I told myself to haggle like a grown-ass woman.

So I asked, “Can you sharpen your pencil?” which is something I heard someone say once. It sounds a lot better than, “Can you give it to me cheaper, please?”

The salesman went away again and when he came back, his pencil was sharper, but not sharp enough. The truck was still too expensive.

I came to my senses, and my inner monologue kicked in:

I didn’t need the nicer truck. It was right that the nicer truck cost more than I wanted to pay. You can’t get middle-of-the-line for a bottom-of-the-line price, especially not if you’re a lousy negotiator like me.

“Thank you, but no.” I picked up my purse, rose to go, and started walking toward the door.

At which point all hell broke loose.

The salesman started running toward me, and so did another guy in a tie, and both men called my name, so I turned around.

“I’m the manager,” said the guy in the tie. “Please, come back and sit down. Let me give you our blowout price.”

BLOWOUT PRICE?!

“Okay,” I said calmly, knowing that it probably would not be anywhere near what I was willing to pay.

So we sat down.

And very dramatically, the manager took out a piece of paper and actually wrote **BLOWOUT PRICE** in a Sharpie, and next to that, he wrote a blowout price. It wasn’t as low as I wanted, but it wasn’t as high as before.

It was the Goldilocks of truck prices.

By the way, did I mention that the truck was M&M blue? And made in the USA?

Dear Reader, I bought my dream truck!

My new blue truck sits in my driveway, right underneath my red American flag.

Red, white, and blowout price.

I realized later that I didn't have to say anything to get the better deal.

I just had to leave.

So what is the moral of the story—or even of this book?

Sometimes you do the right thing, even when you have no idea what you're doing.

Even though your brain is saying: **YOU CAN'T NEGOTIATE. YOU CAN'T EVEN SWIM. YOU NEED A LIFE-GUARD.**

We really are our own lifeguard, in the end. Our feet will walk us right out the door.

Or wherever we want to go.

May you get the truck of your dreams. May you get whatever you wish for.

You deserve nothing less. Because you are top-of-the-line.