

# Where have all the flowers gone?

An admittedly inept dater—single at the moment—laments the lost art of wooing

It's official: Romance is dead.

The tragic event occurred at 9:36 p.m. last Tuesday. That was when a group of friends and I were sitting around in a bar after a reading that several of us had taken part in. Basking in the glow of post-performance relief, we were knocking back a few beers and talking about all of those important things that people talk about when they're slightly buzzed. We had already discussed which childhood

**MY QUEER LIFE**  
BY MICHAEL THOMAS FORD

comic book heroes we'd had crushes on, what our favorite songs of the 1970s were, and the relative appeal of corduroy pants. Now it was my turn to choose a topic for debate.

"Here you go," I said after thinking for a minute. "I want to talk about flowers."

"Flowers?" said my friend Anna. "What about them?"

Truth be told, I wanted their advice. I was thinking about sending flowers to a man I had recently met and was considering asking out, but I wasn't entirely sure it was the right thing to do.

"Say you meet this guy," I theorized, "at a party or something. He seems really nice, and you have a great conversation. A couple of days later, you get flowers from him and a note saying he really enjoyed talking to you and would like to maybe have dinner or coffee or something."

"How did he get my address?" asked my friend Jackson suspiciously.

"What?" I said. "I don't know. What difference does it make? That's not the point."

"I just wouldn't want any of you giving out my address or phone number to some guy who wanted to stalk me," he said.

"Who said anything about stalking?" I said. "It's just flowers."

"I don't know," said Anna, taking a drag on her cigarette. "It sounds like too much commitment to me. I mean, I feel like I owe a guy sex if he buys me dinner. Starting with flowers would be like asking me to swallow on the first date. I'm not ready for that."

"He just wants to have dinner!" I said. "No one even mentioned sex."

"It's always about sex," said Jackson bitterly. "No one sends flowers just because he's a nice guy. He wants sex. And if he wants sex, why can't he just call me and ask to come over? Why send flowers? What's that supposed to mean, anyway?"

"It doesn't have to mean anything," I explained in exasperation. "He likes you. He wants to tell you that, and he wants to ask you to dinner. What's the big deal about flowers? They're romantic."

"It's just sort of creepy," said Anna. "You know, desperate and clutchy and all that."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Granted, it's a well-established fact that I am the world's worst dater. But even I would be thrilled if someone sent me flowers. You know, as long as I liked him. But even if I didn't, I wouldn't turn him in to the local sex crimes unit. Apparently, my friends felt differently.

"I don't like all that flowers and cards crap," said Jackson. "Next thing you know, he'll be calling my dad asking for my hand in marriage.

I prefer your standard gay date: Go to dinner and then go home and have sex all night; say goodbye in the morning, maybe exchange numbers if you want to do it again. That's it."

"Amen," said Anna.

"But you're a straight girl," I protested. "You're supposed to love all that romantic stuff."

"No one I know does," she insisted. "That's all just a coverup for getting you into bed. Any girl I know would be really suspicious if some guy sent her flowers. He's trying too hard. It's like not waiting a day to call someone back."

"Well, I don't believe you," I said.



"There have to be some men left—and women too—who want romance. There have to be some people left who like being courted."

Anna and Jackson looked at each other and laughed cruelly.

"This is why you never go out with anyone," said Jackson. "You haven't learned the rules yet. Just screw 'em and get out. That's how it's done. If you happen to find one you want to keep around, don't blow it by sending him flowers or singing beneath his window or whatever stupid thing you have in mind. It'll just backfire. You have to play hard to get."

"You are a bitter queen," I said. "And I'm going to prove you wrong. Both of you."

The next day, I called up the local florist and sent the man I was interested in a dozen roses with a card that read, "I've enjoyed getting to know you. How about dinner on Friday?"

Then I waited. I knew he'd call. After all, since we met we'd spoken several times on the phone and had great conversations. He was smart, and funny, and all of those things men generally aren't these days. Surely he would understand that flowers don't have to mean something sinister.

He did call, about an hour after the roses

arrived. I was out walking the dog and came home to find the message light blinking.

"Hi," said his voice on my machine.

"Thanks so much for the flowers. They're really, um, nice. Look, about Friday. I guess I should have explained that I'm, um, not really ready to date anyone seriously."

It went on, but we needn't get into the grisly details. Suffice it to say, it was not a joyous moment and it involved the phrase "still be friends."

That Friday, instead of going out with my would-be beau, I went out with Anna and Jackson.

"You win," I said as soon as we sat down. I told them what had happened.

"See?" said Anna jadedly when I was finished. "It never works. You scared him."

"You should have just sent him e-mail saying you wanted to savage him if it was convenient," suggested Jackson.

"That's more to the point."

Before I could argue, the waitress appeared at our table, interrupting our discussion. "Here you go," she

said, setting down a votive candle.

dle.

"For my favorite customers."

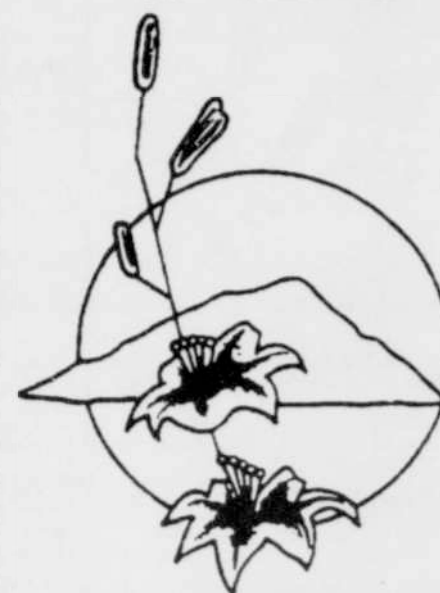
She smiled at us and left. As she walked away, I picked up the candle.

"And just what's this supposed to mean?" I said, blowing it out. "I bet she just wants a bigger tip."

"See?" said Anna, patting me on the back. "Now you're catching on."

■ MICHAEL THOMAS FORD is currently on a reading tour for his book *Alec Baldwin Doesn't Love Me and Other Trials from My Queer Life*. He welcomes e-mail at [Shoptiltee@aol.com](mailto:Shoptiltee@aol.com).

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