

THE PROVOCATEUR

A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

‘Dating apps aren’t the problem. You are’

Journalist and former gay dating columnist *Justin Myers* (aka The Guyliner) says you can’t blame Tinder for everything



IT’S TIRING, ISN’T IT? The swiping, the messaging, the weary certainty that Ben, 34, a 6ft tall ‘creative’ is in fact 37, 5ft 9in and creative only with the truth. Dating apps are the natural home of the sociopathic liar, who bugs you again and again when you don’t reply, or whose profile photo is so old that you turn up to meet him and think he’s sent his dad. Terrible banter, requests for nudes and a middle finger when they don’t come through, then, worse still, the dates themselves: sitting through two hours of someone’s life story and halitosis, going to block them as soon as you’re in the cab home, only to find they got there first. Oh well, what does it matter? He’s nobody, just a face on a screen.

When did it become so cold and robotic? It must be the apps, right? The deathless stream of potential suitors made us complacent, disillusioned. Searching dating apps is something we do when we’re bored; it’s trivial, not exciting. If someone doesn’t work out, we know there’s another ahead, so we skimp on sentiment. What happened to romance, courtship, love at first sight? Wouldn’t it be better if we met people the old-fashioned way, whatever that is? Before technology ruined dating, made it transactional and dull.

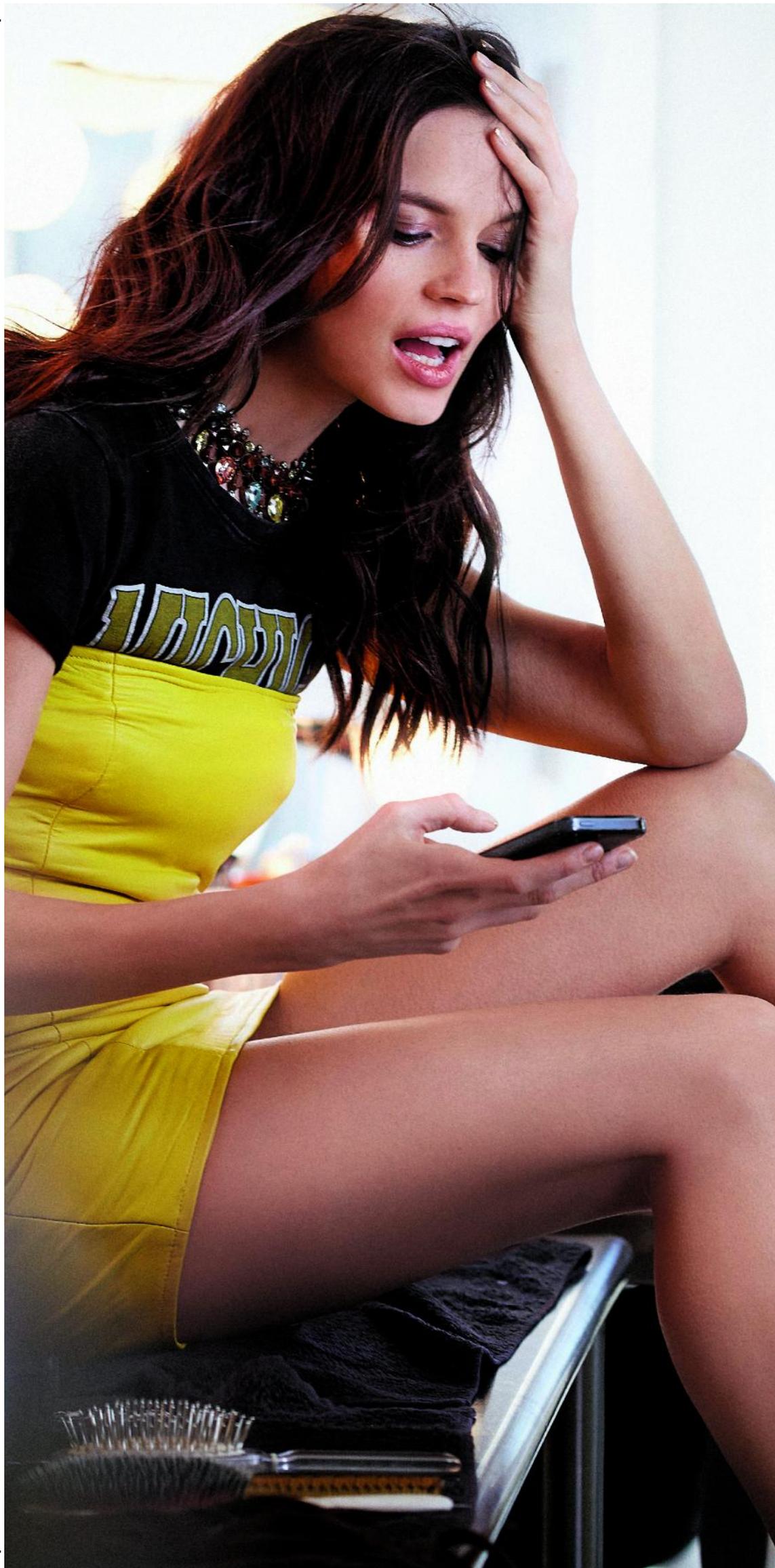
But I have devastating news. You may wish to avail yourself of a fainting couch.

Tech isn’t the problem. It’s us. The humans. Apps give us the perfect excuse to behave like a trash carnival, but they don’t create it. Necessity is the mother of invention but, with dating, it was laziness and impatience. ‘I’m way too busy to spend time finding out more about someone,’ we say, ‘I’d rather make a snap judgement based on one photo.’ While this isn’t groundbreaking – it’s why hot people cop off in bars before everyone else – apps give us more power, and it’s gone to our heads.

Think of so-called digital-age dating ‘trends’, like ghosting. Have you noticed how they’re merely new terms for behaving shittily, which we’ve been expert at for some time now, believe me. Ghosting seems current in a world where we’re in constant communication and can’t imagine why people wouldn’t reply instantly. But it’s been around since time immemorial, when Ug the caveman decided he’d had enough of being hunter-gatherer for his family and sodded off to the mountains to ‘find himself’ among the woolly mammoths. If Ug were alive now, he’d have a very boring blog and ‘not into commitment or endless chat that doesn’t go anywhere thks’ on his Tinder bio. This is who we are.

Rejection has been reconfigured as ‘just one of those things’ – until it happens to us. But when you can block, ignore or fire





off a quick, 'I don't think so,' why would you worry about someone's feelings? Your time is precious and you can't waste it on something that isn't the real thing, because with more choice comes increased pressure. Social media allows us to compare ourselves to anybody else in the world. That perfect Instagram couple who live in a permanent juice-cleanse, on sunny beaches, snap after snap of flattering angles? Back in the day, they'd be your annoying next-door neighbours who went on better holidays than you and had noisy sex – only an irritant to those in close proximity. Technology, however, which humans invented with a view to making our lives easier, gives them fake importance, so we reject anyone who doesn't match up. In the search for efficiency – getting that dream relationship or lifestyle, wasting as little time as possible – we forget there are human emotions at play. So maybe the change needs to come from us. We need to stop using the march of technology as an excuse for our behaviour.

The way we use dating apps, with strict criteria thanks to filters based on age, proximity, even eye colour, lasers out of existence any idea of finding things out for ourselves. And serendipity is not to be sniffed at. One summer, sick of trying to let men down gently, I started saying yes. 'Sure, why not?' became my mantra. It wasn't always successful; I spent untold hours with men trying to teach me about wine/cycling/stately homes/barbecuing – what is it with dudes desperate to school you, btw? But I also met some interesting, cool men. An instant physical attraction is a nice idea, but there's a lot to be said for nurturing it, watching it develop, rather than cutting dead any hope with one swipe.

When used with honesty and empathy, dating apps can change your life; they can help you find out more about yourself. Yes, block the arseholes and, yes, take control over who you talk to and when, but don't let them ruin the opportunities the apps can give you. It's time to widen our criteria, take chances on people, rather than step over them in pursuit of a mythical soulmate.

Filter less on looks – most hot people are evil FYI – and more on a whim. Reintroduce randomness and remember life is not just our storyline, with the rest of the world a series of extras. Tell the truth and have a heart, and technology can be your friend. Oh and, guys, please remember being 6ft is not a state of mind. Be 5ft 9in and proud! (I'm 5ft 10in, honest.)

'The Last Romeo' by Justin Myers is out in paperback on 31 May (£8.99, Piatkus)