

To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance

OSCAR WILDE
Irish poet



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BIRTHDAY TRAGEDY

TWIN brothers who were celebrating their 62nd birthday fell to their death after a balcony caved in at a KZN chalet.

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METRO

VALENTINE'S DAY

Spicing up relationships and improving sex lives

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WITH Valentine's Day being celebrated next week, sexual relations are bound to be part of the festivities.

But during these challenging times, intimacy might be put on the back burner as stressed-out couples battle the obstacles of daily life.

Two Gauteng sex store owners are hoping to come to lovers' rescue for the most romantic day of the year, and with the help of their toys and paraphernalia, the female entrepreneurs want to help couples spice things up between the sheets.

"When we were kids we always had toys, so now that we are adults, it doesn't mean we should stop playing," Sharon Gordon, the owner of Lola Montez and *Saturday Star* columnist said this week.

"Sex toys are the perfect way to take your relationship to the next level."

These sentiments were shared by Dalene Brand, the owner of Pure Plesier Sensual Boutique in Pretoria, who also encouraged couples to temporarily put their problems aside and to use Valentine's Day as an opportunity for intimacy.

"Sex is very important for you. It has been proven to make you happier and there is nothing as good as an orgasm," Brand believes. "Everyone should have sex and everyone should enjoy it."

Both Brand and Gordon have made it their life's work to class up the notorious sex industry, and with the help of their products and expertise, are hoping to improve their clients' sex lives.

Brand was elated to have already achieved this during the 10 years years of running her sensual boutique in Erasmusloof. "I have saved a few marriages where husbands had already moved out," she proudly proclaimed.

For Gordon, a lawyer turned sex store owner who operates from Johannesburg's Hyde Park Corner, her passion is to help people find pleasure.

"Lola Montez is about pleasure, understanding your pleasure, that you are entitled to it, and that there is nothing dirty or wrong with having great sex," Gordon, who has been in the business for 21 years and the first woman in South Africa to spearhead the industry, also believes that this is not just limited to those in relationships, or to youngsters.

She urged people from all walks of life to enjoy sex toys and products, because everyone deserves to "play"



SEX store entrepreneurs Sharon Gordon and Dalene Brand. | KARISHMA DIPA

and have pleasure.

"Sex toys are just like Tupperware with batteries. We need to normalise it and remove the stigma," Gordon believes that this misconception has led to the "orgasm gap". "Many women feel like they don't deserve to orgasm, and that is something I desperately want to change. One of the things about toys that is misconceived is that people think that it is only those who are single or desperate, but the whole thing about it is that they are meant for play and for fun, so if you battle to orgasm, toys will help."

And at Lola Montez, there is a range of toys to choose from. Gordon believes that she and her team have the skills and experience to match the right one to each individual. "Toys are the best wingman on the planet," she insisted. She added that strides made in the sex industry had made sex toys safer than ever before to enjoy.

"The toy industry has got classier, and the toys are much nicer, more beautiful, and the materials are no longer made with plastic jelly but with medical grade silicones."

Over the years, the sex industry has come a long way from intimidating toys which were then largely sold in sleazy stores with blacked out windows. Gordon and Brand offer aesthetically pleasing shops where their clients can feel comfortable to explore the sex world.

"My boutique is a classy and safe



Products at the Pure Plesier Sensual Boutique. | KARISHMA DIPA

space for people to come and shop, and we have a rule that when men come and there is a lady inside, they have to wait for her to finish before they can enter, to ensure discreet shopping," said Gordon.

And like almost everything else, sex toys have also gone digital. "Technological sex toys have been a new trend over the past few years and they are so popular in South Africa," Gordon said.

Among these are app-enabled toys which can be operated from different parts of the world. "They enable



Dalene Brand, the owner of the Pure Plesier Sensual Boutique. | KARISHMA DIPA

intimacy to continue even with long distances," Brand explained.

Air suction toys were also wildly popular, Gordon added, as they allowed imaginations to run wild. "These toys allow you to live out your fantasies, which is great fun and a valuable experience for couples. If you close your eyes while using them, it is a safe way to explore a threesome fantasy."

The Lola Montez owner is also passionate about female empowerment and she believes that her business helps women to feel better about themselves.

"Sex toys help to bridge the orgasm gap, which can also be emotional because women on average experience far fewer orgasms than men."

Women experiencing menopause is also something Gordon wants to help females with, something she says she has also personally experienced.

"I have gone from having a fantastic libido in my thirties to having menopause, so I have empathy for what my older clients are going through."

Meanwhile, Brand added that as menopause had an impact on a woman's body which directly affected her sex life, many of her products were geared towards assisting with this.

"Women think when they reach menopause they don't need to enjoy sex anymore, but this is the most exciting time of your life because we are so much more open to life during that time. It's the perfect opportu-

nity to explore your sensuality," said Brand.

Gordon also believes that whether a woman is in a relationship or not, she is responsible for her own sexual pleasure.

"Lola Montez is all about education and empowerment, and sex is not what we see in porn because that is all staged. A lot of women don't believe in sex toys because they believe that men are responsible for their pleasure, but breaking this patriarchy is something I am passionate about."

"We must take responsibility for our own journey and not just lie there and put up with terrible sex just to be loved and adored, because the reality is that unless we love and adore ourselves first, we can't love others properly."

Brand agreed and added that women have the power through sex and with the help of toys and products, to create a happy and healthy intimate relationship.

"I have been happily married for the past 30 years and it's not perfect but we have a great sex life, and I think that the magic ingredient with sex is intimacy. If you want to have a happy relationship, keep your husband satisfied."

She suggested making your partner and your sex life a priority, something that can be enhanced by sex toys and products.

"Once a week or so, have a date night; even at home where you light sensual candles, have a bubble bath and just spend time together."

Gordon also suggested starting small when it comes to spicing up intimate relations.

"Figure out if you are a G-Spot, Clit girl or both and then start with lube play and don't take it too seriously. There is so much value in making orgasms much easier, as well as having humour, intimacy and shared experiences with your partner."

Both women also advocate for open communication with their partner as well as their friendship circles when it comes to sex.

"Attitudes around sex are changing, but at a very slow pace because people don't want to openly talk about it," said Gordon.

"I think it's the way we have been brought up, and the saddest thing about my shop is that the people who need it the most will never come here because they think it's sleazy. But we need a mindset change," said Brand.

#ATYPICALINTERVIEW:
ACTRESS AND SINGER
NATASHA VAN DER MERWE
ON THE FIRST THING SHE
WOULD ASK PRESIDENT
CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

ACTRESS and up-and-coming singer Natasha van der Merwe is best known for her role in the soapie *Suidooster*, where she plays the role of Suzie.

Natasha is also marking her entry into the music industry with the release this week of her debut single, *Hou My Vas*, in tandem with an official music video, just in time for Valentine's Day.

Natasha is also a talented theatre actress and has performed to audiences all over the world. Her theatre credits include well-known musicals, with roles in the likes of *Mamma Mia*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Rock of Ages* and *Doringsloot*.

Most recently she was cast as Annie in the international touring production of the Broadway musical *Chicago*.

The greatest Afrikaans singer South Africa has ever produced is ...

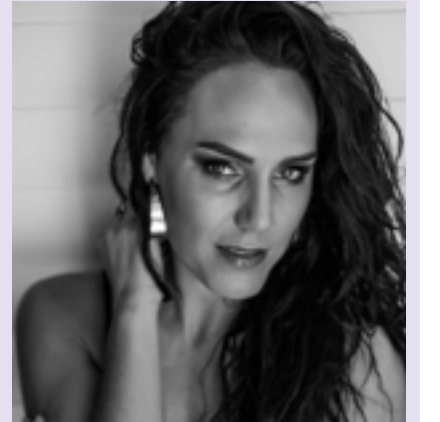
Yoh, this is tough. There are so many outstanding artists, but the first to come to mind are Tarryn Lamb and Theuns Jordaan.

You are able to collaborate with any South African artist on a song. Who do you choose and why?

Lee Cole. I think he's incredibly talented and has such a diverse, unique and incredible set of pipes on him. By far one of our most talented musicians.

The meal that most reminds you of your childhood is ...

Spag bowl. I learnt how to make a mean mince from my dad. Vetkoek is another one that reminds me of my



childhood.

Tell us about the worst date you've ever been on ...

Yoh, this is one for the books. I'm still reeling from shock and it's been 10 years, haha. Let's just say he started off informing me he is going to be late because he is straightening his hair. He then proceeded to tell me to wait for him outside my house (while it's raining) so that I can just jump into the car. Needless to say, he arrives and flings the car door open, without getting out and even introducing himself. We then got to the movies, where I was expected to pay for our popcorn and drinks.

You are only able to shop at one clothing store for the rest of your life. Which store do you choose?

Eish, does Shein count? I think I could be happy with that. Keeping it to an actual store in South Africa, I'd have to say H&M – they have the most variety and cover everything from underwear to evening wear!

What is the biggest misconception people have of you?

I don't feel like people have a misconception of me. I'm pretty much a "what you see is what you get" kinda girl ... But if it comes to me being an actress/performer, I would say that it often looks easy from the outside and glamorous and fun, but it's actually a lot of humble hard work filled with humility and vulnerability.

The song that most adequately describes your life right now is ...

Ooohh, I'm a huge fan of P!nk, and her new song *Trustfall*.

What is your definition of love?

Respect, kindness and honesty. To treat others the way you'd like to be treated.

Your go-to take-out spot is ...?

Ooh, this is tough. I don't really eat take-out but if I have to choose something, I'd actually pick a lekker Mugg & Bean chicken mayo sandwich on gluten-free bread ... or Steers chips with Thousand Island sauce. Lots of it!

You are stuck in an elevator with President Cyril Ramaphosa. What's the first thing you ask him?

Can you genuinely go to bed at night with a clear conscience? There are too many questions. | SAMEER NAIK

BOOK EXTRACT

DO YOU feel more true blue than red hot on Valentine's Day? You're not alone. Wait.

You are alone. That's the blues thing. Unless you have a few half-sized bottles of sparkling wine – and we know how long those last – there's not much fun in popping the cork for one.

The red heart rages because strolling hand in hand along a pristine KZN beach somewhere is out of the question. It's not just the sewage spills but the lack of response from Conman Don.

You've heard nothing more from him since you deposited the money he needed to finish filming the "tropical aspect" of his movie – the one he was shooting for the SABC. He said you'd be perfect for a leading role, but for some odd reason, you can no longer see his profile image on WhatsApp.

You thought you'd be meeting him at King Shaka Airport today. But you're not. You're picking at your cuticles, eating pilchards from the tin, and wondering why empathies like you fall prey to *tsotsis* and why we celebrate the day of Valentine's beheading for the crime of conducting marriages when Emperor Claudius The Cruel had forbidden his soldiers to tie the knot.

Imagine how betrayed the well-meaning priest must have felt – all love, light, and kiss the bride one minute, locked in jail penning a heartfelt letter to his jailer's daughter the next. An unholy wedlock, indeed!

Seize the romantic reins and rule

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CAROLINE Hurry is the winner of a Tourism Authority of Thailand Award for International Media Reporting. She has written for several publications, including Independent Newspapers and the Zurich-based, *A Small World*. "Flow 21 Secrets" is her second book in her 'Hygge Queen' series, the first being 'Reign 16 Secrets from 6 Queens to rule your world with clarity, connection & sovereignty'.

At least, with Claudius The Cruel, you knew where you were. The name alone was a clue. These days the likes of Narcissist Nick, Gaslighter Gary, and Stingy Steve come clothed as Cupid.

They dazzle you with their derring-do tales. They pierce your heart with their poisoned arrows. They trade in Tinder and other fairy tales that enable romance peddlars – commercial florists and confectioners – to charge triple on February 14.

When you come off Cloud Nine, and reality hits, you're in a cold dark pool of self-pity, berating yourself for letting Boomerang Bruce and Hardluck Harry drain your energy, goodwill,



and finances. When did you become a sitting duck for psycho-poachers?

Where did you miss the signs? How did you allow some goalpost-shifting, pompous mansplainer to order for you in a restaurant without asking about your preferences or allergies?

Looking back with an appraising eye, you may admit you failed to weed out the chancers by turning a (love-



FALLING for Narcissist Nick, Gaslighter Gary, and Stingy Steve clothed as Cupid can leave you feeling true blue rather than red hot, trading in lies and fairy tales that allow commercial florists to make a killing on Valentine's Day.

is-blind) eye to warning whispers that became flapping red flags such as these seven below.

1. Online, he addresses you as "Respected Dear", "Beautiful Lady", or gets too familiar too soon

2. Asks to borrow money for any reason

3. Does not return calls and texts timeoutously

4. Delays and evades - you've never met his friends or family

5. He sulks, withdraws, and stonewalls you

6. You find yourself walking on eggshells around him

7. He's negative, stingy, a resentful tipper, and complains constantly

If you've slipped on the treacherous rocks of romance or fallen in love with "potential" for too long, *Flow 21 Secrets to Refresh Your Relationships* (Hygge Books) is an outstretched hand. You can learn:

Four fast ways to stop a rogue in his tracks

1. Always believe in the red flags over someone's potential

2. Trust a person's patterns over their apologies

3. You are more than enough. Value your worth, and never let anyone undermine you

4. Raise the bar by becoming the person you seek. Embody every quality you think somebody else needs to supply

◆ Isn't it time you lifted your standards and stopped wasting time on people who don't appreciate your gifts? Discover more dating secrets with *Flow 21 Secrets to Refresh Your Relationships*, published, from Hygge Books (LLC). It is available on Amazon or directly from the author by arrangement. There is a paperback special for South Africans of R300 and this includes postage to your nearest Postnet. Email the author caroline@hurry.co.za for more details.