

## The English male: marvel or misery?

By Sally Peck and Sam Leith

Sally Peck gives a spirited defence of the species and says it is indeed manners that maketh the English male, while Sam Leith confesses that he feels he and his countrymen leave much to be desired when it comes to wooing the fairer sex.

### Sally Peck

When I was eight, I was in a production of Camelot in New York. I played a mustard pot in Merlin's workshop. What puzzled me most about the plotline was why Guinevere would ever consider leaving King Arthur for Lancelot du Lac.

Knight, schmight. King Arthur had principles. He advocated right over might. He had a castle. Romantically he may have been a bit inept but, once captured, he was in it for the long haul. Old Lancelot was a bit of a cockerel. He may have picked up some Continental smooth-talking, but where was the substance? 'C'est moi', indeed.

Fourteen years later and a few cosmopolitans into an evening out on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, I met an Englishman. In sharp contrast to the hackneyed bumbling Hugh Grant character in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, my now-husband marched right up and introduced himself.

Up until that point, I'd had a few dating misadventures. American men can't go on a date without leaking out where they went to university in the first five minutes—the first two if it was in the Ivy League. A Ukrainian date spent the evening lecturing me on the success of communism, and how he planned to devote his life to the cause—right after he made a few million on Wall Street. A Japanese professor tried to impress by picking me up in a red convertible blasting Kenny G. A French engineer devoted so much flowery language to detailing my many charms that even I grew bored. On a first date, a Brazilian photographer suggested we go to Central Park to take photographs of me. Nude. In daylight. These men were all non-stop PR machines, shamelessly selling themselves, or, at least, promoting an idealised image of what they thought they were.

On the first night I met my husband, he politely offered to buy me a drink, and then proceeded to discuss French wines, Chinese art, banking and literature with insight and enthusiasm, as if that were what one normally did in Alphabet City at midnight. English men are different—they realise it's not about them. A bit of humility isn't a bad thing. Call it shyness if you will. I'd call it manners.

## Sam Leith

Well, we are rubbish, aren't we? Last week I asked my girlfriend to marry me. Where did I do it? Atop the Great Pyramid of Giza? On a shikara in Kashmir? On a deserted beach by the last rays of the setting sun? Nope. I did it in a dingy hotel perfumed with the mingled aromas of Brown Windsor soup and coach parties that should have opted for one more loo break en route.

"You what?" said my beloved. When I got on one knee, I imagine she thought I'd dropped a contact lens. If I hadn't brought a ring, I dare say she'd have said: "You're drunk." Instead, after a while, she said something like: "Oh, okay."

Back in my single days, occasionally I would muster up courage to pay court to a lady. Normally, she would look confused. "Was that... a pass?" she would invariably say as the penny dropped. "Oh, bless you!" Sometimes she then suffered a huge fit of giggles. "Ha. No, really, thanks. But, no. Honestly. Not on your life. Very sweet of you to ask, though."

The English nation's romantic archetype remains Hugh Grant in *Four Weddings*. Go-getting Canadian journalists in search of ruddy-cheeked, flower-brandishing, wallet-waving Alpha-smoothie beefcake are best off sticking to North America.

English suitors are shy, gauche and nerdy when they are not boisterous, bibulous and boorish. But there is one to English men. When they propose to you in a horrible Devon hotel and you say "Oh, okay", that is something for which they will be grateful until the day that they die.

### Match words & phrases from the text to their definitions:

huge fit of giggles	a lot of pleasant-sounding words
the day that they die	an intense attack of laughter
muster up courage	process of attracting women
we are rubbish	lively; with character
he may have been a bit inept	overcome fear (of doing something)
In sharp contrast to	spend his life trying to achieve something
devote his life to the cause	quality that makes up for any faults
flowery language	trying to make people see them as better than they are
promoting an idealised image	very differently from
mingled aromas	we are no good at this
redeeming feature	the end of their lives
spirited	mixed smells
wooing	he was probably not very competent

Which date...  
bored her?

tried to impress her with a car?

suggested something improper?

gave her a political lecture?

What was different about her husband?

How does Sam view British men?

Find a word to describe a well-built, presumably handsome, man.

Explain:

"Knight, schmicht".

" he was in it for the long haul".

"a few cosmopolitans into an evening out"

"Was that... a pass?"

" as the penny dropped"

"muster up courage"

Find other collocations with 'courage'