

## The True-Life Tale Of A Wallflower Gone Wild

By Erin Brereton

how I became a

# fantastic flirt

Interested in you...or just nearsighted?

### I've never been much of a flirt.

Although in college I blamed my lack of dates on the fact I wore overalls almost every day and frequently went to class without brushing my hair, the truth was, I am about as flirtatious as a piece of driftwood. I didn't get asked out a lot as a result. (Although I do suspect the overalls and the matted mass on the back of my head played a part.)

My typical attempt at flirting involves freezing and then making a stiff smile. That is not charming. That is not hot. And, given the lack of dates I've had lately, that is not working. Men I meet now are subjected to my one, really poor pick-up line: *Do you know what time it is?* It could be an informative skit on *Sesame Street*; it could be me flirting—it's hard to tell.

So when a copy of *101 Ways to Flirt: How to Get More Dates and Meet Your Mate* by Susan Rabin and Barbara Lagowski crossed my desk, I decided it was time to learn to suc-

cessfully woo the opposite sex. I set out to test some of the instructions and see if they would make me a flirting master. Or, at least, if they could make me stop using that lame time intro.

### Lesson: Arresting Glances That Won't Get You Arrested Lesson: How Long Is Long Enough?

When I spot a cute guy, my typical reaction is to quickly look away and hope he hasn't noticed me. I quickly avert my eyes as if to say, "I was doing many very important things a moment ago, but I was *definitely not* appraising you." But I was, of course. I'm picturing our first date! How he'll send me flowers! The way my friends will be amazed by his wit and charm! How in love we will be!

But first, I need to anxiously stare at my shoes and pretend he's not there.

As it turns out, I'm not so off-base.

According to *101 Ways to Flirt*, eye contact can easily be overdone. The book warns to avoid a leering smile—think seductive, not fun-house-clown creepy—and to respect his space (no pawing his sweater and drooling). The correct way to look is to let your gaze linger long enough to say "Hello. I see you." (Of course, the most important part of this is to say it in your head, silently.)

My newfound resolution to flirt begins with my friend Nancy's birthday party, at a local jazz club. I'm all ready to shoot three guys smoldering glances but they initiate contact first. All three are visiting businessmen, and the most chatty is a tall New Yorker named Dan. He talks and I pretend to be fascinated. Hoping to spice things up, I start staring at Dan's friend. The friend stares back. Then he looks away. I look back. Then I look away. Then, for visual variety, I look at the big bottles of liquor behind the counter (I don't want to seem like a stalker). Then I look away again. (I don't want to seem like a drunk).

The book doesn't exactly cover what to say after you've engaged in a series of glances, but I feel like at some point we have to stop staring and start talking and I don't know what to say—so far, I've just been mostly listening. Luckily, my friend Stef saves me by asking a question. She is deep in conversation with the third visiting businessman, a nondescript and very inebriated brown-haired guy that peppers his speech with phrases like "I'm so wrecked!"

So did the flirting work? I'm not sure. They didn't ask for my number, but in an odd coincidence, I did run into the nondescript businessman the next day in the elevator at work. He was no longer drunk and, in fact, avoided eye contact all together.

### Lesson: Great Flirting Props for Mass Transit

I take a train to work, and it's full of men—what a perfect place to test out my new lesson.

The book suggests bringing a pet on the train—a great attention-getter, true, but I don't have one and it's hard to borrow and return a dog before work. I instead opt to bring the "something clumsy" the book also recommends. I pack my over-the-shoulder bag until it bulges as if it were with child.

I am somewhat disappointed that there seems to be little feminism in flirting, but I try to look decidedly helpless on the train platform. Is being needy really more attractive?

Luckily, no. The train comes and I am suddenly in the morning scramble to get a spot on board. And I am very unmoved to bat my eyelids at the three men who have just beat me down to grab space near the door. I have the distinct feeling if I were to fall they would stomp over my lifeless body and be somewhat annoyed it was interfering with their morning commute. So it seems like an inappropriate time to hit them up for dinner and a movie.

### Lesson: Going For It at the Grocery Store

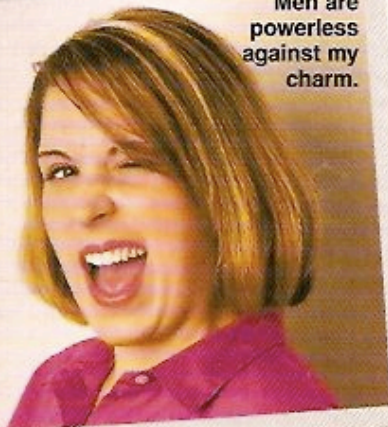
It's Saturday night and I decide to test the book's grocery store flirting advice. As the book says, who's shopping for food late at

Photography by Art Carillo

You  
can't be  
too coy.



Men are  
powerless  
against my  
charm.



## Fast Flirting Tips

There are too many great tips in *101 Ways to Flirt: How to Get More Dates and Meet Your Mate* for me to test them all, but if you're interested in

striking up a few coy conversations of your own, the book is available wherever books are sold. And here are a few of the 101 flirting tips to try:

- Look approachable—smile and laugh.
- Help start a conversation by carrying or wearing something unusual—or asking other people about something unusual *they're* carrying or wearing.
- Talk to every eligible guy at a party. Everyone. You never know who you'll meet.
- Make friendly eye contact but don't stare.



night? Career-minded singles, that's who. Mystified by the thought of potentially dating a guy who has a car *and* a job, I head over to the local grocery store.

I follow one particularly kind-looking blonde man in nicely pressed khakis. I fake like I'm buying a box of granola bars so I can trail him down the breakfast food aisle. The book suggests stealing someone's cart, pretending you thought it was yours and starting a conversation. I'm not above doing that, but he's holding a plastic shopping basket and I can't for the life of me figure out how to pry it from his hands without him noticing—or calling security. And it seems totally strange to start a conversation based on his cereal choice—"Special K? I think you're special, too..."

Foiled again. I leave the grocery store without a flirting triumph. But I do buy the box of granola bars because I'm sort of hungry, and they're really good.

### Lesson: Four Flirting Props That Attract Men Like Crazy

After some research, I find a bar that has dollar-beers every Thursday night. One cab later and I'm standing in a room of about 50 men and a whole lot of inexpensive Miller Lite.

I start to stare at a group of guys near the bar. They look back at me. I casually flip my hair (Lesson: The Signals She Sends When She Wants to Know You Better). I flip my hair again. The friend who accompanied me thinks I am having a spasm. But the men are still staring at me, their eyes glassy, their beers paused in mid-air. *They are powerless against my charm!* I think.

Suddenly, one of them cheers. Vocal support? It's more than I had expected! I am *fabulous*. Until I notice the giant TV screen just behind me. It wasn't me at all they were enchanted with—it was the NFL.

So I move aside. And accidentally enact Tip #25. Although I didn't bring something zany to attract attention, as the book suggests, as it turns out, the pole in the center of the room (besides being a crucial part of the building's structure) is also a great flirting tool! A nearby table of men makes a joke about pole dancing, and I introduce myself.

The guys are all friends and also health and driver's ed teachers. Within 20 minutes I've learned two things: 1. In addition to the old CPR woman dummy, there's now a guy! 2. Once you get into the habit of trying to flirt, the actual flirting becomes a whole lot easier. The coy glances and clever tricks didn't actually produce a connection, but all of a sudden, I felt like I had the confidence to strike up some witty banter.

You need flirting to get your foot in the door. Then it's easy to get something started, by asking questions about the city you live in or, in the case of the health teachers, that sketchy live birth movie shown in school.

And as I put on my coat to leave, one of the teachers invites me to a party he is having. Finally! Flirting success! I guess all that winking worked.

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