

A Former Teacher's Observations on Young Men



By Velina Derilova

There's a truth universally acknowledged by women of all colors and creeds around the globe: men suck. Okay, maybe not *all* of them, but you know what I mean. Or if you don't, ask your grandma or your mom, they'll tell you. Every woman in my family, which consists of a *lottt* of women, told me this on various occasions and in different ways. I never really questioned it growing up, but now I suspect it's a little more complex than that. Right? Right.

Years later, at 25, I still don't know too much about men or male nature. I have been in one long-term relationship and I have exactly three guy friends. I can't say I fully grasp their mindsets beyond the fact that they all (surprise!) like beautiful women and find a lot of stuff to be 'gay' (we're in Eastern Europe, after all). Also, they're intelligent and monogamous and thus are of quality that can be described as, well, above average.

Naturally, I was thrilled to start observing men, albeit teenaged Bulgarian men, and learn more about them when I became a teacher. I hadn't been in contact with teenagers ever since I stopped being a teenager and I had no idea what to expect. Since I am no longer in the teaching bizz, I can now step back and talk about the students that really stood out – the boys who I really believe will become great men, as vague as this concept may be.

So here's my short list of Bulgarian men-to-be who reminded me that being 17 doesn't necessarily mean you're uninteresting and shallow; the men who, I hope, will grow up to value women for who they are and not for what they can offer them. In other words, here's to the good guys.

All names have been changed for reasons of obvious nature ☺

Bozhidar

It's my first day of class. As an inexperienced and anxious young teacher, I enter the class room early to get things ready. And there he is. His hair is outrageously curly and long—the unruly kind that only a handful of guys in this world can really pull off and does he pull it off! And then there's the guitar. He is casually playing and when he sees me, he smiles. “Hi, I'm Bozhidar and I'm a musician.” Um, okay, I can overlook the doucheness of this proclamation, his adorableness exceeds it. After a few weeks, I stop being taken aback by his striking resemblance to Jim Morrison and begin to notice that he is idealistic, kind, absent-minded, creative and thinks the root of all evil is that people don't love each other enough. He is vegetarian and doesn't want to go to college—he just wants to play his music. He also likes cheating on tests and doesn't really do homework. Forgiven and forgiven.

Angel

He is Bozhidar's best friend. They are inseparable and it's disarming. This is the cutest bromance I have ever witnessed. They look out for each other like brothers do and write me a poem when I tell them I won't be their teacher for the second term in an attempt to make me stay. Angel never shows up without his deck of cards despite my protestations to taking it to class and insists on showing me his tricks. I reluctantly watch. Okay, he's good, but I've never been into cards that much. He's not super fluent in English, but it's obvious that he has a big heart, pardon the cliché, and you can't help liking him. A year younger than the rest, his sexual frustration is a tiny bit more apparent, but oh well, we've all been there.

Krum

He is the living proof that appearances lie. He is a body builder and first strikes me as a show off who can't back up his high self-esteem. Two classes later, I realize I couldn't have been more wrong. He is clever and he knows it. I never see him without a book in hand, his test scores are always the highest, and it all seems to come quite effortlessly to him. Krum doesn't overdo things, apart from working on his fitness, ha ha, and unlike my other students really knows when to pay attention and when to fool around. I notice that he prefers to listen than to speak, a non bullshitter, if you will, and always wears sweatpants because, you know, he goes straight to the gym after class.

Dido

He is one of the most intelligent and well-read 17-year-olds I have ever met. His vocabulary comes straight out of a SAT prep book and he likes, just loves, philosophizing. He is good at it too. Also, there's something dark about him. A deep pessimism soaks everything he says and he rarely misses a chance to be sarcastic. Dido's into the heaviest of heavy metal and dresses in black. Hiding his mood swings is not among his primary concerns. He is slightly overweight, but cutely so. At a parents' meeting, he introduces me to his 70-year-old grandfather, who talks to me in impeccable English. Grandpa was a prominent member of The Party back in the day, Dido tells me later on, and I begin to understand a few things. When he's no longer under-aged, I'd love to discuss life, death and all that jazz with him over a beer. Or two.