



LEGAL HIGHS

# Why anticipation is often better than reality

Exhilarating moments — where everything is imminent and nothing has yet gone wrong — are everywhere if you seek them out

Emma Freud | Saturday September 02 2023, 12.01am, The Times

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When it comes to natural highs, the night before my tenth birthday was hard to beat. I had glimpsed a huge present from my parents on the kitchen table . . . Maybe I was getting the doll’s house I’d dreamt of when I was six? Or the tie-dye, bell-bottom dungarees with matching tufted poncho from Biba? The thrilling possibilities made sleep challenging, but finally I drifted off in ecstasy. Come morning, I unwrapped a warm orange blanket for my bed. I can still taste the disappointment.

I should have learnt a lesson that day. The euphoric bliss of the “pre” experience is a heady state to be sought and relished, and the feeling of stirring anticipation is its own form of natural high.

These exhilarating moments — where everything is imminent and nothing has yet gone wrong — are everywhere if you seek them out. Savour the electric charge of possibility as you swipe right on a dating app — you’ll always have that, even if the date arrives wearing a cagoule. Glory in the pub-going, elf-watching and last-minute gift-wrapping of Christmas Eve, which so often provides more joy than the overt consumerism, barely suppressed family rows and compulsory overeating of Christmas Day. And dive into the sweet expectancy of the wedding rehearsal dinner — it can be giddier than the big day itself.



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Recently I attended a hen night, and towards the end of the evening an insanely handsome young man walked in wearing a tight pair of trousers and a sharp shirt. The room exploded as the bride realised that her friends had booked a stripper. He approached her (there was screaming), asked her to dance (hysteria) and transported her around the room in a series of libidinous moves — then bowed and left. It was sensational. The stripper who didn’t strip. Fifteen women had spent five minutes in ecstatic anticipation without ever having to look at the dangle of a wrinkly willy. All the pre, none of the actual. Heaven.

So next month, having learnt from the elation of my dance with the nonstripping stripper, I’m sticking by my new rule and having a party on the night before I stand in a wood in front of a man I have loved every hour of every day for 32 years to say: “I do.” After which we’re going for a pizza with the kids.