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**GET FIT
FOR
FREE**

**BEST APPS
& YOUTUBE
PERSONAL
TRAINERS**

**LIFE
CHANGING
SEX**

Three tales
of love &
seduction

**BREAK BAD
MONEY
HABITS
RICHER
IN 4 WEEKS**

**PIXIE
LOTT**
GIRL ON A
MISSION

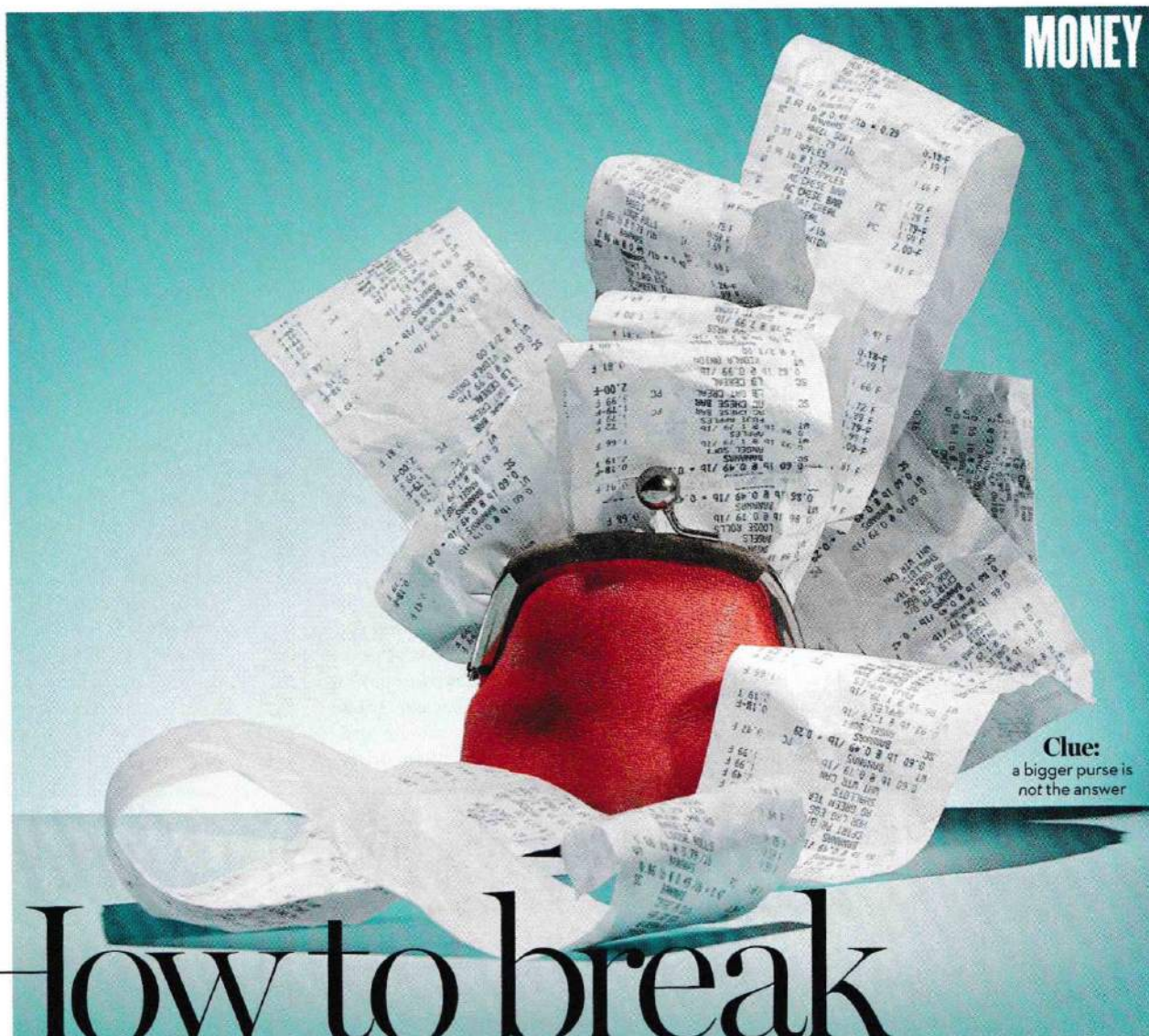
**LINGERIE
AWARDS**
From shape
fixers to date
night winners

**HE'S
BEHIND
YOU**
The terrifying
reality of
being stalked

FASHION FORECAST

Cool spring trends – plan your new look now

Sold as part of a multipack;
not for resale



Clue:
a bigger purse is
not the answer

How to break bad money habits

Smart, successful
(but busy) women are
often the worst at
organising their finances.
Alice Smellie puts
her hand up and vows
to make a change

'SO HOW DO YOU PLEAD, MADAM?'
'Guilty,' I murmur, wondering how I've managed to end up in court for a speeding offence. In truth, my real guilt lies in the fact that I'm a world-class procrastinator. My bills are only paid when the letters turn red, and I've never renewed a passport until after the expiry date. I pay my tax on 31 January, instead of the September before, when I get the reminder letter, and my financial admin is a disaster.

For this reason, a few months ago, I found myself in the local magistrates' court.

Having moved house and not changed the address on my driving licence (I did mean to), I didn't receive the letters about a minor speeding offence. It was only when they chucked in a court summons, a fine of almost £800 and six driving points that a missive finally wended its way from Oxfordshire to Somerset and into my sweating hands. At this point I finally accepted that financial delay, like crime, doesn't pay. Quite the opposite.

According to Piers Steel, a professor at the University of Calgary and author of *The Procrastination Equation*, procrastinators choose immediate gratification, which can be learned behaviour from parents. 'Those of us who seek instant satisfaction and are susceptible to temptation are more likely to procrastinate. It's intrinsically a failure of self-control,' he says.

But far from making you happier, ►

procrastination makes you miserable. Everyone I know who says they're bad with money stresses about it often. I frequently wake up at 3am in a panic about my financial to-do list but, on waking, shunt it aside, only for it to reappear the next night.

Procrastination is ingrained over years, explains psychologist Anna Hamer: 'Every time you put off something that should be dealt with, a neural pathway is created in the brain. The more you do it, the deeper the pathway and the harder it is to unlearn.' In some cases, she says, perfectionism is the problem; if we can't do a task properly, we don't start. Or a task may simply appear too huge to contemplate, so we put it off.

A recent Lloyds Bank survey found that, among couples under 45, more than 50 per cent of women control the household finances, despite being more likely than men to struggle to put money aside each month for unknown eventualities. In fact

54 per cent of women said they found it difficult to sit down and work out a savings strategy, compared with 40 per cent of men.

The good news is procrastinators really *can* change, and this is the month to set the wheels in motion. It takes three weeks to form a new habit, so by 31 January you should be well on the way to being richer.

'You can change your neural pathways,' says Hamer. 'Organisation is a skill, but, like tennis or piano playing, we aren't all good at it. So we have to practise.' New Year is, she points out, the best time to make a change. 'We have a well-established template of starting things on 1 January,' she says. 'Decrease your tendency to procrastinate in 2015 by thinking of yourself as someone who gets things done. Don't set hundreds of goals. Focus on achieving one or two key goals a week for the month until it becomes habit.'

Steel advises seizing what he calls 'golden hours' daily – those four or five

hours in which you are most productive. 'Devote part of this time to vital admin. Turn off email alerts, close Facebook and eliminate distraction as much as possible. Create a password for your emails. Delaying that temptation to check them means you have time to think better of it.'

Nazia Haque, a financial advisor at Cheetham Jackson, recommends booking a meeting with an independent financial expert in January. 'I'm frequently shocked by how poorly organised successful, but busy, professional women can be. I see many who get themselves into critical financial straits because they haven't got round to paying the bills.'

I'm grateful to have paid for my procrastination with only three points on my license and a £60 fine. But my court experience is a wake-up call that's made me feel evangelical about sorting my in-tray. This New Year, things *will* be different, and they can be for you, too. ■

Sort your finances in four weeks

It can be done! Follow this plan by financial expert *Jasmine Birtles*, founder of moneymagpie.com, and you'll be richer by the end of the year

Week 1

Get a savings plan

- Scan online money pages and comparison sites for the best savings accounts. Arrange for a standing order to go out on pay day each month, so that money is automatically transferred before you can spend it. Your first goal should be building a rainy-day account with enough money to cover essential expenses for six months, in case you find yourself without a steady income.
- Book a session with an independent financial adviser for advice on long-term investments, such as stocks and shares ISAs. Visit moneymagpie.com for details.
- Join your company pension, if you haven't already. Otherwise, stakeholder pensions are simple, cheap and easy to set up. Get advice at moneyadviceservice.org.uk.

- After you've built your rainy-day account, aim to put aside half your age as a percentage of your income for the future. So if you're 30, put aside 15 per cent of your wages. This should be split between your pension and stocks and shares ISAs. Go for Index Tracking Funds. Various companies do them – Legal & General, Scottish Widows and Virgin – and you can get more info about them online.

Week 2

Get a will and sort out your debts

- If you are married or cohabiting, get a will right now. Yes, it's boring, but pretending you're not going to need one is naïve. If you think he's the one, then it makes financial sense to get married. Otherwise, if he dies, you pay tax on anything left to you in his will.

- If you're in debt, take the bull by the horns this week. Companies do not actually want to take you to court – it's expensive and time-consuming. Speak to the Citizens Advice Bureau or stepchange.org for a plan to help you take control.

Week 3

Plan your bills

- Put Post-it notes in your diary to remind you when the big bills are coming up, such as car insurance or road tax. Need help? Download an app, such as Life Reminders.
- Make £1,000 in minutes by switching all your household bills. Comparison websites will show you where you can get the best deal on

electricity, gas, car insurance and phones. Do you really need that five-star TV package? Sign up to Freeview and Netflix instead.

Week 4

Plan to splurge

- Think about what you want to achieve in 2015, do the maths and make a pact with yourself to give up one unhealthy weekly habit for the sake of a big treat later in the year. Skipping that greasy Friday night takeaway could save you £1,000. That's your Christmas holiday to the Caribbean sorted, so you don't have to whack it on the credit card – and you'll probably look better in your bikini for it, too.

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