

Introduction

Back on Top

THE DAY I GOT MARRIED, I WAS DELIGHTED WITH THE possibilities—a lifetime partner to honor, cherish, and have babies, minivans, and power tools with. I think that every bride who walks down the aisle is not only dreaming of her future but also privately saying to the world: *See? Someone finds me wonderful enough to have spent two months' salary on a ring, put on a rented tux and those black patent-leather shoes, and decided to live with me forever—even when I'm PMSing.*

But the main thing that I, personally, was secretly thrilled with was that I would never, ever have to go on a date again. Especially not a first date, the singularly most anxiety-producing part of dating.

Well, I was wrong.

Two years ago, after thirteen years of marriage, I became the first person in my family's history—all the way back to my great-great-grandparents in Siberia, Russia—to get a divorce. The divorce itself wasn't so bad. Mutual. Amicable. Friendly, even. I told my ex I was really glad I had married him because he is great to be in a divorce with.

It's the post-divorce dating that I just wasn't up for yet. It takes a while to feel like you're back on top. But I knew I'd get there. After all, it's my favorite position.

Introduction

So, for a while, I just didn't. Date, that is. Instead I took kick-boxing and Pilates and digital photography and salsa dancing (all listed in the catalogs under "Classes for the Newly Divorced"), and I channeled my energy into these healthy activities.

But one can only dance alone for so long.

So I started to tiptoe into the dating world again. Only this time there was a whole new world out there: online dating, speed dating, Lock and Key parties.

I discovered that people don't necessarily date—they hook up or have friends-with-benefits. People spend hours getting to know each other before they ever meet or even talk on the phone. Instead they text and IM (and if I have to tell you that *IM* means "instant message," don't worry—that's how far behind I was when I first started dating. Feel free to just skip to the good parts).

There were rules I'd never heard of: A guy who is interested in a girl never calls before three days, but doesn't wait longer than five. Women who date younger guys are called "cougars," and I don't think there is anything remotely complimentary about this branding. Younger men who like older women refer to them as MILFs—and we are supposed to be flattered. (You will be.) If you call the person you've been dating for the past week and your call goes straight to voice mail, it means something other than he is not available. The list of rules (and the ones I broke on a nightly basis) is actually quite lengthy.

Being a quick learner, however, I went from crawling to walking to running very quickly. In the two years since I have been

Introduction

divorced, I have been on approximately eighty-seven dates. This alone makes my friends' jaws drop and has anointed me some kind of default dating expert. Combine that with the fact that I have been dating since I was fifteen (minus the decade or so that I was married) and during those years I had likely been on 500 dates—100 of them *blind* dates—well, that should make me some kind of reality-show survivor.

But it is my post-divorce dating that gives me my true dating cred. *Because it took being married to cure me of the near-desperate desire to be married that consumed most of my twenties.* And believe me, dating with that goal in mind—to get married—is the most prevalent cause of disastrous dating. It causes us to date people we wouldn't even sit next to on the subway. It causes us to stay in relationships that are completely wrong and possibly dangerous to our health and self-esteem. God forbid we give up on a relationship in which we've invested two or five or ten years because he is the wrong guy. "What, and start all over?"

Let me tell you, *starting over* is one of the most beautiful phrases in the English language, if you can just embrace it and buy enough mint chocolate chip ice cream to get you through the first three weeks of lonely nights. It's hard to pick up the phone and sob or plead when you are stuffing green ice cream into your mouth.

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