

RIPPED FROM THE PAGES OF THE *NEW YORK POST*

Tricks OF THE *Trade*

Tricks
ADVICE ON SEX,
LOVE AND LUST
FROM THE COLUMN
BY AMERICA'S MOST
FAMOUS FORMER
ESCORT



ASHLEY DUPRÉ

Tricks of the Trade

*Advice on Sex, Love and Lust from the Column by America's Most
Famous Former Escort*

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Introduction

WHEN ASHLEY DUPRÉ walked into a hotel room to meet “George Fox” on the day before Valentine’s Day in 2008, she was just another pretty young woman using the world’s oldest profession to finance the high life and pursue the bright lights in New York City. She partied with hedge fund millionaires in the Hamptons and danced on nightclub banquettes in her YSLs while she dreamed of a singing career.

The booker at Emperor’s Club VIP had told her that George could be “difficult,” but Ashley responded matter-of-factly: “I’m here for a purpose. I know what my purpose is. I am not a . . . morose person, you know what I mean.”

But that afternoon at the Mayflower Hotel would change her life—and American politics—forever. After the encounter, she reportedly said: “Oh my God, do you know who this guy is?” A month later the world would know it was Eliot Spitzer, the hard-charging governor of New York who had taken office a year earlier after a landslide victory.

In the jaw-dropping scandal that ensued, it was Ashley who held her head high and refused to weep for the cameras or indulge in self-pity or excuses. On the contrary, she was blunt, unapologetic and fantastically sassy. The day the story broke, she wrote on her MySpace page: “Yeah, I did it.”

Ashley’s straight talk, knowing wisdom and undeniable charm led the *New York Post* to offer her an advice column on sex and relationships the following year.

“Ask Ashley” ran from December 2009 until May 2012, with the irrepressible Ashley dispatching weekly doses of advice on everything from sex toys, threesomes and rubber fetishes to reviving sexless relationships and rekindling lost romance. She was asked what to do if you think your daughter is sleeping with the entire football team, and what’s the best toothbrush for bad breath.

She told people to be adventurous and to enjoy life, to feel their emotions deeply, to be honest with themselves and their lovers. She was talking about kinky sex when America thought “50 Shades of

Grey” was a boring paint palette at Benjamin Moore.

This book is a collection of her best advice columns—funny, poignant, heartfelt, helpful and more than a little sexy.

Ashley lives her life the way she wants, and never apologizes. One of her famous tattoos reads “What does not destroy me, makes me stronger.” At every stage of her life, she has gotten stronger—and she expects the same of her readers.

—*The Editor*

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Pick Ups, Hookups and First Dates

I'm considering going on a date with this guy, but he's—wait for it—vegan. Am I a total bitch for thinking vegan guys are lame?—Anonymous

Hmm. I don't think I could trust a man who doesn't eat red meat! I mean, for men, isn't it the animalistic nature to crave red meat? I don't know. I wouldn't be able to do it, either. Especially not if you're a carnivore yourself.

Look, one of my best friends is vegan, and I give her a lot of credit because it's "clean living." But I'm too much of a foodie to give up certain things. I mean, what about spaghetti and meatballs with sweet Italian sausage? There is no vegan substitute! I don't care what anyone says, it will never taste the same!

My boyfriend and I took his kids to a vegan restaurant on Saturday. We thought we were setting a good example by teaching them "clean eating" habits. Vomit in my mouth. It was horrible. I got the vegan "cheesesteak" and let me just tell you, that is not what a cheesesteak should ever, ever taste like. And those little girls, they gave it a chance and were troopers, but it was definitely put on the "never again" list. No disrespect to vegans, but it's just not for me.

But back to you: Ask yourself whether you can live like this for the rest of your life. Better yet, ask him if he could date a non-vegan. That might be your answer right there!

Despite my hesitance, I say give one date a shot. Tell him to take you to the best vegan restaurant—and let him order. Either way, it'll be an experience. He might win you over with his charming personality and good looks—despite the tofurky.

I've heard that going to a movie is a bad first-date idea because you can't talk to each

other. When does it become acceptable? Is the second date OK? And what are some more out-of-the-box first-date ideas?—Anonymous

First dates are always awkward because you don't really know each other yet. So while some people say movies are antisocial, I actually disagree. In fact, I think they can be a great ice breaker. Sure, you'll likely sit there in silence for 90 minutes, but it'll give you something to talk about over dinner and therefore make segueing into talking about yourself a little less awkward. Not to mention that if you're attracted to each other, the physical chemistry will only grow as you sit side by side in a dark theater. And if you're not attracted to him, well, at least you're getting to see a movie out of it!

The point of a first date is to determine whether you're compatible. So whatever you plan, it should both represent who you are, and what you're looking for in a partner.

If you like desserts, go to your favorite ice cream shop. If you both love pizza, go to a great pizza place and split a few different personal pies. Are you both artists? Take a drawing class and attempt to draw each other! It'll give you a true sense of how someone sees you. And if you guys really did end up building your life together, how cool would it be to have that as a reminder of your first date?

So consider your common interests, and suggest a plan that reflects them. It'll show that you have a vested interest in getting to know him better.

We've all heard women in chick flicks say that on a first date, you've got to order salad because it's feminine, dainty, etc. But what should a guy order? I don't want to come across as girly with a salad, but I guess wings might be pushing it on the macho acceptability scale?—Rick, 34

First of all, you need to be aware of the possibility that the date could go so well it leads to something else afterwards, if you know what I mean. There are certain foods, like wings, that wreak havoc on your digestive system and make things like hooking up a little risky. Look, when you're on a date, whether it's your first date or your wife, you've got to make sure your body is ready to go. You can't be too full. You can't be too smelly, in either hole—your pucker or your tail end. You can't feel bloated or overtired from being too full. Save risky meals for when you're having your buddies over to watch a game or the days you and your partner mutually agree to be gluttonous fat pigs together. When you're out on a date and hooking up is a goal, you must eat accordingly.

Here's what you have to do: Keep most date meals light and even a little bland. This isn't just for the first few dates; it really has to be for any date where you plan on hooking up afterwards. Try sushi or a nice piece of simply cooked fish or any chicken dish that doesn't have a ton of seasoning. Stay away from anything deep-fried. Meats, pastas and anything with a lot of garlic and onion are all deal-breakers, unless you don't mind burping and farting on the girl you're interested in. Well, then, by all means: Indulge!

A cute guy has asked me out a few times via Facebook and text. Each time I say, sure. Then he disappears until I get another message from him weeks or months later saying, “We never went out. Are you still game?” I feel like Charlie Brown having the football pulled away. He just reached out again. Do I reply?—Bella

Guys like this are so annoying. Yes, reply, but carefully. You should respond by saying something along the lines of, “I was interested in going out with you, but not so much anymore. You’ve gone back and forth so many times, it’s a bit flaky.” A guy should treat a gal with respect, always, and especially at the start. I’m sorry to say it, but if he were genuinely interested in you, he would not be stringing you along. He would have set a date, time and place to meet after the first time you accepted. You deserve more than this loser has to offer. I guarantee you are not the only one he’s doing this to. So break free and stop saving your breath on this one. He’s not worth it.

Is it ever acceptable to give or get a number when you are on a date with someone else?—Gary

If you don’t think the date is going to lead to any future dates, then I suppose it’s OK. But make sure you give the date you’re with a fair shot first. Otherwise, it’s like you’re searching for something better when that something better could be sitting right in front of you.

If it’s clear there’s nothing there, then I don’t see anything wrong with making a move on someone else you hit it off with. Finding chemistry with someone is so hard, so why pass up the chance of possibly meeting “the one”?

But if you’re going to do it, please do it discreetly or wait until she gets in the cab to go home. There’s no need for the other woman to know. It’ll just hurt her feelings. I mean, what if this hot guy came walking in and they started talking and exchanged numbers right in front of you? How would you feel? Pretty crappy, I’m sure.

This way, at the end of it all, you’ll still have your dignity, and she’ll respect you for being a stand-up guy even if the relationship isn’t going to go anywhere. Integrity, honor and respect: There are only a few men that still have those qualities. Be one of those guys.

Do you believe in second-date gifts?—Carlo

No. You barely know each other and, in a way, it’s sort of pathetic. It’s almost like you’re trying to buy her affection. Just bring her to a great restaurant and don’t let her split the bill. That’s enough.

I’ve had men do both to me. Well, actually, it was two different guys. One made me split the bill and the other got me a gift before the second date and actually called to tell me that he’d done so. Why he called, I have no idea. Maybe he thought that it would make me more interested in him and more excited about the date? Needless to say, I sent the Bill-Splitter straight to voice mail the next

time he called and canceled the date with Gift Guy. In the first case, it was too little, too late; in the second case, it was too much, too soon.

Some girls like being spoiled, but it makes me question motives. He barely knows me, and he gives me a gift? I mean, come on! Save it for the next girl. If I were a guy, I'd want to know whether the girl likes me for me—not because I gave her some gift. Maybe after the next few dates, if all goes well, you can surprise her with a bouquet of flowers. That's a sweet—and subtle—gesture.

What's the protocol for getting (and giving) someone your information these days? Do people still exchange business cards? Also, if you both swap cards, who's supposed to get in touch first?—Brooke, 38

I totally don't subscribe to the who-calls-who-first philosophy. I think it's stupid. If you like the person, then call. If I were put in a situation where a guy asked me for my number, I would give it to him and let the ball be in his court. You can tell how interested he is by the amount of time it takes him to actually call you. When he does call to ask you out, don't play games. If you're available, then go out with him. If you're not, let him know when you are. And if he doesn't call you at all—don't stress. Obviously he's not the guy for you.

As far as exchanging business cards, it depends how much you're into the guy. Giving someone your business card is actually a pretty personal thing since it gives the other person access to your job and therefore access to your world in general. I think guys should give business cards because it proves their credibility, while girls should only give their phone numbers because you never know—the guy could turn out to be a total creepster.

Few women make eye contact with me, even women I know in the office. It gives me the impression that they don't want me to say hello or start a conversation. Do they want to be left alone?—Bill, 41

Well, it depends. What kind of look are you giving them? Is it a lick-your-lips, undress-them-with-your-eyes kind of look? Or is it just a sweet glance-over, where you lock eyes for a few seconds?

If you're getting the impression that they want to be left alone, it's probably the former, in which case they probably do want to be left alone. (And really, who wouldn't with that stare down? Quit it!)

But usually, when eye contact is exchanged and the eyes are locked for more than a few seconds, there's a sexual/flirtatious interest on both ends. So you need to see what kind of vibe you're getting from them—and giving out. (On the other hand, they could just be in a daze. Sometimes when I'm walking it seems like I'm looking into someone's eyes, but really it's me in a crazy daydream, thinking about all the things I have to do. Simple as that.)

Either way, the next time a woman makes eye contact with you, take note of how her glance makes

you feel and take it a step further by smiling. If she smiles back in a cute, flirtatious, come-hither kind of way, approach her and spark up a conversation.

Use this scenario as the basis for your next approach, keeping in mind that not all girls you make eye contact with will be interested in reciprocating. But eventually, there will be at least one who doesn't want to be left alone.

Every time I'm at the gym I see cute girls, but I don't know how to approach them. Do girls even want to be picked up at the gym?—Gary, 34

It's true: The gym is not a sexy place to pick up girls. Sometimes we do want a guy to take notice—and sometimes we don't. The way you worded it, though, makes me think you go to the gym just to meet cute girls. And when guys who I've never seen before at the gym come up to me and say, "You're beautiful. Can I take you to dinner sometime?" I always say no. You shouldn't really go around asking out random girls just because you think they're cute. You don't want to be known as That Guy, do you?

On the other hand, if I recognized that person as someone who works out regularly at the same time as me, and we had exchanged a few glances before, then I might say yes because I (sort of) know them.

So do your thing, and if you cross paths or make eye contact with someone in particular that you think might be worth talking to, then go for it. (Just wait until she's gotten off the treadmill and she's on a break!) There is something to be said for being attracted to someone when they're all sweaty.

I'm of the belief that the sooner you get the sex out of the way, the more you can bond real afterwards. Is it really so terrible to start a relationship with sex?—Anonymous

I do think it's better to wait. Unless, of course, you just want to get your rocks off, then by all means have at it! But it sounds like you want to start with sex as a means of making sure the physical chemistry is there before bothering to connect emotionally.

But the way I see it, one informs the other and most successful relationships start with the "real" stuff. (Trust me: The more you actually like someone, the better the sex will be.)

See, if you give it up before actually leaving a "real" (read: not physical) impression, then there's a greater chance they'll think that's just how you roll. Then you run the risk of not ever showing the "real" you because you've played yourself (and them).

So keep your head in that "they don't deserve me" mentality. Make them work for it. And don't settle for anything less than what you're looking for to complete your life, be it love or just sex.

I've suddenly developed two simultaneous crushes on women in separate parts of my life. There is chemistry in both cases and I see serious potential for both. But I won't know for sure unless I continue to date each of them. I'm not committed in either scenario, but part of me thinks this is wrong and doing so will taint the relationship with whomever I may possibly end up with. Do I need to give full disclosure to both parties? What is the best way to proceed?—Tim

Definitely do not give full disclosure. Not only might it be hurtful to one, if not both of them, but it could get competitive. And who wins in the end? Possibly no one—not even you.

I think you can continue to casually date each of them until you get to a place with one of them when the choice is more clear. And you'll know. Something will happen—a reaction, a gesture, a conversation—that will sway you towards one over the other.

Just take it very slow, and by slow I mean NO sex until you choose who you want to take that next step with. Not only is it physically dangerous (and morally wrong) to sleep with both women, but I can promise you it would be emotionally difficult—especially for you.

After a few weeks of quality time, I'm sure you will have a better understanding of who they are individually, and which one you are more physically and emotionally attracted to. So take your time and try to enjoy having found a connection with two women.

I work out with a trainer who, like most trainers, is super-cute. More than that, he's super-cool. We hang out outside of the gym regularly, getting drinks or dinner. Everything has been platonic so far, but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't into the idea of giving it a try. However, I'd hate to lose a great trainer if things go south. Any advice on how to get a workout with him and still be sure to be worked out by him?—Cyndi

Once you cross that line, he's no longer your trainer. But who cares? Find another trainer! There are plenty out there who I'm sure are more than qualified to fill his shoes. At least in the gym, not the bedroom.

So stop overthinking it and just go with it if you really like him. You're letting your estrogen get the best of you.

I'm an old-fashioned guy who believes in walks on the beach, intimate conversation, and candlelit atmospheres. That said, I don't want to get married. My aunt never married, and I'd like to follow in her footsteps. Thing is, I also want to continue treating women the way I do, but I don't want to mislead them. What's the best way to let a woman know that I'm not interested in marriage, but do still like her company?—

Anonymous

Look, I'm old-fashioned, too. I'm in love, and I know that I want to marry and spend the rest of my life with the person I'm with. That's something I know that I want, just like you know you don't. Neither of us is right or wrong. It's a personal preference. If you don't share that preference, though, you've got to pay extra attention to how you treat women who want that fairy tale. The only way to do that is to be up front with them from the start. It'll be awkward—like discussing religion or politics on the first date—but if you're insistent about it, it's necessary.

Beware, though: Women often think they can change men's minds. In fact, from the sound of it, I bet you've been in that situation before, where a woman's agreed to move forward with the hopes that you'll fall so in love with her that you'll change your mind. And you haven't. If that's the case, you might want to curb your romanticism a bit. Be mindful and constantly aware of a woman's emotions and feelings. If you sense she might want more, blow the candles out.

I wonder, though: Is it just marriage you'd like to avoid, or commitment in general? Some women don't need the commitment of marriage, but they do desire emotional loyalty. So I'd try to clarify exactly what your needs and desires are before you move forward. Once you do, be prepared to explain your reasons for not wanting those things, and exactly how far you're willing to go in return.

Either way, I do believe that you'll find someone who shares the same beliefs as you—or someone who will change your mind. Just stay true to yourself. Let George Clooney be your personal role model!

I recently went out on a couple of dates with a bartender. My friends are horrified and think I'm setting myself up for immediate disappointment. My only argument against them comes in the form of Miranda and Steve from *Sex and the City*, which I admit is a flimsy reference. Is there life with a guy whose work starts way late and revolves around slinging drinks to cute girls?—Sarah H.

No one should judge your choice of men. Period. First of all, what person hasn't started off bartending or working in a restaurant? I know I have. If you really like him, see where it goes. You won't know until you give it a try. The only downside is the late nights, but if you think you can handle it, then go for it! You guys just started dating, so you don't know where he's at or what he aspires to do professionally. Plus, if it doesn't bother you, then who cares?

I know you want to believe that your friends have your best interests at heart. But sometimes advice from friends—who may be in very different places than you and may have very different standards than you—can do more harm than good.

Follow your heart and just go with what feels right to you. If you don't mind the late nights and you trust his actions with all the "cute girls," then don't let his current job stop you from seeing where this could go. After all, while "SATC" was a TV show, the episodes always featured very real-life experiences, so maybe your situation could turn out to be like Miranda and Steve's!

I'm single for the first time in three years and have decided to try online dating. How long do people normally talk online before meeting in person? I'm a little skeptical of going out with someone completely random in person.—Lauren, 28

I totally understand how you feel. Here you are, your first time dating in three years, and you're diving into a new realm of meeting people. Online dating can be fun, but there are also many risks: Are these guys normal? Creeps? Are their pictures even real? It's sort of like buying clothing online: You don't know how they're going to fit, and you're scared that when the package shows up, it just won't be what you ordered. The only difference is that with shopping, you can return it immediately. Whereas when you finally take the plunge to meet someone in person, you're often stuck "trying them on" for at least an hour. Avoid the awkwardness (and potential skeeviness) by setting up a Skype date first to ease the suspense. You can also use it as a filter to determine chemistry and attraction.

Then, go with your initial intuition to decide whether he's worth meeting in person. Be open-minded—but not too vulnerable. When and if you decide to go out in person, make sure a girlfriend knows when and where you're going out. Have fun, but also be safe in the process!

I had a one-night stand with one of my friends and now my period is late. I don't know if I should tell him, but I could really use the support, emotionally. I also don't want to harm the dynamics of our friendship. We both just wanted it to be a onetime thing, but now I'm freaking out. What should I do?—Anonymous

OK, so your period is late, but did you take a pregnancy test? I wouldn't jump to conclusions and drive yourself (or him!) crazy without taking a few of those.

If he's normally the friend you'd ask to be there for you when you take such a test, well then I'd call him up and ask him to stop by a drugstore on his way over. I know you don't want to change the dynamic of your relationship, but you kind of did that already by sleeping together. This is just one of the potential responsibilities that comes along with taking it to that level. He's equally accountable for the outcome if the test is positive—no matter how casually the two of you thought it'd be—so why should you have to experience any of this alone?

I wouldn't let him off the hook so easily because you're scared it will hurt your friendship. Anything, the situation will really test it. If it turns out you are pregnant, you'll see whether he can handle this like a man—and one who cares about his friend—whether that means helping you emotionally, financially or both. If you're not, you will have both learned the hard way that you need to be more careful in the future—with him or anyone else you share a "onetime thing" with.

Should you call a one-night stand and tell him you're pregnant if you're not going to keep the baby? Is it any of his business, or does he not need to know?—Lauren, 25

No, he doesn't need to know. (Though it is partially his business . . .) But I think it might benefit you emotionally to get it off your chest and share it with the other person responsible. You certainly don't owe it to him. It's your body, and you're the one with the "right to choose." Having a baby is an insanely huge responsibility, and if you're not ready for it, then you're not ready—especially being that it was a one-night stand.

But even if that decision came easily, I would imagine the process itself will be incredibly hard on your mind and your body, and you may want or need the support. Plus, he is half-responsible. Why should you have to go through this on your own? And why wasn't he wearing a condom to begin with? Even if you do decide to have an abortion, perhaps telling him will teach him to wrap it up! In general, you should be more careful. Sometimes we take our bodies and our health for granted—until we get that scare. So maybe this was a "scare" you both needed, and the conversation will be a huge wake-up call for you both to be more careful.

Plus, if you tell him, his reaction can be helpful in dealing with the emotional repercussions. If he handles it immaturely, you'll know you took the right steps not having an a—hole baby. On the other hand, if he's apologetic and kind, you will have a clear conscience to do what you need to do and move forward.

Whatever you decide, I wish you the best. But in the end, it's your decision to make.

A guy I like has expressed interest in me, but I know that he's been with many prostitutes overseas. I like a lot of things about him, but can't help but wonder if men who have frequented prostitutes are capable of being good boyfriends and husbands. Knowing what you know, what are your thoughts?—Lisa, 25

How do you know he's been with many prostitutes? Either you've been a really close friend of his for a long time and he's told you, you met him through the "business" itself, or he has a reputation and got back to you. Not knowing the complete story, I'm going to answer this a few different ways.

First, I can't help but think you met him through the business because it sounds like you're not very close. If that's the case, 99.9 percent of those relationships never work. It might be great at first, but then you'll be out, and a new one will be in. The foundation of your relationship would be totally unhealthy. It wouldn't have the strength and substance needed to grow into anything lasting.

Now, even if you didn't meet him through the business, it's still a big burden. Every time he's away you're going to wonder whether he's being faithful, which will drive you crazy.

From my experience, I don't think men who frequent prostitutes are boyfriend or husband material. They go to them for a reason: It's exciting, and they like variety. How can you be sure he'd give that up? You can't.

He needs to be honest with himself (and potential lovers) by choosing to be with a woman who shares his beliefs. That way, they can see other people or be swingers together. If that's not your thing, move on. Many guys like him just settle and stray because it's easier. But in the end, it's the faithful

I have a severe crush on a girl I work with. We've gone out a few times, but I'm pretty positive she has no clue how I feel. I want to express my feelings, but I'm concerned she won't feel the same way and if she does, might be leery of hooking up because we work together. What do I do?—Anonymous

Well, you're never going to know unless you put it out there. As long as she's not your boss (and you're not hers), I don't see a problem with divulging your feelings.

In fact, you should try something creative to let her know how you feel. Since you're friendly and have gone out before, you're probably aware of some of her favorites: flowers, lunch spots, snacks, etc. I think you should send her things spread out over the course of a week. Sort of like a secret admirer. Start on Monday by leaving her an arrangement of her favorite flowers. In the card, write something like, "You know me and I know you, but I'd like to get to know you more." Let her be curious for a day, then on Wednesday, leave her a little something from her favorite lunch spot or coffee place she goes to for a midday pick-me-up. With this one, get a little more personal in the card and also give her some clues as to who you are. Finally, on Friday, leave a simple Post-It on her computer when she's not looking that says something like, "Have I driven you crazy enough? Let's meet so you finally know who I am (unless you've already figured it out!)" Tell her you'll be waiting on a certain day and time at a certain place with a single red rose. (I know this sounds cheesy, but I'm telling you, women go crazy for this stuff!)

The whole ordeal will prove you put a lot of thought into developing something with her. Unless she's going out of town—or just skeptical, in which case you'll probably find out through office chatter—she'll be there. At the end of the day, what's the worst that could happen? She doesn't show interest or she's not interested? I think you could have a fair shot.

What do you think is the best way for a 27-year-old single male to dress every day in order to get a woman's attention?—Jason

First, get yourself a subscription to *GQ*! It'll give you great pointers on the different trends and tell you where to buy hot items that won't break your bank account in the process. Mostly, though, you need to master the art of dressed-down-dressy. By this I mean looking put together without trying too hard. Invest in a few great pairs of jeans. Get dark, because they go with everything. Also, get a few button-down dress shirts for after-work drinks or dates. I'd also invest in two great pairs of semi-dress shoes (brown and black) along with matching belts.

As far as designers or stores, try Brooks Brothers, Pink, Banana Republic, Gap and even H&M. The trick is to find the brand (and style) that looks most flattering on your body type. You don't want it to

baggy, so also look into finding a great seamstress just in case you need to take items in. (Trust me! That extra care will give your outfits the final tailored look that you should be aiming for.)

Oh, don't forget to tuck in your shirt! And don't even think about having it unbuttoned halfway down your chest. One to two buttons undone—depending on the shirt—is enough. Lastly, don't forget to smile. That looks good on everyone.

As a single girl hooking up with a guy for the first time, do you think it sends the wrong message to be the one who whips out the condom?—Mara, 27

Absolutely not! You don't know where his "salami" has been. Remember: Whoever he's slept with, you've slept with, too. And no disrespect to men, but many of them sleep around . . . a lot. So you can never be too safe.

If you're not in an exclusive, committed relationship, having a condom on hand should be second nature—for both of you. Male, female—who cares? What are you worried about? Seeming like a slut? Try more like mature and responsible. Any guy who thinks you pulling out a condom is too forward or presumptuous is someone you shouldn't be sleeping with anyway. Run! Run! Run!

I'm an African-American guy who prefers white women. Is there any way for me to tell whether they'd be interested in dating a black man before I approach them?—Patrick, 26

There is no way to tell. Approach every woman like you would normally approach any woman you're attracted to. You will be able to tell whether she's interested just like any other guy. Women are attracted to what they are attracted to. And, if they are not attracted to you, don't take it personally. Just be secure with your wit, charm and killer personality. Rely on that to get the girl.

When I'm out in a social setting or even dating online, I tend to attract women I'm not attracted to. I'm a decent looking guy and I have a good personality, but for some reason, I'm not having much luck out there. What can I do to improve my game? Dating coaches and pickup artists tell us guys not to be too nice. Do you agree?—Rob, 34

I do not agree with the whole "don't be too nice" guideline. You have to be yourself. If you're a nice guy, then show it because that's a quality your future wife could be attracted to. (Just don't be a pushover. Women like nice guys who have a set of balls, too!) It's up to you to know what your positive qualities are and how to apply them in the dating scene.

You have to be realistic and open-minded, too. "Beautiful" is a relative term. Define it for yourself. Beautiful looks-wise? Or beautiful in mind and soul?

If I were you—if I were any guy—I’d make sure I was attracted to her personality because that actually makes a person much more attractive. Now, I am NOT saying you should settle for someone you don’t find attractive or “beautiful” physically. I’m just suggesting that you give women you wouldn’t normally date a chance. Get to know someone before you say that you are (or aren’t) attracted to her. You might be surprised.

What are some good opening lines that work on women?—Mike, 47

Don’t be cheesy. Honesty works best. I like wit and someone who’s confident and charming. Take control. Walk over, look into her eyes, and in a slow, sexy, calm, confident voice say, “I noticed you when you walked in. I think you’re beautiful. Do you mind if I buy you a drink?” Or say, “If you’re meeting your boyfriend, I apologize. I just needed to come over and talk to you.”

By then, she’s either interested and says yes, or says that she’s waiting for her boyfriend. If she’s meeting her boyfriend, then say, “Lucky guy. But OK. I respect that. I just needed to come and introduce myself. Something about you intrigued me. If things ever change, here’s my card. I hope you use it.” If it were me, at that point, something about you would intrigue me.

I live in a huge house with several 20-somethings. Recently, some new housemates moved in, and I’ve found myself attracted to one of them. I don’t want to date him (after a serious relationship ended badly, I’ve become relationship-phobic), but I’m definitely up for some no-strings-attached sex. Common sense says this is a bad idea, but I don’t see the harm in messing around with someone while not letting things get too serious. It’s just sex, right? What do you think?—Anonymous

What is the turn-around rate in the house? Like, if you do have sex with him, how long are you two going to be stuck living in the same house? If it’s a few years, that could be rough. But if it’s a year or less, that could be manageable.

Everyone in the house would know—especially the guys; they love to talk about that stuff.

But if chatter doesn’t bother you, and you’re sure that all you want is good old no-strings-attached sex, then go for it. You only get hurt when your expectations are much higher than what’s realistic. Go over the rules and guidelines, and make it very clear what’s expected (and not expected).

Since you’re getting over a relationship that ended poorly, you also need this time to heal. You do have a way to go, but you’re doing all the right things by focusing on your own immediate needs for a bit. If finding a sex buddy amongst your roommates is one of them, go for it. If done carefully and knowingly, it could be super-convenient and rewarding for both of you.

There's this guy I've been friends with for a while. He always flirts with me, but I'm not really interested. (Though we did kiss once . . .) Anyway, I think part of me is turned on by his Rico Suave-ness. Some of the lines he uses just seem so unreal and fake, plus he's a flirt in general so I can't help but feel like I'm not the only one he's feeding these lines to. It's weird. I want to blush and melt, but instead I'm left wondering if he's for real. How do I know?—Cara, 31

“If it smells like a skunk, looks like a skunk and acts like a skunk . . .” You know the rest of the saying. Look, your intuition is the strongest, most powerful thing that you have. Listen to it. Now, I'm not saying to rule out all chances of developing something with this guy. Just keep your options open and continue to see this Slick Rick in a casual way. And make him come to you. Don't chase after him and don't give it up to him so easily. He will either work really hard to gain your trust in an honest way, or if he really is a nasty smelling skunk, then he won't bother with anything too difficult or out of the ordinary because it's too much work. And why should a guy who doesn't put in the work get any sort of reward?

Actions speak louder than words, so let his actions prove to you who he truly is.

A couple of years ago, I helped my parents purchase their first home. Due to the recent slump in the economy, however, they haven't been able to keep up with the mortgage payments, so I decided to move back in to help. I've explained this situation to a number of single women I've dated, but many were turned off by the idea of a single guy in his early 30s living at home with his parents. I want to continue helping my parents to live comfortably, but at the same time it's hampering my social life. What's a good way to approach this situation?—Victor

The girls who are turned off are only after one thing: money. The reason I say this is because you won't be living with your parents and helping them out forever, right? Those aren't the girls you want to date. You want someone who will stick it out with you and understand that the situation is temporary—and honorable! In fact, you should be proud.

Regardless, it's putting a damper on your social (and therefore sex) life, so we need to figure out how to work around the situation. I suggest putting the facts out there up front. After meeting someone, come flat out and say, “Look, because of the economy my parents were going to lose the house. Rather than allow that to happen, I moved in with them so I could help them pay the mortgage. If this is a problem for you, I'd rather know now than beat around the bush and waste both of our time.” If I were the girl, I'd think you have strong family values and even find something sexy about your selflessness! But if she's not into it, on to the next. You shouldn't change what you believe in for anyone.

If you find someone who does understand and is willing to ride it out with you, send your parents

to dinner and a movie on a night you'd like to "entertain at home." It'll buy you a few hours of alone time to enjoy each other's company in your own space.

I'm a 42-year-old single guy who seems to only be attracted to much younger women. I know it's not only about looks, but most of the women closer to my age have baggage, too. I've never been married and want to raise my own kids. Besides becoming independently wealthy, what advice do you have for finding a serious relationship with a woman, say, between the ages of 23 and 35?—Matt

First of all, 23 is definitely going to be out of the equation. She would be 19 years younger than you—that's just not realistic if you're looking for something genuine and "serious." I wouldn't date anyone more than 14 years your junior, which means dating girls that are at least 28 years old. Often at that age, females are ready to settle down because they've experimented to the point where they know what they want (and don't) from a partner. They're also usually established professionally and are at a great place emotionally and mentally. They usually don't have kids, but might be ready to within the next few years. So if you don't want a woman with "baggage," then I'd shoot for a woman in this age range.

But I do beg you not to rule out single women with children. Just because she has kids doesn't mean you two can't have your own. You'd be surprised at how many amazing single mothers are still looking to find someone to love unconditionally. You never know—you could be an amazing stepfather, so keep your options open. If you fall in love with a woman and she has a child or kids, I guarantee you will fall in love with them, too, because they're a part of her. And when you truly love someone, you love every single bit about her.

I just started seeing this guy. We've been on three dates, all of which went really well. His only communication between dates, though, is text. And sometimes, these texts go back and forth for days before I'm finally the one to suggest we make a plan. What gives?—Jen, 31

Technology is now our main form of communication, and we as a society have become nonsocial. It's terrible! That said, three dates is nothing. Whether the form of communication is text, e-mail, letter or phone call, the real issue is that you're chasing him when he should be chasing you. I'm sure that he's still feeling you out, as you are with him, and that's the beauty (and yes, sometimes the curse!) of dating. But you can't look at it like, "This could be the person I spend the rest of my life with." You have to look at it like, "This is someone I am getting to know. And this is part of the process of getting to know him."

Already, his lack of verbal communication is something that doesn't agree with you. Over time

that'll either no longer be an issue, or you'll realize he's just not the right guy for you. But that takes time, and at this point it's really too soon to know.

The best advice I can give you is to preoccupy yourself by continuing to play the field and go on dates with your girlfriends. By doing your own thing and remaining aloof, he'll probably start to wonder more about you, which will eventually urge him to make more plans. If he doesn't, and your texts continue to be sent into the cellular ether—then it's time to move on.

So just back off a bit and see where it goes. Pursuit on his part is happiness on yours.

I had insane IM chemistry with a guy I met online. We were both really excited to meet each other, but then he canceled. We made plans to talk on the phone, but it never happened. In fact, he disappeared—for three weeks! Eventually, he popped up online and apologized profusely. He said he unexpectedly reconnected with an ex, but wasn't sure what to make of the situation. Clearly confused, he asked if I'd consider going on a date with him. Am I a sucker for wanting to say yes?—Clara, 31

Us women are suckers, period. It's in our nature. In this case, it sounds like he's all over the place and not over his ex. Yet it also sounds like he's into you, so I might go on the date—without any expectations. If you don't expect anything, then you don't risk getting hurt.

You could even be a soundboard for his situation and offer him support. (But truth be told, you like him. So that could be painful.) Either way, make sure to go in with limitations so that you can protect your heart.

If the chemistry proves to be just as intense as it was online, don't let it go beyond a kiss—if that's all (If you do anything more, and he decides to get back together with his ex, you'll inevitably regret it and be disappointed in yourself.) If there's still a connection, he'll most likely feel it too, and maybe it'll force him to make a decision about where he's going with his ex versus where he wants to go with you. Make him work for the fact that he flaked on you. Demand respect to get respect. It's as simple as that. If he's unable to give it to you—then move on.

I occasionally have no-strings sex with this guy I know through friends. It usually happens unexpectedly on nights when we're all drinking together. My first question is, we never have anything to say to each other the morning after to the point of immense awkwardness. How do I break the ice? And secondly, he likes to have sex several times a night. How do I reject him without hurting his ego and seeming like a prude?—Amanda, 31

Blame it on the al-al-alcohol! You could hit it off with a Milk Dud if you're drunk. With that being said, cut yourself some slack. The fact that you two don't normally socialize casually explains why

you have nothing to talk about except all the different positions you mastered the night before. And that is, well, awkward.

First, ask yourself two things: Are you legitimately interested in getting to know him? And if so, is it just to make the physical times you spend together less awkward? Or is it because you're interested in something more with him? Either way, brunch could be a good way to ease into a new realm of whatever it is you two already have going on. (Plus, a few Bloody Marys will make the flow of conversation much easier!)

Maybe it'll become clearer to you that he is, in fact, just a sex maniac disguised as a dull dude whom you no longer want to try to make conversation with. Or, maybe you'll discover that you both prefer eggs to pancakes and you have more in common than you thought, thus expanding your existing chemistry beyond the physical.

If he rejects your invite, you're at another crossroads: Continue your crazy romps through the night and accept them (and the awkwardness that ensues after) at face value, or reconsider it altogether.

This brings me to your second question. Sex should be enjoyable for both of you. If you don't want to have sex for the sixth time, then say no. You can't possibly be a prude if you've already done it five times prior. Pretend-snoring (while totally unsexy) might also do the trick.

Clearly you've got a lot of things to think about, which sort of takes the fun out of no-strings sex to begin with. In fact, your asking me all this in the first place makes me wonder if you want something more than that anyway.

I've been friends with this girl for a little while, and the more I get to know her, the stronger my feelings get toward her. She has a boyfriend, and tells me that she is really in love with him every time I try to take it past the friends level. I really like this girl. What do I do?—Nick

Well, Nick, if you don't back off, then you are going to lose a really good friend. This has happened to me before. And from the perspective of the girl who is in love and extremely happy with her boyfriend, it gets to be really . . . annoying.

If you make this girl choose between her friendship with you and her relationship with her boyfriend, nine times out of 10 she is not going to choose you. You have to respect where she is in her life: that she is in love, and that it's not with you. The heart wants what the heart wants—and unfortunately, you're not going to be able to change that. So, are you willing to lose a friend just because you can't be sexual with her? I would hope not.

If I were you, I would stand by her and support her as best as you possibly can, as hard as that may be. That will show her that you actually care about her happiness. And who knows? If her relationship doesn't work out, you could be the one who's there to help her pick up the pieces, and maybe at that point her feelings toward you will develop into something stronger.

If they do, don't hold the fact that she didn't pursue it earlier against her. If anything, you should

respect her for her commitment toward her partner. When you're truly in love—I'm talking about being with that one person whom you just can't live without—there is nothing that can break the bond. Sure, there's plenty of temptation out there. But if the relationship is strong, you keep yourself in check. So in situations like the one you're in, the girl won't risk losing her boyfriend by continuing to hang out with a friend who's always trying to make a pass at her. It's just not worth it. And after a while, it just gets old.

I hooked up with this girl, but I'm more interested in her friend. The friend knows—and she likes me—but doesn't want to hurt her friend even though I ended things a while ago. Now what?—Joe, 22

How long has it been since you hooked up with her friend? If it was recent, you probably don't have a chance with her friend. In fact, you may not regardless. Friends just don't do that to friends even if the hookup was meaningless.

That said, it also depends on how you ended things with her friend and what, exactly, you two shared. If she's still into you (and her friend will know this), then I doubt her friend is ever going to feel comfortable having a relationship with you. But if it was just a onetime hookup, and the two of you parted ways amicably, you may have a shot.

In any case, take it slow. I mean really slow. Dinners, talks—no sex. You need to determine if the chemistry is strong enough to cause a possible rift in her relationship with her friend. Because really, it's all on her.

I have a platonic relationship with a friend I've known for 10 years. I'm very attracted to her and want to be more than friends. But I'm afraid to tell her, since I value our friendship. Should I let her know my true feelings?—Mark F., 40

So you want to break out of the "friend" category? This is super-hard. Because you two are so comfortable together, it's difficult to switch over. You need to step it up big-time. You need her to see you and want you in a sexual way—not a buddy way.

Before you tell her how you feel, do a little "foreplay." When you lean in, hold it there a little longer than normal. Perhaps change the way you look at her a little bit. Dress and smell sexier. Be confident. But let her shift out of it and discover the subtle differences on her own.

After slightly changing your habits, take her out to a really romantic dinner. Talk about life and what you're looking for in a girlfriend and wife. Paint a picture. Show her that you know what you want. And then say how you see her as that person in your life. Tell her that you want to make that work with her, if she's willing to try. Say something like, "I've been thinking about this for a while and I haven't said anything because I was afraid if I told you, I'd lose you. And I don't want to lose

you.”

At this point, you did your part. You showed her and told her how you felt. It's up to her to want to take that chance on you. Even if she says no, I doubt it will harm the friendship—you'll just have to decide if you can be just friends. That's the hardest part, really. But it's better than always wondering what could have been. Good luck! I'm rooting for you.

A man I've been friends with for a couple of years recently announced his separation and coming divorce. At the same time, he expressed interest in dating me. If his situation were different or further along, I'd definitely be interested; but lots of people in my life think it's terrible timing and say I should put a pin in it or else I'll just be a rebound. When is it OK to date a divorcing or recently divorced guy? What's the standard time to give it?—Molly

Run! Just kidding. I can relate to your situation because my boyfriend is going through a divorce. It's really tough because there's a lot going on in his world that you can't get too involved in. If your relationship isn't solid enough, it could break you.

It's next to impossible for me to give you a standard time when it comes to how long you should wait to date a divorcing or recently divorced guy. It could be one month, it could be three years and it could be never because he emotionally just cannot recover.

In many cases, your friends would be right, and you might turn out to be a rebound. After a divorce, especially a nasty one, most guys aren't interested in anything serious because of what they just went through—and I don't blame them. So you have to follow your heart and proceed with caution. You very well may get hurt—but you know what? You won't know until you put yourself out there.

If there are kids involved, don't ask or allow him to rush an introduction. The kids come first. They have a lot going on, as their world is changing. Give them time to adjust so they will be more emotionally capable of accepting their daddy dating someone other than their mom.

If you do decide to pursue this relationship, it's best to keep yourself detached from his interactions with the ex. You'll be happier if you know as little as possible.

And don't nag him about “when is this going to be over,” because the last thing he needs is added pressure from you. There isn't anything you or he can do that will speed up the process. Don't let the drama derail your relationship.

A relationship is all about being with someone whose company you enjoy, who makes you happy and who respects you. If he is unable to do that because of the obvious distractions in his world, then you have to call it quits and break it off. And perhaps you can pick it up again when he's emotionally ready.

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