



## Six Signs of a Dating “Shark”

For whatever reason, you’re single again. In a society with a divorce rate of more than fifty percent, odds are good it has or could happen to you. If it has, and you find yourself “in the market” for companionship, here are some suggestions on protecting yourself from the phonies and frauds who prey on newly single people.

First, *get some counseling*. The reason your relationship didn’t last has much more to do with the person you see in the mirror every day than most people are willing to admit. I’m not suggesting that you’re responsible for your spouse’s infidelity or abandonment or inability to commit; no, they’re accountable for their own behavior. What I am saying is, unless you’re from a culture where someone picked your spouse for you, *you picked that person!*

The fact is, we *attract* certain types of people into our lives, and only intensive counseling and personal honesty will prevent us from making the same poor choice again. Get your ‘picker’ fixed or you’ll be lonely again some day.

If you think you’re ready, usually someone will materialize. One of the first mistakes lonely people make in dating is being in a hurry. After all, your ex- is now with the new boyfriend or girlfriend, and somehow it just isn’t fair that you should be alone. Well, that’s probably true. Years from now, however, it might occur to you that being ‘happy’ with someone who encouraged your spouse to leave you for them isn’t someone a thoughtful person could really be ‘happy’ with!

*Don’t be in a hurry*. Phonies and frauds can sniff out fear and loneliness like a shark tastes blood. Deal with being alone; go out with groups; force yourself into some charitable activities and do some volunteer work. Get emotionally healthy and you’ll make better choices.

The internet has facilitated the ability to develop relationships through Web sites like Match.com, E-Harmony, and others. Some sites are no more than meeting places for casual sex, a dangerous prospect in these troubled times. Others are

legitimate and carefully screen applicants for a right “match,” but no software has yet figured out the vagaries of the human heart.

If you have met someone, here are some things to watch out for. Remember, not all of these ‘signals’ indicate danger, but two or more are really an indicator.

1. *They're new in town.* In our mobile society, people move all the time. Companies transfer employees and contractors from Phoenix to Florida, from Nova Scotia to New Orleans. But if you meet someone who has lived in half a dozen cities in the past two or three years, you gotta wonder.
2. *Their past is a mystery.* They don't talk about their family or where they grew up. In fact, part of your attraction to them is the excitement of the mystery! You find yourself drawn to (sucked in by) speculation about who your new friend really is. I mean, they never come out and say they're with the CIA (go ahead and laugh, it happens frequently, even to smart people), but all the indicators are there.
3. *Money is no object.* Initially, that is, and then as long as it's *your* money. For women, their new paramour is 'quick with the card,' "paying" for dinners, roses, shows, cruises, all with a couple of convenient credit or charge cards. Within a couple of weeks, however, 'things' start to happen. Things like that embarrassing time at the riverfront restaurant when his card was rejected ("The magnetic strip must be worn," he says with a demure smile), and could you put this on *your* card, just this once? Men fare no better. A seductive smile, the toss of the coiffed hair, the warm, *come hither* look, and most of us are stumbling over ourselves, saying, "Whatever you like, honeybun," as we whip out our own plastic.
4. *Everybody's mad at them.* If they *do* talk about their past, and that past seems to be filled with malevolent ex-wives, maniacal bosses, insane in-laws, abusive parents, and larcenous landlords, remember this: *you* are now part of that person's 'future past!' There's an old saying that's appropriate here: When everybody's mad at somebody, everybody's right!
5. *Car trouble.* Like, they don't have one. Or it's perpetually 'in the shop' (usually at a pricey dealership) with a host of exotic problems. "Do you mind if we take *your* car tonight?" Men may get hit with something like, "I need to pick up my mother at Miami International tonight (you didn't even know she *had* a mother); could I borrow your Mercedes for a couple of hours?" Wouldn't it be a shame to find that the girl's 'mother' needed a shave, or that 'Mom' could be so eager for a night on South Beach with the aggressively affectionate 'daughter'?
6. *They're hard to reach.* They never answer your call directly; you always have to leave a voice mail. And for goodness sake, don't just 'drop by' whenever you're in the neighborhood! They need at least half a day's notice. And once inside, you get the strangest sense of *déjà vu*; didn't that model home we looked

at years ago feel this way? Like, all those books that have never been read? They're just there to make the place *look* lived in. Or perhaps it's the other extreme; whoever lives there doesn't need much. There's no TV, no stereo, no 'junk drawer.' There's none of the usual clutter you'd find in, oh, say, *your* house. You know, who really *needs* a dining room table? Or a sofa? Or even a shower curtain? Certainly not Spartacus here.

As I said earlier, no one of these of indicators is usually cause for alarm. But beware the person who has two or more! If they're hard to reach, *and* they're new in town, for instance, perhaps you need to be looking at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's web site for wanted persons ([www.fdle.state.fl.us](http://www.fdle.state.fl.us)); they may be dodging a warrant rather than looking for love.

The best advice is simply to let your brain, not your heart, do your checking for you. If you're suspicious, don't be embarrassed or afraid to *ask questions*. And insist on open disclosure about your new friend's past and present! I'm not suggesting that you prepare or demand an employment application for a date, but listen for clues and keep your eyes open for potential trouble. Most people come with a certain amount of baggage these days. Expect there to be an ex-wife or ex-husband, kids in occasional trouble, a failed business venture or investment, even some health challenges. None of these are cause for serious concern, once they're out in the open. You've probably got some of the same challenges yourself! In fact, a good relationship may be the outcome of some honesty up front, as you and your new friend share some laughs over old hurts.

And for goodness' sake, don't fall in 'love' with a mystery man or woman! Life is exciting enough without wondering if the 'love' of your life is *really* in the CIA.

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