

# Old girlfriends

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Let's say, just for the sake of argument, that I'm married. Which I'm not, but let's say I am. Happily married. Healthy children, great career. No complaints or problems worth mentioning. And let's say I'm at home one night with the kids put to bed and the wife at ladies' auxiliary or whatever. I'm thumbing through a college yearbook, reminiscing as one will do, when I turn the page and there she is staring up at me. That girl I dated ... who is not my wife.

And now I'm thinking about the road trips and the concerts and the parties. "Whatever happened to her?" I wonder. So I google my old girlfriend and I find her blog. She's divorced and living alone and there's an email link on her blog. "Wouldn't it be fun," I think, "to just ..."

Freeze program.

Wouldn't it be fun to what? Come on, let's be honest. To what?

If I initiate contact with this woman, won't I have ulterior motives and won't they be obvious? Is that even open for debate? Even if I begin the conversation with how much I love my wife, how great my kids are, how crazy but satisfying my life is overall, even if I ask her innocent questions innocently, is there any way for me to avoid suspicion? Of course not. But that's because I'm a man, isn't it? And men are never above suspicion, are they? No. Nor should we be.

It's different for women. Women are ... better.

Case in point: A couple of years ago, an old girlfriend emailed to say she was happily married to a man who'd given her several lovely children. She said that he was totally okay with her having casual contact with men she'd dated prior to meeting him, so would I like to be email buddies! I thought to myself, "Well now, that's pretty freaking weird!"

To be clear, I wasn't referring to her email as

"pretty freaking weird." It was my reaction to her email that was weird, my assumption that sending unsolicited email to an old boyfriend might indicate some problem, small or otherwise, with her domestic situation. I mean, she was happy. She said so. I declined further contact with her because I realized that I was misunderstanding the contact, and that I would continue to misunderstand, so that nothing good could come of it.

Last year, another old girlfriend called to chat me up about her current affair with a married man. She talked about how great the sex was with the married man, but how he was having trouble extricating himself from his marriage. She told me that she was seriously into him and he was seriously into her ... as often as possible.

I thought, "Why is she telling me these things? What assumption is she making about me that makes it cool for her to share these things with me in this way? What's the game plan here? What's the game?" That's how I think, you see, because I have a scrotum. When a woman I used to date calls to tell me that she's having great sex with a married man, but she's frustrated because the divorce is taking so long, my scrotum prevents me from assuming that she's on the up and up. "Is this a head game?" I ask myself. "Is she looking for a fallback plan?" At no time do I seriously consider the possibility that a friend is looking for friendship from a friend, because we aren't friends. We broke up. And that is how the scrotum-impaired mind works.

In moments of self-doubt, I've wondered if maybe these women have come to think of me as a some kind of social gelding. Like I'm a priest or an elderly gynecologist. Out of commission. Tamed. Retired. Or maybe gay all of a sudden.

*Continued ...*



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Just a few weeks ago, another email arrived from yet another old girlfriend. We'd come close to having sex almost 30 years ago, although I'm not so sure that we'd ever "dated," *per se*. Maybe we did.

Anyway, she's married with children now, too, and therefore above suspicion. I get that.

Nevertheless, when an old girlfriend writes to me months or years or decades after the fact of my relationship with her, I leap to the conclusion that she's implying some degree of physical or emotional availability.

Admittedly, there's ego involved here, too. No doubt. It would be fair to say, I think, that most straight men like to think that most straight women harbor some reproductive inclination toward them, however vague or unacknowledged. We're all a little dangerous in our own minds. We scorn the unassertive bald guy who says "Yes, my pet" to his overbearing wife.

And then there's protocol, isn't there? The rules of engagement, what's left of them, *passé* as they may be today. Maybe it's worth noting that I was taught the rules by people who were born in the 1930s and I know exactly how my father would have reacted if my mother ever had sent a "just wondering how you've been doing" letter to an old boyfriend. He would have reacted unambiguously.

So it's me. My upbringing, my baggage. My ... you know.

Which is why these former girlfriends wafting back into my life, plain dealing as they are, their intentions pure, straightforward, wholesome, unambiguous ... they disturb me.

So ladies, please, if you and I have dated, certainly if we've ever had sex, consider this before you click that email link on my blog ... I'm very likely to misunderstand your motives.

If, on the other hand, I'm not misunderstanding your motives ...

Hi! My god! I was just thinking about you!