

HOW TO BE SINGLE

1. First, get rid of your lover, partner, fiancé, or spouse. A define-the-relationship talk is the classic way to do this, but glacially cold and slow emotional withdrawal is also effective, as are Post-its. Emojis are efficient and expressive (peace out, broken heart, Edvard Munch scream!). Process servers are legally binding. Ghosting is for lazy people. Poison should be attempted only if you are in an Agatha Christie story and are dying to meet Miss Marple.
2. Alternatively, you can make your significant other get rid of you. Try mysterious dick pics, unrealistic ultimatums, and a series of phantom pregnancies.
3. Now you are single. Congratulations! The trick is to stay that way. You can start by throwing out your razor and canceling all your salon appointments.
4. Be aware that the instant you become single, everyone in the world will join in a relentless conspiracy to get you paired off. The most obvious way to thwart them is to build an indoor fort out of old newspapers and fill it with feral raccoons and refuse to leave your apartment. Do not rule this out just because it's a cliché. It works.
5. If you can't afford to quit your job and go full newspapers-and-raccoons just yet, you could try reconnecting with your ex. Don't actually date them, but text them, theorize them, narrate them, hook up with them, sleep with their picture under your pillow, and write them ten-page tear-stained love letters that you send through the U.S. Mail, walking slowly and deliberately all the way to the post office while the hand that is clutching the letter throbs as if it were full of embers. Do this for as many months or years as it takes for you to get bored of it.
6. Your friends are going to want you to date online. It is hard to avoid online dating entirely, but there are many strategies you can use to maximize dating websites' preexisting propensity to perpetuate singleness in order to maintain their customer base. The simplest way is to start with the path of least resistance and cheerily play along. Tell your friends, with a little wobble of emotion in your voice, that you're finally ready to put yourself out there! Ask them to help you

make a cool OKCupid profile. Solicit their advice about which pictures to include (smiling face from a clear-skin phase, full-body pic from a restricted-eating phase, National Park selfie with a photogenic mountain!). Put a lot of thought into your answers. Be the right amount of light and the right amount of open, with an unthreatening garnish of wit and an appealing soupçon of snark. Choose favorite novels that are approachable without being clichéd. Choose favorite TV shows that are critically acclaimed and full of sex scenes. Inform the people of the internet that you're interested in short- or long-term dating, you're cool with both cats and dogs, and you want kids someday! Act like you mean it! Then set your profile to invisible and try to pretend the whole thing never happened.

7. At some point one of your married friends will say, "Hey, whatever happened to the online dating thing? Don't you think you should give that another try?" She may even insist that you reactivate your account, and subsequently sit down next to you on the couch with your laptop on her lap and sift through your entire inbox looking for plausible messages, because surely they can't ALL be bad. There are a few ways you can play this. One way is to make sure your friend reads the absolute worst messages right away and hope that she'll be so amused by the astonishing grammatical manglings and surreal spellings that she'll fall into helpless giggle fits and forget why she is looking at your messages in the first place. Better yet, she'll be so appalled by the messages' corrosive subtext of misogyny and self-loathing that she'll suddenly slam your laptop shut as if it is a radioactive Pandora's box and she is trying to protect you from the horrors of the world.

8. Another way to deflect the threat of online dating is to go ahead and reply to a message from a plausible person and agree to meet them for a date. This is a bit more labor intensive, as you will in fact have to put on some nice clothes and go out into the world (only the most incorrigible single people actually stand dates up). You should be pleasant and warm during the date—you don't want to give your friends ammunition to blame you for your own singleness. You can even go ahead and have fun! Why not? The stakes are infinitely low. Kiss the person or hook up with them. Or don't. It's immaterial. After the date one of the following things might happen: The person might send you a text saying it was nice meeting you but they didn't really feel like you had chemistry. Or they might go home and instantly block you. Or they might subtly, gradually disappear. In any of these

cases, you're golden! Alternatively, the person might text you and make some kind of clever, bantery allusion to some aspect of your conversation, or a flirty reference to your physical intimacies, in which case you should send them a Havisham GIF, either Helena Bonham Carter from Mike Newell's 2012 version of *Great Expectations* or Gillian Anderson from the 2011 BBC version or Martita Hunt from the 1946 David Lean version. (Anne Bancroft from the 1998 version is too hot.) If your date tries to keep bantering or flirting, just keep sending Havishams until they stop. Or your date might text you and say, "Hey! I had a really nice time the other night. I'd really like to see you again." To which you should reply, with a kind of flat, obtuse, withholding finality: "Huh. I guess that is nice of you to say." Then delete their number from your phone, and tell your friends that they didn't seem that interested.

9. Tinder is great because it doesn't matter which way you swipe as long as you never meet anyone in person. Bumble is too much work.

10. Once you've mastered the internet, staying single in real life is relatively straightforward. The main thing to remember is always to gaze raptly into the middle distance, whether you're walking down a crowded street or schmoozing at a party full of attractive people. Do not allow your vision to focus on exciting new faces or bodies! Pay attention only to people you could never imagine dating (people of an incompatible gender or sexuality or political persuasion; people who are wearing wedding rings and actually holding their partner's hands). Let the people you might be attracted to fade into the landscape until eventually you don't see them anymore.

11. The middle-distance gaze works beautifully for sidewalks, cocktail parties, and public transportation, but it's a lot harder to deploy at work or during dinner parties or in other small-scale social gatherings. Sometimes an eligible person comes into focus despite your best attempts to the contrary. Sometimes you gaze at them and they remind you of nerve endings you'd forgotten you had. Sometimes you feel their attention as if it's painting you with brushstrokes of fire. Sometimes you lie in bed and think of them and melt slowly into your mattress as if the memory foam holds the memory of all the pleasure you've ever known. Sometimes when you're alone you remember something they said and laugh aloud with involuntary joy.

When this happens, it's best to friend-zone them aggressively right away. Talk to them about your exes, your crushing student debt, your toenail fungus. Tell them that you're planning to become a single parent any minute now through surrogacy or donor sperm. Dye your hair a steely gray and pretend that you're old enough to be their parent (or, if you actually are that old, lean into it!), and supply them with a steady stream of patronizing unsolicited advice prefaced by "When I was your age" until they begin to squirm. You could even try to force them to listen as you tell them all about how to be single.

Hopper, Briallen. *Hard to Love* (pp. 31-36). Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.