

A warning from your ghost-busting dating guru...



For the longest time, I never believed in ghosts. Before I went to university, I always insisted that I was too pragmatic to believe in something that has only been heard of in horror stories and 'seen' in old houses that, rather conveniently, often seem to be afflicted with faulty lighting. I was *far* too clever to be conned into thinking that something created by priests to scare children into behaving themselves was real. I was so arrogant in my beliefs that several years ago – to a friend I have since realised has far more knowledge about the real world than myself – I swore I would only become a believer if I saw a ghost with my own eyes, preferably in the daylight and hopefully far away from any graveyards.

Since making that promise, I have encountered no less than three ghosts.

They never, however, begin that way. Like any

other human, they frequent parties, clubs, even your friends' houses until, inevitably, you are convinced that they are a human. You let yourself chat to them. Ghosts are, I should mention, experts in the art of seduction, and so there is a spark, a romantic connection of some kind that suggests this newfound connection may go the distance – or at least go to your local café for a takeaway coffee.

From here, you exchange numbers. The texting begins, texts you possibly intersperse with a date or two. Indeed, such is a ghost's power that they can, for all intents and purposes, appear human for a first, a second and even a third date if they are feeling frisky. Meeting them may not be the most life-altering experience of your life, but still. They seem nice. Fun.

And yet, the danger has already commenced. Because while you were getting to know that

seemingly trustworthy individual, the ghost was lying in wait. What exactly for, I cannot say. Perhaps, to use dating parlance, they are waiting for you to reveal a 'deal-breaker'. A love for the Barbie movie, or a hint that you may be looking for some kind of emotional attachment. Maybe they are not anticipating any deal-breakers at all, but rather, are simply waiting for boredom to creep in.

Whatever the reason, the inevitable time for transformation comes – and as their body vanishes, so to does their interest in you. The texts you had gotten so used to reading first thing in the morning? As immaterial as the ghost's body. The cookies they brought you when you were having a down day? They may as well have been a fever dream. You try, of course, to be optimistic. You let your friends reassure you with a plethora of possibilities; the ghost could, after all, be busy with work, or have been struck down with flu, or their phone (much like their previous relationships) could have died. Soon, however, it becomes impossible to deny. You've been ghosted.

Experiencing this phenomenon once is bad enough. You're surprised, a little hurt, and a lot indignant at the rudeness, but at least you'll be better at reading the signs next time, right?

Wrong.

These ghosts are an epidemic that no amount of ghostbusting experience can cure, simply because our primary way of communicating with them facilitates the invisibility they crave. The minute they decide to revert back to their spectral state, they can conceal any hint of their intentions with an expertly-crafted text message that makes their victim think they have every intention of seeing them again. Over text, you can't see that your paramour went from trustworthy mortal to intangible phantom the minute they decided their interest in you was exhausted.

Such is what makes dating nowadays feel like a game of Russian Roulette; much like how you can't tell whether the chamber of a gun is empty or not without looking inside, there is no way of knowing whether the person you bestow your affections on is a ghost, unless you ask them directly. And that, ironically, is the one thing you can do to ensure a ghost appears – or rather, disappears – immediately. After all, any hint that you may want to be more than just a casual fling is a big no-no in Ghostland.

So where do we go from here? Is the dating game really as hopeless as I make it seem?

Not exactly. If it were, the global population would have stopped increasing by now and we could worry about one less climate-related issue. Nevertheless, to any ghosts who may be reading this now, I have one simple request: return to whatever netherworld you came from. I'm all for embracing the differences between each person (even the differences in ontological status) but we've got cuffing season coming up soon. The least you could do is hibernate until your would-be victims have found someone genuine to spend the winter months with.