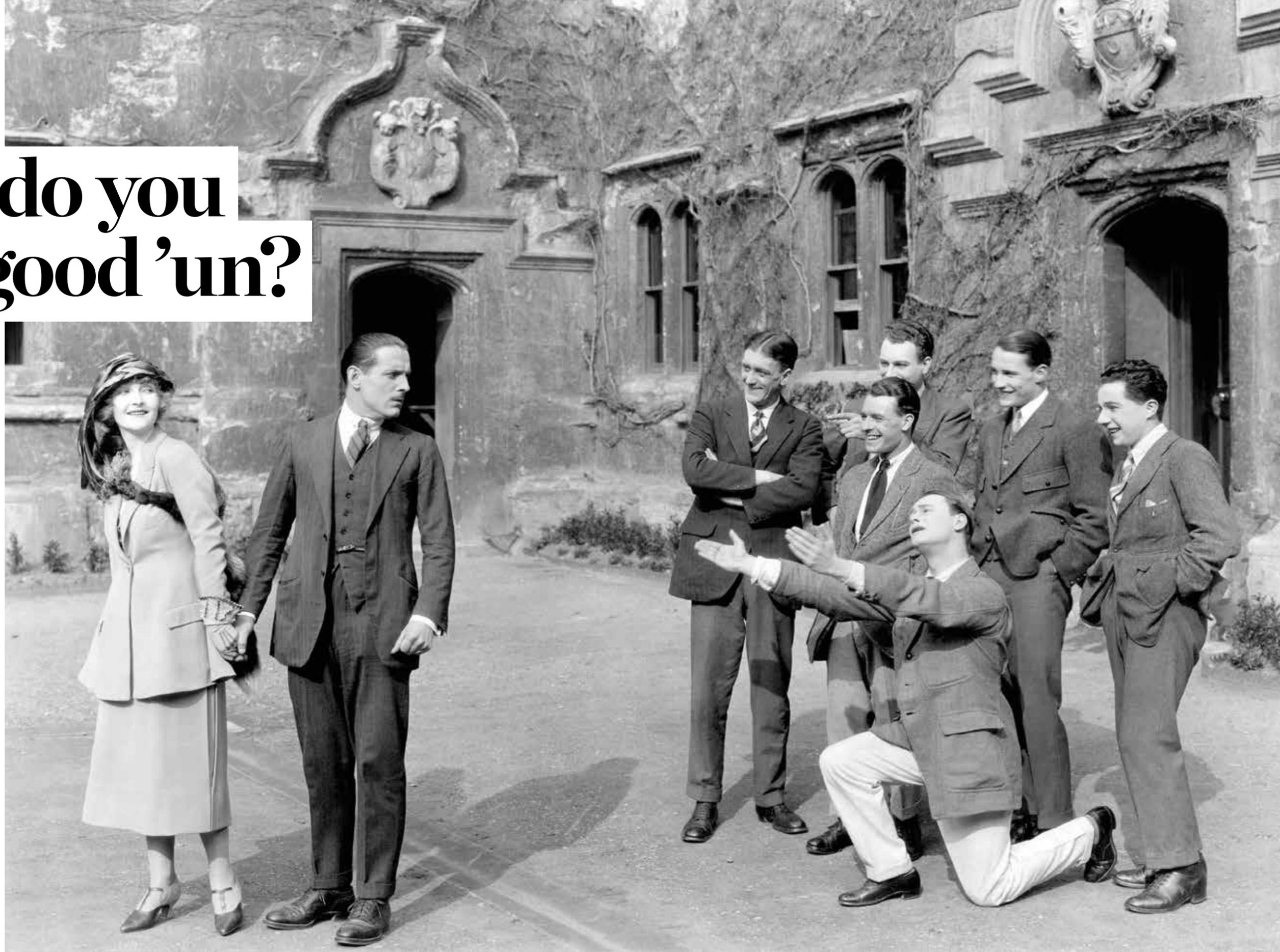


How do you find a good 'un?

Following her divorce, Katrine Boskoff started dating, only to discover she was repeating old patterns. She turns to the experts to help her break from the past

Honestly, I have lost all faith in my ability to pick a good man. Six years after my divorce, I have dipped in and out of the dating scene and it has not gone very well. The sane, solvent, savvy men I date all transform into needy chaps who want to be rescued as soon as I fall for them. There was the charismatic American who turned out to be an alcoholic with mummy issues; a man who confessed bankruptcy and suggested moving into my house after a month; and a university lecturer, who, after a truly lovestruck start, began to say things like, 'I don't know who I am any more,' the moment I bravely told him that I really liked him.

Is it me? 'Yes, it *is* you,' said my bossy best friend. 'The only thing that these relationships have in common is you.' I need professional guidance... >>>





“We are all longing for an imaginary world in which we believe everything will be OK”

more aware you are of your patterns, the more you can start to change your behaviour. Being strong means you don't have to risk being vulnerable. From the first date, try to show vulnerability and ask for what you need. Allow yourself to be listened to instead of listening to him. The men who want to be rescued will drift away.'

STEP

2 Get real

Another problem is that I fall for someone far too quickly – before I've had a chance to figure out the dynamics at play. 'You are not alone,' says psychotherapist, Fiona Arrigo. 'Many women I see have had therapy and are self-aware, but then, "Bam!", they meet someone and a kind of addictive amnesia overrides the awareness,' says Arrigo. 'They

spot the warning signs, yet the thrill of the craving is bigger than logic or their innate wisdom. There is a hungry ghost that never seems to be satisfied. The bottom line is: we are all longing for an imaginary world in which we believe that everything will be OK.'

How do we lay the hungry ghost to rest? Arrigo believes that, given the right conditions, a woman will 'drop into herself' to find the answers she needs. 'You need to create a daily practice of forgiveness and a deep compassion for yourself,' she says. 'You need to give yourself space to reconnect with what you know to be true. Falling in love is a fantasy. You need to ground yourself in reality; the present. Observe what is happening versus what you *want* to happen.'

Like dating, I've dipped in and out of meditation, mindfulness and yoga. When I practise, I am able to connect with what 'feels true for me'. I suspect I knew my American had addiction issues way before it was obvious, but I was so wrapped up in the 'thrill' of it, I deluded myself. Yes, I seek connection with a man, but the first thing to do is connect daily with myself via yoga, meditation or simply mindfully noticing what my body is telling me.

PHOTOGRAPHS: IMAGE SOURCE

>>> STEP

Gain awareness

'Choosing a partner can follow an unconscious pattern that is often repeated from your early family life and primary caregivers. If you felt unsupported and ignored by your mother, you might unconsciously seek a partner who will not listen to you or support you,' says counsellor, Denise Pia. 'But it's an unconscious choice you're making, so the first step is to make the unconscious conscious.'

Pia recommends some counselling, particularly if any kind of abuse was involved but, if not, you can start the process on your own by writing about your relationship in your journal. Pia says: 'Explore the relationship with your mother and father. Write down a stream of consciousness: What were they like? How did your parents treat you; your siblings; each other? How did they make you feel? How do you feel about them now? What role did you play in the family? Were you the carer? The truth-teller? The baby? Now, write about your last three romantic relationships – are there any patterns that you can spot that may hark back to your relationship with your parents?'

This exercise made me emotional. My father died when I was a teenager, so I definitely became the strong one in the family. I had to look after my mother, physically and emotionally. A large penny dropped. In my 10-year marriage, I was always the strong one who supported my ex emotionally and financially. Even after our divorce, I helped him after he had a breakdown. 'You play the rescuer,' says Pia. 'This was the way you survived. You had to be strong; to rescue yourself and your mother. Being strong is what feels most natural to you.' Bingo! But, how do I change this pattern? I don't mind being the strong one sometimes, but it's too exhausting long-term. She says: 'The

COACH YOURSELF: PONDER THE FOLLOWING

- **KNOW** When do you feel you know someone? After six weeks? When you know their friends?
 - **TRUST** When do you trust someone? When they do what they say they will? When they are on time?
 - **RELY** When can you rely on a person? When they listen to you? When they are on time?
 - **COMMIT** How do you know he's the right person? Do you feel you belong in the relationship? Can you visualise a future? Do you want to commit?
 - **TOUCH** When is it too soon to kiss or be intimate? What's too long without intimacy?
- For details of Dr John Van Epp's five-step RAM technique, go to lovethinks.com

STEP

3 Slow down

A happily married friend suggests a practical method called The Relationship Attachment Model (RAM), developed by Dr John Van Epp, the author of *How To Avoid Falling In Love With A Jerk* (McGraw-Hill, £13.99). 'Romantic love suppresses the neural activity associated with your ability to judge a partner correctly,' he says. 'Massive releases of oxytocin, dopamine, and other hormones and neuropeptides in the brain create euphoric feelings that further cloud analytic judgements, masking those repeating offences that should be obvious warning signals of problems to come.'

Van Epp's RAM technique involves drawing five columns: to know, to trust, to rely, to commit and to touch. The columns are progressive, so start with 'know', then move to 'trust' and so on. No column should get ahead of the one before it. It's difficult to *trust* somebody before you get to *know* them and, in fact, if you trust someone before you really know them, you can end up in an unhealthy relationship. It's also hard to *rely* on a man before you've begun to trust him. Don't have sex (*touch*) before you know him enough or trust him. Van Epp says: 'This will keep you safe. If you get to

know someone slowly, to trust him, then rely on him, commit to him and only then get intimate, you have more chance of making a decision based on your head, as well as your heart.'

What next?

I feel more equipped to date now. I can look back at my experiences and see where I may have gone wrong. With the American, I got too swept away and didn't listen to my intuition. I'm going to commit to meditate or write in my journal daily, to stay connected to my true intuition, versus any delusion or fantasy that hijacks me. With the man who wanted to move in with me, I might have done too much listening and encouraging instead of talking about my needs. I presented myself as a haven of calm (and cash). Now I realise that I need a haven, too.

I feel a little fearful about making myself vulnerable from the get-go but maybe the baby step is talking more and listening less on a first date. I am going to commit to slowing down. With the 'I don't know who I am any more' man, I needed to get to know him a lot more before I trusted him.

If the one thing all my relationships have in common is me, I know I can tweak my behaviour and awareness to get a different result. Wish me luck!

vitacounsellinglondon.co.uk (Denise Pia); thearrigoprogramme.com (Fiona Arrigo)



Kim Morgan
Asking questions can help new parents enjoy their role

Your own wellbeing is almost never more important than when you are a new parent - but it can be the time that we neglect ourselves the most.

Coaching Cards for New Parents can provide some much-needed time to think in those busy and life-changing first few months. If you are looking for a thoughtful and meaningful gift for a new parent, then helping someone take just five minutes per day to focus on what they are feeling and experiencing can:

- 🐣 Increase their confidence by noticing what they are doing well
- 🐣 Allow parents to talk honestly about the demands of their role and how they are adjusting to it
- 🐣 Make some time for themselves and their relationship

ASK YOURSELF

What are your aims and hopes as a parent?

Kim Morgan's Coaching Cards for New Parents are available now from Amazon