

## How to Find Love on Reality TV

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You're frustrated, it's understandable. You're tired of being single, of hearing phrases like "the one," "settling down," or "biological clock." Your friends, married and smug in their blissful matching-monogrammed lives, have started referring to you dismissively as their "single friend." You have become a rarity, an endangered breed, a token, an affirmative action attempt by the hordes of LL Bean-clad couples that have, frighteningly, become your social circle. You're tired of showing up at parties, weddings, and backyard barbeques dateless, only to find that these same well-meaning, but terribly misguided, friends have invited their boring-single-accountant in some sort of Fiddler on the Roof matchmaker musical number. You stare into his eager, beady eyes and wonder how to meet a man that doesn't live in his mother's basement, collect Superman memorabilia, or talk incessantly about his rashes.

You've tried everything. You've altered your body which, frankly, never needed altering in the first place. You've dyed your hair the unnatural streaky blonde *Cosmo* recommended, lost the three remaining pounds standing between you and a size four, bought every wire-laden bust-enhancing bra, and in October for your thirty-fifth birthday even treated yourself to a consultation with your best friend's plastic surgeon. "Just shopping around," was what you said as he slashed editorial dots and dashes in dark purple ink over your chilled and pale skin. You'd been interested in an eye lift, maybe bigger boobs, he'd used the phrase "extensive project" as his disapproving eyes scanned your naked vulnerable flesh.

You've tried hobbies you once thought of as too pedestrian (golf) or too exotic (*Krav Maga*). You have taken classes at the community college you found boring (Molecular Biology didn't bring the range of geeky-but-hot guys you had dreamed of) and fascinating (although, in fairness, that pottery class did bring in one romantic invite . . . too bad it was from the mopey seventeen-year-old kid who assailed you with bad poetry and guitar ballads when you turned him down). You've attended political rallies (who knew there were *no*

sexy Republicans?), mind-numbing community meetings, and volunteered for every cause imaginable (your personal trainer thinks you're Mother Teresa due your extensive collection of charity event tee-shirts). You have even attended events that left you psychologically scarred and physically nauseated (the Saturday spent with your older brother at Gun Fun X-treme X-travaganza left you with nightmares of glassy-eyed deer and leering blood-soaked hunters).

Your last resort? No, not Dr. Symington with his violent purple pen. No, don't accept that invitation to the Elk's Club dance with the beady-eyed accountant. There is only one real option left, one possible escape from a life spent living with four cats, walking around in a plastic shower cap and curlers in public muttering to yourself about the price of cottage cheese—one exotic oasis from the flat gray life you are currently stuck in: reality TV.

You balk! True, you may have to compete with countless other women for his attentions, some of them sabotaging your every attempt at romance with pranks reminiscent of a Haley Mills movie. True, the spontaneity is carefully scripted and timed—leaving you to mill around countless hours with your makeup melting under the production lights, and your feet aching in the too-small hooker heels the chain-smoking wardrobe lady shoved into your hands, drinking flat champagne, and making small talk with the cameramen. True, this Mr. Right may be a beefy jock who can't name one U.S. president prior to Regan, and who answers with an immediate and unironic, "*Green Eggs and Ham*" when you ask him the last good book he read. He may have disgusting personal habits or an extensive criminal background the producers forgot to include in their spiel to "potential girls." True, this may all seem degrading and a little ridiculous. But it's romance for the new millennium. Be happy that you have this. Imagine it.

You're in a rented Roman villa in the hills of . . . well, Beverly Hills. But they'll say it's Rome for the show. The production lights shine down on you like unfiltered sunlight as the devastatingly handsome, albeit not terribly intelligent, Mr. Right smiles at you from his mark. You are standing in a line with three other women, the auctioneer calls out your name and you clump up to the platform in the powder-blue prom dress Wardrobe Marge chose for you. The wet staring bovine eyes of the other contestants watch your every move. You have an expectant look, an eager longing gleam in your eye; the producers are thrilled at how well you're doing. Mr. Right will, of course,

make you one of his “selections” with the hackneyed but much-coveted phrase, “Will you accept this rose?” You have performed beautifully this week; you really should think about acting as a career.

But what’s this? You say “no” to the rose? This isn’t supposed to happen. The producers scramble around checking their scripts, shouting for the writers. And why are you staring moony-eyed at that camera guy? The one who brought you the bottled water and chips in hour three of pre-production, the one with the “Union 127” button pinned to his faded jean jacket, the one with the nice blue eyes and quiet sarcastic sense of humor, the one who found you an equipment box to sit on when the hooker heels started causing blisters, the one who is now staring back at you with the same moony eyes.

The producers are pissed. This whole scene will have to be re-shot, several in fact. Something is mentioned about you having a sick mother and needing to return home unexpectedly. You will be expected to cry on cue, saying this was your last true chance at love but your family always comes first. It will be confessional, devastating, poignant; it will get great ratings.

But of course you’re not listening anymore. Mr. Right picks something off his scalp and examines it closely before eating it. The other contestants cluck and fuss among themselves while you sit slouched on the equipment box, laughing at something your cameraman says while you share half his meatball sub and finally unstrap the ridiculous hooker heels. You have met him: Mr. Right.