

MARRYING A WIDOWER



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
BEFORE TYING THE KNOT

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INTRODUCTION

IF YOU'VE JUST STARTED dating a widower, this book may not be for you—it's for women who are in a serious relationship with a widower and are thinking about spending the rest of their lives with him. To know whether or not the man you're interested in is prepared to enter the dating world, I suggest you first read *Dating a Widower: Starting a Relationship with a Man Who's Starting Over*. That book gives you a frame of reference so you can determine if he is mentally and emotionally ready to move on. *Marrying a Widower* will help you know whether he's prepared to make the ultimate commitment and spend the rest of his life with you. More importantly, it will walk you through many of the unique circumstances and challenges that come with marrying a widower to help you decide if taking this step is right for *you*.

Throughout this book, I'm going to assume that marriage is the eventual end game of your dating activities. I understand that not everyone wants to get married. Some people are happy with lifelong partnerships or something else—that's fine too. If you don't want to tie the knot, as you read this book, just replace the word "marriage" with a term that describes what you want the relationship to become.

Having a successful marriage takes a lot of work. As long as you're both willing to make each other the center of your universe and invest the time, energy, and love it takes to grow and nurture your relationship, you will have a partnership that will bring you nothing but joy and that will last for the rest of your life.

I hope this book can help you decide if marrying a widower is the right thing to do, or that it can help make your current marriage (if you've already married a widower) sweeter and stronger.

Abel Keogh

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CHAPTER 1

THE END GAME

WIDOWERS BECOME INVOLVED in serious relationships for different reasons. Some miss the late wife and want someone to “be there” to help alleviate the empty feeling in their lives. Others want someone who will be on call for an occasional roll in the hay, to cook their meals, or to babysit their kids. And, believe it or not, there are even widowers who are looking for someone they can spend the rest of their lives with. Whatever his reason for wanting a relationship, it’s important that you both have the same end game in mind. For example, if you want to get married, but he prefers living together, or he’d be happy with a nebulous, open-ended friendship, you’re going to waste months or

years of your life with someone who's never going to give you the love and happiness you deserve.

While it's important to be on the same page in any relationship, it's doubly important to make sure a widower has the same relationship goals. Many men will settle for a relationship with a woman they don't love simply because they're lonely. Almost every widower I've talked to has, at some point, started a serious relationship because they wanted companionship. These widowers keep the relationship going until they tire of it or until someone better comes along. They leave behind lots of broken hearts and women who feel used.

Sadly, I've made this very mistake. Less than a year after my wife, Krista, took her own life, I became serious with a good friend named Jennifer. I promised her the world and implied a life of happiness together. I started that relationship because my heart ached for companionship, and having someone in my life who wasn't a perfect fit was still a hundred times better than being alone.

When things started to get serious with Jennifer, I thought I loved her—or at least, I had strong feelings that I thought would turn into love. It was nice to have

someone to talk to and a warm body to hold, even if I couldn't see myself spending the rest of my life with her. As time went on and my feelings for her only become more ambivalent, I tried to convince myself that I loved her. I rationalized my lack of love toward her as a sign that I was still grieving. All I needed, I thought, was more time to grieve, and things would eventually work out. It wasn't until Julianna came along that I realized I never really loved Jennifer in the first place.

If you want to avoid being the woman who gets used by a lonely widower, you need to make absolutely sure you and he both want to get married—to each other. The sooner you can do that, the better off you'll both be.

There are several ways to know how the widower really feels about you. The best and most obvious way is through his actions—not his words. If he always treats you like a queen, it's a good sign that he wants to spend the rest of his life with you. But more often than not, a widower will send mixed signals. For example, he may call you every day, but still have photographs of the late wife all over the house. Or he may wine and dine you every night, but won't stop talking about the late wife

and the fantastic life they shared together. This makes it hard for a woman to know where she stands.

Find time when the two of you can have a serious conversation about where you see the relationship going. This can be a scary step, because there's always a chance the widower may not give you the answer you want. But knowing the truth, even if you don't like it, is better than wasting part of your life with someone who is with you because he doesn't want to be alone.

Keep in mind that one talk probably won't do it, either. Julianna and I had several big talks at different points in our relationship. We had our first conversation about six weeks after becoming exclusive, another when Julianna realized I was still wearing a necklace with Krista's ring on it, a third when I accidentally called Julianna by Krista's name, and a fourth during a six-hour drive home from a marathon she ran. There were probably lots of smaller talks in between, too. Sometimes I found them uncomfortable, because Julianna was worried about whether I was really ready to commit. However, because we were able to openly discuss what we wanted from the relationship, our discussions helped us move toward our goal of marriage.

Knowing that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with me made it easier for me to make room in my heart for her. It also helped me focus on starting a new life with her and served as a gut check to ensure it was something I really wanted to do. The more we talked about marriage, the more excited we became about taking a walk down the aisle together. So when I finally did ask Julianna to marry me, the proposal itself wasn't a total surprise. We'd talked enough that she knew I'd eventually ask her to marry me, and that when I did, she would say "Yes!"

HOW SOON SHOULD YOU HAVE THE TALK?

Over the years, I've had people ask me how long they should wait before having this talk with the widower. The truth is, there's no set timeframe. As a rule of thumb, if you've been seriously dating for several months and you can see yourself marrying him, there's nothing wrong with bringing up the subject—and it doesn't matter how long the late wife has been dead, either. Julianna and I had our first "Where is this relationship going?" talk about a month after we started dating

seriously, about nine months after I became a widower.

Don't worry about having the talk too soon and scaring him away. You're both adults, and you should be able to have adult conversations. Talking about the future isn't a proposal. It doesn't mean you have to get married the next day. It's better to know sooner, rather than later, if you both want to get married, so you can work toward that goal or move on with your lives.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT BEFORE YOU TALK

Before you talk about your future together, it's vital that you know where you see the relationship going. Do you want to get married, or do you want something more casual? If you can't clearly define what you want from the relationship, don't bring up the subject until you can. It's unfair to the widower to expect him to talk about a possible future together if you don't know what you want.

BEWARE OF THE GRIEF CARD

Widowers willing to settle for companionship with women they don't love will often play the grief card

when talks about the future arise. They'll say things like they're still grieving, or that they need more time before they can figure out what they want. If a single or divorced man said something similar, most women would hesitate to take the relationship any further. Widowers, however, tend to be given more leniency when it comes to opening their hearts, and a woman will move forward despite the widower's inability to articulate how he really feels about her and the relationship.

The truth is, widowers know how they feel about the woman they're with. Those who know they want to get married again don't have a hard time saying it—even if they're still mourning the late wife. I dated Julianna less than a year after Krista's death. My heart was still tender, and I was still grieving. There were times before or after a date with Julianna when I'd cry my eyes out. Despite being an emotional wreck at times, I knew I didn't want to spend my life with anyone but Julianna. I also knew that the only thing keeping us from getting married was my own sorrow and sadness, so I worked as hard as I could to forgive Krista and move on with my life. I did it because I knew that the reward of taking

Julianna by the hand and exchanging vows would be well worth it. Widowers who feel the same way about you will do the same. A widower unable to make room in his heart for the woman he's dating has no business being involved in a serious relationship.

WIDOWERS ACT HOW THEY REALLY FEEL

Sometimes it's hard to distinguish between widowers looking for companionship and those who want to get married. The best way to know how he really feels about you is to pay attention to his actions, not his words. Any widower can proclaim his love, or say he wants to spend the rest of his life with you. Only a widower who really loves you will treat you like the only woman he's ever loved. Widowers who talk a good talk, but don't really have your best interests in mind, will eventually betray themselves through their own actions.

When I was dating Jennifer, I said lots of wonderful things I didn't mean. For a while, I was able to back up my sweet nothings with actions: I called her every night, flew down to see her on a regular basis (we

lived several hundred miles apart), and sent her emails throughout the day. But eventually, I couldn't put the physical effort into the story I'd weaved. I stopped calling her as often, made excuses why I couldn't fly down, and sent fewer and fewer emails. Despite this, I continued to tell her that we had a future together, and she continued to believe it.

If you have any doubt about how the widower really feels about you, pay close attention to how he treats you. Those who are sincere about tying the knot will align their actions with their words. They'll do everything in their power to make you feel like the only woman they've ever loved. Widowers who are in relationships for their own selfish reasons will be able to put on an act for only so long. With these men, sooner or later, you feel like you're competing with a ghost.

HAVE THE COURAGE TO WALK AWAY

If you believe he doesn't have the same relationship goals as you do, don't be afraid to walk away. Some women hold on to a relationship that's not going anywhere because they think the widower will change his

mind or eventually grow to love them. Don't fall into this trap. Love doesn't work that way. If he can't fall in love with you after several months or so of serious dating, he never will.

Never settle for a relationship with anyone who can't give you top billing in his heart and mind. If you settle for second place, you'll never be truly happy. Life is too short to waste on someone who can't treat you like you deserve to be treated. If you wait for the widower to come to his senses, the relationship will eventually end, and you'll have nothing to show for it. Have the courage to walk away. You're a queen and deserve to be treated as such.



CAROL'S STORY

When I first met my husband, he was 45 and widowed less than a year. I was 43 and crazy about him, but also quite lonely.

He talked constantly about his deceased wife. At first, I tried to be sympathetic because I liked him so much. After a few weeks, (yes, I was still seeing him,

despite the enormous red flag) I finally told him I was sick of hearing about her. I didn't care what she would have done in such-and-such situation, I didn't care what she liked and didn't like, and I sure as heck didn't care that she had ugly feet! I also didn't care if he stuck around or not.

But stick around he did, and being the lonely, bored woman I was, I continued to see him. Over time he talked about the late wife less and less. Occasionally she came up in conversation, but she seemed to be mostly on the way out. I hoped that our relationship would be finally one of two hearts instead of three. Unfortunately, my happiness would prove to be short lived.

After four years of dating, we decided to get married, despite all the red flags—for example, when I first met his mother, we traveled hundreds of miles and stayed in her house. The first day, I found myself alone with her. His mother's opening line? "So, you knew Mary [the late wife], didn't you?" Then I sat and listened to hours of what Mary did and liked. His mother never asked anything about me—where I worked, what my family was like, nothing. Not only that, but

the bedroom in her house where I stayed had pictures of Mary and her husband all over the walls. It was horrible.

Now we have been married two years, and the deceased wife is back with a vengeance. I recently found out that when I am at work, my husband goes to the cemetery and takes pictures of himself next to their double plot. I was crushed and felt like number two all over again.

Ladies, do not make the mistake I did. I wanted to believe that things would get better with time. Do not be in denial if the man you are with is still hung up on a deceased spouse. All people deserve to be number one in their spouse's life. Do not settle. If you see these types of red flags, *run away as fast as you can*. At nearly 50 years old, I'll have to go through another divorce and start over again, all because I wanted to kid myself that things would get better. My husband's first wife has been dead seven years, and things have only gotten worse. Take off the rose-colored glasses and find someone who cherishes you for who you are. You'll be glad you did.