



She Says...

Delving Into His Past

When his history comes a-poking, Aoife Stuart can't resist a peek – but will curiosity kill the cat?

Facebook can be blamed for many things: tagged fat photos, friend requests from old classmates you didn't even like the first time around, and mundane status updates (nobody cares what you're having for breakfast, people), but perhaps the social network's most heinous crime is the rate at which it vomits up the past. Facebook has somehow become a portal through which the past, in all its frizzy-haired, badly-dressed glory, can infiltrate the present, creating a bizarre new dimension.

It's a dimension where the '90s fashion disasters we'd wiped from our conscious reappear faster than you can say 'oxblood Doc Martens' (thanks for the tag, sis) and that creepy kid from high school now wants to play a nightly poker game with us. But worst of all, in this new dimension, it's apparently acceptable for long-forgotten exes to wink at us, nudge us and even poke us, without warning. Whether we like it or not, we're getting dragged kicking and screaming down memory lane, and there's nothing we can do about it.

Take last Saturday afternoon, when my fiancé was tagged in a photo on Facebook, which showed him cosying up to a perky blonde. Judging by his haircut and her bad jeans, the photo was taken circa 1997, but I was intrigued nonetheless. Peering over his shoulder as he clicked on the profile of the tagging culprit, I attempted to sound blasé as I uttered the mantra of paranoid women the world over: "Who's that?"

The Ghosts Of Girlfriends Past

"That's my ex from years ago, Sarah. I told you about her," he said. "Oh," I replied, wracking my brains. Sarah, Sarah... wait *that's* Sarah? And he was right, I had known about her. Sarah was a single mum he'd dated for 18 months at the age of 21. I'd heard about her a couple of years back, during a wine-fuelled swap of dating CVs early in our relationship. The Cliff Notes on their courtship: they met at university, she was pushing for commitment, he wanted to play drinking games at the Students' Union, and they eventually broke up because he wasn't ready to be a

step dad to her kid. Yet somehow, I'd just expected her to be more, well, mumsy.

She was, until then, just a fleeting figure in his history book. Mentioned in passing, along with the other ghosts of relationships past, like Chris, the wannabe DJ (read: unemployed slob) I'd dated for a year when I was 16 because he told me he was the next Oakenfold. Or Caitlin, my fiancé's date for the school formal, who tried to set fire to his locker when he broke up with her. Not forgetting Ryan, a professional cyclist I dumped at 23 when he tried to get me to swap late night parties for early morning bike rides... But I certainly never imagined I'd be seeing any of this motley crew of exes again, or any of the hideous outfits I wore when I dated them, for that matter (I still shudder at the memory of my underwear-as-outerwear club apparel).

Google-Stalking

Now here was Sarah, tagging my fiancé in a decade-old picture as if it was yesterday. And she was nothing like the mousy-haired dork with milk bottle glasses I'd pictured (thanks, imagination). Turns out, the past is not so easily forgotten when it's boasting honey highlights and a skimpy DVF dress (oh, and did I mention Sarah is now single and 'looking for a relationship'?).

The dormant green-eyed monster inside me was stirring, and I needed to know more. Later, alone, I checked out her profile. "I'll just get a better look at her, then shut it down," I vowed. But five photos albums in, I was hooked. I'm not quite sure what I was searching for



"On Facebook, it seems exes can wink, nudge and even poke us without warning"

exactly – perhaps some sign that she was still secretly hung up on my fiancé – but I couldn't stop clicking.

Too Much Info?

Facebook seems to have sensed this opportunity for mischief, throwing up random faces from the past under the guise of 'people you may know,' begging you to fling open the door to the past and invite every dodgy date, pre-GHD hair day and cringeworthy outfit into your present. Thanks for the suggestion, Facebook, but there's a reason I haven't friend-requested my ex. He's a bunny boiler. What's that? Do I want to see pictures of us together? Erm, how can I put this? No freaking way!

Before the advent of Facebook, a brief but candid dating confessional, usually involving a mutual exchange of 'magic numbers' at the start of a relationship was all we needed to know about our partner's past, now suddenly here I was immersed in his ex's family snaps. One enterprising friend has developed a cut-throat cure for this type of curiosity: she recently gave her boyfriend's Facebook account a spring clean, deleting all and any ex girlfriends, ruling that, "They have no relevance to our life."

A touch extreme, granted, but as I scanned through photos of Sarah's 30th, I had to reason that maybe my friend had a point. Then, just as I was about to shut the laptop and berate my nosiness, an album I'd nearly missed caught my eye: 'Uni Photos.' *Jackpot*. Tentatively, I clicked on it, half-afraid I'd find photos of my fiancé and Sarah performing the *Kama Sutra* in the halls of residence. What I discovered, however, was not quite so heart-wrenching, though equally as offensive.

There, documented in photographic splendour, was every fashion disaster my fiancé had made throughout the late '90s, including chin-length curtains, a hypercolour t-shirt and a charming pair of Nike Air Max (with the tongues out, natch). Wiping away tears of laughter, I realised, instead of judging Sarah, I should be thanking her. These hideously-attired skeletons she'd dragged from the closet would provide hours of entertainment in the future (I'm having some of the snaps made into fridge magnets). But I suppose, to be fair, I'll now have to dig out some old pics of me in that club wear... dammit! ■