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Ex-cuse me!

By MK Bateman

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When Derek Che, an LA-based media consultant, ran into his ex-boyfriend last year, he felt a knot in his stomach. Sure, it was emotional to see his ex again, but there was another factor...During the breakup, Derek "took" his ex's favorite sweater as a parting gift. "I know it was spiteful, but I was angry...and it was Marc Jacobs. Of course, the one time I see him in a year, I have it on."

You probably don't need us to tell you that running into an ex is one of Murphy's Laws: Anytime you look/feel/smell your worst, an old flame will cross your path. And when that fateful day inevitably arrives, how will you handle yourself? Follow these techniques and you're guaranteed to walk away with your pride intact (not to mention your sweater).

**#1. Acknowledge him.**

Don't run in the opposite direction. Tempting as it may be to duck into the deli, you'll wind up feeling embarrassed by that kind of maneuver later. "This is your chance to face your fears," says Robin Handburg, CSW, a New York-based psychotherapist. It's normal to be nervous, but remember, the encounter won't last forever. "And when you've walked away, you'll realize you survived." That's a huge confidence boost.

**#2. Keep the conversation in the present.**

"Even if you had a nasty breakup, now's not the time to rehash the past," says Hamburg. "Keep the conversation focused on what's going on in your lives right now." But don't ask for—or give up—too many details. The more superficial the exchange, the better chance you'll leave unscathed. You can send your regards to the family, mention that you started a great job, but steer away from your own love life, and his, for obvious reasons.

**#3. Don't give in to the drama.**

If your ex insists on delving into what went wrong, resist the urge to argue. Take responsibility for your share of the breakup and apologize for any mistakes you made and stay focused on getting out of there. The one thing you don't want to do is get into it in public. Not only because causing a scene is embarrassing, but because running into an old flame out of the blue is bound to stir up old, messy feelings which can bubble over. "The idea is to keep your dignity intact," says Jamie Buffalino, advice columnist for *Time Out New York*. "Acting out may feel good in the short term, but it's just going to make you feel terrible later on."

**4. Be gracious to the new flame (gack!).**

Of course, nothing's more stomach-churning than running into an ex when he's with someone new. Who's hot. And holding his hand. But take this as your cue to really shine. Extend a hand, introduce yourself, "even tell the new boyfriend what a good catch he has in your ex," says Hamburg. "And whatever you do, don't let the new guy catch you checking him out!"

**#5. Don't linger.**

Contact with the ex, unless it was an amicable break-up should be kept to a minimum—say, five minutes. "The longer you stand on the street corner, the longer the conversation, the better the chance of getting into a serious exchange or an argument," says Hamburg.

**#6. Resist the urge to replay the encounter in your mind.**

Ok. You made it. You walked away, head held reasonably high. So what do you do now? The answer is not pick apart every word and gesture the two of you traded ("I wonder what he meant by, 'See you soon?'"). Instead, congratulate yourself on acting like an adult. Maybe you'll want to celebrate by going to an outdoor café for a drink and people-watching. You never who you'll meet.

*MK Bateman is a writer living in Greenwich Village, NYC. The last time he ran into an ex, he broke out in a sweat and darted into a subway in the middle of a conversation.*

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*sweat and darted into a church in the middle of mass.*

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