Plucking the Perennial Favorites

There are men who only live in my phone and not in my real life.

Well, at some point they lived in my real life but in ever so brief ways. For example, there's the financial planner whom I call J. Trouble. (I think his name is John but it could be Josh or James.) We went on exactly — count 'em — two dates. And then, like any good "man magic act," he disappeared.

Except he didn't stay gone. In fact, he shows up every season. Every four months, like clockwork, there's a text message from Mr. J. Trouble telling me he was thinking about me, or we should get together, or my favorite, the ever simple, "Hey gorgeous."

But it's not just him. I have a whole crop, eight or nine of them — men I've never slept with, never been on more than a few dates with, never expected much from, who disappear and reappear every few months.

I am at work when one such message arrives, so I run to my work-wife, Jessica, the woman who effectively handles all my drama when I'm in the office (and keeps me in a steady supply of Kit Kat bars and Advil). When I tell her about J. Trouble and the others like him, she tells me, "It reminds me of these ugly yellow flowers we used to have next to the driveway growing up. My mom hated those flowers so much. We'd mow them over and in the winter run our sleds over them, but they just kept coming back."

I understand the metaphor all too well. So I decide it's time to delete the perennial favorites from my life or else they'll keep popping up like ugly yellow flowers.

Over brunch, my married gal-pal, Jen, thinks back to her dating years and remembers what she called her "boomerang men." No matter how far she threw some, they just kept circling back. Erica Hollander, a trainer, educator and therapist who specializes in human communication, listens carefully when I tell her about these "boomerangs."

"You need to ask yourself 'What messages am I sending that make you think you can pop in and out of my life?' Is there something you're doing to invite this kind of behavior?" she asks.

Other than texting them back each time? I hedge. I'm a smart alpha-female. I want to end this annoying pattern. I want to communicate my intention directly. I want to be left alone if it's not going to work out.

Hollander sees through my veiled excuses and pushes further: "All of us want to get on with life and get on with productive relationships. The relationships you've described have no potential."

Ouch. But she's right. And she makes me realize that I'm doing myself no service by perpetuating the "cool girl" myth. Like many women, I want to be thought of as an awesome creature who is oh-so go with the flow. And that I'm the exception, not like the "other" girls. So I keep texting back, keep perpetuating a cycle because I don't want to be rude. Plus, I'm curious to know what's brought whichever man it is back. But I never get the satisfaction of knowing. So it's time to end this unhealthy cycle.

More disturbing is the fact that when I delete these men I feel nothing. No guilt, no excitement, nothing. J. Trouble and the others are plucked easily like the simple weeds they've become. So I keep deleting, until I get to one that I don't want to delete. One that I sometimes wish would come back (due to whatever idiotic reasoning, thanks Dr. Hollander). I think about deleting him for several days. Until finally, I do.

And just like the others, I feel nothing. Unlike the others, I am relieved to feel nothing.

— By Leah M. Charney

Charney is a sassy yet classy minx who may be unleashing her delete key on Facebook next. Contact her at www.datingandotherbadhabits.com.