

Dating POV: You're Either the Cartier or the Knock-Off in Your Relationship

IT'S SURPRISINGLY EASY FOR MEN TO SPOT THE DIFFERENCE



BY [SYDNEY MEISTER](#) • PUBLISHED JAN 16, 2025



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Jake spots her the second she walks in. Olivia. She nestles in the corner, her oxblood leather jacket slicing through the scene of Soho Grand aristocrats. Her friend says something that makes her snicker—a stark contrast from the tight lips and darting eyes of the girls around her. Jake doesn't hesitate. He makes his way through a sea of faux fur coats and knock-off Bottega Veneta Cassette bags to get to her.

"So," he says, taking a swig of his Old Fashioned. "Where do I get a jacket like that?"

She raises an eyebrow, amused. "Burberry?" she probes, tugging at the collar of his parka. "I don't see you in vintage."

He shoots back, "You don't think I've been to 2nd Street?" And just like that, they're off. The conversation flows as easily as the dirty martinis she's sipping. He learns that she's just moved back to the city after a stint in London. She learns that he's an investment banker who lived in London three years prior. When she mentions her favorite band, Jake says he's seen them live—a fact that's only half true. (At least he's heard of them.) He can't help the white lie; she's sharper and funnier than he expects. He's not about to short his stock when he's trying to play the long game.

By the time last call rolls around, Jake knows he's hooked. Olivia isn't just gorgeous; she's captivating in a way he hasn't encountered in years. As the lights come up, she plugs her number in his phone and slips it into his hand, teasing, "Don't make me regret this." They part ways with their respective groups, but when he goes to bed that night, he's excited. Already planning the perfect text. He'll wait a day—maybe two—then suggest reservations at an edgy new bar he thinks she'll appreciate.

Yet, to his surprise, he wakes up to a text from Olivia at 9 a.m. the next morning.

"Hey, had an amazing time last night. Let me know when you're free to shop vintage 😊"

He stares at the screen, rereading her message for the third time. She's texting *him* first. It's not what he expected—a girl like Olivia initiating the first move. He lingers, sitting up in bed, debating what to say back.

"Well I need about ten more coffees for this hangover," he exaggerates. "Maybe another if we're talking fashion."

Her response comes almost instantly. "Lolol. I'm just making sure you don't chicken out. I have a busy day today but could ditch this annoying brunch I have with my sorority sisters..." The typing bubble appears again: "Maybe meet you at 2nd Street instead?"

Jake wasn't planning to see Olivia again so soon. His Saturday is booked—basketball in the afternoon, a friend's birthday dinner in Tribeca later. Plus, even if he were free, he thinks, *Ditching brunch? For me?* Maybe she's more attainable than he'd thought; so quick to clear a prime slot in her weekend schedule. Then he realizes his game starts in an hour, and he still has yet to locate his basketball sneakers.

He writes back from the subway 20 minutes later: "Would love to, but I have basketball and birthdays today. Can I hit you back later with a plan for this week?"

Her response comes later that night: "Sure. Let me know."

Short. Simple. And for a moment, he feels a pang of doubt. Is she annoyed? Or is she back to playing it cool? He brushes it off, deciding that he hates small talk over text, too. He goes on with the rest of his Saturday, compartmentalizing Olivia for a later time.

But then, Sunday afternoon, his phone buzzes again.

"Weird... am I imagining things or have you not asked me out yet? 😏"

The winking emoji practically makes the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. For the first time since he met her, something feels... off. The banter is still there, but now she's leaning too hard into it. Why is she chasing? He starts re-examining the night they met, looking for signs of insecurity. And then, to his horror, she sends another text.

"I'm a busy girl, Jake. Lots of dates to squeeze in. Just trying to make sure I can pencil you in somewhere."

He suddenly feels overwhelmed. Like she needs something from him. So, he goes back to watching football. He eventually returns to the chat when his team loses. “Didn’t realize I was competing for a spot,” he sends at 11:57 p.m. “Don’t know if I should be flattered or worried.”

Her response comes 13 minutes later: “Depends how good your next invite is 😊”

Jake sits back, staring at their exchange. He was so sure Olivia was rare; as hard to get as his grandfather’s Cartier Santos watch. But with every follow-up text, she feels less like Cartier and more like a knock-off. It’s not just the timing of the texts, which scream *I’m available!* It’s the way she would so casually ditch her friends for a guy she met less than 48 hours ago. The more he thinks about it, the more he feels his initial perception of her was off. Somehow, the spark seems dimmer now.

He types out a reply, backspaces, then sets his phone down. Maybe he’ll text her tomorrow. Or maybe he won’t reply at all. At this point, he’s not even sure she’s worth the effort.

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A man chases a woman like she’s a limited-edition Cartier watch. Then something happens and his interest wanes. He starts seeing her as more of a cheap knock-off than a collector’s item.

This is a scene that happens regularly across bars in New York. A man chases a woman like she’s a limited-edition Cartier watch. Then something happens and his interest wanes. He starts seeing her as more of a cheap knock-off than a collector’s item. In the realm of casual dating, it’s a theme I cover ad nauseam. (Read: Situationships.) But how many rom-coms can you name about a woman who “has it all”—only to find her husband in bed with his secretary? It’s what brings me to a question that’s asked of commitment-phobes and cheaters alike: Why do some people maintain their value in a relationship, while others, over time, seem to lose it?

Enter: The Theory of the Leisure Class—a book that, during my research for this story, helped pinpoint the dynamic. (It also proved that not much has changed since its original publication in 1899.) My major takeaway is that any item deemed ‘luxury’ in status hinges on two principles. The first is rarity, which means it’s exclusive and difficult to obtain. The value of something rare isn’t just in its scarcity, it’s that it’s not easily accessible—exclusively reserved for people who meet a certain standard. Then there’s the second principle, endeavor. This refers to the quality—the unique process—that goes into crafting something extraordinary. In that sense, I think of endeavor as the mystique behind luxury itself: why we’re willing to pay substantially more for an item. When put together, rarity and endeavor create the illusion (or reality) that something’s worth pursuing—and protecting—over time.



She was the one deciding whether he'd measure up, not the other way around. By simply being herself, she was a Cartier-caliber investment.

Fortunately, we have an application of this framework: The Cartier Watch Theory (see the video above for my explanation). YouTuber Margarita Nazarenko originally coined the theory in a [TikTok](#): "Imagine you're in a store, staring at a \$10,000 Cartier watch. It's stunning, the kind of item you can't stop thinking about. You leave the store, unsure if you're ready to make the commitment, but the watch lingers in your mind. Then something strange happens: The store manager starts calling you. At first, they simply check in, asking if you're ready to buy. But soon, they're offering discounts, hinting that other customers are interested—even accusing you of [being rude for not getting back to them](#) sooner. Suddenly, the watch doesn't feel exclusive or desirable anymore. It feels desperate. So much so, that you start to question whether it's a knock-off. By the time they send you an email offering 50 percent off, you're over it entirely."

The point of this anecdote is that, in relationships, you can either be a Cartier watch or a knock-off. This applies to men as much as it does to women, but for the sake of this article, I'll focus on Jake and Olivia's dynamic. At first, Olivia seemed as rare as her vintage coat—and not just because it stood out from the other girls' faux furs. When Jake approached, she didn't rush to flatter or accommodate him. Instead, she matched his energy with a challenge. Even her goodbye—"Don't make me regret this"—implied that *she* was the one deciding whether he'd measure up, not the other way around. It goes to show that, by [simply being herself](#), she was a Cartier-caliber investment. And in return for her authenticity, he was willing to offer his top price: time, energy and commitment.



When you try to convince someone of your worth, especially before they've had time to evaluate it, you signal you're a knock-off.

Everything changed when Olivia broke the Cartier rule. (For what it's worth, I don't think the [morning-after text](#) was a deal-breaker.) IMO, the milk started to curdle when she offered to ditch her friends. Suddenly, she felt accessible, ready to drop everything on a dime and meet Jake on his terms. As Nazarenko's video pointed out: When you try to convince someone of your worth, especially before they've had time to evaluate it, you signal you're a knock-off. Olivia's follow-up texts—particularly the playful but slightly desperate "Why haven't you asked me out yet?"—pressed Jake to *seal the deal* before he was ready. The more she pursued, the less he felt like he had to work for her attention.

So now, for my harsh economics-tinged conclusion: men only offer top dollar—again, their time, energy and commitment—when they perceive a woman as a rare endeavor. It's not about playing games (for the most part). It's about creating perceived value. For Jake, Olivia began as a Cartier watch, but as her behavior shifted, so did his perception. She went from luxury to convenience, ultimately diminishing her own status to knock-off.

Likewise, for women like Olivia, the challenge lies in recognizing this value. Creating artificial scarcity—or withholding sex until the third date—won't be enough to move the needle. The only way to project designer-level confidence is by setting boundaries (avoiding anxious behavior). When you sell too hard, you dilute your brand. Boundaries create scarcity while anxiety creates dependence. It's why, the less self-supporting you are, the more you'll signal, "I wasn't that valuable to begin with."



When you're selling something that's truly one-of-a-kind, the right buyer doesn't need convincing.

It'd be easy for me to blame men for their "collector's mentality" but let's be real: Cartier is just as beloved by women, if not more. The key takeaway here is that rarity—as in, the qualities that make you unique—is always worth the investment. Desperation, on the other hand, is as easy to spot as a knock-off on Canal Street. Whether you're on a first date or five years deep into a marriage, your value will always reflect your level of self-worth. After all, when you're selling something that's truly one-of-a-kind, the right buyer doesn't need convincing.

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