

Back on the romantic front line, Britain's more eligible bachelors appear to be warier than ever. "I'm meeting gold-diggers all the time," says Brian Johnson [not his real name], a 34-year-old software multimillionaire from north London, who has been looking for a while to settle down. With around £10m to his name, he says he cannot trust the single women he meets in the private members' clubs and restaurants where he spends his evenings. He will now date only women he knows have their own independent wealth, such as those who come pre-vetted by Seventy Thirty, a dating agency restricted to "millionaires and high-net-worth individuals".

"With these women in the clubs, you can see their attitude change once they find out I'm loaded," Johnson says. "And you're thinking, before the divorce laws changed, they might have taken me for half a million, maybe a million, which is still bloody good work for a couple of years. Now, not only will they get half my assets, and a lot more if they've got a clever solicitor, but they'll also get a big chunk of my future earnings.

"I'd love to get married," he says, lowering his voice. "The truth is, I feel so lonely it's unreal. But tell me one thing: for all this government's talk of promoting family values, how on earth does the law protect the man at all?" ■