

You Are Loved Beyond Measure

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The summer following the great British Covid-19 lockdown was a rough one for dating. During that lockdown, I had mustered up the courage to leave my five-year abusive marriage and start a life of my own. Scary doesn't even begin to describe what I felt moving out on my own, let alone trying to find a new, healthier relationship with the elusive love of my life. So much of myself had been lost during those five years and I didn't know who I truly was at the age of twenty nine. So much of my existence had been beaten down, but not my hope for finding true love. So I did what any almost-thirty and newly single person would do, and I began sifting through my photos to build a profile on a dating app.

Tinder and Hinge seemed to be full of guys who were only looking to make up for a summer of lost fun. Five awful dates and countless "hello there! What's your favorite movie?" conversations later, and I was fully convinced to succumb to the cat lady life. "Let it happen! Let's go get that little calico we saw on the website!" my inner cat lady exclaimed.

I logged back into Tinder with full intentions to delete my profile and never try dating apps again. But there was one message at the top of the list that stood out for some reason. It was a young man who I had matched with weeks earlier but didn't feel a spark while we initially talked. He was nice enough and my type physically, to a tee, but I just didn't feel the spark. His follow up message was kind though, and he seemed to be on the same page as me—defeated. "Hey, I figured I'd give it one last shot and send my number to see if you want to go out for a game of pool sometime. You probably get loads of messages like this, but if you see this: I hope you're doing well. -Dan". I responded, assuming I'd probably never hear back from him. To my surprise, the most excited response popped up only minutes later, which led to a full exchange of phone numbers.

I was away on a trip for work at this time, so we talked nearly nonstop for almost a week. The similarities in our lives and interests continued to flow, from our careers in the United States Air Force, to

family values, to life goals. We even began trading our favorite country songs to bond with each other further. As the week progressed, he started to mention things like "really listen to the lyrics of this one" or "might have a bit of meaning behind this one (with a winking emoji)". By this point, I was definitely picking up on his hints that he felt like he was falling for me before we even met. This was a relief because I was undoubtedly feeling the same way.

But this was when the feelings of self-doubt started to flood my head and heart again. We had a date planned for Friday night, but I was beginning to worry if I would be "enough" for him. I stood there staring in the mirror, picking myself apart. The way my hair had thinned out due to stress over the past year; the bits around my face were now short and particularly curly from the humidity, which always drove me insane. The way I wasn't as fit as I had once been. My skin wasn't tan enough to be considered beautiful. Surely he would take me on the date and never see me again.

I nearly cancelled the date a few hours prior to him picking me up, when he sent me a message saying that he hoped he would be enough for me. "What kind of sick twist is this?" I thought to myself. I threw myself into getting ready for the date and when the doorbell rang, I opened the door to the most vibrant and sweet smile I've ever laid my eyes on... my first instinct was to shut the door in his face and hide, which is something we joke about to this day.

Dan opened my door to the truck to let me in and we were off to the pool hall. The conversation flowed like we had been friends for years. This never happens for me, especially with the anxiety that I've formed from my first marriage. It felt like there was a spell placed on me, turning me into a normal person for the night. My confidence even carried over to the games of pool, as I potted ball after ball and made witty jokes. I couldn't help but be distracted by the strong hope that he would kiss me already. Yet again, he didn't disappoint, as he pulled me in close for a sweet first kiss. The rest of the room seemed to fade into the brightest darkness I've ever seen and I turned to mush. My life was made and I was in trouble now!

The date continued and he dropped me off at home later that night. I was in bliss with another good night kiss, but quietly worried that he'd change his mind about me overnight. I don't think I slept a

wink that night, between the recap of the wonderful night and the worries that this was another failed dating attempt. Eventually, I drifted off and woke up to a Good Morning text message from Dan. When I messaged back, he told me “Hey I have an idea, but you’ll have to trust me a little.” Uh-oh. I love/hate the sound of this!

He proposed that we go out on his motorcycle since it was likely the last nice weather day in England before the rain and cold winds came. I’ve never been a thrill junkie or a risk taker. Motorcycles, rollercoasters, and fast cars have never been my forte, but something about the familiarity of this man’s heart made me want to take risks now. Before I could change my mind, I said yes and got dressed for him to pick me up. We rode in his truck over to his house, so he could help me get ready for the ride. The helmet, finding the perfect gloves from his collection for my small hands, a thick coat, the nonverbal signs to let him know if I needed anything during the ride, he covered it all. And with that, we were off. My hands wrapped tightly around his ribs at first, but as the minutes went by, I relaxed into the ride and loved it! He stopped on the side of the road at the midpoint to make sure I was okay. If you ask, he’ll now tell you that when he flipped the visor up and saw the joy in my eyes, that was the moment he knew he’d someday marry me. Merely four dates later, we dropped the L-bomb so neither of us would explode from holding back. I had never been more sure of anything in my life. This was what love was always supposed to feel like.

We had known that he was slated to go on a trip out of the country for work since we began chatting, but the day had finally come. I slept over and he kissed me on the head and gave me a “see you soon” squeeze before he left me in his bed to sleep until morning. When I woke up alone in his bed, the feeling of sadness came over me. I got up, prepared myself for the day, and as I was leaving the house, I discovered a note on my backpack. The handwritten note reinforced his love for me and expressed that I made him feel things that he thought would never be possible to feel. It reassured me that (being a dual military couple) we would make it through many more of these trips and only come out stronger in the end. The letter brought a smile and tears to my face, but it was one of the last lines that had the greatest

impact. “I will prove to you that you are loved beyond measure,” he wrote. That line has stuck in my head and heart since the first day I read it, and for once in my life, I truly believe it.

Fast forward to mid-November 2021 and although it has only been a matter of months, we have secret plans eventually wed. In our experience, love does not know time. Love does not know distance. Love does not know your past. What love does know is accepting every bit of what a person has to offer, including flaws and insecurities, and working every day to make sure they know that they are loved beyond measure. After both of our failed first marriages, heartaches, and life experiences, Dan and I have never been more sure of anything. When you know...you just know.