

**Opening Up One's Heart and Mind to Another in an Attempt to Explore the
Bedrock of a Vital, Romantic Partnership Only to Be Repeatedly Left Standing
Alone in the Driftwood of Self-Discovery: A Review**

~ humor essay ~

Alright. First things first. I know what you're thinking: *Wait a minute. Hang on. Is this a review of some visionary art-house flick I carelessly missed? ...Did the New York Times Best Sellers list skip over what would seem to be the self-help wonderbook of the century? ...Is Fiona Apple releasing another album? ...Or could it be that for the love of god and all things not in any way even remotely related to creating a match.com profile someone is going to review the actual story of my real freaking life and tell me if I'm on the right goddamn track?!*

Let me assuage your wonderment straight away, fellow sailor-mouthed mortals who are, like me, seeking the real-deal love thing, by formally clarifying (in my pajamas) that as it's not every day one finds themselves back at college at age forty-one drafting a "critical" paper for a writing workshop with the following instruction looming in their crown: "Since you have the freedom to choose ANYTHING you want to review, start by brainstorming a list of things over which you already have authority," I'm happy (okay, relatively speaking) to report that the answer to your query is: Yes! As in, that's right, we're talking real fuh-reaking life and love here, kids.

Now. Before we move on to the analysis as outlined by our epic (earnest!) title, it's important to note that upon brainstorming my way to deciding what the subject of this review would be, I did consider a host of topics over which I believe I hold a fair degree of dominion, but that would surely be considered more traditioanl in nature: the memoir *Eat, Pray, Love*; the film *Cinema Paradiso*; French-pressed coffee; New York in June...that sort of thing. (For the record: Pretty, Damn, Good; Molto fantastico; Toujours!; Gershwin ain't no fool tho, yo.) But as I deliberated over what thesis I would present and critically examine, this notion of writing from a place of *authority* kept hovering in my writing mind with notable vigor. Where did it lead me? In the general sense, to an array of rich and vivid life experiences stitched together by robust threads of passion, pursuit, and peril. But if we're talking actual, beautiful-turned-difficult shit I had to deal with that can now be fused into a piece of writing intended to serve my fellow love-questioning mortals (hint—we are), then:

[insert twenty years' worth of living, leaping, loving, losing, learning, and landing on Self-Discovery Island, here]

Then:

[insert me pouring a glass of red]

In light of the fact that I have in recent days made yet another shift in status from “Bedrock Explorer” to “Driftwood Dweller,” and considering that I don’t feel so much disappointed by this development as I do fortified by it (NOTE: period of intense disappointment, included), I am compelled to offer you fine love-is-the-answerers my hard-earned two bits as to where the value lies in relentlessly doing what I believe the kids today would refer to as “going for it.” ‘Tis my hope that upon considering such excavated bits, you will be inclined to concede with my ultimate finding: *Opening oneself up to another in an effort to unearth and cultivate lasting love—regardless of the outcome—is in every instance a worthwhile expedition.*

Or, perhaps at the very least you’ll snag a few pointers on what constitutes a kickass Sanity Survival Kit. (P.S. If you’re guessing “self-esteem, a pottymouth, and/or wine” to be items A through optional/recommended C, you are already, in my estimation, killing it.)

Now. On to the obscure yet eternally relevant review at hand.

Let’s begin our discussion by noting, and I trust, agreeing, that the occasion of meeting another human being atop this big-blue cosmic marble whirling into whereverland who we long to spend copious amounts of time conversing with and placing our lips upon, is rare. If we add to that a deep-rooted longing to move through each day in a monogamous relationship with such a person—loving, laughing, luxuriating, and learning about each other so as to potentially build an inspired life together, perhaps even a family, then I trust we’ll further agree that what we’ve got here is essentially the most sought after treasure of our shared earthly excursion. What I can say with certainty is that during my four-plus decades spent on the planet thus far, I’ve had the great fortune (take heed, comrades—after the dog, hindsight is man’s best friend) of having met no fewer than three men who for me seemed to fit this seemingly impossible-to-fit bill. Mind you, I’ve also had the pleasure of meeting a much larger number of men for whom any curiosity about a potential partnership was cut off at the lip-placing, button-undoing, judgment-flipoff pass by a hearty fusion of self-knowledge, interpersonal savvy, and good old-fashioned, evidence-based intuition. However, given that the aim of this piece is to authentically substantiate my “Thumbs up to heartache and pain!” claim, I shall base my examination here solely on those experiences I’ve had with the above-referenced three men, each of whom I felt at some point vaguely sure might prove to be what the kids today, yesterday, and I’m guessing until the end of motherloving time will continue to refer to as “The One.”

After contemplating the best approach to take in extending to you this critique d’amour, I’ve come to the conclusion that going back in storytelling time to animate said expeditions,

while a potentially engaging jaunt, would be an emotionally laborious one for me, and I suspect an “Aw man, can’t you just give us a list?”-inducing one for you. Let’s be clear: I’m here for you, mes amis. As such, I now present for your consideration, list one:

**OPENING ONESELF UP TO ANOTHER IN HOPES OF
LETTING IN LASTING LOVE:
THE CONS**

1. You will spend a fair amount of your precious earthly time and energy sharing those qualities which, over the course of your life, have come to make you *you* with some other human who in an instant makes your heart dance, your soul smile, and your loins...well, you know...and who will at some point during the course of your relationship, however short or long it may be, express to you some variation of any number of the following phrases:

- I’ve never felt more alive in my life than when I am with you.
- Maybe this is what the real thing feels like.
- You are so incredible. And beautiful. And [*see thesaurus.com*].
- I don’t normally do this sort of thing, and I know it’s only been [*one night to one month inserted here*], but...here’s a poem I wrote for you.
- I cannot. Wait. To see you tonight! And tomorrow night. And forever.
- You would make such an unbelievable parent.
- We’ll go there!
- Hiking used to be so boring.
- You have the most amazing brain.
- You have the most amazing body.
- You have the most amazing sense of humor.
- You have my heart.

only to, at some further point in time, render such phrases—and so, alas, some portion of your mental and emotional stability—null and void by uttering (perhaps by phone or voicemail, or even writing in an email or text) exactly, or something that closely resembles, the following: "I don’t want to hurt you. It’s just, well, I just have to do this. I’m sorry about this. But it’s for the best."

I know. Sigh. Only one con, yet what a doozy. Stick with me here, fellow sentient beings. Now that we've got the hard part formally (hmmm...does red wine come out of fleece?) squared away, let's move on to what I hope will prove to be a highly encouraging list number two:

**OPENING ONESELF UP TO ANOTHER IN HOPES OF
LETTING IN LASTING LOVE
~ THE PROS ~**

1. As a result of experiencing the massively arduous con noted above, you will enter a period of time, however short or (maybe ridiculously) long it might be, plagued by mild-to-acute feelings of disappointment, anger, confusion, self-doubt, fear, regret (I promise we're in the "pros" list), loneliness, and denial. While enduring such feelings, you will make at least one but probably several misguided attempts to attain some romantic outcome you desire and are pretty sure you "deserve" because somehow God/the stars/the universe/the divine unnamable all-knowing-and-loving-mystical-wonderforce-who-created-you-and-keeps-your-heart-pumping got the actual one wrong. These attempts will fail, and life will kind of suck for a (maybe good long) while, but—there will come a day when you feel immensely grateful because the whole big suckass shebang will be what puts you in a position to benefit from PRO #2:

2. You will be given one or several opportunities to transform yourself for the better and fortify those qualities which make you you, and so, totally fucking awesome (unless you are an asshole, but more on that in a second) because you have allowed those painful feelings and foolish attempts outlined in PRO #1 to flow—which is the only way your heart will ever get caught in the undertow of happiness, which to be (maybe annoyingly but so be it from the driftwood!) clear, is the *only* way for it to at some point be washed onto the shore of Self-Discovery Island. I know. Fun!

3. You will discover lots of shit. Namely—albeit, *eventually*, which in some cases can reveal itself to be a mere moment or a few days, but most often will manifest as months, or even [...*pause for another glass-pour aaaaaaand raising glass...*] years!—that you are totally fucking awesome, and that other people are simply either:

- a) Beautiful and wonderful and perfect* and on their own life-paths, which were clearly designed to intersect with yours at some point in order to (less clearly) teach you something and certainly to teach them something although they may or may not and by "may" I mean probably are not hip to such a gift nor will they ever care to be taught anything about themselves and grow through an intimate relationship but frankly [*raising glass*] that's no business of yours in Totally Fucking Awesomeville.

b) Some people are just assholes, disguised as not-assholes for a while.

4. You will invite into your life the chance to become, through any number of bouts with our lone and trusty super-powered “Con,” keenly aware that when someone says they are sorry, they don’t want to hurt you, such an assertion is invariably on some micro-level, the truth (okay, let’s say it is 50-75%% of the time, in light of PRO #3b); however—and more importantly—you will also come to understand that when someone claims they need to end things, yet they don’t really know why, they just have to, they can’t explain it, they have some feeling that you’re not meant to be, they are absolutely and above all else, yes sure perfect and wonderful and beautiful and simply moving along their path as best they know how, but at its core, such a claim is 100-150% piping-hot horseshit. Now, it also isn’t *wrong* that this person is making such a claim, and they are certainly in no way a decidedly evil person for making it. It’s just, not the essential truth and for whatever reason, they haven’t yet had the ability to become emotionally aware, courageous, or compassionate enough to tell you what (or...sorry, perhaps *who*) the real reason is. As such, way deep down where it counts in all the elusively vital places that fire a benevolent heart, soul, and mind, and so, the opportunity to co-create joy and intimacy with a beloved partner across a lifetime, the situation is likely harder for them than it is for you. Mind you, while we’re at this rather bitchslappy list-o-pros, let us not discount the fact that *you* may have said or done something kind of foolish, or premature, or perhaps even a bit desperate that sure, yeah, fine, felt right/morally righteous at the time but now you regret to all hell because that’s right [*wack!*] your choice(s) may have indeed, in some way contributed to the end of things. Still—please do rest assured: even THAT part is a-okay, because you are just doing your best, too! And none of your choices have anything to do with the intergalactical masterful who-knows-whatlight & law & love we’re *all* governed by. Or just as importantly, with that future, better-you that you’ll greet in due time, having made such blunders. I promise. I’m reflecting back on and appreciating the various “failed” missions I had to endure to learn all of this shi- - this invaluable, life-affirming wisdom as I type the hyphenated prophecy *better-you*.

5. If you truly and wholeheartedly do the work of engaging in PROs #1-4, although at times you may end up questioning your emotional and mental stability, so long as the people who cross your path are not all assholes, on my grateful count you will stand a good chance in this short planetary dance called life of knowing at least three “The One” contenders who you will someday...when all is said and done (and said again...and done again) come to regard as beautiful, wonderfully imperfect human beings who you are overjoyed to now call “friend.” I promise. I’m looking ahead to the dinner plan I just made with one of them as I type the word *imperfect*.

And so, dearest readers, beloved lovers of love, it seems that at this post-list juncture we are approaching the bring-it-home bend of our rather unconventional look at major-league lovin'. (Which is to say...yes, that's a cheezy metaphor aaaaaand so we're also at the big-finish moment of my bottle of red.) Before I bid you adieu and bonne chance with a hearty "Salute!" I've actually saved one final PRO for last! Since I believe it is the most precious excavated bit of advice I can offer from a place of "authority"—or at least, the one that most fully reflects my real-goddamn-life-fired beliefs on the value of living, leaping, loving, losing, learning, landing aaaaaand repeat—I thought it might be helpful to distinguish it from the mathematics of the lists above. (Although, if we look back to our trusty lists, it's clear that while my "Thumbs up to heartache and pain!" claim may call for long division, it is ultimately simple math.)

Truth be told, my suspicion is that when you kindly elected to read beyond the long-ass (totally beautiful and perfect!) title of this "review" as a means to consider the ideas it offers, you were already well-aware that taking a risk with your heart—regardless of whether you've explored the bedrock of love and ended up going solo in the driftwood more times than you care to count, or are only now embarking upon your maiden voyage of a first hello/awesome conversation/irresistible lip-lock that may or may not lead to the horizon of a blazing waking-life partnership—is never a smooth expedition. However, if I've done my job here (and by parenthetical golly, kids, I hope I have), I shall take comfort in knowing that you have become at least a tad bit more inclined to accept my fervent proposal that it is, has always been, and will always be—a worthwhile one. If not only as it fosters the prospect of true and everlasting love, then simply because...

*You just might find yourself single at age forty-one, trusting in the next "Hi, is this seat taken?"
as you sit, relaxed and happy at your desk, after midnight, in your pajamas,
conversing with no one as you type the words
blazing waking-life.*