

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

——— By Danielle Gasparro ———

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 love-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 seeking the real freaking 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 nonfiction 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 here, kids.

Now, before we move on to the analysis as outlined by our epic (earnest!) title, I think it's important to note that upon taking to said brainstorming, I did consider several topics for this review over which I do believe I hold a fair degree of dominion, and that would surely be considered more "traditional" in nature: the book *Eat, Pray, Love*; the film *Cinema Paradiso*; French-pressed coffee; New York in June...that sort of thing. (P.S. Pretty, Darn, Good; Molto fantastico; Toujours!; What's fucking better, yo?) But as I deliberated over which subject to examine, this notion of writing from a place of *authority* kept tugging at the lapels of my pen with notable vigor. Where did it take me? Generally speaking, to an array of colorful life experiences quilted together by the threads of passion, pursuit and peril. But if we're talking actual shit I had to deal with that can now be fused into a piece of writing intended to serve my fellow melancholy man (hint—we are), then:

[insert twenty years' worth of living, leaping, loving, losing, learning and invariably 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-lovers my hard-earned two bits as to where the value lies in what the kids today might 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, that: ***Opening oneself up to another in hopes of letting in lasting love—regardless of where one lands—is ever a worthwhile expedition.***

Or perhaps at the very least you’ll snag a few pointers on what constitutes a rockin’ sanity-survival kit. (P.S. If you’re guessing “self-esteem, a pottymouth, and/or wine” to be Items A through optional-but-recommended C, you are already, in my estimation, rocking 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 four 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 feelings of life-partnership curiosity I had were cut off at the lip-locking or button-undoing pass (hi mom!) by a hearty blend of self-knowledge, interpersonal savvy, and good old-fashioned, hard-earned, 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 solely on those experiences I’ve had with the above-referenced four men, each of whom I felt vaguely sure might at some point 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 offering 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 reflect: I’m here for you, *mes amis*. 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 time and energy sharing those qualities which, over the course of your life, have come to make you *you* with some other person 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, but...here's a poem I wrote for you.
- I cannot wait to see you tonight.
- You would make *such* a remarkable parent.
- 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 exactly, or something that closely resembles, the following:

- I'm sorry. I don't want to hurt you. Really. I hate this. It's just...well, it's just a feeling I have. I promise, this is as hard for me as it is for you. I am so, so sorry.

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 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/that divine unnamable all-knowing-and-loving mystical wonderforce who created you and keeps your motherfreaking 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 suck-ass 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 (likely annoyingly) clear is the *only* way for it to at some point be washed onto the shore of Self-Discovery Island. 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 are designed to at some point intersect with yours in order to teach you something, and certainly, to teach *them* something regardless of whether they are hip to such a truth or not or even care to ever be taught anything about themselves but quite frankly 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 Con,” keenly aware that when someone says they are *so sorry*, they *don’t want to hurt you*, such an assertion is invariably the truth (okay, let’s say it is 99.99% of the time, with respect to 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 *can’t explain it*, they just have a *feeling* that they should, they are absolutely and above all else, yes, 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% (no exceptions) piping-hot steaming horseshit. Now, it also isn’t *wrong* that this person is making such a claim, and they are certainly in no way a bad person for making it. It’s just not the *essential* truth, and for whatever reason, they simply haven’t yet 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, the situation is probably *harder* for them than it is for you. (Mind you, while we’re at it here, let’s not discount the fact that *you* may have said or done something kind of foolish, or premature, or perhaps even a bit

*As in, *inherently flawed. Just like you. And me. And all of mankind.*

desperate that, sure, yeah, fine, felt right *at the time*, but now you regret to all hell because, yes, it may have in some way contributed to the end of things. Still, please do rest assured that even THAT is a-okay, because you are just doing *your* best, too, and none of your choices have anything to do with that big-blue masterful plan we're all governed by, or that future, better-you that you'll become having made such blunders. I promise. I'm reflecting back on *one, two...three* of the four aborted missions I had to endure to learn all of this shi--invaluable, life-affirming insight as I type the word *better-you*.)

5. If you truly and wholly 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 and still miraculously beating heart's count you will stand a good chance in this short life of knowing *at least* four "The One" contenders who you will someday, when all is said and done (and said again...and done again) come to regard as beautiful, wonderful, "perfect" human beings who you feel grateful to simply call "friend." I promise. I'm looking ahead to the dinner plan I just made with one of them as I type the word *wonderful*.

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 review of major league lovin'. But before I bid you adieu and *bonne chance* with a hearty "Salute!" I've actually saved the final PRO for last. Since I believe it is the most precious excavated bit of all—or at least, the one that best reflects my real-goddamn-life authority on the subject of living, leaping, loving, losing, learning, landing aaaaaand repeat—I thought it might be wise to distinguish it from the mathematics of the lists above. (Although, for the record, it does seem that if we look back to our trusty lists, we can clearly deduce that my "Thumbs up to heartache and pain!" claim is, essentially, simple math.)

Truth be told, I'd wager that when you kindly elected to read on beyond the long-ass (totally beautiful and perfect!) title to this piece as a means to consider the earnest two-bits it intends to offer, you were already well-aware that taking a risk with one's heart— regardless of whether you've explored the bedrock and stood solo in the driftwood, or are only just now embarking upon the maiden voyage of some first hello/awesome conversation with supplemental lip-locking that may or may not take you to the horizon of a vital waking-life partnership—is never a smooth expedition. However, if I've done my job here (and by potty-mouthed golly, kids, I hope I have), I shall take comfort in knowing that you have perhaps at least grown more inclined to accept my fervent proposal that it *is*—and *will always be*—a worthwhile one. If not only for the prospect of true, lasting love, then simply because...

You just might find yourself single at age forty-one, trusting in the next first-hello as you sit relaxed and happy in your pajamas, conversing with no one as today's best version of yourself savors the most delicious glass of red two lips have ever been placed upon.