

DATING
POWER, PRIVILEGE, & PRETENDING
written by Danielle Ma | March 14, 2015



Half dressed, head on his shoulder, she watched the movie absentmindedly. He was just more into movies than she was. The little screen of her MacBook Pro filled with images of Matthew Perry and Bruce Willis, plotting and such. Dialogue, laugh track, repeat.

Then the little bells started going off.

Her texts synced with her laptop, and the little message notifications started appearing in the top right corner, intrusively demanding to be seen. Most of the phone numbers weren't saved with names, thank god. She wondered if she could play them all off as friendly or professional texts. But the message previews said too much. They were flirtatious; they were plan-making texts.

She decided to ignore them. He said nothing except a playful, "Someone's blowing up. So popular." She laughed, and they continued to watch the movie. After a bit, she got up to get water, grabbing her phone along the way to respond. After all, they weren't exclusive. She knew he wasn't seeing anyone else – hell, he had disabled his dating profile and deleted the app the very day they met. He liked her. And she knew that.

But it was still new, still early, and they hadn't had The Talk yet. She wasn't sure about him. Before the movie, she had hooked up to dinner with two close friends. It was their first meeting, and she had been uncharacteristically unexcited, disinterested even, at times. She texted during dinner, talked to other guys. It was no surprise all those responses were coming in later during their date.

Okay, here's what you need to know though: She's actually not a bitch. She was that night, sure. In a major way. But in reality, she's actually a very loving and sweet person. She's smart, liberal, and socially conscious. She had spent most of her college years examining societal issues and the dynamics of power and oppression. Her blood boiled in the presence of "ists" – racists, sexists, classists.

But somehow, in what only can be described as a heartbroken attempt at rebounding, she found herself wearing a personality that didn't belong to her. It was stolen from someone else. Someone kind of lost, kind of arrogant. Someone kind of elitist (she was becoming an "ist") who thought she was better than the guy who brought her macaroons on their first date. She was categorically more privileged than him – grew up in an upper middle class, predominantly white suburb. Went to a top-tier college. Moved to New York to chase her dreams, whatever those might be tomorrow. He grew up in a culture where academic underachievement was the cool thing to do. Went to the college he could afford that was close enough to home. He now worked in the service industry with a starting salary so low that he hustled daily, charming New York tourists for the tips that paid his rent.

Their differences made her feel more entitled to his affection, and so, she wasn't the passionately devoted partner she ordinarily would've been. Their relationship became the exception that slipped through her moral cheesecloth. The saddest part is that she didn't even realize. She didn't realize just how deeply the toxic notion of "dating down/dating up" had seeped into her subconscious until one day, when he stopped talking to her.

He was usually one to respond within 10 minutes. They texted everyday, and she knew his communication patterns well, not to mention his general daily routine. So when he didn't check in all day, she finally decided to send the first message. It was nearing the end of the work day, and she said something about a particularly challenging project or team member or something – it's all a blur to her now. No response. She went to a hip event in Brooklyn during which she heard from various dating app founders. It was fascinating and reminded her of him, a little pull starting to work at her heart. She stepped out briefly to call him. Still nothing.

By the time she got home, it felt like she was having a psychotic break. What was happening? And why was it happening? She called her best friend, originally to vent and yell and whine, but she ended up in tears somehow. She felt an overwhelming sense of guilt, and she couldn't shake it. She had fucked up; she hadn't respected them the way she knew they deserved. And it looked like maybe they weren't a "they" anymore.

In the fairy tale of her life, she doesn't end up with this guy (spoiler alert: he had actually just misplaced his phone, so their relationship didn't end that day with radio silence, but later down the line with caring words and a sad hug goodbye.) She knows she'll never forget him. He was the one who challenged her – her beliefs and her politics and the things she wanted to embody. He made her realize how easy it is to say that people are people and love is love, but how hard it can be to live by that perfectly and consistently. We are biased and flawed humans forever capable of improvement. And as long as we know that, as long as we keep trying, then every moment that slips through our moral cheesecloths becomes a learning one.

image via www.screenjunkies.com

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Danielle is a passionate twenty-something living in New York City with too many interests and not enough time in the day. She works at a boutique ad agency next to her favorite building, the Flatiron, and spends a lot of time in parks with coffee. She frequents food festivals, listens to science podcasts, explores comedy clubs, and writes, a lot. She diaries the moments and conversations in her life, writing mostly about dating, love, and sex in the city on her blog, Here's The Thing.

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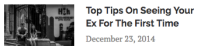
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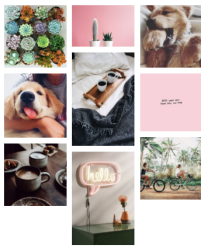


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