

## Out of Blue Comes Green

### *Getting Over*

This essay is really a follow-up essay to the one entitled “Pessimism’s Hunger,” and is part getting over a relationship and part taking stock before I commit to a new one.

As I re-read what I wrote in the prior essay, I see that my feelings have changed. If I had not captured that moment, I suspect that I would deny that I ever felt that strongly about the breakup. Actually, and much worse, I would have denied that I felt that strongly. The most important thing I have learned in the past month and a half is that it is healthy to have those strong emotions.

I spent the first months after this break up as I had others, suppressing and denying my emotions. I told myself that I could just go on. I told myself I was a moral failure for not going to her birthday party and meeting her new guy. I told myself—well, I told myself many things.

Emotions are not digital, they are not turned on and off, and they do not evaporate as ghosts do when the cold light of reason is shown on them. Rather, I learned, strong emotions flow naturally from strong values. Our relationship was a value and it was right that I would mourn its passing. Emotions, though they ultimately follow cognitions, certainly do so only haltingly and with a multitude of missteps. Throughout the past month, there are times that I did not think about N, there are times that I thought of her and was able to genuinely smile. There are others when the thought of us, her, her moving on first—all of it—nauseated and capsized me. Within the space of minutes, I could be alternately satisfied and sickened at us and our relationship. At some point, however, I no longer felt sad thinking of the good times and no longer used the bad times to vindicate vilifying her. I knew I was better, and ready to start this essay, when the good memories no longer made me cry.

This may sound crass, but looking back I can tell you the moment I knew, from my side, that my prior relationships were going to end. It was not when we started fighting; it was not when we slept in separate rooms; it was not when we stopped having sex. I have learned that when the kissing stopped, my relationships were in dire trouble.

For me, part of the recovery was having friends who made me recognize what I was feeling, validated those feelings, and then kicked my ass when I wallowed in them too much.

On a similar vein, it was useful to have songs that captured my mood and lyrics that captured my sentiment. Especially those songs that stop you in your tracks, and appear to have been written for your consumption. For example, one evening I was just listening to music and Don Henley’s “Heart of the Matter” came on and it was if he had written the lines for me:

There are people in your life who’ve come and gone  
They let you down and hurt your pride  
Better put it all behind you; life goes on  
You keep carryin’ that anger, it’ll eat you up inside

### *Moving On*

Others can tell themselves otherwise, but I know that relationships are completely riddled with expectations. When we are romantically involved with someone, we have expectations of what kind of person they are, what kind of behavior they will do, what they will or won’t like. Somewhere along the line, I realized that the woman I was with was not the woman I expected.

We had less in common than I expected; we had different views of our futures than I expected; we had different expectations than I expected. We danced to a different rhythm.

From the inside, one of the necessities of breaking up is extinguishing these expectations. In the last relationship, I would expect to start the day talking to her, expect to go shopping with her, expect to eat dinner with her, expect to talk with her about the day's events. At the end of the relationship, with each of these events coming and going, the unfulfilled expectations hurt until slowly each extinguished themselves until they were no longer expected. I was told by many people that time heals all things; it doesn't. Time simply provides the occasions for healing to occur.

I don't know why she couldn't stand beside me, I don't know why I wasn't worth it; I don't know. But, for her, I wasn't. Perhaps it was not a flaw of hers, but more a function of the situation. She needed to know that I would commit before she stood by me, and I needed her to stand by me before I would commit. Mutual reticence bred mutual resentment. In truth, we simply had different expectations and needs.

Because of different needs, we could never be what we might have been; maybe some day we can be what we always should have been: simply friends.

If there is anything that I have learned, it is to be honest about my expectations and needs. I had a friend who once said that he couldn't marry anyone who didn't like the television show *Friends*. While I don't share that need, I have my own. One thing that has become clearer is that we all have needs that we are seeking from a partner. I don't know exactly where these come from, or how to "objectively" justify them. At best, right now, all I can do is honestly state them and only defend or insist on the ones that I feel most strongly matter.

I realize that this might sound naïve, but it has taken me this long to realize that people vary widely in what they want from a seemingly similarly named relationship. To some people, a wife is a helpmate, to others a home maker, to others a virtual servant, and to others a sexual friend. People want different things out of life. Some want nothing more than to have a family and children of their own. Others want to travel the world. What is important for me in a relationship? The best I can describe what I want is to say that I have a question that I want to answer. I see each new article or book I read, each class that I teach, each new integration measured by this goal. I want to look back on a life not composed of separate events, but a life composed of a series of integratable units. It would not make me happy to realize that I have done the same thing for a decade. I do not want to feel that I could be replaced. I want to be with someone who also feels this way, and which whom we can share each other's goals.

People have commented that perhaps I do have too many characteristics that I am seeking in a mate. Put bluntly, they tell me an honest man for Diogenes would be more easily found. Many people tell me that I should compromise on my religion stance, that I won't find someone in this area who isn't religious. I think, what would it profit me to gain to whole world and lose my soul? I am not a materialist—and consequently an atheist—as an afterthought. This is a core part of who I am. Why would I want to date someone who didn't share this? There is no woman so wonderful that I would rather have her than my own integrity. I would not slay Prometheus to have Aphrodite.

I spent the better part of my 20s in relationships that were over before they ended. In more than one, I knew this early in the relationship. My experience, and that of my friends', has been that big issues at the beginning usually swell with time. Thus, next time, if I see these issues rear their Hydra head, or my friends point them out to me, I won't slay one to and continue the relationship pretending the problem has been solved.

In short, to close this essay at the close of tough year, I resolve to be more honest with myself about my emotional needs, to listen to my friends when they tell me things about my partner I don't necessarily want to hear, and not to settle into a mediocre relationship on the pretence that it is better than none at all. These insights have been painful to learn, and the change has been exhausting, but I think they have made me more likely to find relationship happiness. Though this has been painful, I'll close this essay by borrowing another line, a line that expresses my belief that the future will be better: "[It] don't matter/ My eyes have seen/ For better/ Out of blue comes green."

Christopher Robinson

8 December 2002