

Pessimism's Hunger Changes Everything

I have a friend who once commented that breaking up is so difficult that it was surprising that people ever ended relationships. As I write this, I am coping with the end of a romantic relationship and painfully aware of just how many facets of my life have been affected.

At the risk of making any future partner jealous, the woman I dated was simply one of the nicest people I have ever met. She has a good heart, and a smile the sun envies. I hope I can be permitted one reminiscence to illustrate how she made me become a better person.

She and I had gone on a trip and before we left she told me to check the air in the tires. I, being the mechanical genius one might expect, filled the tires until they passed my press-test: I filled them until I couldn't compress them by pressing on them. A few hours into the trip, on a relatively uninhabited stretch of highway and a few miles from the nearest exit, the front tire blew out. Now, me, I proceeded to rant, rave, cuss, and engage in a multitude of other equally effective solutions. She, on the other hand, calmly asked about the spare tire. Even when she found out there wasn't one, she kept her grace and wits about her and calmly suggested that we drive slowly to the next exit and have it repaired. Three hours later and one hundred dollars poorer, she was still calm and resisted rightly blaming me for the whole ordeal. I have to admit, I can only hope that if that ever happened to me again, I could be a fraction as calm and supportive as she.

From near the beginning, we both had this constant pulling in two directions. On the one hand, she and I got along so well on most of the day to day things that make up a life. Plus, for me as I have said, her emotional empathy truly made life better. On the other hand, we were not sufficiently compatible. If I can speak for her, I think ultimately she just wanted me to love her for who she was. To my discredit, I was too busy trying to get her to adopt many of my interests and goals to appreciate her for what she was.

We knew all of this for a long time before we finally ended the romantic part of our relationship. Perhaps—no, surely—each of us hoped the other's good characteristics would be shortly come to include those things that we felt were lacking. The greatness of what was, combined with the hope of better to come fueled a stalling relationship.

So, she and I return to the dating scene. Again, we try to find that connection, that mix of characteristics that attracts and that will add happiness to life.

As the title of this essay indicates, for me this time has not been going well. Quite frankly, I am tired and depressed most of the time. Concentrating is difficult, and I constantly find myself drifting. Sometimes, even watching TV is taxing. At other times, I actually get in a few good hours of work, although usually with great effort. Even though I believe that she and I can more likely find deeper happiness with others more suited to our needs, there is this pang of uncertainty. Lonely nights breed lonely questions: Did I do the right thing?

It is natural for former couples that have ended on somewhat good terms to stay friends, and to continue to support the other. After a time, however, they start new relationships. The first one who finds a good match has it easier for they have their new partner to start supporting them, while the other may still be leaning too much. She is seeing someone, and I realized something I never suspected: it is one thing to be broken up, it is another for her to be dating someone else. While there were problems, it is tough knowing that someone else shares her greatness. I would have to admit, even after all, I am jealous.

Now I, as I'm sure is common, feel that I have many good characteristics. So, it is a mighty blow when I seemingly cannot attract anyone. As for me, even the internet is one more source of

misery as not a single person responds with interest when I write them. Offline, the few dates I have had, although at first promising have ultimately led nowhere. Although I am daily in front of a number of people, and somewhat nominally the center of attention, I feel invisible.

I have been told by friends that I am too picky, with a seeming checklist of traits that I am looking for. Pessimism over future happiness makes me wonder if they are right. On the other hand, I am also aware that pessimism makes me too ripe to throw myself into a relationship with someone who is wrong just to be in a relationship. I have to consciously resist this, because I have learned that even if you rebound into another relationship you still have to deal with the feelings from the prior one; a quick romance neither mellows emotions nor heals wounds.

The uncertainty is driving me insane. Did I do the right thing? Am I too picky? Am I too demanding? Will I ever fall in love again?

I wish I could say that I don't care, that it doesn't matter. Now, I don't feel that I need another person to complete me or that I am nothing unless I am in a romantic relationship; I feel, however, that I am a better person when I am in a relationship. *We* is often the better part of *me*.

I am not always like this. Usually, I am driven, confident, able to focus, energetic, and in love with life. This pessimism is changing everything. I don't know how long I will feel like this, and I certainly hope for my own sanity that I stop wallowing soon. As I said, this is written in the midst of the suffering, not retrospectively. For my own sake, I can only hope that there is a retrospectively.

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