

“You Need a Wife, Not a Husband”

Recently, Komo and I sat in one of my favorite restaurants, La Bottega, an Italian café in downtown Vancouver that doubles as a deli and wine shop. Our conversation veered into a heated recap of my most recent relationship and inevitably morphed into an exhaustive evaluation of my all-time most significant pairings. An epiphany befell my friend, mid-sentence. Komo offered this succinct summary: No matter where a relationship ends up, I strive to live in, to maintain, the fairy tale beginning. I treasure the earliest, most romantic moments, ignoring less palatable, current truths staring me in the face.

In short, I'm always (mistakenly) Julia Roberts to someone's Richard Gere. I'm enchanted by initial courtships: first dates, first words, how my boyfriends and I met. Partly, I fall in love with a beginning that, usually, unravels and dissipates; I bask in the relationship's most fecund point, despite monotonous or troublesome dynamics that emerge. This was definitely the case with my live-in partner: Years of friendship, I believed, meant we were star-crossed, long-lost lovers. I remained committed to the cause because it seemed cosmic forces willed it. When it came to the demise, I was last on board—as usual. I blame a too-early and frequent diet of Ms. Roberts' films—the schlocky bill of goods her drivel sold.



lady about town
BY DANIEL BORGEN

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The only dynamic that rivals romantic affairs is my connection to home. Thus, similarly, I often ignore the uglier parts of my hometown, Vancouver. It's a less intense version of the blind love I cling to during courtships, but hopes which impede a real come-to-Jesus remain. There's plenty bad to be said—and much justified. Suburb after suburb creates the kind of endless sprawl The Arcade Fire must have envisioned (or sauntered through) when writing their last album. Chain restaurants, mini malls: soulless, barren. Tucked away—almost secretly—around the I-5 corridor is a bastion of relief from the countless suburban blights, a community populated with professors, artists, entrepreneurs and other open-minded folk.

La Bottega is there. After our meal, Komo and I crossed the street to my favorite coffee shop, Mon Ami. (Another friend dubs such excursions “Vancouver Safaris.”) We moved from one beloved hotspot to another, past the towering pink church, up the tree-trimmed-

street; I pointed out favorite dive bars, filled with professional, all-day drinkers. We pushed Mon Ami's old, creaky door open, ambling past locals hard at work on laptops, or engrossed in conversations like ours. We eased our way to the counter, past the art-lined walls, where urban, friendly, but not-beholden-to-Starbucks'—“boost your patrons' self-esteem”—mantra baristas occupied their usual positions. An old woman, dressed simply in grays and high-waisted blue jeans, stood next to me, intent on procuring one of her many free coffee refills.

Kate, barista *de jour*, joked, “Bringing scandal and cleavage wherever you go, Daniel.” (The combined gay that is my bright, plunging t-shirt *plus* Komo might count as scandal.) I responded, “Showing off the goods in my life-long quest to land a husband.” The older woman, lurking, listening, hissed, “You need a wife, not a husband.” Oddly calm, staring at her, I shot back, “No. I assure you, I am quite gay, and I need a husband, not a wife.” Nervously grasping her dull, ratty cardigan, she mustered, “No, no, it's all in your head.”

I paused. Instantly, the woman represented a

lifetime of people in safe havens intentionally—or not—upending them: aunts trying to fix me up with marketable females in front of my boyfriends, others oft-suggesting conversion therapy, camps, more who compared my “affliction” to alcoholism and drug addiction. Managing the mix of past and present, I declared, “No, you're wrong, and we're moving toward more progressive theories now. I am *gay*, it's not in my head, and, yes, this deep vee is meant to attract men, not women. But you're free to peek.” I took the southernmost point of my vee and pulled it down further. Finally silent, she scurried away, muttering.

Those around me marveled at my ability to not unleash a profanity-laced tirade. (I did, too.) And, despite the old-woman-as-blight-on-landscape, I maintain that Downtown Vancouver is a reprieve from the sprawl around it, much like Portland has its own much-needed reprieves. And maybe loving a fairy tale isn't so terrible sometimes—relationships or otherwise, as long as the hurt isn't unbearable. Instead, let's label such affections “seeing the good in others,” even if it's selective vision. Even though we can't revisit old relationships, or make them evolve, we can certainly go home again. And there, sometimes, the good outweighs the bad—just enough. ☐

I'm never more delighted than when my plunging t-shirts initiate conversation. Email DANIEL@JUSTOUT.COM.

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