



Baby, Be Mine

The Art of Courtship

BY CARRIE GROSSMAN

In eighth grade I had a mad crush on a boy named Blueberry. Actually, his real name was David, but I used the code word “Blueberry” to conceal his identity. When one of the gossipy girls found out and exposed my feelings, I was mortified, but it was all for the best: Blueberry liked me too! First we exchanged love notes in math class. Then we slow danced. One month later he made me a mixtape, and things started to get serious.

Sure, I was scared to kiss him lest I ingest any food remnants lodged in his braces, but that was no big deal. Our young romance had little to do with smooching; it was all about the courtship. We simply wanted to woo each other because it was so much fun to express our affection. Lucky for me, Blueberry was quite the suitor. He hid love notes in my schoolbooks and made me dandelion bouquets during gym class. By the time we finally did lock lips, it was pure magic because I was smitten.

Is there anything sweeter than courtship? Truly, is there anything more magical than the dance that ensues between two people who wish to claim each other’s hearts? Though it may seem trivial, courtship is actually one of the most important aspects of any sexual relationship. Such sweetness helps to fan

the spark between souls, helping it grow into a passionate inferno of love. It also inspires a sense of confidence and trust, which is essential when navigating the uncharted waters of intimate connection.

Fortunately, the landscape of courtship has changed over the years, shifting from a somewhat sexist, formal arrangement between a man and a woman to a wildly creative journey between two lovers, regardless of class or sexual orientation. Thanks to feminism and the sexual revolution of the 1960s, courtship no longer fits into a box, nor does it come with a set of rules. Instead of wooing with the intent to marry—often for financial or political reasons—we are free to pursue someone simply because he or she captures our attention.

In the West, courtship has been heavily influenced by the chivalrous tradition of courtly love and the romance of the Victorian Era. To this day, writers like Shakespeare, Keats, and Jane Austen inspire us with their romantic stories and sonnets, and remind us of the connection between language and romance. It’s not a huge surprise that words and wooing go well together. After all, the rise of romantic love coincided with the emergence of the novel, and the word *romance* comes from

the Old French *romanz*, meaning “verse narrative.” Romance is one way we lovebirds can craft a beautiful story of our courtship and write ourselves anew in relation to our partner.

Still, romance isn’t all rendezvous and roses—it can be fickle at times. As Oscar Wilde said, “Deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance.” But does it have to be that way? Do romance and courtship have to come with a steep price tag of fantasy and illusion, or can they help us dive into deeper truth? Although we may write off romance as a fleeting, sappy creation of pop culture, perhaps it has a lot more to offer if we simply shift our perception. Perhaps all the Valentine’s Day madness points to something meaningful: the true sweetness of romantic love and its ability to lift us out of the mundane into a sacred world of beauty, connection, and transcendence. Have we lost our appreciation for this romantic notion with all of our sexting and online affairs? Or have these contemporary tools become new, convenient avenues for courtship?

Either way, courtship is all about anticipation and deepening the polarity between lovers so that, when the time comes to hit the sack, we are more than ready. Texts like the *Kama Sutra* speak in depth about courting practices, including how to woo, kiss, embrace, touch, and bite our partner. The author, Vatsyayana, tells us what to do in the “pleasure room” and even offers specific instructions about how to continue our courtship after lovemaking has ended. For instance, the woman should lay her head in the man’s lap in the moonlight and listen as he tells her about the stars. Never mind that our consort may have no clue about the constellations—it’s a nice sentiment.

Courtship offers an opportunity to shift out of our everyday reality and plunge into pleasure. When we court, we have a chance to express that which we usually keep hidden: tenderness, vulnerability, desire, and devotion. While these qualities may emerge at times, it’s rare that we let down our guard and share them unabashedly with another human being. To do so is to risk rejection and hurt. That’s why romantic love demands courage: It asks that we get clear about how we feel and have the valor to put our heart on the line. Usually, we can get by just fine in our safe, stuffy world of closure, concealing our deepest longings and feelings. But if we truly desire another person, we have to follow Rumi’s words and “gamble everything for love”; otherwise, we may never taste the fruit. Yes, it can be scary, but that’s what makes it wonderful.

Though it’s safe to admire someone from a distance, we enter the beloved’s world only when we leap into the unknown. Once we leap, however, we must be willing to do the work. While many people think about courtship as the period *before* the consummation, in actuality, courtship should be an ongoing affair. Whether we’re with someone for 15 minutes or 50 years, we should never stop adoring the one we love. We are truly endless mysteries, and the quest to know our beloved is an adventure that has no end.



One of the reasons so many relationships fizzle is that they lose a sense of freshness. Familiarity can turn even the most passionate partnership into a stale loaf of platonic bread. To avoid this, we need to nurture a spirit of spontaneity. While this may take a bit of imagination and effort, it’s certainly possible. After all, even animals court, and some quite beautifully. The male bowerbird, for one, builds elaborate love nests out of twigs, leaves, flowers, feathers, and shells with the hope that he might win the object of his attention. Like this winged suitor, we humans are infinitely creative, and we have the potential to make our courtship a kind of art.

The true artist always asks, “How can I express how I feel in the most unique, inspiring, and genuine way? How can I give form to what’s in my heart?” Whether or not we consider ourselves artists in life and work, we are *all* artists when it comes to love. Each of us has an opportunity to craft a world of care, enchantment, and delight for our beloved—and that journey can be more rewarding than the consummation itself.

The question is, can we sustain romance over time? Is it realistic to expect that we can jump into the bathtub or fly off to a tropical island with our partner at any given moment? Probably not. But maybe that’s not what real romance is about, anyway. Maybe it’s in the small, simple moments—a tender look of love shared across a crowded room or a touch that is ripe with desire. D.H. Lawrence defined romance as “a nice little tale where you have everything as you like it, where rain never wets your jacket and gnats never bite your nose, and it’s always daisy time.” That’s lovely, but perhaps real romance is actually the opposite: getting soaked in the rain and devoured by gnats, but not minding because love makes the mess beautiful.

Ultimately, the best way to court the one we desire is with kindness. Kindness really is the biggest turn-on. Yeah, we may want someone sexy, charming, forthright, and whatever else, but how far do those qualities go? If we just want to open someone’s legs and not their heart, a little hotness goes a long way. But if we actually want to blossom in love, we need to consider how we woo. Without a greater context of appreciation, honesty, trust, and respect, candlelit dinners don’t amount to much.

True courtship is about letting go of our self-centered expectations and considering what we can *give* to another person in service. It’s only when we court someone with the desire to know them sincerely that the loving seeds we plant continue to bear fruit into the future. As we remove the garments that guard our hearts, we discover that, behind our beloved’s form, life itself is courting us. In every moment of this never-ending romance, we can open to the beauty of our own being and become the very essence of love itself. 🐾

Carrie Grossman is senior editor of Common Ground. Visit her blog, Live from Lee-La Land, at TheLightInside.org/blog.