

## LOVE

I started a project about love over three years ago. It all started because I was alone, angry, but most of all, I was confused. I thought love was supposed to be this wonderful thing, yet instead I felt cheated. First of all, I wasn't even sure if I had ever been in love and second of all, if I had been in love, I wasn't quite sure I ever wanted to feel it again because those feelings were on par with suicidal feelings. Needless to say, I was lost when it came to love, so I reached out to those around me.

I bombarded my friends with emails, messages, texts, and conversations, asking them to tell me what they thought love was. I figured, if the people I trust can explain to me exactly what love is, then maybe I'll be able to make sense of it. However, this plan failed. Love is such an abstract concept that all of my replies varied in range of time, distance, and meaning. Each response was more intangible than the last and I felt like I was never going to understand what love really is.

The first response was from a friend of mine. At one point in time I thought I had loved him, and to this day I think that maybe a part of me did, but maybe it was something different than romantic love. He wrote a poem in typical ABAB fashion. It read like an equation and even though it lacked the subtleties that the romantics possessed, it proved that he had loved and he understood what it was.

The second response came in the form of pity. A friend of my brother's, who sometimes masqueraded as a friend of mine, wrote me a message that appeared to be full of consolations as if I had lost someone, but then transpired into what he thought love was, and then back to pitying me for "never being in love." Yet, maybe it was my own personal opinion of this individual that clouded the true message of the letter: love is simple and it's what you do with love that makes it great. It can come and go, but the memories of love never leave you.

The third response came from a dear friend of mine who've I've never met. (You might know who she is). The second I received her response, I knew that it would shed some light on my situation and thankfully it did. However, she was right where I was: living in a world full of love that we've never experienced or thought we hadn't experienced. We were romantic girls constantly doubting our decisions, always thinking we might be in love instead of actually admitting it. Her questionable love existed a boy who lived in a high-rise in New York City. She told me we always love things that are no good for us, so she locked her heart away in this boy's suitcase. When he left, if there was truly any love in her heart, it would be packed away with all of his unused things.

Three responses in and I decided to give it a try. I felt like K had helped me tap into what love really was, so I wrote, "I imagine its painful, crazy, and the most wonderful feeling in the world." I would open and reopen the file and stare at the screen. I still wasn't satisfied.

After that I abandoned the project for two years. I couldn't waste any more time trying to figure out what love is, was, going to be. Of course it was always in the back of my mind and every essay, post, and journal entry during that time was riddled with the

investigation of love, but to directly acknowledge it was something I was too afraid to do anymore. There was radio silence and I fell deeper and deeper into loneliness. At the age of twenty-five I accepted the fact that no matter how much of a catch my friends and family convinced me I was, I was never going to figure out love, let alone find it. I basked in my melodramatic agony and decided: I was done.

Then one night, the first time I came out from under my blankets after my most recent, and hopefully final heartbreak, something happened. Then a couple weeks later, it happened again. Then the next day, it happened once more and I stopped it from happening one more time. I boarded a plane to Philadelphia and ran away from what I imagined could be real love for the first time in my life.

The following two weeks were the most agonizing weeks of my life. Every second of every day all I could manage to think about was B and the way he made me feel. Then one festive evening in early May we decided: we're going to do this and it's going to be wonderful. Over the next three months, B and I grew closer than I ever have to any other human being. I could feel this love growing inside of me and when the words finally escaped me, I knew what was love and I was right. It certainly was painful, crazy, and the most wonderful feeling in the world.

I decided to reinstate my project and reach out to those around me. The feedback this time around was ten-fold. I was bombarded with replies and it made me wonder if my love had spread to those around me.

The first response, which was written by a happily married friend, came in the form of "people are meant to live in pairs, meant to share things," while the second response, written by an engaged friend whose relationship was quickly deteriorating, came in the form of love is not happiness, but a journey only few accomplish. While the latter turned out to be a cheating prick only months later, I kept searching for the universal definition of what love is.

The third response came, ever so poignantly, in the form of "Love is feeling like you don't have to pretend with the other person. You can just be yourself. Farts, warts, and all." While the fourth response shined a light on why I was having so much difficulty in the past. J wrote, "I've felt most in love with someone when they are gone." She honed in on this idea of absence and no matter whom you fall in love with, men, women, transgender, etc., "if you don't love someone, you won't feel that pain when they are gone."

Having read this latest response while I was two thousand miles away from B, it all came together. Not only had I been in love before, albeit, probably too many times in the past, I was deeply in love now and distance, whether it's time or space, helps me to realize that love is wholeheartedly painful.

By the time I got to the fifth response, I began to feel a little sick. I didn't want to end up like my past self again, but I kept reading. This particular response was written by one of the most intelligent and seamlessly craziest person I know. His response was chock full of hard to read words and even harder to understand concepts, but simply he wrote,

“Honestly, love to me, is nothing more than recognizing someone or something that has tendons where I have mortises and mortises where I have tendons.” Thus solidifying how truly crazy love is.

I was feeling a little better when it came time to read the last of my responses. Both of which are from two very dear and very different friends of mine. The sixth response focused on how beautiful love is and how love is something worth living for despite losing her lover to suicide. More importantly, she talked about how love is like finally getting home after a long trip and laying in your bed, “absolutely comfortable and where you belong.” While the seventh and final response ended my search on a positive note by stating, “Love is the thing we are searching for and one cannot express love to others or to other endeavors until one experiences self-love.” These two letters proved the final piece of my love puzzle: no matter how you end up or who you used to be, if you can truly love yourself and find the beauty in love, it can be the most wonderful feeling in the world.

And so I leave you with a sonnet and the hope that no matter what happens to you, remember to never run away from love no matter how painful, crazy, or wonderful it is.

I dream of us during the night  
We are flying high, your hand in mine  
“Don’t fly too close, it’ll be too bright”  
I turn over, you sigh; it must be a sign

I close my eyes and drift off back to sleep  
We’re swimming now among fish and seaweed  
You move and bend, trying to creep  
past the starfish, through the sand, we’re finally freed

Consciousness hits me once again  
Where are you? Where did you go? Are you coming back?  
I see you outside, but you need to explain.  
Your mind couldn’t rest, so you went searching for a pack.

If this is love, I never want to see it leave.  
If this isn’t love, I don’t think I can handle another grieve.