

serena kerrigan

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date*

*become the prize, enjoy the ride
and never settle again.*

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*Become the Prize, Enjoy the Ride
and Never Settle Again*

Serena Kerrigan



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To my mom, who taught me that the most
important person you'll ever date is yourself.

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Introduction

Henry Who?

Henry was *the* boy in my second grade class. Floppy brown hair, dark eyes, and a quiet confidence that made him magnetic. He was my first crush. My first proof that even at seven years old, my deepest desire was to love and be loved.

Henry was obsessed with *Pokémon*. When our teacher, Mr. David, taught us how to write, he let us pick any word we wanted to practice spelling. Henry, of course, chose *Pokémon*, scribbling it over and over again in his notebook. So, naturally, I did, too.

I remember Mr. David hovering over my desk, nodding approvingly. “Serena, I didn’t know you liked that cartoon!”

I didn’t. But I liked Henry. And this was my first attempt at getting his attention. I was sure it would work.

A few days later, I was at the tiny magazine shop in my neighborhood. It was a hole-in-the-wall that stocked every possible publication, from frothy editions of *People* to *Fishing World*. My mom would always let me pick one out to keep me entertained while she ran through her never-ending list of chores. I usually reached for *Brides* magazine. Like any seven-year-old deep in their princess era, I was obsessed with the dresses.

But that day, something else caught my eye. A *Pokémon* magazine. Thin, colorful, with a few comic strips inside. The perfect gift for Henry. I handed the cashier both magazines, *Brides* and *Pokémon*. My mom gave me a look but said nothing as she paid for them, and we left.

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That night, I added a personal touch. In my best attempt at cursive, I wrote on the cover: *Serena*  *Henry*. Just so he would know that out of all the girls in our class, I was the one. The best girl in the whole world.

The next morning, I couldn't eat. My entire body buzzed with anticipation. I skipped all the way to school, barely able to contain myself. When no one was looking, I slipped the magazine into Henry's cubby. Then I waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Nothing. No smile, no thank you, no acknowledgment that I even existed. At 2:30 P.M., when we all went to grab our backpacks and coats, on top of my things, staring at me like a scarlet letter, was the *Pokémon* magazine. Henry had returned it. Without a word.

A feeling I didn't yet have a name for took over my little body. My hands shook. My face burned. I couldn't stop the tears. When my mom met me outside school for pickup, she immediately knew something was wrong.

"What happened?" she asked.

I ran ahead of her, too humiliated to speak. She followed, letting me cry our whole walk home. Once inside, I threw myself onto my bed, sobbing so hard I could barely breathe. My mom sat next to me, patient, calm, waiting.

"Serena, tell me what's wrong."

"You wouldn't understand," I choked out.

"Try me."

I looked at her, all-knowing and wise, and with every ounce of devastation I had in my tiny seven-year-old body, I wailed, "You don't understand because this has never happened to you! My heart is broken because Henry doesn't love me."

To this day, I don't know how my mom didn't die laughing. Instead, she wiped my tears, pulled me into a hug, and said, "One day, years from now, I'm going to remind you of this moment. And I promise, you'll look at me and say, *Henry who?*"

I don't know if I understood what she meant back then. But it broke the spell that afternoon. We went to the kitchen and made hot chocolate, and I let myself forget Henry. At least for the rest of the day.

It was my first heartbreak. It would not be my last.

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And every time I called my mom, whether in my teens or twenties, crying over some guy who ghosted me or resurfaced at 2:00 A.M. for a booty call—she would say our code words: *Henry who?* A reminder that the right guy, the real love, wouldn't give the *Pokémon* magazine back.

Even at seven years old, I was already strategizing. Already trying to decode the unspoken rules of attraction. Already taking rejection personally. That moment, the heartbreak, the inability to understand why someone wouldn't like me back, is the same thing so many of us feel today. The stakes just look and feel a little different.

Maybe it's a text that never comes. A situationship that never solidifies. A person who keeps you on the back burner, giving you just enough to stay, but never enough to feel chosen. It all comes back to the same question I asked my mom through tears: Why doesn't he love me?

Because at the end of the day, the right guy will keep the damn magazine.



My obsession with love never stopped; it just grew up. I spent my tweens, teens, and twenties navigating the entire spectrum of it all: situationships, whirlwind romances, the sparks that burned too bright too fast, and others that fizzled before they even started. I have felt the sting of watching someone return the metaphorical *Pokémon* magazine over and over again. I've also learned how to laugh about it. How to move on. How to stop proving my worth to someone who refuses to see it.

But it wasn't until the world stopped in 2020 that my story really began. I had recently quit my job as a video producer at Refinery29, a women's media company, and suddenly found myself single, jobless, and trapped in my tiny apartment on the Lower East Side. Facing the terrifying prospect of being alone indefinitely, I went on a mission to find a "Covid Boyfriend"—a partner-in-quarantine to help me navigate the crushing loneliness of lockdown.

Since I couldn't go to a bar, I brought the bar to my living room. I launched a live Instagram dating show called *Let's Fucking Date*—fifty virtual blind dates, streamed from my couch, with thousands of people watching me fumble through it all live.

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My chaotic search for a man who could hold a conversation over Wi-Fi became a cultural phenomenon. Thousands of strangers in the comments would scream “RED FLAG!” or “HE’S THE ONE!” in real time, voting on my decisions and dissecting every awkward silence. It was the first time dating felt like a community event instead of a private struggle.

Unlike traditional dating shows where the woman is a passive participant at the mercy of a producer’s edit, I was the entire machine. I was the host and the contestant, but I was also the director, the lighting tech, the stylist, and the hair and makeup department. I owned the lens, the narrative, and the broadcast. In a world that expects women to sit back and wait to be chosen, I was in control of the stage I was standing on.

After three seasons, I didn’t find love (although there were a few contenders), but I found something better: a problem I was obsessed with solving and a community that was ready for a new narrative. I’d accidentally conducted a massive case study on the frustrations of the dating landscape. And the conclusion was obvious: We have been trained to follow a script where we audition for a role in someone else’s life instead of casting the lead in our own. I saw how many of our issues stemmed from outdated, male-gaze narratives that left women feeling small and exhausted. My audience wasn’t just there for the drama; they were hungry to reclaim their own power.

So I built the tools to do it. I created a series of card games designed to transform how people connect—conversations that skip the small talk and crack you open. Women wrote to me saying that after playing my games, they heard “I love you” for the first time, they received the proposals they’d been waiting for, and in a few cases, literal beds were broken (sorry, I’m not sorry!).

What started as a living room experiment turned into a multimillion-dollar business, proving that women were starving for what I was selling. And I don’t mean the card games. I took my dating advice on the road with a one-woman show and developed a scripted comedy TV series. I haven’t just lived the plot; I’ve written it, produced it, and performed it.

Over the years, I’ve received hundreds of thousands of messages from women asking for guidance and coached countless women one-on-one, which cemented my status as a dating expert. That pull toward mentorship

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is baked into my DNA. Applying it to my own love life, however, took time. As they say, those who can't do, teach.

I didn't grow up with a blueprint for love. My parents divorced when I was two and didn't remarry, and as an only child, I didn't even have an older sibling to learn from. So I looked for answers in books. As an English major at Duke University, I was assigned Austen and Shakespeare, but the titles I devoured cover to cover were dating manuals. *The Rules*, *Getting to I Do*, *Why Men Love Bitches*, you name it, I bought it.

I wanted a cheat code but found a paradox: These books claim to be empowering yet are deeply focused on making us more desirable to men. They ultimately end up feeling outdated—steeped in fear, control, and a misogynistic version of dating that doesn't match our reality. The game has changed, but the desire to make sense of love, attraction, and relationships is timeless.

That is the duality of being a woman today. As much as we fight to dismantle sexism, we are still wired to want the best of both worlds: the seven-figure check and the hand that opens the car door. We want to make executive decisions all day, then surrender the reins when it's time for dinner. We want the fierce pride of independence and the soft thrill of a love note in our pocket. It's messy, it's complicated, but that's exactly why we're here.

Dating can feel exhausting. Apps reduce people to profiles dismissed with a thumb, situationships are the new relationships, and ghosting has replaced goodbye. No wonder so many of us feel one mediocre date away from throwing our phones into the ocean and moving to a farm with no men. But main characters don't subscribe to the tragedy of the masses. We flip the script.

That's why I wrote this book. I, Serena Fucking Kerrigan—known to my followers as SFK—am here to teach you how to stop waiting for someone else to define your worth and start directing your own love story. One where you are the lead, you own the happy ending, and you never lose yourself in the process.

Because unlike some of its predecessors, this book isn't about making him like you. Success in dating isn't about securing a ring or locking someone down or proving you're "worthy" of love. It's about showing up as the most confident, unapologetic version of you. About building a life and a love that actually feels good. That is the only goal that matters.

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This book belongs to the woman who feels like she has to shrink herself, lower her expectations, or over-calculate every move just to avoid getting hurt. It is for the woman who has considered settling, not because it feels right, but because she is tired.

I've made every mistake and survived every nightmare you can think of. I've been ghosted, love bombed, breadcrumb, and blindsided. I've unknowingly dated two brothers (don't ask), chased the emotionally unavailable, and convinced myself that if I just played it cool (cue the *Gone Girl* monologue), they'd finally commit. I've read every book, tried every strategy, and still ended up crying into my mom's lap more times than I'd like to admit. But through all of it, I've figured out what works and what's complete bullshit.

I'm going to be honest with you: There was a moment when I almost broke. Publicly, I was shouting from the rooftops about being the Prize and never settling. But in private, my reality was starting to contradict me. No matter how much I put myself out there, I kept attracting the same fuck-boys and couldn't break the cycle. I was the Prize, allegedly. So why did I keep getting treated like a consolation?

Then the comments came—"If your advice is so great, why are you still single?"—and my intrusive thoughts got louder. I started to question everything I was preaching. What if I was wrong? What if I wasn't going to find my person? What if the brand, the message, the advice, was one giant oxymoron? My love life and my career had become the same question, which meant my identity had, too. I wasn't just failing at dating. I was failing at being me.

But instead of giving up, I made a different choice. I went back to therapy. I let go of trying to control every detail, stopped obsessing over the outcome, and started saying yes to things I normally wouldn't. That is how I ended up in a podcast studio in 2023, sitting across from a podcast host named Felix.

That day, I didn't put on a performance. I barely even put on mascara. I wasn't trying to be the polished "SFK" version of myself. I was vulnerable—I told him exactly how much I was struggling with dating. And for the first time in a long time, I felt understood. Six minutes in, the interview ended and the connection began. Everything I had gone through had put me in a

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place to end up in that chair. When he asked me on a date after the recording, the old version of me would have overanalyzed every text or acted like a different person just to keep him interested. This time, I did not overthink it. I did not contort myself into someone easier to love. I showed up as I was.

Despite a six-year age gap (call me a cougar, I don't care), the alignment was undeniable. We were both only children born and raised in New York City, both bilingual with foreign moms, both products of parents who'd divorced when we were two, and both driven by the same relentless ambition. But the most important thing was that, from the beginning, I felt completely safe. I let him see me fully, and he met me with care, consistency, and affection. Everything flowed. The love I was waiting for, and wishing for, wasn't a delusion. It was a destination. The advice in this book is exactly what led me to him—and more important, what made me the woman who was ready for him.

You already have most of the answers. Sometimes you just need a hug and a slap in the face. And I don't blame you. I like it rough, too.

Will you disagree with me in this book? Absolutely. Do I care? Not in the slightest. Dating is messy and nuanced. There are exceptions to every rule and there isn't one solution for every situation. There are times where I'm going to tell you to be yourself and also tell you not to text him back. I'll tell you to stop overthinking and then give you fifty things to think about. Welcome to being a woman.

Everything in this book comes from years of interviewing, focus grouping, analyzing, and absorbing the experiences of my friends, my community, and myself. (All names have been changed to preserve anonymity—except Felix's.) Whether you're single, dating, or deep in the chaos of figuring it the fuck out, this book is your no-bullshit guide to playing the game your way and winning.

By the way, I'm speaking to the girls who are currently in the trenches with men. It's a hetero-centered strategy—if that's not your game, take what works and ditch the rest.

I'll tell you everything I know. Because I've lived, learned, loved, and gotten fucked . . . over.

A lot.

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YOU ARE THE PRIZE

The Foundation

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Before we dive into the dumpster fire of your dating history, the curation of the Roster, or how to stop entertaining men who have the emotional range of a teaspoon, we need to get one thing straight: This book does not start with men. It starts with you.

Most dating advice skips this part and rushes straight to strategy: what to text, when to play hard to get, “how to be irresistible without being too much.” That approach assumes you are already standing on solid ground.

And I’m going to hold your hand while I say this: Most of you are not.

You are impressive, accomplished, and outwardly a total icon—but internally, you are braced for impact, trying to build intimacy on a nervous system that has never felt safe.

Whether you are single, in a situationship, or already in a committed relationship, the foundation is nonnegotiable. This is about trusting your gut, owning your decisions, and wanting love without apologizing for it.

Without that internal anchor, dating becomes a constant, exhausting audition. You start negotiating your needs, performing confidence instead of feeling it, and chasing clarity from men who are only consistent when it comes to disappointing you. You confuse anxiety for chemistry and call it a spark, wonder if you’re too much, too late, too intense, or not enough, and end up rescheduling your entire life for a man who wouldn’t even hold your purse.

You are the Prize.

Throughout this book, you’ll notice I use the word *Prize* a lot. Somewhere along the way, life chipped away at your confidence and dating confused your worth. So I am drilling it into you until it sticks—not as a cliché, but as a correction. The more you see it, the more you believe it. The more you believe it, the more you move like it.

By the end of this book, you will not need me to say it anymore. You will just be it.

When this foundation is solid, everything changes. You stop chasing and start choosing. Rejection stops feeling like a verdict and starts feeling

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like redirection, away from mediocrity, toward something real. Love stops feeling like something you have to earn.

Read this section slowly, and do the mirror work even when you roll your eyes. Especially then.

You are the Prize. Now let's fucking act like it.

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Chapter 1

Being Single Fucks

We've been sold this narrative that a relationship is the only social currency with real value. You could be winning in every category—health, wealth, and mental clarity—but the world doesn't truly cheer until you hard launch your boyfriend. A grainy photo of a man's hand at dinner is somehow treated as a bigger accomplishment than a promotion or a breakthrough in therapy.

When I ask someone, "Are you dating?" and they answer, "I'm literally so fucking single," it's usually said with shame, like they're announcing they're behind on rent.

Being single is not a terminal illness. It isn't a personality flaw, a diagnosis, or evidence that you are an incomplete protagonist waiting for a man to reboot your plot. It is the absence of compromise. Do you just want a boyfriend for the sake of having one, or do you want to find your person? Any one of us could go out and find a seat-filler by next week if we were willing to lower our standards and ignore our intuition.

The problem is that no one throws a party when you cut off a toxic situationship. No one sends flowers when you finally confront the shit you've been avoiding. No one cheers when you choose yourself after years of chasing people who would never choose you back.

I got so sick of watching everyone else get celebrated for doing what they were "supposed" to do. So after one very eventful year, I said "fuck it," and I made a registry for myself. I had just moved into my own apartment,

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was running a company I built from scratch, and had somehow managed to keep myself (and one very resilient plant) alive. I mean, hello? That felt worth acknowledging.

I made a list of the things I associated with “settling down”: champagne glasses, a fancy vacuum, and new sheets with a thread count that said, “I love myself more than any man ever has.” I went out and bought them myself. I didn’t need a registry to feel complete. I was just done pretending my milestones were lesser because they didn’t come with a ring or a sonogram. These were my wins, and you bet your ass I was going to celebrate them.

That’s when it hit me: Why was I waiting for a man to validate a life I was already killing it in? The relationship we have with ourselves is the one we live with the longest. But there were times when being alone felt like a deficit. But once I started celebrating my own wins, something shifted. I stopped seeing my singleness as a problem to fix and started treating it as a limited-time offer to figure out who I am with no one to answer to. I started choosing myself.

We have to stop treating finding a partner like the only metric for success. Because being single is not the pregame; it’s the main event. You do not start existing the moment a man recognizes you.

I learned this from my mom. After my parents divorced when I was two, she chose to stop dating. Not because she *couldn’t* get a date (she’s a catch), but because she was genuinely happy on her own. No one around us could grasp it. They whispered, questioned her sexuality, and wondered what was “wrong” with her. I was mortified. I actually filled out a Match .com survey for her when I was twelve—complete with my own “expert” analysis—convinced that if she just went on one date, she would be “normal” again.

I was too young to see what she had already built, and how radical it was. My mom did not need to perform femininity to feel valuable. Fulfilled by her work, her family, her friends, her books, and her own damn company—not missing a thing. She was the first real example I ever had of a woman who did not treat romantic love like a finish line. Now I finally get what she was showing me. **The right person isn’t the missing piece. They’re just the cherry on top.**

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Learning how to enjoy my singleness looked a lot less like a wellness quote and a lot more like a curated playlist, a vibrator, and a mirror pep talk. That is the gift of being alone: **No one is watching.** You get to figure out what actually makes you feel good, without wondering if it's "attractive" to someone else.

My Main Character Checklist:

- ☐ I took myself on a solo date to dinner like I was the main character (because I am).
- ☐ I spent an entire day being a tourist in my own zip code. No "What do you want to do?" loop, no compromising on where to eat, zero negotiating.
- ☐ I decorated my apartment like I was hosting a *Vogue* shoot.
- ☐ I masturbated—not just for the release, but to learn exactly what I need so I never have to settle for less.
- ☐ I talked to myself in the mirror until I actually believed what I was saying.
- ☐ I treated every sidewalk like a catwalk, because obviously.
- ☐ I invested deeply in my friends. Being single is easier when you have a core group of people who remind you that you're already chosen every day.
- ☐ I poured myself into my family. I spent time with my grandmother, remembering that I am the payoff for every sacrifice she ever made.

These weren't just activities to kill time. They became a declaration that my joy and safety are self-generated. I stopped looking for someone to fill the gaps and started looking for someone who could keep up. You cannot choose well if you cannot be alone. Because women who enjoy their own lives do not settle by accident.

There is a massive difference between being alone and being abandoned. One is chosen. One is not. I am not saying that being alone is always easy. I have sat in my apartment feeling gutted, calling my mom in tears, wondering why no one was there. Those moments are real. They do

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not make you weak. But I stopped being terrified of my own company the second I realized how lonely I felt in relationships where I was “chosen” but ignored. Being alone never sucked the life out of me the way trying to force a bad fit did. Loneliness will lie to you and call itself longing. Don’t fall for it. Loneliness is a fleeting moment. Longing is a loop. It keeps you stuck, settling for the bare minimum just to feel full.

The victim mindset is where growth goes to die. And you didn’t buy this book to flatline. When you see yourself as powerless in your own life—waiting for a man to arrive so your “real” life can finally begin—everything stalls. You stop growing, you stop building, and you start rotting.

No one is coming to “save” you. Those low moments are invitations. Can you self-soothe without reaching for your phone, calling an ex, or swiping on an app just to feel wanted for a second? Learning how to regulate your nervous system (and talk yourself off a ledge) is crucial.

And when love arrives, it will not feel like a rescue. It will feel like **recognition**. When you are in love with your own life, a man has to meet you there. It makes him think, *She has her shit together. I need to show up if I want to be part of this*. And if he can’t, the trash takes itself out.

That is the beauty of being alone. When you love your life, you stop waiting for someone to make it worth living. Because when you do it right, being single fucks.

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Chapter 2

Stop Apologizing for Wanting Love

If you've ever rolled your eyes at a couple who couldn't keep their hands off each other, then cried about your ex in the shower ten minutes later, this chapter is for you. If you've ever told your group chat you're "too busy" for a relationship while secretly checking your phone to see if *he* texted, you are not alone.

You are not weak for wanting love. You are just tired of pretending you don't.

Two things can be true at the same time: A man does not complete you, *and* wanting a relationship doesn't make you desperate. Somewhere along the way, we convinced ourselves that "independence" meant "indifference." We decided that needing no one was a flex when really it was just a way to avoid being disappointed.

The reason we struggle to admit this is because we've been trained since birth to assume a role where we have no power.

Blame it on *Cinderella*.

I was addicted to that movie growing up. I watched it so many times, I practically turned into a pumpkin. But let's take a closer look, shall we? You have a girl in an abusive household who just sits there and takes it until a fairy godmother shows up, gives her a sickening makeover, and sends her to a party above her tax bracket. She dances with a random

dude, loses a shoe, and is later identified—not by her personality or her intellect, but by the size of her foot. The prince “picks” her, and she lives happily ever after.

That was our introductory course in the art of the audition. We’ve spent our whole lives being fed the same boring message: **Love is a reward for good behavior.** We were taught that if we were pretty enough, agreeable enough, and passive enough, we’d be chosen.

This turned dating into an evaluation where men were the judges and we were the contestants. We were so busy trying to be “chosen” that we stopped checking to see if the guy was even worth the effort.

For most of human history, women did not marry for love; we married to survive. Marriage was an economic agreement that granted us access to safety, social status, and basic legitimacy. Romance was a bonus, not the point. Even when it became normal to marry for love, the pressure didn’t lift—the goalposts just moved. Find him before your ovaries expire. Don’t be too successful or you’ll scare him off. Don’t wait too long or you’ll end up alone.

But we are the first generation of women who do not need a relationship for security. We don’t need a man for money, and we sure as hell don’t need him for meaning. We’ve frozen our eggs, padded our bank accounts, and curated our lives too fully for mediocrity. Now we’re looking for someone who is worth sharing them with.

That freedom gives us something no generation of women has ever had: the ability to want love without needing it. But there’s still something terrifying about admitting you want a relationship when it technically isn’t “needed.”

I spent years learning how to stop shrinking. I set boundaries, got a little selfish, and stopped making myself palatable for men who didn’t deserve a seat at my table. And it worked, for a while. But that was all defense. I knew how to keep the wrong men out. I had no idea how to let the right one in.

The Pick-Me tries too hard. *The Cool Girl* pretends she’s not trying at all. Then there’s *the Prize*.

Be honest with yourself: Which one are you?

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<i>The Pick-Me</i>	<i>The Prize</i>	<i>Too Cool to Care</i>
Thinks love will save her	Knows love is a bonus, not a rescue	Pretends love doesn't matter
Desperate to be chosen	Chooses herself first	Refuses to be chosen
Shrinks to be liked	Takes up space without apology	Disappears to stay in control
Grateful for the bare minimum	Demands consistency and depth	Rejects vulnerability altogether
A relationship is the goal	A relationship is a bonus	A relationship is a threat

When my friend Daphne got into a relationship and started skipping parties to hang out with her boyfriend, I used to judge her. I told myself she was “losing her independence,” that she was becoming one of those girls who suddenly forgets who she is the second a man shows interest.

But what I didn't admit was that I envied her not because she had a boyfriend but because she let herself *want* one without apologizing for it. She didn't downplay her feelings or make excuses for being excited. She leaned into it, and I couldn't understand how she made that kind of softness look like strength. She was the Prize. And her boyfriend knew it.

Then there's Priya. She had a roster, but never a relationship. She used to re-download a dating app every Sunday night and call it “market research.” She'd swipe half-heartedly, laugh at bios, and screenshot red flags for the group chat—deleting the app by morning like it never happened. She told herself she was just seeing what was out there, but beneath the jokes and the curated indifference, she wanted something real.

And then there's the woman who thinks she's exempt. The one with the boyfriend, the label, and the shared lease—who still feels a persistent ache. You are lying next to someone who hasn't asked you a meaningful question in months, and you're gaslighting yourself into gratitude. Wanting more doesn't make you ungrateful. It makes you honest.

Wanting a partner who supports you, adores you, and makes you feel

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seen is a sign of what you know you deserve. Being single just means you haven't compromised yet.

You are allowed to want a relationship that holds you without holding you back. A partner who respects your independence and still shows the fuck up. Someone who hypes your ambition instead of being threatened by it. Someone who watches you walk into a room and is still in disbelief that he gets to be yours. Because you can tell how much you love yourself by the partner you choose.

And the most confident thing you can say is "I want love," and mean it.

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Chapter 3

Rewrite Your Script

If your dating life feels stuck, stalled, or doomed, pay attention to the way you talk about it. You are not unlucky in love. You are not bad at dating. You are repeating an old narrative, and frankly, it's boring. It is time to rewrite it.

I remember this one night I had a date scheduled at the same time as a cozy night in with my college friends. Deep down, I felt disconnected and shaky, craving familiarity and safety, not a stranger across a table. But instead of acknowledging that I was nervous, I decided to play psychic. I convinced myself the date would be a total disaster before I'd even put on my shoes.

I was pre-rejecting the night so it didn't have the chance to reject me first. I walked out the door with "This is going to suck" playing on a loop in my brain, and guess what? It sure did. I wasn't a participant on that date; I was a saboteur looking for evidence to prove my own shitty mood right. I showed up ten minutes late on purpose to prove I didn't care. I asked him, "Isn't dating in New York just the worst?" I texted my friends mid-date that it was going horribly. I spent the night mentally drafting the "funny story" I'd tell them later instead of letting the moment unfold.

None of what I said on the date was malicious, but every word out of my mouth was subconsciously building distance. I was too busy controlling

the outcome to actually enjoy the evening. When the date ended, I met up with my group and leaned into the bit. I exaggerated the awkwardness to make them laugh. And after the bit, they all went home to their partners—and I walked home to my empty apartment alone, the way I always did, wondering how many more nights I was going to choose the performance over the possibility of something real.

Words create reality. The language you use, even in passing, shapes how you see the world, how the world sees you, and what you believe you deserve. You need to rewrite the script. **You are the writer, the director, the producer, and the star of your own story.** You don't get to control every plot twist, but you *do* control the language you use to frame the experience. Don't stutter.

Think about world-class athletes. Do you think they walk onto the field saying, “We’re going to lose”? They speak as if they’ve already won. That isn’t delusional; it’s foundational. I don’t know the difference between a touchdown and a home run, but I know that no one gets a trophy for showing up and acting like a loser.

This is why I take language so seriously—especially when it comes to dating. How many times have you said, “I am so single,” or “My dating life is shit”?

Or any of these . . .

“It’s tragic out there.”

“Dating is so hard.”

“Dating in [insert city] is the worst.”

“The apps are terrible.”

“I’m never going to find love.”

It might feel like harmless venting, but it is scripting. If you narrate your life like a tragedy, don’t be surprised when you’re crying in the final act. Stop talking about dating like it’s a punishment. If you want your story to take a different turn, you have to change the dialogue.

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