

Ben Backus – February 4, 2016
“Love Story”

Saturday in this dimension:

“So, have you had a good day?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you having a good time?” I ask. She glances at me, and then barely forces a smile.

“Yeah, fun,” she responds lackadaisically. I can tell that she isn’t actually enjoying herself, which really pisses me off because I put a lot of work in to this day. This morning I woke her up with breakfast in bed. After her morning routine, I surprised her in the kitchen with flowers, presents, sweets, and I even had that stupid vinyl record player playing her favorite music. We walked in the park holding hands. We rode one of those paddleboats that looks like a duck. I even took her to this hipster bar with all her friends, and she hasn’t thanked me once today. Now, we’re sitting here listening to some uninspired indie rock band, and I ask her what she thinks, and she can barely force a smile!

“That’s it?”

“What do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” I raise my voice. I say, “Yeah, fun,” while imitating her apathetic voice. “I give you the best birthday ever, which cost me a small fortune, and you’re sitting here like... like you spent all day doing taxes or something!”

“Well I’m sorry that I’m not happy enough for you,” she responds, matching my volume.

“You’re not happy? What reason do you have not to be happy, Anna? Today has been perfect!”

“I’m allowed to have feelings—”

“I don’t care about your feelings! Boohoo if you’re sad. How about you consider my feelings, and at least pretend to be grateful rather than spending all day being a bitch!” Of course, when I shout that word the rest of the bar silences, making me look like a prick. I expect her to storm out, garnering the sympathy of the peanut gallery, but instead she looks deep in to my eyes and starts crying.

“I’m sorry,” she sobs, collapsing on to me. “I’m such a bad girlfriend!” she cries, which forces me to tell her she isn’t.

“No, no, you’re a great girlfriend. You are,” I say gently in to her ears as she continues decompressing. As she talks, we leave the bar and take a cab home.

“I’ve just felt so pointless lately, and it seems like nothing can make me happy anymore,” she says, amongst other things. We cuddle on the couch for a while as I listen to everything she wants to say. Eventually, she falls asleep in my arms and I feel a little better, but I feel like I need to call my mom for advice.

“Mom, I don’t know if I can do this anymore. I want to be a good guy but... it’s hard.”

“I know sweetie,” my mom says. “Remember though, you can’t fix her depression. That’s her very heavy cross to bear. If you want to be a good boyfriend, you just have to be there for her.” My mom has said these words before.

“I know... it’s just... I don’t know mom. I don’t understand Love.”

Sunday in a slightly different dimension:

“This is an adequate breakfast,” Anna says, indicating that she is ready to partake in our required daily small talk.

“I broke my record. It was all done in ten minutes.”

“Very efficient,” she responds. I glance at the news screen and read the broadcasted information.

“Annual Reproduction Down by twenty Percent,” I read. She sharply looks up at me with a unnerved demeanor.

“Have we sent proof of our mandated sexual activity from last night yet?” I look at her and think, trying to recall if I did my duty last night. Then, I realize my mistake. In fact, I never submitted the video documentation to the sexual reproduction bureau. I was too tired. The government-mandated relationship documentation that is due before each Sunday morning, with harsh penalties.

“No. I forgot,” I say. “This is most unfortunate.” She suddenly stops eating.

“Well then, should we prepare for our arrests,” she suggests.

“Yes. Put your food away and we’ll wait at the front of the house,” I decide. We wait for three minutes in the entrance, then there’s a knock on the door. I open it and see an androgynous police officer.

“Hello couple 860B-032F. We neglected to receive your weekly documentation. I’m here to escort you to the relationship correctional institution.” Anna and I outstretch our arms for the police officer to cuff.

When we arrive at the institution, an androgynous group of operators guide us out of the vehicle and in to a large white building. Operators dressed in pink scrubs process our information and then take us to a cell. We sit down on our bed and wait for the directors of sexual rehabilitation. Eventually, they open the door and enter.

“Welcome, couple 860B-032F. You are here due to a new government initiative to rehabilitate citizens’ emotionally and sexually. As you know, humans’ emotional capacity has been rapidly decreasing since 1998, and while industrial productivity has skyrocketed, humans no longer naturally establish enough sexual relationships to maintain our population. So until reproductive technology advances enough, the government requires that you fornicate regularly enough to conceive more than two children. Now, not only have you failed to document your weekly copulation, but also you have been a couple for about two years without the conceiving. Thus, you are here so we can ensure that you are having intercourse correctly, regularly, and passionately. Do you follow?”

“Yes,” Anna and I responded.

“Good, and let it be known that if you do not comply with our instructions, you have the option of being androgynized, and your reproductive organs will be donated to the government’s other reproductive initiatives. Now, follow me.”

Monday in a slightly more different dimension:

"I love these eggs!"

"And how do they make you feel?" I ask my girlfriend and soul mate, Anna.

"Wonderful! I am so delighted to be with a man like you!" I look at her with a crisp smile on my face. I hope this is the one.

"Do they make you want to be together forever? Anna? My dearest?" She blushes, and takes a bite.

"Well I don't know if they're that good, my love. But they are certainly amazing!" she responds. This disappoints me. I pull out my pistol and shoot her in the head. I reheat the eggs and clean up the kitchen. Then, I grab my computer and order a new girlfriend from soulmate.com. She arrives in half an hour.

"I love these eggs!"

"And how does this breakfast make you feel?" I ask my girlfriend and soul mate, Denise.

"Amazing! I feel fulfilled! I'm so lucky to have a man like you!" I look at her, evaluating her features. She's very attractive, and she was raised in Texas!

"Do they make you want to be with me forever, Denise? My dearest?" She giggles, and takes a sip of her orange juice.

"I don't know if they're that good, silly!"

Terranday in a very different dimension:

"This has been such a wonderful conversation! I always enjoy having such interesting people to talk to over meals," says the woman I just met, Anna.

"Me too! In fact I've been meaning to ask you something that I've never asked a woman that I've just met." My palms are sweaty as I look in to her eyes.

"Well then go ahead! I'm sure we are thinking alike."

"Okay. Anna, I want to be inside of you."

"Wow! I was thinking the same thing," she exclaims.

"Really?" I smile widely. This is delightful news, and my parents would be proud! Most men don't enter a woman until their thirties, or maybe even never.

"Yes it is! Let's go right now!" Anna responds. We leave the restaurant and take a taxi to her place. We walk in and I hurriedly take my clothes off while she walks upstairs to her room.

"I hope I'm not too excited!" I call out, fully naked in her living room.

"Don't be. I've done this with many other men! They're all very happy with the experience," she responds through the floor. "Feel free to come on up! Everything's ready!" I scurry up the stairs. "Oh wait, could you throw your clothes away first?" she asks.

"Of course, sorry it completely slipped my mind." I rush downstairs, discard the outerwear, and then return to her room. "Okay! So, where is your assimilation chamber?" I ask.

"Follow me. It's right over here." She puts the cognitive adapter on her head and I climb into the metal cylinder. The top seals shut and then the perspective-absorbing fluid surrounds me. It's the most relaxing feeling ever. First I feel my memories disappear, then my facts and knowledge, and then finally my consciousness dissolves in to hers. Now we are one!

Annaday in a different paradigm of existence:

Anna is alone. She exists, but I do not. Yet she still acknowledges me. It is so amazing that our friendship can prevail despite my crippling disability–nonexistence. Then, one day, she decides to cure my aversion to reality. I am not nearly as talented, creative, or smart as she is so I could not explain how she manages to fix my predicament. But miraculously, she brings me in to her reality.

“I am!” I exclaim.

“Yes, you are!”

“Oh Anna, I am so deeply grateful for you!” I embrace my creator enthusiastically.

“I love you too,” she whispers.

“Oh.” I separate us.

“Wait, do you not love me back?” she says, baffled and disturbed.

“I mean, I think I love someone else, Anna.” She stares at me. It takes a moment for her to respond.

“Who?! Nobody else is!” She shouts, throwing her arms in the air.

“I love Mary!”

“Who’s that? Mary isn’t real!”

“But she could be, as I am now!” I cry to her. Anna sighs and then laughs frustratedly.

“I can’t believe you love someone else.”

“I’m sorry, Anna. It’s just natural.”

“Natural isn’t a concept! I created everything that is, which is only you and me!”

“And you can create Mary for me. And maybe find someone else for yourself.”

I no longer exist.

An arbitrary point in time in a universe where reality is incomprehensibly different:

Anna does not exist here, and neither do I. The only thing that exists here is nonexistence itself. However, in this universe, if it can even be called that, the concepts of existence and nonexistence function differently than the other dimensions in this story. Where this part of the story takes place, nothing comprehensible happens. The only force that is comparable in this universe to those of the other universes... is the force of love.

No, that’d be stupid. If existence were unfathomably different here, why would love still exist? That being said, since it is impossible to define the story that occurs in this universe, it may be valuable to discuss the concept of love abstractly, if not just to fill out the rest of the page. Thus, the following is an attempt to define love, broadly and ambiguously, in the context of relationships.

Love is not an emotion. Emotions are temporary and fragile. The emotions that tend to be mistaken for love are lust, romance, and compassion. Love is also not a chemical reaction. Love is caused by some combination of trillions of chemical reactions, natural forces, and probabilities, but that still doesn’t describe what Love is. It’s different for everybody. No computer could ever be programmed to understand Love, but at the same time no human has ever understood it entirely. This is because Love doesn’t exist. It’s just an idea; Love is not something concrete. In fact, it would be a bad thing if Love did exist because then it’d be so unimportant. The beauty of Love is not its scarcity, but its innate complexity and volatility.