

## Some Results of Eating Pomegranates and Apples

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He often snaps pictures of me while we're on dates. Reading a menu, drinking coffee, in the middle of taking a bite of a shrimp, talking passionately about something, staring out a window. He often tries to sneakily snap pictures of his daughter and me, but she usually catches him and makes him promise not to. It's not that she doesn't like me, it's that she doesn't like having her picture taken. He captured a picture of me asleep and her asleep on me, while we rode the train home from a winter adventure in the city. On a Sunday morning, his daughter watches me do my makeup and requests that I wear red lipstick. I say I will only if she will. We play with lipstick and take silly pictures for her daddy. A picture of us making kissy faces, her with an enormous red mouth and me with a tiny red mouth, is her daddy's virtual wallpaper on his cellphone screen.

1. Pandora opened the box.
  1. Pandora was given a box, as a gift, and was then told by the gift-givers not to open said gift. She was curious. She opened it. All of the evils were released into the world through the opening of that box.

2. The way we fell in love was shady. The way we fell in love was curiosity. The way we fell in love released all of the evils into the world.

Wandering through Target, our favorite place on Earth, the man who I've been in love with for almost two years now and myself ending up hugging or kissing or sweetly touching some part of each other's bodies in every vacant aisle.

With thick, dark hair, big, round, brown eyes, and wide shoulders, he aesthetically fits the description I've been giving for years before I met him, the description of my perfect man. Stylistically, the same, wearing tight-ish jeans, plaid shirts, band t-shirts, hoodies, and Converse like it's his uniform. Intellectually, the same, being naturally smart, well-read, and having pop culture knowledge readily available. In personality and interests, the same, being serious but funny, overwhelmingly nice and charming to everyone (not just me), a Musician, a pastry chef (a plus), outgoing but independent, and clinging to me like a slightly tight shirt not a binding waistband.

With an ex-wife (who I sometimes convince myself is still in love with him, even though we're both sure he's not in love with her), a daughter who (we both think) is beautiful and fun but (more I think but he thinks too) is difficult to please, child support to pay, and judging eyes waiting for us to fail, he does not at all fit the description I've been giving for years, the description of my perfect man.

2. Eve ate the apple.

1. In the Garden of Eden, only one tree's fruit was forbidden: the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Eve was tempted by Satan, who was disguised as a snake. Eve ate the apple. Eve

convinced Adam to eat the apple, too. Through Eve's eating of the apple, all of the evils were released into the world.

2. A misinterpreting of this Bible story is the basis of misogyny. Eve ate the apple therefore all women born after Eve are inherently evil. The actual point of the story is that all humans born after Adam and Eve have an inherently sinful nature. Eve's weak point was flattery and Adam's weak point was the beautiful Eve. Adam's mistake was not Eve's fault, but his own. Eve's mistake cannot be blamed on Satan, really, but on falling for his flattery.
3. The concept of The Other Woman conjures up contrasting images of sexy and sinister. The Other Woman is one-dimensional, is shallow, is selfish, is the enemy. The Other Woman is a tired cliché, is a metaphor, is not a human being. The Other Woman steals the "happily ever after." The Other Woman gets the better end of the deal. The Other Woman wins. The Other Woman does not suffer, just makes others suffer. The Other Woman is HAPPY.
4. I heard someone say once, "I don't know, when I think of The Other Woman, I think of a dark-haired woman who wears garters." I was accused of being The Other Woman. I wasn't though, not really.

One of my favorite pictures of us is a photo I took during our summer weekend getaway to Forecastle Festival 2014 in Louisville, Kentucky. The arm's-length-away headshot features me in a blue slightly low cut t-shirt and him in a black crew neck t-shirt. I don't remember what band's set we were waiting for, but we look sweaty and tired. My giant, distracting hair is in a ponytail, so my gold earrings, distinct brows, purple eyeliner, large nose, faded red lip stain, lip ring, and sassy but goofy facial expression are all the more highlighted. Even though the

picture is purposely of both of us, his face is tilted in a way that makes it look like he just jumped in my self-portrait at the last second. His mouth is open like he's surprised, thick brows lifted to reveal all the deep wrinkles in his forehead, and his freshly cut old-school hairstyle is shown in a way so both the front of it and the side of it are seen just before his gauges are spotted. The vanity in our facial expressions is an eleven on a scale of one to ten.

We are the vainest couple. And I think that's how we survive despite the intensity of our arguments. We know our relationship is weird and judgmental eyes are everywhere, so we latch onto the pretty parts of it. Embrace the weirdness. "Steer into the curve." Yes, I am the sexy younger woman and he is the sexy older man. Yes, we do like the same alternative, indie music and we wear alternative, indie clothing and we are cute. We don't believe any of this and yet we believe all of this; we are the vainest couple because that is our defense.

### 3. Persephone ate the pomegranate.

1. Persephone was abducted by Hades and brought to his home, the Underworld, to be his wife. As protest, she refused to eat or drink anything in the Underworld. Hades worked out a deal with Demeter (Persephone's mother) in which Persephone could spend nine months of the year with her family and three in the Underworld. However, Persephone got so hungry while in the Underworld that she ate a few pomegranate seeds there. Zeus (her father) had no choice but to banish her to the Underworld forever.
2. Some people we know put all the blame on him for our situation. He was, undoubtedly, very much more in-the-wrong

than I was. But I am not a victim. I was not abducted. I was not starving before I ate the pomegranate seeds.

We are both plagued by past mistakes. But we are both fully trusting God now instead of trying to figure out any answers. Still, the anxiety remains.

The Anxieties, The Data, The Soothing Words:

- There's comfort in making up superficial reasons for complex and intricately sad situations.
  - He says the noble reasons, "It's not even about looks. Me and you are just better together. I just like you for you. I love *you*. I want *you*." Then he says the superficial reasons, only after much prodding from me: "You're prettier." "You're more fun." And then I add, "You and I are both artists." I am much more comforted by the superficial reasons. Making up superficial reasons brings humor into these situations, makes the need to over-analyze them until you throw up seem superfluous. These reasons have very little truth and are completely flat, but grounding them—cementing them into the path of life, carving them in a tree—closes the mysteries. Of course, no doubt, all of these things are fleeting and/or subjective. But which comes first, the proof or the statement of truth? Does the proof even matter? If you say it, doesn't that make it true?
- Even better than artificial reasoning, though, is the hypothetical approach.

- “Choosing between us, if we had all been the same age, in the same place, at the same time, both wanting you, which would you have chosen?” “It always would have been you. No question about it. Given the choice, I would have chosen you. But I had no choice. You were seven years old the year we got married.”
- But after the flood of this comfort comes the next doubt: What about the possibility of losing him to someone else?
  - “I have learned my lesson. Love is a choice. I choose you. I didn’t understand that with her. With you, I choose to love, no matter what. It’s no longer an emotion.”
- And what about when his child compares me to her when he’s not around?
  - “My mom pees all the time, too.” “You yawn just like my mom.” “When you say, ‘yay,’ you sound just like my mom.” (That last one stings a little because he always laughs and says “you’re cute” when I say “yay.”)

Side note 1: If anyone is still worried I’m not suffering enough, that I’m not taking all of this serious enough, that I ever thought this was a pretty little fairy tale, you can stop worrying now. Today I want to drown my sorrows in a punch bowl of pumpkin ale. But I know I should read my Bible instead. So I compromise by listening to the words and notes of my favorite Christian musician, Mike Mains.

- Nonsensical comparisons from a six-year-old attempting to connect with me are one thing, but what about when a member of my own family says it?
  - “It’s funny, though, isn’t it? How much her new boyfriend looks like him and how much you look like her.”

- But for those who say we're alike, that I'm just a younger and more adventurous version, there's a response to that, too. "We could not be more opposite."
  - "It's true. I see no similarities." People see what they want to see. It always would have been me. We are nothing alike. After we officially became an item, I spent about a year looking in the mirror and deciding Her or Not Her every day after I got dressed. Loose, high-neck shirt: Her. Long skirt: Her. Dull colors: Her. Less make up: Her. Baggy jeans: Her. Perfectly styled curls rather than natural waves: Her. Not only did I categorize myself in these terms, the whole world became Her and Not Her. I don't like this stranger because she looks like her. I cannot watch this movie because it reminds me of her. That joke wasn't funny because she would find it hilarious. A fight him and I used to have but rarely do now: "You better not wear those shorts in public." "You cannot wear that to school." "There's no reason your shirt has to be that low." Are you trying to turn me into her? But the same mouth says: "I love your style. It's really cute." Contradicting. And then him saying I'm making too big of a deal out of him wanting me to dress more modestly, that I'm relating it back to her when it has nothing to do with her. "You are everything I want. I don't want you to change. I'm just scared of losing you. I've never had to worry about losing a girl like this before. You're just too hot." I think, both hypothetically and in this particular case, saying your girlfriend is the hottest girl you've been with and that's why you worry about her so much is a form of vanity, even though you are not talking about yourself, because she is in some way a part of you. Again, we are the vainest couple. But is that the real reason we have these fights about my clothes?

And does it matter if it is, as long as to believe it is comforting?

Side note 2: This “hottest girl I’ve dated” nonsense is really the manifestation of his insecurities about losing me, insecurities about the age difference, his fear that I will outgrow him.

Her image is sometimes burned into my every thought, sometimes intersecting any momentary happiness I achieve, so describing her appearance now does not appeal to me in the slightest. But, for reference: both have brown hair and brown eyes. Now that she’s lost about seventy-five pounds, I probably weigh ten or twenty pounds more than her. She used to have boobs and now she doesn’t. She never had hips but she’s always had a booty. Fleshy. I’m, not in a bragging way, hour-glass. Firm enough but definitely not toned. She’s pale, undertones are pink, maybe racist in the unknowing way, and I’m light but unmistakably olive. She has an enormous naturally red mouth that devours her face next to beady eyes and tiny nose. I have a plump/short pinkish/purplish tiny and circular mouth, Asian-esque eyes and an enormous nose that devours my face. What men who find us physically attractive find us physically attractive for: is plain, sweet, simple, old-fashioned...maybe. I am interesting-looking, exotic, wild...maybe.

- Any kind of reasoning used in this situation is simple-minded and faulty.
  - These are things he tries to express but can’t coherently so I summarize them into a gift for him, for us: “She’s the kind of girl you’d date when you were in some kind of phase. And she appears sweet and innocent even though she’s actually very harsh, controlling, and money-obsessed. You were in a phase and got stuck, got pushed into proposing, were never whole-heartedly into it, were lost and got caught in a bad

place, tried to make it work even though you were hating it and I so respect you for trying so hard and for eventually doing what would make you actually happy. You did not leave her for me; you left her for you.” The nineteen-year-old art student seems more like the girl you would “date when you were in some kind of phase,” but I’m twenty-two now, we’re still together, and I understand you in a way I’m confident no one else ever has or will. The guilt he feels is not because he still loves her. The guilt is for his daughter and, in a way, for never being able to truly give himself over to his daughter’s mother even though she wanted him to/needed him to so badly. As Tom Petty would put it, “She’s a good girl...I’m a bad boy, because I don’t even miss her.” All he can do now is love his daughter and love me more completely than he has ever loved before. But never regard me as “second chance” or “second choice” or “redo.” It always would have been me.

A Reasonable-ish Conclusion, Maybe:

Out to dinner with my family, and a member of my family’s girlfriend starts the “Reasons Nicole’s a Horrible Person” game. The fun of joking about my ex-boyfriends and all my other social/moral failures seems to be abundant to her, my siblings, my cousins, and occasionally my dad. Everything is a joke in my family. That’s how we—they—cope. The jokes might hurt a little but are generally fine from only my brother and one of my cousins. From everyone else, they only further infect the self-inflicted emotional wounds. *Yes, let’s play the “Reasons Nicole’s a Horrible Person” game...right in front of her boyfriend and his daughter.*

In Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets*, she writes that her friends agree that seven years is an acceptable amount of time to be in emotional pain before you get better. I don’t know how many years I’ve been in pain because the

count keeps restarting when new mistakes are made, but seven years from the year we started dating makes about five more years—and I refuse to actually use them all on sadness, even though Nelson’s friends say I can.

**Nicole Montalvo** is a native of Chicago’s south suburbs and is currently a Chicago resident. Her work has appeared in *Blotterature Literary Magazine*, The Stereo Studio online art gallery, and in a student anthology published by CCLAP titled “Chicago After Dark.” She holds a bachelor’s degree in creative nonfiction with a minor in cultural studies.