

The bold belongs to G.

2/7/14

Dear Cynthia,

I am going to find some pictures to send to you. The latest will be of my graduation. Last September I completed an MSc in Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics, which is one of the most prestigious social science universities in the world.

G, I can express myself no other way than with Valley Girl talk: Oh. My. God. Congratulations! I am completely impressed but not surprised. I had no idea you had embarked on a huge venture like this. And it is a huge venture. What drive you have. Once it was getting up every day before dawn and feeding horses, something that most people would never have the self-discipline for. Now it's earning an incredible degree—as well as a useful piece of paper, I would imagine. You are still so young!

You too! We are both young. (How much older than me are you? Not much, surely.

Well, I just turned 65 in December. I forgot to wish you happy birthday! (December first, right?) Your idealism still stands out. Adversity can harden resolve. And that, combined with brains and energy, can move mountains. It's the energy that gets to be the issue as you get into your sixties, I find. Dominic has not slowed down hardly at all, but I have. Dominic is into his 70s now, n'est ce pas? Yes, he is now 72! I have a Pavlovian response nowadays to the necessity to focus and endure stress. The years of the custody battle took it out of me. I remember that. What a trauma. The following years of being razor-close to open battle with my immediate lead at Boeing took it out of me. I got even with him in a totally ethical way, but that's another story.

Do tell

The following eight years of working in a job where I was completely over my head technically (it was either accept the offer at the technical center, or get laid off), those eight years took it out of me. F and G's having so many emotional problems, bi-polar problems, took it out of me.

Well yes, that was a real hard-hitter of a problem. I never gave up. You don't give up, and that's what I always admired about you.

Thank you, G! But I suppose one gets weary. I never would have believed it until weariness became a way of life, a little bit! But now I run from stress. And so I can never throw myself into any of the fun projects that I used to have love but no time for. My motto is: no more stress. Of course, good luck with that. But I think I am slowly healing now, and will eventually land on my feet.

What often amazes me is just how long it takes us to heal, but also the fact that we do, always, heal in the end. Make it happen as soon as you can Cynthia, encourage the healing, watch it knitting together the broken pieces of your soul, because you do have to get back to those fun projects!

I really miss throwing myself into all the things that I said, during my working years— Oh, I can't learn that now, but I sure intend to learn that once I retire!

Do it earlier rather than later!

You are so right.

Nearly 4 years ago I met K on an internet dating site. We began a relationship, which seemed to work really well. About three months after that, he began to tell me some of his history. He had come out of prison only the previous year, after losing his business due to a fraud attempt.

Okay, but fraud is a non-violent crime. K would never be violent. That's exactly what I thought. There are a lot of laws in this country and I'm sure that at some point I have committed a felony. But I don't think I ever physically hurt anybody. So I don't think I'm so different from K.

He had over-reached himself and tried to forge some information in order to borrow more money and avoid bankruptcy; then when he was arrested, he skipped bail and was on the run for 18 months. He ended up with a very long prison sentence, partly because he had skipped bail and partly because he seemed to get a hanging judge.

God. What a sad story. What's he like?

Well, he's very kind and generous and we have a marvellous relationship when it's not about money. We can talk about anything, and he wants to resolve things by talking about them (fantastic! Do you remember Terry, and how I could never get him to resolve anything, to talk about anything? I do remember this. Especially the French conversationalist who came to your house and T left you to deal with because T was in a funk. Yes! Funny how you should remember that. I suppose I told it with such venom!

No, G, you didn't tell it with any venom, just related it as an example of how T could be, when he wanted to be, on the periphery. I don't know how you stuck with him. I say this in part because of what this incident illustrates, and it blows my mind. If Dominic did this I would be so startled I would be standing on my head.

I have borrowed heavily on my credit cards and on my brother. I owe tens of thousands. K keeps saying it will all be okay.

No, G, it won't.

Well . . . I think there's a good chance it will end up okay. You may well be right! I just have to make sure I control it a lot better than I have. No more spending any money until K's bringing it in. Lots of it. Maybe it will.

I don't blame you. In the last 100,000 years, human risk-takers passed on their genes more than non-risk-takers, I can't help but think. I think that being a male risk-taker gives you a reproductive edge. Why? Women love it. Dominic is a cowboy. He has been a knight in shining armor to users, who see quick deliveries of software, and the bane of his managers, who always want to have long delivery schedules and plausible deniability. I can see them, red-faced, trying not to shout, "You promised them WHAT??" I can see myself, red-faced, trying not to shout, saying, "You didn't think he needed MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE?!" Yup, that happened. But when Dominic turns this boldness to other things, he shows that it is sometimes amazing what a cowboy can do. And I find this behavior extremely desirable! As in, sexually desirable. Sometimes, socially desirable. Never, financially desirable. Fortunately, Dominic is as conservative about money as he is liberal about a lot of social issues. He's a tightwad. But penny-wise and pound-foolish about minor, nickel-and-dime things. Being a tightwad can, sometimes, bite you in the ass! Like with MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE. Oh dear. But it could have been so much worse. Here's the kicker: The same kind of bad decision will be made again, in the not-to-distant future. That's because, in the main, Dominic is penny-wise and pound-foolish, and over and over again makes decisions based on saving some little amount of money while risking far more, given the randomness that is the nature of the universe. I accept this and love Dominic madly. But I try to stay on top of all the financial decisions made in our family, out of fear of Dominic's attempts to save money. Yes, V had a non-injury accident with a car, on his motorcycle. We owed \$1500.00. He rear-ended (and slid under) the car. I'm surprised that he doesn't have PTSD about getting on that bike now. But there it is. He's got all that fucking testosterone and thinks he's indestructible. Yes, he's another cowboy. Yes, I guess in me it is partly the cowboy-attractiveness, but also the understanding that I've been very cautious all my life – there is a part of me that wants to take part in some of the rest of life, and probably thinks it's possible now that the kids are independent. If this is the case, then I recommend that you utterly go for it!

For a long time, I worried that K was a con man, taking me for all I had. But I figured out that he couldn't be, because he spent so much time encouraging me to take last year off (to go to university) even though I didn't have the money. I read this the same as you do. At the start of the year, he was certain the things he was doing were going to work, and he would have money to support us both within a few months. It didn't happen. But if he had just been in it for the money, he wouldn't have worked so hard to get me to university.

You are so right about this. It is a real relief to be sure that he really is in this relationship for the long term, and he's even willing to cook meals every day for my

whole family for a week skiing! Right, he was cooking for all you guys as a way to con you out of your fortune!

I'm just finishing a 4-month contract as a business analyst, and K is trying to get a website business off the ground (been working on it since September). Here it is: www.goprintsy.com. I went there! I was very impressed! I still have to feed money into the web business, because he needs to buy things like pieces of software to make it work.

Except not any more. I see!

What do I really think? I suppose I think that in the end, he will make a success of something he's trying. I think he's very able, but all the cards are stacked against you when you've been in prison. You'd think the whole society was desperate for you to go back inside.

That is so true, it is so illogical, so counter-productive, so cruel, so absolutely downright silly, I can't even believe it. When will people cotton to the fact that if you make it easy for non-violent people to enter society, you won't have to support them in prison?

The truth is, I'm exhausted with worry. I have to look for another job now because my contract has ended, and I think I'll be really careful this time about how much I feed into his business venture and how much I keep to pay off my debts. How did I get myself into this? Maybe I should have left him way back when he owed me only a few thousand, but then I wouldn't have the relationship I have now.

This is the central question, no? Does having a good relationship make trauma worthwhile? I know the answer, but I know that human happiness dictates otherwise. The answer is, no. The trauma makes the relationship toxic, and the toxicity invades both sex and friendship. Then, bitterness sets in and whole relationship gets viewed as a wasteland.

Well . . . yes and no. It is a truism that no relationship is perfect. Obviously, it's all about deciding what's okay and what isn't, and about what you want to cope with. Frankly, I'm amazed at how marvelously un-bitter, friendly, easy and fun our relationship still is after all it's been through. We're both amazed! But the key thing is that we do both talk about things a lot, and take things apart, and don't let bitterness settle.

G, if you can do that, I congratulate you. And if you want it to work, I believe it will.

But. Human happiness may require a sex life and the experience of being loved, which all of us want and need, unless we're psychopaths. Human happiness

may require that someone be there when we open the door to our homes every night.

I believe that I may have encountered that sentiment in myself: “When things feel positive, we’re absolutely great together”. It was with my second husband, to whom I was married for 10 years. Except for the problems with sex, we were great together. He was one of the best friends I ever had. Even now, when I remember things he said, I realize readily why I fell in love with him. But sex was not passionate between us and there is no remedy for this if you’re only in your twenties and have been married for only two years. It just took ten years for us to realize it. B needed to fantasize that I was his mother, during sex. And though I didn’t know this for a very long time, I felt that sex with him was weird, in some indefinable way. But in every other way he was perfect! Taking any bets on how long a relationship can last where everything is perfect except for the sex? Where there are no children to keep people together? How long can a relationship last where everything is perfect except for the money?

Yes, I have a list of ‘it was perfect except for’ as well. There was M; such a funny (ha ha) man, such a great sense of humor, intelligent, playful, kind, but – and this took a while to see – SO bitter about a whole list of things to do with his life so far that he eventually started taking it all out on me. I remember thinking of him as the perfect coat, but when you try it on you find there’s a huge, irreparable tear in the back that you didn’t notice. And then D. Kind, intelligent, a Quaker, ready to talk about everything, but SO lazy – in the end I thought I would go crazy. But I tell you Cynthia, it is really different with K. Nearly 4 years and things keep getting better.

Do you know how many people wish they could say that? You must be doing something right.

I don’t know. There are no painless alternatives. It’s not like you just haven’t thought hard enough about it, and if you only thought hard enough about it you would come up with a painless alternative. The alternatives are all painful. But they will only be painful when the end comes. That could be tomorrow, or it could be ten years, no? Is it enough to say, “We had some good years (meaning the first five or six, before terror really sets in)”? It might well **BE** good enough. My understanding is that what people interviewed in hospices regret most is the things they **HAVEN’T** done, not the things that they have. You might well be snatching happiness from life while you’re still young, instead of growing old waiting for happiness to find you. Right. That’s my story. I have no money. I’m terrified of bankrupting my brother as well as myself.

G you can’t risk bankrupting your brother. For this reason alone, you shouldn’t give K any more money. Once D is involved, your happiness is secondary to your duty to make him whole.

Actually, I didn't mean that. I'm not really bankrupting D.

Well that's all to the good.

I'm exhausted. I think that this state of exhaustion precedes a state of apathy, which is worse. But once you're in a state of apathy, you won't be able to be in love with K any more. Your apathy will prevent that.

I'm in a relationship which is great in every other way. But the money situation will slowly poison the good parts of your relationship.

It will if we don't fix it.

Steady here, G. You want to help out, we're sending our 3 kids through college while they live at home, I know what it's like, but I sense that you feel that you have betrayed C by not being able to give her money. Yes! That is not the case. Ah. Not being able to give money to someone because of one's own needs is not a betrayal. It may be a damned nuisance, but it is not a betrayal.

Feels like a betrayal, it really does. I'm sure you're right. But it still feels like I'm doing something wrong! Nevertheless, the relationship seems to be going well, and the two of them seem to be set for the long-term.

This is great!

F's fiancé looks really nice. Do you like him?

He IS really nice and I like him a lot. He is very laid back, I have never heard him have an argument with anyone, including F, yet he has his own set of standards that he is not readily budged from. Have they a date set for the wedding? Whenever they're out of school? Though as far as I'm concerned, they could get married right now and continue to live here. But, once they're married, they would perhaps more keenly feel the absence of having a place of their own. I think that they want to get married when they can afford to rent a place of their own. That is so good. I'm so glad she's found someone who can handle her, and see through her problems, and really love her. It is pretty important to have a place of your own when you're just starting out in a relationship, so let's hope they can afford it before too long. Hope V gets reconnected with himself. I suppose he's at that age. Disconnects and re-connects happen a lot when you're only about 20.

You said that you thought that maybe, because you talked so much, I didn't want to communicate any more. Not true! It's just that things have been so difficult I haven't known where to start.

Damn, I know what you mean, this situation is unbearably demanding. And complicated. G, your partner has a lot of knowledge of how business works

(something I know nothing about), he's smart and he sounds completely lovable. A man who would cook for me? With expertise? Pretty marvelous. And it is so providential that he happened along to nudge you and nudge you into going to school and getting a marvelous degree. I don't think he has any nefarious motives, at all. I think he honestly loves you and honestly believes that he can make a go of it in business. And maybe he can! But the problem I see is: he's got bad judgment.

Well, I'm not sure how true that is. Obviously, the original crime, along with the terrible decision to run away, demonstrated awful judgement, but I'm not sure it's typical. Since that event, I've taken part in a lot of his decisions alongside him and I'm not at all sure that he could have done much about most of what happened. Everyone just piled on top when he came out of prison, and the problem is, as soon as you have a criminal record, you get no slack from the legal world at all. This is true and this is awful. I think that K has a lot of grit to try to jump through the million hoops that he must have to jump through just because he has this fraud on his record. For instance, if a large company wants to sue you, they can get all your assets frozen just by saying that they 'believe' you owe them something. Then you find that you really DO start owing people money, because you can't get to any of your money. This can go on for months, until you pay a lawyer to get the hold revoked. He found this kept happening, because the deeper you get in the hole, the harder it is to get out again.

I certainly believe this! During the custody battle with K it seemed that all our money went to lawyers.

With Dominic I can ask him to right now, please, write out a check for motorcycle insurance. I don't know if that is going to work with K's bad judgment, because he is the one with the expertise in business. You don't have that, neither do I, so you can't ride shotgun on his decisions. You just have to trust him.

I think I can trust what I need to trust. I can put by enough money to keep us, and keep my pensions to myself, and he can get on with running his business as he chooses. The house will stay in my name, and so will the money that I would have used in retirement anyway. I'll just let him get on with his business. And he was extremely successful for many years – I don't see why he couldn't be again.

I think that you make irrefutable sense. Four years together and things are as good as ever? Yes, I would nab him.

And trusting a person who has bad judgment leads to bitterness against them, eventually, I think. Because despite their significant expertise and energy, their bad judgment will sabotage their efforts. This is what I see in K, not any kind of un-cherishing behavior, he's a good man—just doesn't make good decisions. Well, somebody must marry people who are bad decision makers and live happily with them. Maybe it's only when one needs to financially depend on them that things get rocky, and some people can just go ahead and support a

bad-judgment maker. Also, I have to add, who hasn't made some really BAD judgments. I have. And they have affected my whole life.

So, G, I feel for you, I worry about you, I feel so helpless when I hear that you worry at night about money and the lack of it. The only thing I can say is this: you always have yourself, your cooking-hot brain, and me for a friend, ☺ ☺ ☺ if that helps. Whatever you decide, I want you to wring whatever happiness out of your decision that you can. Twist! And hopefully, be happy.

Also, it sometimes happens that when I get one of your Christmas letters it doesn't feel like it's really to me (because it goes to all your friends), so I don't get round to answering it personally. But the note I got in the card (just received it yesterday) was definitely to me :) and that made me feel good. So glad we're in touch again, and that I've told you everything. Let's stay in touch! Let's stay in touch!

I'm so glad you're still so happy with Dominic. I know you've had a really chequered love-life, and that's both bad and good – bad because it probably means you've been through so much pain and anguish, but good because you've tried so much and done so many different things, emotionally and in other ways. There's no replacement for that. It's great that you've had lots of good years with Dominic – hope you have many more.

Thank you, G. As you can probably tell, I can't be married to a man for 25 years without giving up on certain things. You have to choose your battles. Dominic drives me crazy, sometimes, but he is indeed the love of my life. But I had to get married four times to find him!

Much love, Love Always, Cynthia xoxoxo

G xxx