

**"love"**

A Short Story

Written by

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“love”

I've known her a long time. We've lived next to each other as long as I can remember. For a long time, I didn't notice her much -- no more than I noticed anyone else around me, like that boy from 12B who always used to put his hands where they shouldn't have been. I didn't see anything special about her -- or at least I didn't see then what an amazing person she was. I was too busy trying to fit in with the cool smoking kids, hoping to get invited to all the "wrong" parties. Too busy trying to be the best at everything, get a car, trying to win the war with my parents.

I spent my twenties, as they say, looking for myself without much success. I saw her once in a while; she was as they say looking for her self, too. We reconnected again the month I came out. It was the most liberating, yet terrifying time of my life. And without me even asking, she was there for me. She was there when I cried over a blind date who was just a little too butch, and when I partied and got my first lap dance. We became good friends. I started seeing the part of her I would end up falling in love with.

But it all really started the day my first girlfriend broke up with me. I was devastated -- I felt my life had ended. I called her, seeking comfort. Being with her revived me. And for the next year, we spent as much time together as we possibly could.

We made a list of all the things we liked doing together, like watching "Ellen," and eating the same dish at the same restaurant every weekend. It was a long list. One very warm night, when neither of us could fall asleep, we stayed up all night talking, crying, and watching reruns of "The X Files" in the dark. We made a list of all the things we didn't like doing together, like going to Target. It was a short list. That night, I really saw her for who she was, and in the morning, I knew I felt differently about her.

But having feelings toward my best friend made me feel more scared than happy. I tortured myself thinking about it: "What do I do now? Do I tell her? Do I act differently? What if she doesn't like me back? What do I do if she doesn't like me back?"

I'll wait. I have to wait. Maybe she'll say something. I will wait and study her. I'll wait for a sign -- a sign that she likes me, too. And then I will tell her how I feel. Yes, I will wait."

Three months later, she got a girlfriend. Yeah, I know. It's a good thing I waited. I won't lie -- it was hard. Very hard. I tried to spend time with her, she tried to spend time with me, but you know how it is. Then "Ellen" got cancelled. I just kept to myself. And after a while, I got a girlfriend, too, and watched us as we drifted apart.

Her breakup was as big a surprise to me as it was to her. She was hurt and I was there with open arms, happy to have her back. Happy to be wanted by her, even if only as a shoulder to cry on. I broke up with my girlfriend.

Eventually she got better, and we were back to our old selves. "Ellen" reruns started on Lifetime and we were spending time as if the world was made just for us. But I knew. I knew I couldn't go on like that for much longer -- that every happy moment with her was also a sad one, filled with longing. But how could I confess my feelings to my best friend, to the one who had seen me through almost everything -- except this? The stakes were high; it was all or nothing. I wanted to throw up.

It happened on rainy afternoon. We were sitting on my couch watching the rain fall. She turned to me and told me how lonely she felt and how rainy days brought out her loneliness even more. I took a deep breath and gathered all the courage I'd ever had. I told her there was something I needed to tell her. She smiled and said that I could tell her anything.

I knew there was no turning back, so I told her. I told her about my feelings for her, and how I had wanted to tell her for so long, but couldn't because it felt so weird and scary. When I finished, I studied her face, looking for any sign of what would happen next.

She sat quietly for a few moments, then looked up into my eyes. She said she was surprised. She had felt something, but wasn't sure what it was. She said she was glad I said all those things, and that she would not have had the courage that I had. She then hugged me and told me that she would love to go out with me, just the two of us. She said she felt like this was the beginning of something really good, and that she looked forward to taking this new journey with me.

The rain stopped. As I sat on my couch, running through my head the earlier conversation I'd had with myself, I realized that I'd done it. I had finally done it. I had finally told myself about all the feelings I had, about all the love I had for myself. All those years of depression -- of feeling like I wasn't good enough to be loved, or attractive enough to be desired. All those bad relationships. All the loneliness and pain. I had finally had the courage to tell myself how much I loved myself. How wonderful and amazing I was. How great and interesting I was. How I would never be alone because I would always have myself. I had finally done it. It had been terrifying, but I'd done it.

I looked at myself in the mirror -- and I was happy.