

The Only Boy Who Could Ever Reach Me

A wonderful thing happened when I decided to walk the Eightfold Path. Realizing that I am the cause of my own suffering led me to a Sufi exploration in which I “did not surrender my loneliness so quickly;” I let it season me, until I needed God.

I met a man online with a hold on me that no one has ever had before, not even Super Grover. That’s because Super Grover isn’t the yellow string partner that can *finish the title*, but Aaron is. I told him that I didn’t believe my emotional abuse was real until I was an adult, that people talked shit about us behind our backs but no one bothered to fire her. He gets it. Having someone in my life who can understand the way my life has gone since I was an infant is the thing I needed the most to complete my journey home. I’m not an outsider anymore. I’m so counterculture that I’ve become the one that everyone trusts with their dirty little secrets, because when they come to me, they’re not going to be judged. I’m going to judge the situation, but not them personally. I am valued for my no bullshit approach in the neurodivergent community and hated in the neurotypical community because my conversation style is blunt and literal, which is taken as aggressive and demanding. Autism sucks, because neurodivergence is not knowing what’s not being said.

Therefore, other neurodivergent people flock to me because I have heuristics on behavior, and I can social mask a pastor. Therefore, they’re getting the social cues they desperately need to understand both me and others. This would not be possible had I not been a preacher’s kid, because I wouldn’t have studied how to seem neurotypical so long. I could have been more unmasked had I not been an incidental public figure. 1600 people knew me week to week. Maybe two of them were actually friends with me, if that gives you any indication as to how popular blunt and direct is on any given day.

I had to learn to soften my language, and I did to such a degree that I never took up any room anywhere. Getting by was getting invisible while I struggled with deep, deep emotional wounds alone because my parents *literally* couldn't understand me.

Supergrover got me back to all the way unmasked because she's as blunt and direct as I am. But I was reading her as neurotypical and getting butt hurt about everything because I couldn't tell over the internet that she was neurodivergent until ironically I put all the puzzle pieces together. Everything that I was taking offense to was her own lack of being able to pick up social cues. She's never failed me, not once, and I couldn't see it. That's because she wasn't picking up my social cues of "be more affectionate so I don't think you hate me all the time," and I was missing the social cue of "I don't hate you ALL the time." We have the standard relationship contract in the Lanagan relationship system. We are only contractually obligated to like each other on birthdays, holidays, and alternate Thursdays.

This makes me laugh because the first time she edited me, I asked her when a good time would be to e-mail her my document. When she said, "I can take a look starting Thursday late," I thought, "Oh, thank God." Never has glancing at my calendar meant so much. It makes me cry that I'm so emotionally starved with her and she's so rich..... but can't feel it for one reason or another. It's a crapshoot every day because she's looking for love in all the wrong places.

She thinks I try to get attention by trying to meet mutual friends to get closer to her.

I try to plagiarize every inert thing she's ever sent me so that she knows she's loved and heard to get closer to her.

That's very different.

I have never been more touched in my life and felt we reached common ground silently when I said I hadn't seen her in a while and could she just turn her camera around and snap. It doesn't have to be fancy; I just want to update my mental image.

And then I cried because for the very first time, she knew she was looking at me. It was intimate, unsure of how to pose for someone platonically, I suppose. Her inner monologue in the photo seems to be running thusly: "I know she loves me so goddamn much and I think I feel that way about her? Unclear." Her smile is shy and unsure, as if trying to please me in some way and not taking in there is nothing she could do that wouldn't please me.

Her eyes are deep and dark in a copy because I took the color out of the photo and raised the shadow for drama. I keep both as keepsakes, because the original and the stark black & white are how I want her to remain in my mind. In a way, she's my legacy, and I am hers. We've created something that will last longer than us. We've gone through the dark and scary, yet in the original she's wearing soft and warm clothes, just an angel. But that's not the only side of her I like.

It put me on the ground for a second because it was so profoundly moving. You'd just have to know how far we've come and how long we've worked with each other to maintain our pen pal relationship, but it's not currently working; I don't know whether it will ever be resurrected. I have done enough of both in trying to please her and trying to call her out to lance the infection. She's warmed to me twice in 11 years, completely unburdening herself in the most beautiful ways, the ones that make me want to dive deep into her and never resurface. It has nothing to do with romance. My brain doesn't work the same way when we don't talk.

I remember telling her years ago that if I lost her, I wouldn't know who I was anymore, and this has proved to be true every time we've tried to connect and walked away when it got too intense. It will always be too intense.

“Well, gentlemen, if you’ve ever had a bale of hay dumped on you, you know how I feel.” -Truman after FDR died and the struggle is real. It is also worth it and will always be worth it if she comes my way. But my history with her is that if you fuck up once, you don’t get another chance..... until she’s had long enough to forget about whatever she’s mad at and just reach out *a propos* of nothing. This is how we do it in the South.

I guess.

I think she also doesn’t realize that her story would be more complete and she would hate my writing less if she was in on the joke. She’s only seeing how I feel reflected back to her without seeing what I think of her feelings because she won’t give them. And if she said “don’t write about this on your blog, just keep it between us, I would.” She never has, and I debated telling our story for years because of it. I was always afraid of consequences bigger than me, and for now, I don’t have to worry about them ever again. I do not take this relationship lightly. I’m all in. I will absolutely rip her husband limb from limb if he ever hurts her and not only that, I have a bigger motherfucker than she does (Aaron will smile when he reads this). I’m not ever saying I would start a fight, but I am not above showing up in a covered wagon to drag Ruth back to where she fuckin’ belongs if the need arises.

I’ve been Ruth my whole life through social masking. Now I’m Idgie.

Towanda, motherfuckers.

What you get from being comfortable with yourself is that everyone can relax around you. Quite frankly, I have an alpha dog personality because I’m an omega. A true alpha would never say “serve me,” but “how can I help?” I identify with Vladimir Zelenskyy because he didn’t start out by saying “I want to run Ukraine.” He created a television show that was so realistic people couldn’t help but NOT make him president.

And, oh my fuck. I just made a connection I'm betting even the great and powerful Oz wouldn't see coming.

He watched Jed Bartlett and realized he could win if he created The West Wing in Ukrainian based on polls that said Martin Sheen could be president if he wanted. Stockard Channing made me cackle when she said, "who would want *Marty* as president?" Vladimir Zelenskyy realized A LOT OF PEOPLE did... (I am spitballing, but this is headcanon given his age).

However, he differs from Aaron Sorkin in that he's got just as wild and wacky neurodivergent comedy, but the drama is toned down. It is clearly a sitcom meant to convey more humor than ire, but I promise you it still launched a war.

You don't laugh at Putin on television. He's the only one who dared, and he lost. That's because even if you win a war, you lose through the process of having to go through war at all. I'm not saying he shouldn't have done it. It was a brilliant political strategy and the whole world is rallying around Ukraine. I am just saying that in this case, it happened therefore because of it. It's a shame something like that could never happen in the United States because neither one of our candidates would ever start a war because someone embarrassed them on television (if you believe this, I have some oceanfront property in Arizona with your name on it. Did you know that if you say gullible very slowly it sounds like "oranges?"). I know all of this through talking to people.... And listening closely, like when Hillary Clinton told all y'all Putin was a dirty motherfucker in not quite so many words and you didn't listen. You traded a viable candidate for someone who cozied up to a leader that would have no problem putting you feet first into a crematorium if you were caught spying against Russia, because WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK MURDERED OUR ASSETS? Probably personally, I'm guessing. Ten of them in one summer due to Aldrich Ames and Donald Trump is in a dead heat with Kamala Harris. Explain it to me like I'm five. How do you not know

that this will end in a major fucking disaster if Harris doesn't win? So many people in the US need to get it together, because unless every single poll is wrong, there are a lot of people in this country who think there are two sides to the story still.

YOUR CANDIDATE IS A FELON AND A RAPIST. IF YOU VOTE FOR HIM, YOU ARE SAYING THAT TREASON, TAX FRAUD, AND RAPE ARE OKAY.

Once more for the people in the back:

YOUR CANDIDATE IS A FELON AND A RAPIST. IF YOU VOTE FOR HIM, YOU ARE SAYING THAT TREASON, TAX FRAUD, AND RAPE ARE OKAY.

But at least we're the greatest country in the world. I make it my business to know what's going on globally because what's true of millions of people is also true of two. We only improve ourselves through sharing our stories, and I've heard a ton.

I like talking to people. It doesn't matter if they've done sex work or they lay brick for a living. It doesn't matter whether they're pilots or dance coaches. Everyone has a story, and most people don't think theirs are interesting. Aaron and I know better, because we've been discussing it. People like us are so incredibly rare that I have decided that I'm not jumping into anything like a crazy person. I just really like him and want to see where it goes. We're long distance, so we have time to really get to know each other before we meet on the ground. My friends are going to be overjoyed that their text notifications will go down because I've found a partner who likes to use text as much as I do and doesn't care if I ping him six times in a row because he's neurodivergent, too.

It doesn't matter whether we connect on a romantic level or not. We might, we might not. It's just not a question that can be answered on a timeline yet. It's a question that is *waiting* to be answered. What I know is that I already have two models for how to have successful platonic partnerships, so I'm not threatened to test the waters with

Aaron because we're emotionally available enough to vacillate between friends and lovers; a relationship is like pastoring a church. Only 10% of your work week is preparing what to say on Sunday morning. All your other waking hours are being the person who bears silent witness to both elation and devastation. Often, these moments of gut-wrenching psychosomatic pain and rushes of dopamine happen within hours. What is true between two people is true among almost all of us.

Every day of my life:

- Someone is born.
- Someone dies.
- Someone has violence perpetuated against them.
- Someone perpetuates violence against someone else.
- Someone is confused about where their part begins and the other person's ends.

Everyone comforts the victims, and that is not wrong. I am just [Sister Helen Prejean](#) DEDICATED not to judging my friends or my parishioners.

Aaron and I are the people that take in that kind of pain, day in and day out, because we both have that confessional vibe. It happens when your parishioners reach into the thousands, because you don't have an MDiv and people don't care. Your peers look at you differently when you're the preacher's kid, as if you have some divine power they don't. This is not because of who preacher's kids are as people. Other parents give their kids that impression, and it's all emotional trauma all the time. *Who do you think pastors to children?* Are they more likely to go to adults, or a peer who is assumed safe and is ABSOLUTELY NOT OKAY?

Life didn't get better until I realized that I was built to be the weirdo that people trying to uphold Christian values would turn to when they needed help, because I admit who I am up front. If you don't like it, you don't have to like it. As it turns out, when people are genuinely fucked up, they don't mind talking about it. People who are consumed with shame and guilt could never imagine being comfortable. "Life is pain, princess," etc. As you build character, life is less painful because mistakes give you the wisdom to stop punching yourself in the face..... **Repeatedly.**

I especially have the "confessional vibe" with children. Hands down, my heart has been broken by children on the Metro more times than I've ever been hurt by an adult's problems. As I was explaining to Katya, we do not want to give off the vibe that we are uninterested in other people's stories. It is what to do with them once we know them. When I receive a disturbing e-mail, I ritually wipe my hands, getting rid of the negative energy and improving my mood with movement. It is never negativity toward a person, it is that when my friends are hurt, I hurt. For instance, meeting Jonna Mendez was a big deal in retrospect, because it's harder to read "The Moscow Rules" and "In True Face" when you know the author.

Clinical separation is a skill that is handy when you're talking to parishioners, clients, patients, e.g. and murder on anyone trying to get close to you because what you're projecting is "you have the ability to hurt me, so I'm listening carefully without reacting so that I understand the situation entirely." This comes across when the person is a stranger to you. It becomes your natural inclination, and you become "unapproachable," "rude," and "aggressive" to your friends. That's because over time you learn that if you take on everyone else's problems, you'll never have time for your own. Some people are particularly seduced by it, like therapists and social workers. The healthy way to do it is to heal all your trauma so that you can walk other people through

theirs. All too often people become therapists so that they can social mask “perfect” and avoid anything that’s bothering them on a deep and spiritual level.

Aaron and I don’t do that. We’re the ones willing to sit and talk about things like relationships before they begin. He knows I’m dating Zac, but not serious about him, and that I’m also serious about a romance novelist I met a few months ago. Again, not jumping into anything crazy with either one of them. Just doing visioning and values with myself over the kind of life I want. I know Bryn and Super Grover are my first priorities, because they’re the ones with whom I have the most history. That being said, neither one of them are my romantic partners. They’re my emotional support.

Katya made me cry today because I was talking about how it wasn’t fair of me to be monogamous anymore and thinking about someone else all the time. That it’s been years and years since I had any romantic feelings for Super Grover at all, but that didn’t mean my feelings of care and protection went with them. She commended me for explaining poly so beautifully. I said, “Thank you. I’ve spent a long time researching it because I’ve been in love with Super Grover for longer than I can remember. I must deal with it, and my way of dealing with it is being there for her when her romantic relationships fail, too (*not that they will. I meant in addition to Bryn*). It’s not unrequited love. She appreciates the sentiment, just doesn’t want to follow through. It’s no less a blessing she’s in my life, but I cannot have another relationship without calling myself poly because I’m so attached to her that I’ll love her like that my whole life. It’s not fair to be monogamous and thinking about someone else all the time. I don’t constantly think about her romantically, just worry for her welfare and things like that. It’s been 11 years since I had those feelings, but my feelings of protection and care haven’t gone away at all. I have a feeling she was offended when I said she had accidentally gained a husband and a gentleman jack, but I assure you that I meant it in the best of ways. Like, I have your back when your husband doesn’t. Relationships end

sometimes. I'm not rooting for it, but if it happens, Bryn and I will save you some couch. I doubt she would ever take me up on it because she's got her own support system. I'm not here to intrude, just to be supportive.

A wonderful thing *also* happened when we met. When she rejected me, I knew it was my fault. I set out on a mission to embrace my childhood trauma so that I could learn who I was. I became relentlessly driven into self-discovery, which is what attracted her to me in the first place. She said, and I quote, "looking inside yourself isn't for sissies." That's because the reason she rejected me was only partly based on her sexual orientation. The bottom line is that even if the stars had aligned in all the right ways, we would have thought about creative ways to murder each other and collect the insurance to cope with the daily grind of emotional dysregulation. Our relationship hasn't gone up and down or anything (the eyeroll is implied, and she will share it).

To be clear, this is my favorite part of being in a relationship with her. We are complete yin and yang, logical and emotional but never at the same time. Just as much of a basket of crazy as Jon & Heather Armstrong were or Jenny & Victor Lawson *still are*. We fight like cats and dogs but can never seem to separate because we are genuinely interested in each other- not as romantic partners, but we have each other's backs. My favorite e-mail from her in the last five years has been, "my reaction was INDEED 'let me get my purse, that motherfucker.'" It felt good to know that my Mama Wolverine's eyes still glow in the night when I'm in trouble.

The first person I had to tell about all of them was Katya, because she lives in Helsinki and we don't have mutual friends. Also, she isn't poly or bicurious, already knows about Zac, and calls me on my bullshit *well*. I have opened her mind to poly just by explaining what it is, not to persuade her toward anything; I was only trying to point out that poly is a better fit for a lot of neurodivergent people because of the way their

attention span works. That I can be interested in multiple people because my feelings about one shut off with the other to be truly present.

I told Katya what it was like to have loved and lost Super Grover, and she reassured me she would come back. I said, “I know. I haven’t given up. We are too much a part of each other’s wild and crazy brains.” And it is true. I do not know what she is doing or where she is, but I send her hugs and cheek kisses every chance I get, knowing they’ll metaphysically land one day. It works to tell myself that I’m hugging her, because in the anxious/avoidant connection, I’m the anxious part. It’s helpful to know that it’s just my nature. I have to handle my own anxiety.

I’ve become more sure of myself in starting Lanagan Media Group, and we’re starting to gel as a team. That being said, as soon as I started The Sinners’ Table, I told Aaron I wanted to see where our relationship went. That’s because I could not imagine birthing a vision like this with someone and not being a little in love with them. I don’t know Aaron well enough to know whether I’m in love with him or not. But I know who I am. My brain turned on when Janie, the Canadian Editor said, “I found out I have assigned seating at The Sinners’ Table.” I couldn’t envision a future in which it was impossible that I would become attracted to him if we were working together that closely.

I decided to stop narrowing the future down and start building it up. Super Grover was with me through all the hard years, so I hope that one day she’ll come back and say that she was too quick to anger as well. If she doesn’t, all I can do is thank her for providing the now she started giving me 11 years ago.

And honestly, the story doesn’t end here, either. I’m also dating a romance novelist who is so talented I’m glad I met her before I read any of her books. My self-esteem would have been too low to approach her.

It took me days to write this entry, because I started out with the idea that “the only boy that could ever reach me... was the son of a preacher man.” And then my heart got bigger. I realized through my evolution into enby, the preacher’s son who’d done the most to rescue me was.....

Me.