



The mark of true love

Cultural differences mean little if kindness is at the heart of a relationship

SHAKESPEARE said, "The course of true love never did run smooth". I have a suspicion that he may have based his conclusion on the premise of finding love on foreign territories.

I am sure others had a far wilder dating life than I did when I lived in Malaysia.

Back home, I lived safely in the sheltered confines of my family, abiding to the routine of sleep-eat-study until my late teens.

There were boys, too, but I never dated. When I plunged into relationships, it was always with good boys. They not only led me to think good thoughts, respected and understood my vision, but also held my handbag, my umbrella, my door and put food on my plate during social situations.

Somehow deep down, I always knew there was more. There was a sense of certainty to these relationships which felt untested, as if they would crumble if pressure was applied.

When I moved to England, I started dating. After all, isn't that what people do before they settle down?

There I learned things that no

one had prepared me for, where no clues ever surfaced from novels or romantic comedies.

Without going deeply into the spectrum of personalities I was acquainted with, there are a few common characteristics I discovered from dating British and European men.

For instance, there is no chance of him holding your handbag. It's not a good look. And he may forget to shelter you from the rain when he is holding your umbrella. But he may hold your door (and so will everyone else in the country).

The only one deboning the chicken is yourself. Shared finances are split equally, 50:50. If you offer to pay when you're eating out, don't be surprised when he says "yes". He will want a lot of "me time", for playing computer games, sports, hanging out with the boys.

A lot of the dating happening in London revolves around people who play games with one another. This means that even if you fancy the pants off someone, you're supposed to pretend that you aren't all that keen on them. This is to stop them from running a mile once you

declare your undying love for them.

Not that any of these are truly evil things, they are just cultural differences arising from societal perceptions. During those moments, I would find myself reminiscing about my ever-so-gentlemanly ex-Asian boyfriends.

It's not that Western men aren't chivalrous; they are just firm believers in equal rights. In return, they will value your opinion, and give you the uncensored, honest truth, even if you don't want to hear it.

And that, I realised, was what was missing before. In order to grow, the soul needs to understand the mistakes which have been made and evolve.

For every man who believed that the best way to keep a woman keen is by being mean to them, there is another who was raised in conventional love, one who believes in true love and kindness.

The latter is the sort of person my husband is to me. With him, it was an easy friendship. An easy shared household, as we were flatmates. He made friends with my friends. But, when the time came to take

things to the next level and start a relationship, the path that followed was riddled by my traditional values and desires.

And yet, we survived all the challenges. When he went down on one knee and presented me with two rings, one of which was the engagement ring and the other, simply a bonus ring — a blue ladybird soldered on a gold-coloured ring, I knew based on how much I laughed when I saw the bonus ring (he had snuck back to buy it when we saw it in a shop) that I would say "Yes."

Last week, I got married to this strong, yet sensitive boy. This boy who once put me on his back for a piggyback ride in the rain, and who took the shampoo out so we could wash our hair under the wide open sky.

This boy who not only managed to stay sane but also helped me through my mentally deranged PhD days. This boy who reflects the truth that I need to know when my own reasoning fails me. And this boy who, despite our cultural differences, believes in true love and kindness.

I choose kindness every time.

■ Samantha Hiew was born and raised as a typical Malaysian Chinese girl, but it all changed when she received a prestigious scholarship that saw her off on a solitary journey to the UK. A decade later, she reflects on the time in between, peppered by detours, inspirations and a renewed understanding of her homeland. Today, she continues to be a protégé to no one but Life, and writes from a place of simplicity and truth with the aim of throwing a light for her readers. Follow her stories on <http://samanthahiew.com/>

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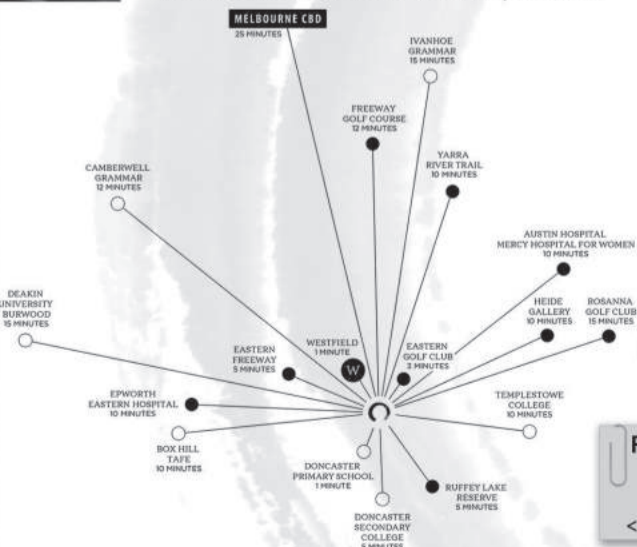


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