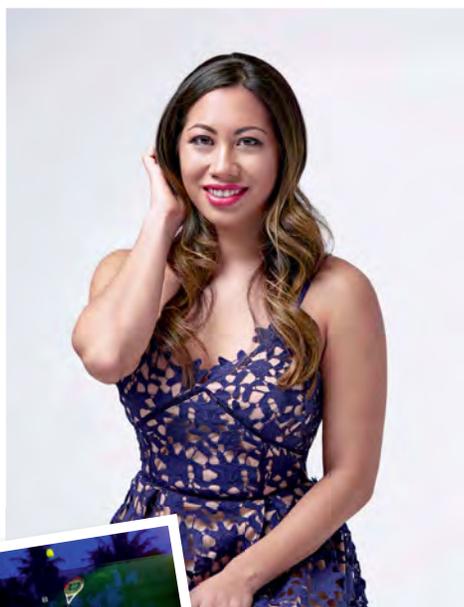


Love, Actually



Call me cynical, but sometimes, I'd really like to find the person who came up with the concept of "Happily Ever After" and give them a piece of my mind. It's not that I'm anti-romance—not in the slightest, actually. It's just that I do believe this idea is what is, in large part, responsible for so much heartache, so many dashed dreams, and the kind of unrealistic expectations that can result in crushing disappointment. I know, that sounds a little harsh, but hear me out: Everyone has a different definition of what romance is. To some, it's the fairytale, with expensive gifts and a luxury candlelit dinner for two while musicians serenade you and private waitstaff tend to your every need. And if that's what you and your beloved would enjoy together, then by all means go for it. But there has to be a real foundation of love there first for it to last, and those are not always the kinds of things that win someone over. In the movies, the standard formula goes a little like this: Guy meets girl, they keep running into each other, wind up

falling for each other, then panic about that, and thus fall out. They then make up after a grand gesture or epic declaration (or both) and walk into the sunset hand-in-hand forever. It's a nice idea in theory—and while I am aware that this actually *does* happen to some people in real life (I actually know some!), it is a rarity, and this is not standard reality. Especially after, in the movies, they've hardly spent time getting to know each other first—and it tends to be when the characters are going through some kind of existential crisis. In real life, it is actually not the Big Things that mean the most, but rather, the little everyday acts that show how much we truly care. It's the person

who wakes up ten minutes earlier every morning so they can make their partner a cup of coffee before they go to work. Or when someone does the dishes or laundry without being asked even when it's not their turn, simply because they know their loved one is tired from a long week at work, and never insists on gratitude or holds it over their head in a later argument. And it's not just in romantic relationships: I have a weird phobia of sitting with my back towards the busier side of a room, and it always warms my heart when my friends give me the seat facing the side I prefer without a second thought. The little, thoughtful things are what show that we do not judge, that we accept each other as we are, and that we pay attention to all of our little quirks regardless of how odd they may seem, because it's what makes someone special. Those are the people who will grow old with us. The truth is that we as people constantly evolve throughout the different chapters of our life, and the "happily ever after" can only occur only if it's with someone who understands that that means growing *with* you. And in order to have someone accept you as you are, you need to accept yourself first. That's what people mean when they say that in order to love someone else, you have to learn to love yourself first. After all, until you know who you truly are—and you are comfortable with, even proud of that—then how can you know what it is you really want, how to make sure you don't settle for less, and how to genuinely allow someone else to make you happy too? We've packed this issue with ways to help you figure that out. Have an awesome month—see you in March!



Much like in tennis, the start of a romance game is always love-love when both sides have no score to settle yet...

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TIME FOR A CHANGE

IF YOU HAVE...

15 SECONDS

Have a date tonight? Here's your excuse to have some chocolate and coffee! Both are known aphrodisiacs. Or just invite them round for dinner and whip up one of these recipes. "Foods To Get You In The Mood," p.57

5 MINUTES

Spend a few extra minutes in the shower by having a stretch: The warmth will allow your muscles to relax and you can go deeper, releasing more tension. "Discuss: Fitness," p.14

15 MINUTES

Whiz through this speed upper-body-focused workout that takes just a quarter of an hour and only requires a set of dumbbells and your own body weight. "Arm School," p.50

30 MINUTES

Having dinner at home? Sit at the dining table and don't turn on the TV. You'll take more pleasure in your food, and you can watch *House of Cards* after. "Food: A Love/Hate Story," p.62

60 MINUTES

Take a little time for you—and by alone time, we mean legit alone time without any social media. Take a bath, read a book, go for a walk, whatever it is it'll help you feel better after. "Me, Myself and I," p.75

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