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Summer 2020

Love Like a Magnet

Candice looked up at me through her green bangs inquisitively. I could tell she was extremely amused that I had chosen her to interview. She loves to talk.

I work with Candice Bales at a burger and craft beer restaurant called Rodeo Goat in Plano. She has dark brown eyes and a pixie-like facial features. Her nose curves up at the end of her face, making her appear judgmental, although that statement is far off. She only spreads gossip without judgment. You can't work in a restaurant without knowing everyone's business. It's like a sorority.

I've known Candice for a little over a year now, and although we didn't keep in touch when I went off to school in the fall, we remain very fond of each other. Candice's first name is Lisa, and due to our tendency to dance at random throughout the restaurant and our ease at talking to the guests as if they are old friends, I am known as Lil Lisa around the Goat. Everyone loves Candice. She's our gem.

When I started recording, she laughed and said that she used to record her friends while they were just hanging out in college, like a podcast. "On tape recorders, of course, since it was the nineties." This was the first of many "I'm so old" jokes. Candice has a very particular way of living her life. She doesn't really take shit from anyone. She is very matter of fact. Disorder in her life has caused her to develop a strange, cool, calm demeanor. She is perceptive. It shines through when she describes the world around her.

"I have a whole theory about relationships," Candice said. "You keep getting with people just because you find compatibility with them. And sometimes you're just okay with them, and that's ok too, if that's the love you want to find. People have to try compatible love to see if it works for them or not. And it does if you're seeking only comfort.

"But then there's love that pulls you in like a magnet. You can feel each other's energy when you finally get to them. You can't do that with just anyone. You don't have to try; you love each other so fucking much that all you wanna do is love them."

Candice has always been waiting to fall in love. She told me about her first crushes in school, all the way to college. She showed me pictures and love letters and liked to consider herself to be creepy with respect to how many little tokens she has kept from these men over the years, but I thought it was sweet.

She told me about the time she had a dream that her and her high school crush Jeremy were making out in the back of her friend's car and then the very next night it came true. Each story showed just how much each man was different. Each love or almost love affected her in a different way. It is a strange contrast to perceive someone who is simultaneously fiercely independent and claims to not get along with people and yet also so deeply yearns for human connection.

She kept making jabs at her looks, which irritated me to no end as she is a very beautiful woman. However, her take on this was... different. She said, "I have a very high opinion of myself as a person, just a very low opinion of myself physically, so I think that its best that I think I'm so unattractive because then I would be so fucking arrogant. I wouldn't even be funny. I'd just be a cocksucker. A dick to everybody!"

Candice is such a grounded person to everyone around her, but her complicated life illustrates what she had to get through to get here.

Candice was born in Abilene, Texas. “My sister Jennifer’s entire life, my father was convinced that she wasn’t his. But she was. Still. We had to get blood tests when we were in high school, and even when they came back confirming their relation, he would convince himself otherwise. He just kind of pouted about it all the time.”

Her parents got divorced in 2006. “This was great news for me,” she said. “We hated him. He beat the shit out of us when we were young and there just wasn’t a lot of love there. Then Mom moved in with me. I kept on telling her no, but it happened anyway because she said yes,” she said with a chuckle.

Years later, Candice realized her father might be schizophrenic when out of the blue contacted her and her sister and presented them with information about her sister’s “real” parents and how their mother cheated on him with 20 men, whom he had written out as a list. Candice’s relationship with her mother hasn’t been particularly easy either. Her mother relies on her to this day to support her and her paranoia, checking the phone bills, looking for phone numbers she doesn’t recognize, and confronting Candice about whether she is colluding with strangers and plotting against her. Candice is surrounded by chaos and remains grounded.

“I was 20 when I met my husband. He was 15. Don’t be creepy--we were friends. His name was Richie Gould, and he came to my snow cone shop every summer and would always hang around. I thought he was beautiful. Year after year he would come back. But then, I moved away, went to college. And he moved to Indiana. Years went by and he eventually married. We lost touch.”

Some time after that, Candice made a MySpace page that didn’t include her face or name in it, and yet one day she received a friend request from none other than Richie Gould.

“My profile picture was just two Converse shoes. And yet I get a message asking if this is Candice. I was like, ‘how the fuck does he know this?’ He went on to explain that he had just gotten a divorce. He was 26, I was 31. It was exactly ten years from when we met that he came back into my life.”

They would just talk on the phone and text a lot. He didn’t have a car, but he told her one day that he would be in town. “God, I was so good looking back then. He was being shy all night, so I finally made the move, and got to kiss Richie Gould for the first time. We hopped in the back of my Montero sport, and I got to sleep with him for the first time, too. I’m pretty sure I got rug burn.”

However, things fizzled out. Candice owned a Christmas store, and Richie didn’t have a car. She eventually started dating a guy named Zack. “I was with him for seven years. I didn’t really like him that much. But it was comfortable. He was nice. He didn’t seem to care that I didn’t want kids. Richie would wish me a happy birthday every year, but he ended up meeting some lady and marrying her and having a kid. He loved being a dad. He loved making his kids happy. He was such a good man.”

A Christmas store? Candice? She wasn’t exactly jolly. I demanded more info. “It was fun. I know that much. I love Christmas. We sold Christmas trees, ornaments, table décor, serve ware, trays, scoops, glasses, what have you, stockings, tree skirts, I did that for 13 years. I’d order the stuff in January, I arranged it all, and then decorated the entire store myself. It was enormous.” She said.

Six years into dating Zack, Richie asked for her phone number on Facebook. She gave it to him. “You mother fucker. This is tempting. I’m sure it’s nothing.” But the last year she was with Zack, she was talking to Richie on the phone a lot. Candice said “it wasn’t anything tawdry... Just talking.” Sometimes he would come to the Christmas store. But they kept a respectable distance. He was married, and she had Zack.

“You either fight for that love that pulls you in, or you don’t. And that’s not what everybody wants. Some people just want a companion at home. That’s what Zack was for me. Just someone there so I wasn’t alone.”

Richie was her magnet, and she couldn’t ignore her feelings for him. So, when he told her that he got a divorce, she asked him to come move in with her and broke up with Zack immediately.

“I like doing things because of the story. Especially if it’s gonna be hilarious. So, we lived in the back of my Christmas store, knowing it would make for a good story later” she said laughing. “It had this huge space in the back and a bathroom, and we never got caught even though we lived there for almost two months. I just couldn’t bear to kick Zack out of our house so suddenly. He was a good man. He didn’t deserve this. I had to give him time. But those two months with Richie are my fondest. I don’t even like cuddling. OR being close to anyone, frankly. But I liked it with him. And we didn’t have much of a choice. We had a twin air mattress. It was nice, though. Hours of just enjoying each other. Everything felt right the entire time. I was nervous at first. But I trusted my gut. He had his set of problems, but never did he not love me. And my gut said to be with him. It just sucked that he died.” She said with a sort of wistful sadness, staring out the car window.

Richie was 36 when he died. They had been living together for three years--not in the Christmas store, but in an apartment near the restaurant where we work. Candice’s eyes leaked when she told me about losing Richie, but she didn’t cry. “It was just a powerful love. We enjoyed each other. So much. I think very highly of myself mentally, but not physically, anymore. He made sure I felt sexy. But I think it’s good that I think I’m ugly. I really wouldn’t be as funny.”

When he died, everyone at work tried to make her feel better, but she would not be consoled. She didn’t enjoy life the same way anymore. Her person was gone--ripped away from her life--after the years it took them to find each other.

“I’m tired of ‘strength,’” Candice said. “When Richie died, my friends were like, ‘you’re stronger than you think.’ I don’t need to be strong about this. Shut the fuck up. When your husband dies, we’ll see how strong you want to be. Suck my cock”

It took Candice a while to recognize that people were just trying to help and connect to her. And she slowly let us—a little. “I don’t know why everyone cares me about me so much here. I don’t get it. I was really nervous about working here because I hate being around people. But everyone here, I get along with them all.” Although it seemed the way that our coworkers treasured her perplexed her a little, I was glad to hear she felt that love.

All magnets have north and south poles. Opposites poles attract each other, while the same poles repel each other. The force generated by the aligned atoms is known as a magnetic field. Candice is definitely still mourning the loss of her north pole. The magnetic field she had with Richie was pure passion. But, for the first time, she’s again open to finding a new one.

“Jeremy, one of the other boys from my past, came into my life recently. Yeah, the one I dreamed about making out with. He’s in jail right now, but we write letters. He also weirdly contacted me 10 years after we had last spoken. His last letter he sent to me was 20 pages. It’s

nice to communicate with someone again. So yeah, I have a prison pen pal and it's the dude I had a crush on in high school. Life is weird." She laughed. So, Candice has begun the search for her new magnet-like love. She is determined to find it. And until then, according to Candice, the folks at the Goat will do just fine.

Author's note:

There is so much to this story that I didn't know exactly how to end it. I wasn't sure how to tie it into a neat bow. Candice is a very complex person. I wanted to do right by her and by the assignment. I tried to not think of her reading this because I feel like she would be mad that I left out her 'best lines.' I tried to picture instead the audience reading this. I inserted my voice into this draft without trying to control the story and let her lead. This piece did not seem like a love story to me when I first wrote it, but I guess it became that. I wanted it to come across as larger than that, even in this final version, and I hope the idea landed. I know I stray from the metaphor in parts of this, and I do so intentionally because Candice isn't just all about love, and neither is life.