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LOVE COSTS...

Diary of a Commitment-phobe



If the best things in life are free; Free love exists (providing that love is a multiple of HD where H = Huge and D = Diamond); Therefore love is sometimes free; Therefore love is the best thing in life.

I never was that great at Maths. I always tried to get creative with equations. (This time I'll double the value of X to give it some personality.). In fact, I was never that great at being in love either. But even so, I'm pretty sure that the logic applied above has as many flaws as an ultra-low-denier silk seamed stocking in a hail storm.

I have spoken many times on why love is not necessarily the best thing in life, but I have never really contemplated whether it is, has been or ever will be free. I don't think so. But I'm going to look at this mathematically, in the same way as I look at my phone bill and judge whether O2 really did give me 400 'free' minutes that I never used, or whether Caffè Nero really did give me my fifteenth latte 'free' after I'd bought 14.

Let's see, the last time I went browsing for love, I was hit with a bill before I'd even taken anything to the checkout. Analyze this:

Meet enlightening man in working situation who truly engaged me = one hour's lost work due to diversions to start conversation + seventeen further hours of lost work due to daydreaming

Meet enlightening man for second time much to my pleasant surprise = twenty-pound cab fare because I stopped to chat and missed a train.

Meet enlightening man for the third time = extortionate drinks bill.

Speculative future meetings of enlightening man = new pair of shoes, dry cleaning of best silk shirt that was saving for very important meetings.

Meet enlightening man for date = extreme giddiness and artificial sense of euphoria the next day resulting in me yes to babysitting two-year-old nephew + cost of morning after outfit to prevent being seen in previous day's clothes + loss of ten minutes per hour on obsessive text checking.

This equation doesn't end here. It continues exponentially.

Sex isn't free either, but at least the cost is capped at cash. Or shopping trips if they're very generous. Love, however, is so expensive we don't even get to see the price tag – and I assure you I never dare grace the threshold of those sorts of shops.

Yet this exorbitant commodity is still in high demand. It reminds me of Wimbledon. No matter how much the tickets go up, there's

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always a crowd who'll pay to sit in the rain, eat soggy strawberries and watch Andy Murray.

It seems we will do anything to get our grubby little hands on love. We will swear monogamy for it. Men will spend a month's salary on a tiny ring for it. Women will pair up men's socks for it. Long distance lovers will spend half their waking hours at airports for

it. Unrequited lovers kill themselves for it (see Constance Mayer, Romeo or Greek Aminias). Men agree to exchange their Porsche 911 for a Range Rover for it. Women agree to apply scorching sticky wax to their sensitive nether regions for it, and then rip it all off without a painkiller. Dogs will play dead and do a host of other demeaning tricks for it. Their masters will pick up their shit for it. Cats deceive us for just a bit of it. Mothers go through gruesome 24-hour labours for it. Fathers watch gruesome 24-hour labours for it. Siblings give up kidneys for it. We lose sleep over it. We give up our last Rolo for it.

Sex is cheap in comparison. No, sex is like Poundstretcher in comparison. Why, for the meager cost of some Louis Buttons and a couple of seaweed body wraps I could probably secure myself a whole bevy of keen and regular fuck buddies through one night

out alone. I will hold out from investing in love though – stingy skinflint that I am.

You dummy! I hear you cry, 'Free Love' means free as in 'no strings'. Not free as in 'no cost'. But you see, the two are interchangeable. Free Love as in casual-uninhibited-sex still comes at the cost of awkwardness with the person you chose to do it with, the hassle of managing expectations and the tedious task of cleaning the sheets. Women have to cough up for hidden costs too - that of reputation. The greater the number of her 'free' lovers, the lower she is held in public esteem.

The so-called Free Love of the 60s has to be the greatest misnomer of the last century. How can love ever be free? Even those who chose to clope to San Francisco in the back of a camper van during The Summer of Love had to pay their dues with a driving roster, an 'understanding' over each other's map-reading skills and turn-taking on who's going to empty out the van's septic tank this time round.

Love will always constitute sacrifice. In love, there is always unwritten diary space blocked out for your partner. In love, it will always be insulting to ask for more personal space. In love, our identity is pigeonholed and much harder to explore. I remember love as being a constant battle between doing the simple things I wanted to do with my day – reading a novel before bed, meeting a friend for lunch, signing up for a salsa class – and convincing the love in my life that no, honey, I really am not prioritizing trivial things over you.

Oh, I know that love is a bespoke service and there are many personal rewards way beyond what it says it does on the tin (we hope it is a silver plated tin - given the cost). That gooey feeling in the tummy justifies a significant amount of the investment. Soothing pillow talk at night pushes up the value a little higher. Security for a future adds a little more marketability, and having a holiday companion sends the cost-and-worth correlation to a near perfect 45 degree gradient.

But don't forget this is just the quote for acquiring new love. This doesn't include the cost of severance. These can be so stinging that

some have been known never to be tempted by love again. The lawyer's fees, the furniture-splitting (includes expense to replace 'joint' CD collection), the compulsory month of binge drinking through denial, the Kleenex tissues, the radical haircut, which comes round about three weeks after the definitive split (mostly female-only cost).

Love is such an emotionally expensive commodity that there are some innovative folk who have made attempts at substituting the emotional investment with a material one. This works particularly well if you are loaded. I know all about these pay-as-you-go models for love. Because during a self-exploratory 'phase' of my life, after I

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got bored with magic mushrooms and legal highs, I dabbled in several such relationships.

This 'phase', by the way, is told in all its glorious details in *Sugar Daddy Diaries*, my confessional memoir which is published in March 2011. But to truncate, what I found during this 'journey of discovery' was that my natural preference for an emotionally low-maintenance relationship was

regarded as quite a perk by many cash-rich but time-poor gentleman. So much so, that they were willing to compensate in some form or other – be it via Prada, spa weekends or a first class airline ticket. They merely viewed these gifts as a precaution against having to field off The Woman Who Wants More while they were in positions where they couldn't give more.

This wasn't a discovery I was entirely comfortable with at first, believe me. I went through all manner of moral dilemmas. Until I came around to sheer logic – some people, in certain spells of their lives may not be in a position to benefit from the full splendor of an all-out love affair.

And so, they opt for the more reasonably priced companionship. It comes with a sizable raptor, sex, and a mutually agreed level of regularity. But there's no 24-7 clause in there for either party. As

one of my divorced sugar daddies once memorably declared: "I should never have married her. I should have done this: I could have sent her to Madison Avenue every day to shop, housed her in a central Manhattan, given her everything she wanted. It would have been far cheaper than marrying her."

Real love, though, can't be bought on the goldest of AmEx cards. Real love is probably the only thing left that we have to save up for. And let's hope it stays that way. But we better make damn sure we want it. Because you can't sell that one-off on eBay at a profit when you tire of it. ☼



"No, I didn't say that Free Love and the Counter Culture were responsible for multiculturalism, AIDS and Rupert Murdoch. Just that you and Mum screwed around and smoked a lot of dope."