

I Got Soul But I'm Not a Soldier

by Eric C. Wat

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One morning in late 2005, I woke up and looked out my bedroom window. I saw my backyard and realized that I had not been back there for over two weeks. The grass was a little wilder with neglect. I had that sinking feeling about the house again, the sense that the house could exist on its own very well without me, that it was not really mine. Like someone spurned, I began to complain about it. On New Year's Eve, I caught myself doing that with my friends. For some reason I was feeling ungrateful, even though the house was really not that demanding and I was lucky to have it. So two hours before the clock struck midnight, I made my only New Year's resolution for 2006: to make peace with the house.

I didn't know exactly what that would entail. I thought about how there were so many spaces that I had not been using, and how my friend Anna, who began to stay with me after the New Year's, had made this house a little warmer, a little more mine, just by using a room that had had no purpose for the last half a year. So I thought making peace would mean infusing every space of the house with a purpose. But what would happen when Anna leaves? I was very clear that I didn't want a roommate or be a landlord. So did all this space mean that I had to find a different kind of partner? Was the house telling me that it was time to settle down?

So to take this a step further, the corollary of making peace with the house seemed to be finding a boyfriend. The logic was not really that sketchy, considering my neurosis of being a single homeowner. So fine, it's been a while since I went on a date (almost a year since K.). I was ready.

Wasting no time, I went online and found this guy. We corresponded quite a bit via email over the course of almost two weeks. He was 39 years old. He had grown up in Singapore until he came to the U.S. when he was 20. He spent over a decade in Columbus, Ohio before moving out to LA so he could have more of an opportunity to date other Asians. He was a medical engineer and lived in Burbank. Some of you might know that my ideal boyfriend is someone who doesn't have a big family. (I mean, I have my hands full with mine already.) So I had to ask him if he had family in LA.

Only my sister, he said.

YES, MY DATE IS AN ORPHAN! But then, he elaborated...

My parents live in Singapore.

GOOD ENOUGH.

I liked that he was responsive and inquisitive about me, despite the fact that we had met online and

gay men were known to use the Internet more as a hookup tool than a dating one. We were emailing each other at least once every day. We even knew each other's last names! I didn't think he would go through all the trouble of asking about me and what I like if this was just a sex thing for him, would he? Or is email courting like reading fortune cookies, and I had to add "in bed" to every question he asked me? As in, "What do you like to do ... (in bed)?" If that were the case, I really botched that question.

I didn't want to jump into bed with him on the first date. I really wanted to do this old-school. At the same time, I didn't want to make it seem completely chaste either, or that I was just looking for a friend. So I infused our conversation with some unmistakable sexual flirtation when the time called for it. Example - this is from an email exchange in the morning of the day of our date:

DATE: What do you want to do tonight besides dinner?

ERIC: I'm open to anything else as long as you still respect me in the morning. And I like the kind of respect that comes in the form of a breakfast.

To that, he responded half-earnestly that since he couldn't cook, he would buy breakfast beforehand and have it ready in the morning.

Knowing how much of a cynic I am, on the way to our date, I even psyched myself up in the car by listening to "Love Songs on the KOST." I got a haircut three days before the date, allowing just enough time to grow out of that shorn look. And when I asked him where he wanted to eat a few days before our date and he said we would just "wing it," I resisted my control freak nature to research a place. Since I had complained that I always had to chase after someone and make all the decisions in a relationship and for once I would like to be wooed, I decided to leave that decision to him. This is big for me, considering that we were meeting up in Burbland, and like my friend Diep said, we'd probably end up in a TGIF. I'm so getting points for this one.

This story, despite the long set-up, has a very short punch-line. I am telling you all this because I want you to know that I did everything by the book. I do not have a penchant to sabotage myself by looking for emotionally unavailable men, as my bad luck with men would sometimes indicate (especially if you're a therapist). So when this whole thing blows up in my face, it's really not of my own doing.

So the punchline: halfway through our date, he revealed that he's in an open relationship with someone who had just moved in with him a few months ago. Oh. My. God. Did he realize I had to listen to Whitney Houston for this????

Have you ever felt your heart heave for so long that it was one big sigh that never ended? But at the end of this date, in addition to this heaviness in my heart, I felt more emboldened to date again. It couldn't get worse than this, I reasoned to myself. (Or could it?)