

## THE LAWS OF ATTRACTION

by Marya Sea Kaminski

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## THE PLAY

The Laws of Attraction...

Right. Um...

Number One. Beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder.

Number Two. To quote Paula Abdul, opposites attract.

Number Three. If he picks on you, it's because he likes you.

Number Four. Careful what you wish for.

Number Five. You never do get a second chance to make a first impression.

\*

Hello? Oh! Um... hello.

Sorry I'm a little late. It's Matt, right?

I really like that name.

What do you call a guy with no arms and no legs lying in front of your door?

Sorry.

\*

Hello? Oh! Hello!

Sorry I'm a little late. I have a TERRIBLE sense of direction. In fact, I have absolutely no idea where I am right now.

\*

Hello.

Well, thank you.

You also look great.

I mean, GREAT. I mean, I've been meeting a lot of men. A lot. I made a pact to go on at least three dates a week until I found one that would stick and also had a job, like a good job, a good job that makes real money, like maybe I could cut my hours at the restaurant if things get serious. And really, at this point, looks are just a bonus and, man oh man, ding ding ding ding!

\*

Well, thank you. You look nice too.

Oh really?

Mm hm.

Mmm.

Well, I-

Hahaha.

That is so-

What is it you – oh.

Wow.

You know, I really need to go to-

Mm hm.

\*

What is it you do?

Okay. Not bad.

So I'm just gonna jump right in here and say I am definitely looking for a committed relationship. I have retired my fuck buddy status, if you know what I'm saying. Ha. Seriously, though, yes I'm

looking for someone who also wants something long term. Someone who is ready to commit to one person; someone who is also tired of being alone. I mean. Not that that's my defining quality, but sure. All my friends are getting married or at least partnered with someone who comes home every night. And some of them are talking about having kids. And I don't need all that. I'm not looking for all that. But I am ready to not be alone any more. It's not good for a person.

Cool. I'm glad you understand. You seem really... Well, Matt, I want to be really honest with you. I'm glad you sent me a wink. I've seen your profile before but, I don't know, you're pretty different from the guys I usually date.

Oh geez, really? Alright.

Well, let's see, there was this guy. His name was Ezekial but he had legally changed his first name to Sir so most people called him Sir Zeke.

Yes, I also called him Sir Zeke but, to be honest with you, I tried not to address him directly so I could avoid that. Sort of awkward, you know? So, I was bartending at this place by the university and he started coming in a lot and one night we were all partying pretty hard and he pulled me into the back hallway and tried to kiss me. At first I didn't let him but eventually I gave in and we hung out for the rest of the night. He told me that he ran a dating service out of his VW bus but that... never really made sense to me. Anyways, we made out that night and the next day I came down with the worst case of Strep Throat I've ever had. I told him I couldn't see him any more and he showed up in front of my building and threw a garbage can through the picture window in the lobby.

\*

Law of Attraction Number Six. If you feel desperate, you probably are. Abort all missions.

Number Seven. Princes are deceiving. Frogs are forever.

Number Eight. If you really like him, don't sleep with him on the first date.

Number Nine. There are exceptions to every rule.

Number Ten. Always wear your good jeans.

My mother and father fell in love at first sight. They met on an elevator. My father had an office on the top floor. My mother was wearing hot pants and a bright red wig. It was the 70s. She had recently lost forty pounds and her virginity. On their first date, he picked her up with a bucket of fried chicken in the backseat of his car.

Big spender. Her, I mean. My mother.

She was spent. She bet it all and threw her hand down on the table. She loved her pockets empty. She was immediately tied in knots.

When my parents first got married, they lived in an old house with two German Shepherds and a homemade whiskey still in the cellar. A brilliant, half-assed contraption, I'm sure.

My father wasn't much of a speakeasy.

There was nothing easy about him.

And one day, it all blew up.

I come from a long line of hot pants and pencil skirts  
that fly by the seat.

Butchers who knew how to handle their meat.

Gamblers and teachers and cheaters and flirts,  
laughter and late nights and men who don't cry.

Mothers of mothers of pretty, young daughters  
who brought home boys in shiny shoes and bow ties  
to meet their families and daddy's shotgun.

Sons

who oversalt their food and fall short of their length.

I come from a long line of bullies and women of strength.

After my father died, my mom got a tattoo, a gym membership and a melancholy quiet where there used to be sounds of fighting and rage. I remember watching her put on makeup in the bathroom mirror. Her lotions and powders. A forced kind of fun.

I am beginning to look like my mother did then. Age creeps up on me like flood waters. I employ underwire and lipstick to do the jobs of youth. I stare at the clock, quiet and melancholy and wait restlessly for the next thing to make me feel alive.

After my father died, I became a girl drawn to my own misery. I would paint my eyes black with mascara on rainy days to wander the city and wash up in dark places. At night, I dreamt of hiding. Under wet, cement stairwells. During the day, I'd turn off my phone, preferring strangers to friends. I would exhaust myself with walking and drinking and dancing and spending too much time and energy with too many painful people. I was attracted to that. To trouble and to grief. I wanted it all the time.

Law of Attraction Number Eleven. We are drawn to what we know.

Beware the things that attract you, they are often the wolves you've had before in a soft, familiar disguise.

I have lived most of my life courting self-destruction.

I have been seduced over and over again

by my work

and my sorrow

and my addictions.

The blood and salt of my past.

I am drawn to tasks

that are difficult or nearly impossible to finish. Too many projects completing in the same week.

Jobs for which I am underqualified or do not have the proper tools to complete. Manual labor that threatens injury or embarrassment.

Shame. Walking home in the morning in caked mascara with my bra stuffed in to my back pocket.

Misbehavior. Actions I'll need to disguise or lie about later.

I am attracted to being too busy. Not showing up. Making enormous commitments with small rewards and neglecting people or projects I care about with faux-regret.

Damage. Damaged people. Damaged furniture. Dressers missing drawers and knobs and feet. Rust. Buildings and people coming apart at the seams. Hems that have failed. Cloudy, out-of-date eyeglasses. Sunburnt tattoos. I am attracted to things that barely had a chance to begin with and places I don't quite fit in. Punk shows. Dark bars filled with old men. Lunch restaurants in bad neighborhoods. Truckstops at night. Not fitting in makes me feel so special.

I am drawn to cigarettes and whiskey.

Sugar.

The personal-sized Strawberry Shortcake at QFC. Anyone? The first bite is so good. Strawberries in thick syrup against a backdrop of economy cool whip. I'll dig into the springy cake to cut the sweetness of the syrup and slide my spoon between the spongy layers which taste so... well... a little heavy. And then there's more whip cream and more thick strawberry dip. And eventually... it's hard to finish. Eventually I can't. It still looks so good, but the inside of my mouth is now coated with a slippery chemical sugar shellac and if I take one more bite I know it will be one bite too many.

I've done that plenty of times.

I'm attracted to things I do well.

I also admire men who are sweet. But I have been attracted to the ones who taste bitter. A fly to honey. A moth to the blue fluorescent zap. I've attracted men who creep in like Himalayan Blackberry and root deep under my skin. They thrive in these warm, moist conditions. My garden is

hostage to their thick, tenacious presence. I don't ever mind. I could spend all day tugging at their stalks.

I have lived most of my life seduced by self-destruction and tugging at things that won't give.

Number Twelve. We reap what we sow.

Between you and me, I thought self-destruction made me a better artist. A truer actor. A more dimensional writer. I needed movement. Like a shark, like if I stopped for one moment I would die. I needed dangerous circumstances. I needed to create something to write about that was so painful and frenzied that the words would burst from my body. My creative impulse tasted like adrenaline. I wanted to live inside of that feeling all the time; I wanted to spend all day jumping off high places into accidents against pavement.

All of that hard living nearly killed me.

I'm hoping I have something softer in store.

Law of Attraction Number Thirteen. Disappointment is your own simple machine.

Number Fourteen. Good things come to those who wait.

Mary grew up among the Polish rowhouses and butcher stores on Allegheny Avenue - thirty blocks north of the heart of Philadelphia and the crack in the Liberty Bell. Her older sister, Genevieve, was very smart and exceptionally good at things like tennis. When they went to the Polish mass on Sundays, Genevieve would softly whisper the readings along with the old glassy-eyed man in the pulpit. Mary would stare at the back of men's heads. She'd study them. The way the skin became soft and light just under the line of their shirt collars. The tiny rivulets of short dark hair that would pour out into two fine points on either side of their necks. She wanted to touch them, to stroke her fingers against the grain and feel those tiny hairs resist the inside of her hand until her fingertips nestled fully into the thick, trimmed curls above the ears. She never did, of course. She never even removed her thin, white gloves. While Genevieve recited psalms, Mary just stared.

And simmered. But she would never call it that. She wouldn't call it burning. She would not even admit she felt heat. She was careful and she was very sweet. She only had three blouses but she had precisely attached lace around the collar of each one. A delicate frame for her long, pale neck. She wasn't smart like Genevieve or wealthy like some of the other girls at school. But she was fair, and sweet and she burned slightly hot.

There was a beauty parlor on the corner of Allegheny and Aramingo Avenues. She could see the mirrors from the street, lined with gold, they reflected the women and the room into infinite frames. The chairs spun all the way around and were covered in slick turquoise blue. She sometimes thought about those chairs before she fell asleep at night. She felt the palm of her hand glide lightly across that shiny blue.

Eventually she got a job there. First sweeping the floor between each client and then pushing the heavy metal buttons of the register. She studied the fashion magazines and changed the way she wore her hair. She wrestled with rollers every night and while Genevieve read a book in the light by the bed, Mary pushed oily white cream across the skin of her face and dreamt of turquoise blue.

He saw her through the shop's windows. The salon was on his way to work and he'd walk on the other side of the street so he could go slowly and study her silhouette against the glare of the mirrors. He always noticed her hands, her long fingers and their tiny tips. Sometimes, on the way home, he'd watch her laugh. He'd stop for just a moment and then hurry on ahead.

Pete lived only a few blocks from there, and he worked in Benson's garage. He'd been hanging around the garage since he was small and had spent many years paying attention. Now almost twenty, he was a good mechanic. Quiet and honest in a way that made other men trust him. He had thick, calloused fingers and the dark lines of grease stained across his palms. He wore his work on his hands and he was proud of his work.

One day, before he left the garage, he washed his hands carefully and thoroughly. He used a file to clear the black from his fingernails. Then, he waited. He tried to time his arrival so he'd walk by the salon just as she was leaving, but there was a client there late so he waited across the street until Mary swept for the last time and locked the door. He walked over gently, "May I walk you home?"

Mary knew Pete. Philadelphia's Polish quarter wasn't so big. Mary had seen Pete in the neighborhood and at church on Sunday and while she hadn't exactly memorized the back of his neck, she said yes. They walked home together that night.

I never gave much thought to my Great Aunt Mary and Uncle Pete. As a kid, my family would drive down to Philadelphia once or twice a year and my grandmother would insist on our annual visit to Pete and Mary's house.

I was always fascinated and slightly horrified by the clear plastic covers on all their living room furniture and the clear plastic runners that connected the front door to the dining room to the kitchen linoleum. I admired Mary's immaculate bleach blonde beehive. I was always impressed with Pete's white, white smile, and his Buddy Holly glasses and the way his hands were lined with dirt. During our visit, they would laugh together and kiss on the lips. We would all listen to the radio and eat vanilla wafers with milk over plastic placemats.

I never really gave much thought to my Great Aunt Mary and Uncle Pete until Mary started to go blind six years ago.

Pete re-arranged things. He moved their life into the front room of their Philly rowhouse. Bedroom downstairs. Her make-up vanity in the living room. The dining room table lined carefully with medications, peppermint candies, and her sweet-smelling moisturizers. He bathed her and set her radio to the station that played polkas and jazz. He bought her a cordless phone. He did not take the plastic off the furniture. Spills and accidents concerned her now more than ever. Well into retirement, he still spent every day at the garage. But on Mondays, they walked the eight blocks to her beauty salon so Mary could have her hair set. He would take her hand between the dirty creases of his fingers and they would step slowly, while he described the maple trees that lined the sidewalk. The cold changed their colors to warm.

I think happy endings don't always feel like endings.

Law of Attraction. Number Fifteen. Attraction can be hot and tasty, but commitment will sustain us.  
Simple devotion is what will keep us warm.

**End of Play.**