

Amanda Richards

Gingrich

AP Lang/Comp

March 12, 2012

Love Triangle, or: You Brought This upon Yourself

I'm sure the last thing most people want to hear about is more teenage romance attempts, but if we could harness any of fiction's strange and unrealistic powers, a good many would go for love's uncanny ability to develop at the speed of plot. After all, it is only in the strange world of fiction where the unlikely pair will find each other, the secret confessions will not turn into disaster, and a beautiful relationship will only fall apart when the author wants it to. It's a much sought-after secret in our world filled with hearts getting broken in, flings with the sole purpose of irritating one's parents, and cries of "You're too young for this." All we need is for the happy ending to follow. I never expected to join this circle of confusion, but when I least expected it, I found myself entangled in a web of uncertainty. I found myself asking questions I couldn't answer: should love of an extracurricular be unconditional? If you think you love one activity, but a turn of events throws you into the arms of another, do you stay loyal to the first or move on? If you promise your commitment to a team, are you allowed to say you're "not married to it"? Most importantly, is my sarcasm even coming across in Times New Roman?

I first met Band in the summer before fourth grade. I was already familiar with the music types; I'd been playing the violin for several years prior and Orchestra was trying its hardest to hold onto my attention. However, Orchestra and I were slowly growing apart; as a young child, I was horrible at keeping friends. But then Band sauntered into my life and we quickly became joined at the hip, fulfilling all sorts of tropes about being childhood friends and inseparable

neighbors. And here we have our first example of If This Were Fiction: we would grow up and get married and I would be a professional flautist until my ears fell off. Because I am *Sweet Home Alabama*'s Melanie. I am *Final Fantasy*'s Tifa. I am Emma. As the years went on, however, this outcome became less and less probable.

The first few years excelled in the way a good adventure story excels. They were exciting, wholesome, and beautiful in a way that doesn't desensitize you after the first twenty-four hours. There were some difficult spots in our friendship, mostly related to my own shortcomings and musically involved people that I didn't like. They never lasted, though, because Band always had ways of reminding me why music was the greatest thing since *Mulan*. (Oh, wait. I hadn't watched it yet.) I found other good friendships: Chess, Academic Bowl, Soccer. Most of these fell neatly into the "Nice While They Lasted" corner of the closet, and we eventually grew apart. Band stuck around.

We were having problems, though. By the time I started high school, I'd realized that in the limited circle that was my world, Band was exceedingly popular. I was not exactly the most dedicated flute player, and I was acutely aware that Band knew people who were friendlier, more interesting, and better musicians than I was. It was when I started viewing these others as competition – superior competition – that I realized how jealous I was. Add this to the fact that I'd just started marching in addition to playing concert music, and I was just about ready to admit that I might be in love with Band.

If This Were Fiction: I would stew in my own feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, and jealousy until I boiled over and blurted out an impassioned confession in a moment of weakness. Band would either reciprocate or start avoiding me in the hallways. Because I am *Y: The Last Man*'s Beth. I am *Flipped*'s Bryce. I am Jane Eyre.

I knew who Fencing was at this point. Someone who rode my bus in middle school had wanted to introduce me to him, saying I'd like him. In tenth grade, it only took a little persuasion for another of my friends to convince me to finally meet him. And despite the fact that he was an indoor, solid-ground sport, we got along swimmingly. I got to know him a little during my second semester. By the time my junior year rolled around, I was pretty sure he was a keeper. My parents were a little more wary than I was. They tried to warn me that if I participated in too many activities, I wouldn't be able to keep up with my schoolwork. After all, Band had always been a fairly high-maintenance friend, and I was also getting acquainted with Literary Magazine and Symphonic Orchestra (who had never forgotten about me). But I've always been the sort of girl who, when you tell her that she's taking on too much at once, will smile sweetly and say, "Challenge accepted."

Would it be too much to say that I lived for fencing? I was by no means the best fencer on the team, possibly not even a very good one, but that didn't matter. I thought of it as room to grow, and I had so much fun regardless of aptitude that it was almost unholy. Unfortunately, I was stuck in an uncompromising agreement: Fencing irreconcilably came second to band, each and every time. This year, I missed one tournament, the end-of-season banquet, and countless practices because Band said he needed me at his side. Last year? I missed every tournament save the championship, in which I couldn't participate. At first, I accepted the agreement without question. I'd known Band much longer than I had Fencing, and besides, Fencing was just a passing interest, a friend that I would lose like so many others before him. I thought I was prepared to deal with this. But, in the ominous way that can only be accomplished by ending a paragraph, I was wrong.

Much to my surprise and pleasure, I actually qualified for the championship tournament. Much to my surprise and displeasure, I discovered that I had a band clinic that was scheduled on the same Saturday as the tournament. Much to my raging confusion and inner conflict, I was completely torn. Yes, I had agreed to prioritize band without question, but here I was, ending every single promise I'd made with a big fat question mark. After considerable soul searching and deliberation, I was fairly certain that I wanted to go to the tournament. I had earned my spot there, after all. The band clinic was all day; I could still attend about half of it if I left immediately after the tournament. The compromise, in my mind was fair, especially if one took into account the numerous times I had neglected fencing to satisfy band's neediness. The difficulty was telling my band director of my decision. On the Thursday before the date, I approached Mr. Walsh warily, uncertain of how he would react.

Band went ballistic.

He needed me, he said. He was disappointed that I could be so undedicated, that I was making the wrong choice. How important are you to Fencing, anyway, he asked me. Fencing could get by without me for one day. Band needed me to be there, and I shouldn't have even had to think twice to agree with him. The fact that I'd waited until the last minute to tell him made it even worse; the event had been planned for months.

I was a lousy friend.

This is where the line between my life and Fiction becomes blurred. I never could understand why the fictional characters didn't just tell the control freaks where to shove it. I expected them to realize that they were independent enough to know what they wanted.

I wish it could be so simple.

Band told me to rethink my decision, using the tone of voice that suggested I had better come to a different conclusion this time. But I came back the next day and told him the exact same answer; needless to say, he was disappointed. I was halfway convinced that I would do horribly at the tournament simply because I was so worked up about what I was missing.

Nothing that drastic happened. I fenced about as well as could be expected, considering I'm still relatively inexperienced. When I told the rest of the team that I had to leave early, they didn't turn on me and run me through with their épées. Instead, Mrs. Stanton, our team mom, started making cracks about band Nazis. I wished those who were still fencing good luck and left feeling better than I had in days.

I spent the entirety of the band clinic and the days afterward treading carefully to avoid Mr. Walsh and being on my best behavior, as if I needed to apologize for my insubordination. To this day, I still feel like he hasn't forgotten.

That tournament was a turning point for me, one where I realized something rather depressing: I liked Fencing because he wasn't after my loyalty. He expected no promises and he didn't try to drown me in my own guilt. And that, to me, makes all the difference. It's the difference between the friend who's always glad to see you and the friend who clings to you until you can hardly breathe. It's the difference between parents who are always there when you need them and parents who smother you with attention. It's the difference between helping someone because it's your pleasure and helping someone who's in constant need.

If This Were Fiction: the above would be a revelation in which I'd realize I was walking down a different path than I'd thought, in which I'd go running into the arms of my true love or whatever it is heroines do as their stories come to a close. But I'm not Marianne Dashwood. I'm definitely not Eowyn, because I'm reluctant and indecisive and all sorts of other adjectives that

do not lend themselves to romantic plots. And Band knows it. Band knows that I am band geek of eight years; that no matter how much wiggle room I make for myself, I can't just get up and walk away. Why would I? Band is still important to me, no matter how often I can taste the words "I am madly in love with fencing" on my tongue. No matter how badly I want to quote the words of a lovelorn shepherd – no matter how many times I want to say to Band, "I wish I knew how to quit you." And so it is that the end of this essay is not the end of this plotline. With fencing season over, I may have survived the year, but a sequel may be in order. Our uncertain, depressive protagonist has yet to navigate her senior year of high school.

Next year, we add Lit Mag into the equation.

Cameron Morton

Gingrich

3/11/12

AP Language

Doodling

I like to doodle. No, scratch that. I love to doodle. I think I've been doing it since I was very young, maybe first grade. While my friend's notebooks contain rows and rows of perfectly copied notes, mine look like someone turned my head upside down and somehow the contents of my brain spilled out onto paper. My doodles consume pages and pages of notes, blurring into lines of words, snaking around bullet points about the Civil War, engulfing facts about Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. The doodles start in the borders, but throughout the course of a one hour class period they spread like the black plague, over taking the crisp white pages of notebook paper and turning the page into a dark, swirling ocean of ink. If you were to look at my

old notebooks every single page you would flip past would be marked by some sort of design, a swirl here or there, a pattern of diamonds, dress designs, trees, people, and tornados consume pages and pages of schoolwork. However, these are examples of my most rudimentary works of art. Anyone can draw a tree or a dress, that's really nothing to brag about. My most breathtaking doodles surface in moments of true genius, well, perhaps not genius, but rather insanity.

Over the course of one hour (usually math class) I can take a page of notebook paper and cover it completely, so that it is no longer recognizable. I start in the center of the page usually with a swirl, I connect it to other swirls, triangles, and dots, and slowly the picture grows before my eyes, reaching like a flame towards the outer corners of the page. Eventually, it becomes a mass of swirling objects, intricately mixing together to form a complex work of art. Miniscule swirls and diamonds, words, stars, and lines blend together and cover the now unrecognizable page of paper. These doodles remind me of what the inside of my brain must look like: A twisted, tangled, mess of words, memories, dreams, ideas, and pictures.

I imagine most peoples brains could be defined by what they would draw if they were sat down at a table, given a pen, and told "GO." I have some friends who would probably stare at the page for hours on end before drawing a home, a tree, and a stick figure family and then call it a day. This friend's brain most likely contains neat rows of file cabinets all labeled and in alphabetical order. I know others who might draw an engine, in 3D complete with descriptions. This friend's brain seems like it would be a series of blueprints, a diagram for how life is supposed to run. If I was given a pen and a piece of paper and unlimited time I could draw my doodles for hours on end. While doodling, it's almost like I don't have to think at all, the doodles just flow out of the pen on their own. It requires no brain activity, it just happens. My pen glides

over the paper seamlessly, without any assistance. This provides the perfect time to think. I'm fairly certain that's the reason I enjoy doodling so much, it helps me think. It's interesting, while I am making a complicated mess of a piece of paper; it seems to help me unravel the thoughts in my own head. It's almost as if the confusion of my thoughts spill onto the paper, providing temporary relief for my brain. I think about lots of things while I doodle: my future, my family, my friends, my grades, college. I think about moving away and becoming someone important. I think about how badly I want to do something that makes a difference. I think about things I wish I had done and the things I want to do.

Teachers might think they are giving us the biggest gift of all, knowledge, and undoubtedly they are teaching us some valuable lessons. However, what exactly is the value of my learning about how magnets work? I don't plan on being a physicist. Why do I need to know how to balance equations in chemistry? I don't plan on becoming a chemist. These teachers have given me something far more valuable than any notes on the periodic table. They have given me unlimited time to think. Unsuspecting teachers mistake my ferocious scribbling for enthusiastic note taking and I am left to my thoughts and my doodles. Because of this I am extremely thankful for school. Without monotonous teachers and dull PowerPoints I would not know half of what I know about myself today. I am thankful for the valuable work our teachers are doing. They aren't aware of it, but they are inspiring the most magnificent doodles and thinking time. Without the work of dedicated teachers, I wouldn't be the person I am today. They have given me time to think, time to doodle, time to find myself through meaningless scribbles. I owe my teachers everything. Perhaps when I graduate, I will give them all a page of one of my intricate doodles. I will stand before them and say "This is what I accomplished in your class. Thank you." For some creative minds, the dull, repetitiveness of high school is disheartening and

draining, but I have found it to be exactly the opposite. Where I could not find inspiration around me, I found it in my own mind.

Doodling is not for everyone, but for me it has been the most valuable part of my high school experience thus far. The confusing messes in my notebooks represent hope; they represent what I want to do in the future, they represent the person I am, and the person I want to become. To all the doodlers of the world, I say: doodle on. It is an invaluable gift you have been giving and you shouldn't waste it. Cover those pages of notes with whatever spills out of your pen. You just might find yourself when, and where you least expect it.

Olivia Hill

Dr. Gingrich

AP Lang

10/16/09

One Wrong Turn

A crisp, rosy sunburn dusted my nose and shoulders; my hair streaked in coppery golden highlights. The sweet taste of spring break still rested on my tongue and I reveled in the fact that three more days of pure paradise in Cabo San Lucas laid ahead of me. My sister and I danced around each other, giggling about the occurrences of the day as we primped for a tasty dinner in the heart of downtown Cabo.

Soon enough, our parents yelled down to us, beckoning us to the tiny rental car that reeked of stale cigarettes. The view of the rugged mountains and the soft beaches was breathtaking; my eyes hungrily searched and observed

the delicious view. After twenty minutes in the cramped car, I noticed a change in my mood. Gone was the fizzling excitement from the sun soaked day and the energizing shower. That familiar draining feeling that can only be related to the spending hours in the sweltering heat dominated my body as I rested my head against the back head rest.

A few minutes later our car was suddenly submerged in dazzling lights and spicy music. My renewed vernal energy swam through my body as I eagerly rolled the window down in order to catch a better view of the town sprawled out ahead of me. Sexy Latin women draped in lavish yet skimpy clothing roamed the streets, carelessly laughing, dancing to the energetic music, and swaying their full hips. Open aired, charming restaurants dotted the street-sides, the sweet waft of intoxicating foods drifting throughout the air. Faintly ahead, I could see the shore line with expensive yachts casually paused in the calm lucid sea. At that moment, as my dad drove ahead in search of the restaurant, I decided in my head that this was heaven and I wanted, no, *needed*, to live here and be apart of this fantastic world. The energetic yet tranquil atmosphere tingled my awoken senses, the people beckoned my name with their infectious dancing and dreamy laughter. My body swelled with happiness as every fear, every worry, melted from my mind and into the whistling air behind me. Inhaling, I gasped a deep breath, swallowing every memory and every taste I could, never wanting this religious-like experience to end. The word *perfection* lit up in my overwhelmed mind. My day dreams of building my future perfect life here in paradise were abruptly interrupted by sharp voices in the front seat.

“Where did you say this restaurant was, Vernon?” My mother spat.

My dad glared at the road ahead, his head whipping from side to side in search of a street sign. “How am I supposed to know? You’re the one who made reservations.”

I leaned back into my seat, deciding it was best not to say anything when my parents engaged in these rare “discussions” as my parents so called them.

“Take a right here.” The car began to turn down a darker street. “No, not here, the next one!” My mom exasperated, fuming.

“You said there! Okay fine, I’ll just turn around while you call the restaurant and let them know we might be a little late.” As my mom reached for her cell phone, I glanced out the window and noticed three things: first, the lively, ostentatious tourist city of Cabo was had disappeared, second, we were on a one way road with no visible signs of an exit, and third, I was completely terrified for now what replaced my formally perfect view was chilling.

As my fingers trembled like an aged lady’s fragile hand, I timidly rolled up the window, gripping my sweater closer to my body in an attempt to warm up the icy feeling of dread crawling over me. I reached for my sister Abigail’s hand and waited for the familiar, comforting feeling of our fingers intertwined. The tension between my parents dissolved as they realized our situation. In an attempt to remain composed, my dad gently reached over and locked the doors. The normally quiet ‘click’ seemed to shatter the deafening silence into a million pieces. Around us, dark, menacing buildings with charcoal iron bars guarding the windows and doors cascaded over the jaunting streets. Soiled and patchy

ground replaced the well paved streets, our car now precariously rocking back and forth from the unevenness of the crunching gravel road. I bit my lip nervously, as I watched groups of dirty prostitutes with ratty hair and scabs on their knees stumble along the broken sidewalk. Even as waves of nausea rolled over me, pity and heartbreak still flashed in my heart as I watched those poor, helpless girls desperately attempt to sell their damaged bodies. A few more frantic glances into the darkness and I noticed that the people here were glops of slurpy mud, all clumped together and encrusted yet united by this common somber quality.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw my dad straighten his back and it was then that I noticed all of the hard locals greedily eyeing our tiny rental car. The color drained from my mother's face, leaving her pale and ashen as she gripped my father's hand and whispered to us to stay calm and perhaps lean back a little more into our seats. Terrified, my sister and I obliged, clasping each other's sweaty red hands. Swallowing back sour bile, I did the only thing left to do: I prayed. I prayed with all of my aching heart to keep our family safe and to provide us a direction as to how escape.

I could see the way we probably looked to them; a group of white people out enjoying themselves on "perfect" vacation while they were scrounging for pennies in their own personal hell. In their perspective, it would be only fair for them to take a just little from us. My dad sped up the car just as one of the stumbling, drunk, slobbering men broke into a run towards our car. Nausea and adrenaline twisted through my veins as my dad blindly swerved onto

streets, searching for an exit. After what seemed like an eternity, we veered onto the bright main road, finally safe.

An experience such as this does not just slip from your mind, no, it has been etched into my memory as it serves to teach me a lesson about life: Not everything is as it seems. To me, I was in the most exotic, beautiful, perfect place in the world. A “pure paradise”. I couldn’t even comprehend that just a few paces away, grimy poverty was alive and thriving. My naïve self believed that this paradise was completely unblemished. Yet, now that I ponder this assumption, I can’t help but wonder how I came to a conclusion that I had finally found perfection. After all, what in life is truly perfect?

It’s impossible to achieve perfection, and yet the illusion of perfection can be and is portrayed by many. It is common knowledge that in society, the illusion of perfection is highly desired. Everyone wants to be “perfect”. Take a glance at the magazine ads and the media and the pressures of being perfect scream through the slick pages; Wear these clothes and you’ll have perfect style, eat these foods and you’ll have the perfect body, buy these hair products and you’ll have perfect hair. Why is it that we want to accomplish something that is not physically possible or even found in nature? Our absurd standards for ourselves have reached a maximum high if we can’t be happy without seeming to appear “perfect”. Why must we pursue something as abstract as perfection? Even if someone or something is claimed to be “perfect”, that decision can always be debated because perfection is a very subjective topic; my idea of perfection could be utterly different from your idea of perfection. In

my opinion, Cabo was flawlessly perfect, yet with just one wrong turn, I was exposed to Cabo's raw and daunting blemishes. Society needs to learn that perfection is unrealistic and that anything that appears to be perfect is probably just a thin gauzy veil hiding dramatic and dark secrets.

As I lounge here pondering perfection, I can't help but to be grateful that I was exposed to the deceitfulness that is the illusion of perfection. Without this knowledge and experience, I would be blind to the assaults that the media and society throw at me to be perfect; now, I am able to stare "perfection" in the eye and am able to confidently say that you are not real and that I need to be in search of something that makes me happy, not something that makes me perfect.