

Tempestuous Lover or Mr. Nice: Can You Ever Have Both?

Am I asking too much, hoping to find a balance between lust and friendship? Probably not. Call me optimistic, call me stupid, but I'm just not quite ready to give up.

A friend set me up with one man last month who sounded perfect in almost every way. But when I opened my front door and shook his hand, the turntable in my gut came to a halt: *Nope, not attracted*. Of course, being a mature adult, I wisely counseled myself, *Give it some time, maybe something will develop. So what if you don't find his face appealing. It could grow on you.*

In the car at the end of our third date, he leaned across the stick shift and kissed me. I shut my eyes, determined to give him a fair shot. *Well, yes*, I thought. *This is kind of nice*. And then, *I wonder if I still have enough time to mow the lawn before the sun goes down*. Not a good sign.

Sometimes I feel as if someone has given me a hundred-dollar gift certificate to Barnes and Noble but with this catch: It's all I'll ever get to spend on books for the rest of my life, and only two of the aisles are stocked—Romance and Reference. My options? Twenty paperback Harlequins or one hardcover dictionary. Do I go for several throwaway reads or a single solid volume that I'll keep on the shelf for years?

Suspecting I may have unrealistic expectations, I poll my happily married friends: "What was it like when you first met? Did you know he was the one? Did your stomach rocket to the penthouse?"

"I felt I'd known him forever when we first met," reports Teri. "But after our first date, when a friend asked if I'd slept with him, I shrieked, 'Are you kidding? He's so short!'" Now she suffers separation anxiety when her five-foot-four husband as much as dashes out for the Sunday newspaper. And Jenny just laughs, saying, "We were housemates for a year, and I couldn't imagine why any woman would want to share even a pepperoni pizza with him." They're expecting their first child next month.

I wish I'd never asked. I want to wail, *Wait! Tell me about the five-alarm fires, the hundred-mile-an-hour tornadoes, the 9.5s on the Richter scale*. But that wouldn't be realistic, would it? I mean, I've had a few long-term relationships myself and have yet to be blown away by an act of God.

Take my last steady. I can assure you I didn't lose a wink of sleep after our first date. But within two months, my heart would race whenever he called. We stayed together four years. Now, I can't say the chemistry between us was the fiercest. On the contrary, it was experienced in little zings that would come when I knew how he was going to answer a question before he actually did or when he saved up all the hotel chocolates for me from his business trip. A quiet flame, but one that burned deep. Then again, it didn't last. So maybe that's a bad example.

In any case, I know I have to be careful whom I choose. When the triplets wake up at 2:00 A.M., screaming for their bottles, I don't want to be wondering why my husband hasn't made it home from the office yet. Nor do I want to be sitting around in flannel pajamas playing Yahtzee with a man whose face I prefer not to look at, wondering if I could have done better.

Am I being too picky? I don't think so. I just have to keep remembering that when you cross Albert Einstein with Tom Cruise, you do *not* get to display both Nobel prize and Academy Award on the mantel. ☑