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DREW BARRYMORE

# LOVE LIFE

How to raise your standards,  
find your person and  
live happily (no matter what)

MATTHEW  
HUSSEY

*New York Times bestselling author*



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**The names and identifying details of various individuals named in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.**

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## DEDICATION

To Audrey Hussey, the woman in the elevator.

To Mum, for carrying the torch further.

And to all who not only seek love but are brave enough to give it.

This is for you.

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## INTRODUCTION

### KARMA IS A BITCH

Confession time. For most of my life, I have been a terrible person to date. I may have been an effective coach and speaker, but I was still a man in his twenties—albeit one in the surreal position of seeing comments under my videos that read: “He would be the perfect guy to date.” Many people assumed that someone with my emotional intelligence had to be a wonderful person to be with.

They were wrong.

I can say with a hundred percent certainty that I have never been, by any stretch of the imagination, the perfect guy to date. And though I’ve always had enough self-awareness to feel uneasy reading those comments, I had no idea in my twenties—and dare I say, even in my early thirties—the extent to which the opposite of this was true.

From the moment I started my career as a professional dating coach, as a nineteen-year-old giving advice to women, I was doomed to fail as a partner. This is perhaps the fate of all coaches, therapists, and advice-givers of every variety who do not become enlightened before starting to dole out wisdom at scale—which is to say, all of us. Except maybe Eckhart Tolle ... his enlightenment seems pretty legit. The rest of the gang fall short more times than we would like to admit. And the great joke of life is that from the moment we start ranting righteously about any one thing, life will conspire to make us trip up in that specific area.

So what exactly made me such a terrible person to date?

I dated multiple people at the same time, without exactly announcing that I was doing so. For the most part, I didn’t lie about it. I just didn’t actively say it because it was convenient for me not to. Sometimes I lied about it, on occasions where I told myself it was the right thing to do because I was “sparing the feelings” of the person I was with (a fluid relationship with the

truth I have since worked to correct). I occasionally ghosted people. I slept with people and then let it fizzle out, without ever really acknowledging, or even always having the awareness, that feelings were being hurt. In some cases, I continued to seek the attention of people who wanted more with me, even though if I'd been honest with myself, I'd already made my mind up about not wanting more with them. I did this because the attention felt good, and life was lonely without it. In slow, quiet moments, in times when I desperately needed to sit with my feelings, work out my shit, and learn how to be alone, I picked up the phone and called somebody new.

It's one of the reasons my content has been so hard-hitting. When I tell women what to watch out for, it's often a younger, more reckless version of myself.

I'm not saying I wasn't a gentleman. Was I chivalrous? Absolutely. Was I kind? Most of the time, yes. I wanted to treat everyone well. I loathed the idea of ever hurting anybody. Did I care about people's feelings? Deeply. But in the end, I cared about mine more.

The way I dated when I dated casually just had a way of hurting people. And yet the most pain I caused was not when things didn't lead to a relationship, but the times when it did.

Why? Because even when I thought I was ready, I was not. I was not ready for real commitment or for any kind of compromise, nor was I ready to make any kind of plan for the future. I still negatively framed relationships as a sacrifice. But I was ready to enjoy being in love, and this, I would later learn, is not the same thing as being ready for a relationship.

Not that I was aware of any of this at the time. If you'd have asked me then, I would have told you with no lack of sincerity that I was a great person to be with. I felt deeply, I loved intensely, I gave a lot to the relationship, I was respectful, I was sensitive to their needs and a good talker. All of this made me possibly the most dangerous kind of guy who's bad for you: the one you don't see coming. At least with an obvious cad, you know what you're getting into. You may still go home with him for the excitement of it all and the story, but you definitely don't expect a future.

Like so many people who think they're being harmless in their twenties, I thought my job was to fall in love with someone and then strap in. But that is not a relationship. That's a fairground ride. It exists for our enjoyment. When the ride stops being enjoyable, we get off. Whatever the "You Must Be This Tall to Ride" sign reads for the roller coaster of romance, the height

requirement for a serious relationship is much, much higher.

FLASHBACK: I AM TWENTY-FOUR, AND I already think, or at least desperately want the world to think, I know it all.

I find myself standing in front of the Beverly Hills sign, with a major publishing deal for my first book, *Get the Guy*, millions of views on my YouTube videos, and a brand-new prime-time NBC show called *Ready for Love*.

By this point, I'd been helping people for six years, at all stages of dating, coaching thousands of people in person, onstage, in one-on-one sessions, in small groups and large ones, at every step of attraction, through every degree of heartbreak.

But all that happened back in London, and this was Los Angeles, my new home for the next three months of shooting. I was excited, I felt confident. I wanted to be part of it. So here in Beverly Gardens Park, too new in town to know or care what a cliché I was, I proceeded to film the first YouTube video I ever shot on US soil: "3 Tips for Getting Over Heartbreak."

The whole time I was delivering my priceless tips, there was an older man standing off to the side. He wasn't interfering, but it was hard not to get self-conscious knowing I had an audience. It's a curious phenomenon, feeling comfortable with the idea of putting up a video that would be seen by hundreds of thousands of people, if not millions, and simultaneously feeling shy that a single human being is watching me record it. For his part, he seemed amused by my guerrilla film shoot on a sunny day, and when we were packing up at the end of the session, this stranger came over and said to me, "You've never had your heart broken, have you?" He wasn't being confrontational, but there was an easily detectable tone. It was the kind of tone you hear from someone who's been around long enough to have been punched in the face by life—maybe a few times, maybe a lot—speaking to someone who just doesn't get it (or more accurately, hadn't gotten *it* yet).

I felt patronized and pissed off. Who was this guy anyway? "I didn't ask you to stand there and watch me," I thought. "And now you're going to judge me?" But as much as I didn't want to admit it to myself, he had struck a nerve. It's not that the "tips" I gave didn't make sense. For what it's worth, they did. The surprising thing about the advice I was giving at twenty-two and twenty-three and twenty-four is how right some of it—not all of it, but a lot of it—really was. But on a deeper level, as my friend could see right

away, the shoe didn't quite fit.

Someone who had lived longer and suffered through a real heartbreak would have known that cheerily offering "tips" was perhaps the wrong approach for speaking to somebody climbing out of the living hell of heartbreak.

I have never run into my first American critic again, but if I did, I'd tell him that since our first encounter, I have fixed that hole in my resume. My version of this formative life experience was its own cliché. I made exactly the mistakes that I tell people to avoid: I rearranged my life to fit hers; I ignored red flags; I pretended I wanted things I didn't just to be with her; I placed my sense of self-worth in the fact that we were together, putting my own career on hold and losing touch with my deeper needs; I let myself be miserable for months on end, spending my time anxiously worrying about being in love instead of *enjoying* being in love. Suffice it to say I was, perhaps for the first time in my life, not in my favorite position: the driver's seat.

I've always been a voracious note taker. Whatever most occupies my thoughts finds its way into the notes in my journals, my phone, or anywhere I can scribble down my musings on the fly. But my journals aren't filled with "Dear Diary" entries. They are filled with the things I tell myself to help me get through the day. In this sense, reading these notes paints a pretty vivid picture of whatever pain I was trying to cope with at the time. Looking back at my notes from that relationship, the scariest thing about them is not the palpable anxiety I was trying to fight off, but the "encouraging" notes I wrote to convince myself to stay.

Even a quick scroll brings up such gentle and loving self-talk as "If anyone can take it, I can." "This is warrior training. If I can handle this, then I can handle anything." "Don't wish for life to be easier. Work on becoming stronger, more resilient. This is a huge opportunity for me to grow."

You would think from reading these that this was some kind of mental pep talk in the middle of Navy SEAL training. Except I was writing about my relationship. That's how unhappy I was. I wince at the lack of compassion I showed myself, and at just how dangerous my determination and tolerance for pain can be when directed at the wrong target—in this case, martyrdom in a relationship where most of my core needs weren't being met.

These notes weren't even hard to find. There were a lot of them, many too embarrassing to put in this book. A particularly sad line I found

sandwiched in between a bunch of work-related to-dos reads:

“My expectations are what’s fucking me up right now. Before, I just appreciated it for what it was, but then I went from gratitude to expectation.”

Here we have the chilling justification for my then-well-practiced masochism: *My problem is not that my needs aren’t getting met, my problem is that I have needs. All I need to do is get back to being grateful that I have this person, instead of having any expectations of them. Forget feeling safe, secure, loved. You’re just lucky to be here!*

After the initial pain of heartbreak, it became abundantly clear that this was the wrong relationship for me. Reading these notes still makes my heart break for the Matthew in that relationship. Nonetheless, I’m thankful for them. They serve as a reminder of the frightening degree to which energy can be expended in the wrong direction.

Whenever you hear me suggesting you reevaluate a behavior that is making you miserable, don’t think I’m putting myself on some kind of pedestal. I’ve fallen into the same trap. And never mind the people in your life who roll their eyes at the things you do. Trust me, chances are, they’ve done their share of crazy shit too.

When our own form of crazy leads us down the wrong path, or even when we do everything right and someone simply crushes us anyway, it helps to have a home to come back to: a place of love, truth, and restoration. For me, when I was at my worst, the first port of call was my parents, my brothers, my boxing coach, and my closest friends. I was lucky to have all of their combined experience and wisdom then. And yet, despite all these loving figures in my life offering their positivity and solutions, I still find that one of the greatest antidotes to pain is more pain. Not more of my own pain, but the pain of others—the necessity of communing with other people who are going through it.

In my darkest times, there has always been a very special place where I’ve been able to find this kind of communing. A place I could always go to feel less alone, to feel more like my best self, where my troubles disappeared. That place was onstage, or in sessions, listening to people, hearing them out, talking through any problems they brought up, and devising plans for dealing with both their immediate issue and, when we could breathe a little and widen our focus, helping them find the confidence they needed—confidence that, in nearly every instance, I could remind them they already had. Having this community has always been one of the most beautiful aspects of this

career, and it has made me very comfortable making space for the pain of others.

Put me onstage in a conference of nuclear physicists and I'll start sweating. (*Are they, by any chance, heartbroken nuclear physicists? If so, I can help.*) But get me onstage in front of people in pain and I'm right at home.

On the last *Love Life* tour before the country shut down and there were no more in-person events for two years, I was onstage, in the question-and-answer part of the evening, and I spotted a man with his hand up near the back of the room. Now, let me be clear, in previous years there weren't a ton of men at my events. When there was one, especially when he came in the form of a gruff, stocky Texan, he stood out.

"What's your name?"

"Roy," he said.

Roy had a weathered kind of handsomeness, and he didn't seem too overwhelmed at first glance. But it takes courage to stand up and articulate your hurt or worry or confusion, so I asked ...

"Hey, Roy, how are you?"

"Good, Matthew. Thanks. I've had an ex talk about you a lot, so I thought I'd come check you out." That got a big laugh from the entire room, followed by a spontaneous round of applause, and Roy noticeably relaxed.

"Well, thank you for being here."

"Yeah, yeah. I enjoy everything you have to say, but I'm a man." Roy deepened his voice a bit when he said the word, in a plainspoken way. "So I'm just trying to figure out what I can take from a male perspective." He spoke slowly, not out of nervousness, it seemed, but emotion. "I'm very ... I guess, 'reserved.' And I dwell on my hurt, because ... we're people. But I have a problem." He plunged in. "My ex moved on fast. And it hurts, man. We were together for like five or six years, and when they move on fast, it makes you feel like you're not good enough. And I just want to know, how do I change my perspective on letting stuff go? Because that's what I need to do. I need to let stuff go or I'm going to be unhappy for the rest of my life."

When he reached the end of his question, the room broke out in applause, in recognition of Roy's honesty. Then there was a long silence as I considered how much I related to what Roy had said, not just about the pain of heartbreak, but the dizzying bewilderment of watching someone you're not ready to let go of move on at breakneck speed. The silence was broken by a

voice from another part of the audience: “There are twenty women who are going to give you their number!” The entire room—including Roy—laughed.

“Roy, you’re going through an incredible amount of hurt. When did this happen? When did she move on?”

He explained how recent it had been—a matter of months.

“So,” I said, “it’s incredibly painful. Part of the pain is you continuing to convince yourself that this must, on some level, have been the right person. And that your ‘right person’ is now with someone else. Now, I don’t believe that. I believe that the right person can only be the right person when it’s two people choosing each other. As much as you may have loved someone, and as incredible as they may have been, if they don’t choose you, they cannot be your true dream relationship.

“You’re mourning because you think you’ve lost the person you’re supposed to be with. But I can promise you, you haven’t. Because unless someone chooses you, they’re not the person you’re supposed to be with. You can be disappointed that she wasn’t the right person, but you can’t grieve like she was, because she’s not. Disappointment takes a minute to get over, but it’s much easier to recover from disappointment than the idea that you’ve lost the love of your life. You didn’t lose that. That is still to come. Something better is coming for you, I promise you, brother.”

Allow me to restate to you what I said to Roy, in case you yourself are struggling to move on from someone who didn’t choose you:

*It’s OK to be disappointed that someone didn’t turn out to be the one. But don’t grieve as if they were the one. If they didn’t choose you, they’re not.*

And while we’re on the subject, by the end of this book, I want your confidence to be in a place where someone “not choosing you” is the biggest turn-off in the world. The problem is, and this may be where you find yourself right now, that if your confidence isn’t currently in its best shape, when someone doesn’t choose you, you default to fundamentally questioning your worth.

So I continued to Roy:

“Then there’s the ego element: She chose someone else, why not me? What did that person have? Why wasn’t I good enough? One of the greatest pieces of advice I ever received was: Kill your ego. A piece of you has to die. Right now, you’re going through hell. It’s been awful. Somebody ripped your heart out. That is hell. But I *want* that version of you that goes through hell and comes back out alive and has something to tell us at the end of it. Do I



want the version of Roy that hasn't been through that? That's boring. I don't want that Roy. I want weathered Roy, scarred Roy. We become far stronger by what goes wrong in our lives than what goes right. So all this you're going through is like a great stew, adding flavor. It's going to make you more complex, more compassionate. It's going to make you kinder, more empathetic to other people. It's going to allow you to bring more to your next relationship. And it's going to make you such a strong person. And after you get through this? What is there left for you to be afraid of? I've died already! You can't scare me!"

You will, of course, have noted that I did not, having been through it myself, address Roy's heartbreak by proceeding to tell him I had three tips to get him over it. Luckily for Roy, a more weathered, humbled Matthew had laced up his shoes that night. Just as I believe of Roy, my value to everyone in that room and everything in my life had expanded through my pain. I had become a better partner to my audience, just as Roy now had the ability to become for the person waiting for *him* on the road ahead.

A real relationship requires bravery from both sides. It requires us to be vulnerable enough to allow ourselves to be seen. It requires curiosity and vision to fully take in who the other person is. To really see them. To accept their on-camera selves, and their hidden behind-the-scenes mess. To view their worst parts with acceptance and generosity, not contempt. And to have enough faith and strength to trust the other person to offer the same latitude to our darker sides. On top of all this, it requires two people who actually have a vision for where they want the relationship to go, and the daily execution to move toward that vision. Exceptional relationships are not found. They're built.

In the pages that follow, I will share with you the lessons and stories that have changed my life, and the lives of the millions of people who follow my work, whose trust in me I look to earn in the way I show up, both in public and in private, every day.

Who are these millions anyway? Fifteen years ago I may have started making videos for heterosexual women, and while they still make up the majority of my audience, today it's more diverse. There are many more Roys. And people from the LGBTQ+ community have found help with this work as well. Love is universal and flows in all directions. The advice I offer is rooted in human nature. I am grateful to all for seeing past the limited range of pronouns I've used in the introductions to my videos, pronouns that could

make many feel that the message wasn't for them. In this book I've tried to remove those barriers and to use more inclusive language. Whatever the gender or sexual preference of the people featured in this book, we are all capable of stumbling in the same ways; which is why, whoever you are, I trust you will find yourself somewhere in these pages, and in doing so, I hope you feel seen, regardless of who and how you love, or how you identify.

I'm still learning to be better at the concepts I cover in this book myself, but I'm a whole lot better than I used to be. We will, all of us, find ourselves in need of advice in our love lives at some point. I have always found the subject of dating and relationships to be a wonderful *way in*. It's a way into our demons, our insecurities, our trauma, our hopes and dreams, and the ways we might also be stumbling in other areas of life.

It is my experience that one cannot talk about love without talking about life. And one cannot truly have a great relationship with love if one does not have a great relationship with life itself. To have an exceptional love life, we must also cultivate a love *for* life. Whatever stage you find yourself in, I invite you to discover, in the pages that follow, the tools we will need for both.

## BEING SINGLE IS HARD

I started giving dating advice more than fifteen years ago, mostly to small groups of guys. A handful of women saw that the advice helped and asked for sessions of their own. As women began to outnumber men, I sometimes had attacks of conscience: Who am I to peddle advice about what a woman should do or feel? What do I know about being a woman? But these attacks almost always came in the luxury of hindsight, after a session, when I had the chance to run things over in my mind, or once I started recording the events, when I could listen to the audio or watch the video all over again. It never happened in the actual moment, onstage, when a woman was telling me about a crisis in her life, expecting relief, insight, or some kind of plan. In that situation, I can only trust in experience, as I try to pass along everything I've learned from answering questions like hers before.

By now I have spent literally thousands of hours in situations like this. It doesn't matter who someone is, or what their background is, or how they identify ... the right response is the one that helps them out of their immediate trouble, and hopefully nudges them toward a long-term strategy. This book is full of the answers I return to again and again. I prefer practical advice over pallid positive thinking. I want people to go out into the world knowing there are real steps they can take—things they can do and things they should stop doing.

One small thing that's given me a shred of understanding for the kind of constant pressure women can feel from their families and married friends—and sometimes it must seem like it's coming from all sides—is the pressure I got as a guy talking about dating and relationships. When a journalist or someone in my audience asked me if I was single, I always felt a combination of boredom at being asked that question for the thousandth time, and frustration at the farce of it. If I told them I was in a relationship, they'd say,

“Oh, that’s great,” and move on. If I said I was single, they’d respond, “How come? You’re the relationship guy, after all.”

Can I admit that this got to me? Not every time, but more than every twentieth time I answered that question, it made me doubt myself, so that it felt impossible to let that part of my life work itself out organically. I found myself backing into the situation I warn against: putting so much pressure on myself to meet someone significant that I had to constantly resist making bad decisions, all because I wanted the check mark of being in a relationship—something I had to remind myself wasn’t important in the first place.

Let me answer the question once and for all. First of all, I’m not the “relationship guy.” What matters to me is not that someone is in a relationship, but that they are happy with whatever their status is right now. I’ve never preached that people *should* be in a relationship; I’ve just helped them find one if they want to be. And second, I don’t think my being in a relationship is my strongest qualification. I happened to get engaged while writing this chapter, which is a happy circumstance for me, but the label alone shouldn’t be a badge of honor. Simply being in a relationship doesn’t make me or anyone else a success—many people I’ve coached could proudly count themselves more successful the day they left their relationship. And we all know at least one couple whose relationship has all the social media hallmarks of a blissful union, but behind the scenes is on the brink of annihilation.

Let me paint the more honest picture:

- If you find love as a result of my work, I’ll be happy.
- If you break up with someone you shouldn’t be with and become single again because of my work, I’ll be just as happy.
- And if you decide you’re not in such a rush to find a relationship after reading this book because you’re loving life and being you, and you’re not trying to fill a hole by finding someone who will make you feel good enough, then that’s the jackpot.

None of this makes being single easy. Even if we shake off the outside pressure to meet someone, we still have to deal with our own feelings about the need to connect. In fifteen years of coaching, I’ve worked with countless women who feel their dating life isn’t going anywhere. Disenchantment and hopelessness follow rejection and heartbreak until a person starts to feel that