

# Adoration in Limbo

by Chris Ladd  
EDITORIAL EDITOR

This weekend, this past weekend, from absolutely nowhere came this girl. From nowhere. I found myself changing shirts, holding poses before the reflective black glass of my window (I have no mirror), washing my hair with shampoo, even trimming my nails and clearing the empty food wrappers from the waste bin.



WHERE THE  
HELL IS  
WAYNE, ME?

I shaved. I used oil-free moisturizer. I arranged my part in this special way I have that hides zits on the top of my forehead, and I brushed my teeth twice, sticking my tongue way out and clunking my molars with the blunt end of the toothbrush. This girl, this quasi-stranger, regressed me, like a traveling hypnotist in low-ride denim, from a studious, self-aware twenty-year old to an insecure, narcissistic adolescent. She may as well have packed a silver pocket watch in her overnight bag.

I'm in a relationship with someone else right now, I should point out. I'm happy, and my eyes have no need to wander. This girl, this walking question mark, woke in me something older, something outside of reason or of need, something buried deep in the reptilian sections of my brain.

A crush, I've decided, is the polar opposite of healthy attraction, of a true relationship. The nadir to its zenith, or the zeden to its nithzer, or something. I'm not sure. I spent a lot of time in front of the mirror during high school, covering zits and parting hair, and so I didn't do so hot on my SATs.

A real relationship, the dictionary definition, points to something that builds up both relaters, that grows confidence, and a mutual feeling of self worth and importance.

Crushes are different.

A crush is the sudden realization of your own complete inadequacy as a human being, exalting one person high and above yourself, ceding them power, rendering yourself useless and immobile. At its center, a crush is inaction; a form of adoration in limbo.

Ripping through personality like a tropical storm through North Carolina, they scatter trailer parks of sincerity, expose the bedrock of self-doubt, and erode any sediments of humor or cleverness from the beachheads of conversation. When I was young, and storm warnings flashed across our television at home, the rush to gather batteries and candles and fill the tub and pots and pans with fresh water was a welcome disruption to normal routine. I've since seen enough bad weather to favor clear skies and invest in a generator. Crushes are intense, exciting even. But they're dangerous.

At this point in our respective lives, when we've grown, presumably, into rough sketches of the adults we're destined to become, shouldn't we have passed these kinds of emotional migraines? Shouldn't they reside in the damp history of high school, in the parts of us we left with hall passes and locker rooms?

Like a young mother who eats pickles and ice cream long after the birth, I've had trouble leaving this last crutch of adolescence behind.

In my former life, the life before college, I had two major crushes, two that really nabbed me. The first struck in the last gasps of the eighth grade, the second in the middle of the tenth, and I'm still not sure how I got over either of them. It's the second one, the one from tenth grade, that I'd like to focus on as an illustration of what crushes actually are, and why I've come to distrust them entirely.

My second crush, the tenth-through-twelfth-grader, was Allison Thomas. She wrote me once, an email while I was on vacation in Germany. I can't remember anything of what she said now, but I'm almost certain that this infamous transatlantic communiqué a) didn't say much, and b) didn't intend to. I swallowed it, the crisp edges of that email, and caught its barbs on the pink flesh of my lungs. I dragged Allison around Europe that summer, by my guts, and it took two years to spit out the hook.

In the fall, I returned to the U.S. with a firm understanding of German modals underfoot and new emotional weight buried somewhere in the chest/head/groin area. Allison's language choice in high school was Spanish, if I remember.

If the normal throes of adolescence rendered me awkward, this new burden of affection tapped the very deepest mines of my own clumsiness. Between classes in the hallways at school, my mouth and throat clogged with dry flour, and my hands turned to butter. Not normal hands coated in butter, so as to be slippery,

but butter hands coated in clumsiness, so as to be melted through by hot pencils, pens, biology lab equipment, and the odd notebook dropped casually by the Spanish-speaking object of my obsession. How could I return such a notebook when my hands could do no more than streak oil over the pages?


There was no reason for this crush, nothing terribly special about the girl. She's not even my type, and in this way I'm certain that the crush came from someplace else, somewhere older, or younger, inside me. But this attraction lasted months, years, into the very heart of my senior year, and in that time, I never once explicitly asked this girl out. Not once in two years of stilted emails and IM conversations. This girl was in my homeroom, ten minutes a day, five days a week. For six years.

Adoration in limbo.

Since this time, I've tried to hold my ambitions pretty well to a rubric, tried to weed out these false desires, to purge myself of them, and I've failed. Sometimes these crushes develop, spring from their less honorable roots, equalize, and become happy and contented relationships, but in my experience, they usually don't.

In spite of any rubric, any relationship, any amount of spitting, the hook of the crush won't go away. It's braided into all of us, this senseless attraction, intertwined with our notions of love and ourselves and the world. I don't think we'll ever 'get over' crushes. They'll never leave us.

The girl, the hypnotist in denim, did leave, on Monday, and things are back to normal. I'm back to my comfortable, stubbled self with greasier hair and dirtier carpet. But I'm happy, truly happy, and that's an emotion a crush can't provide.

  
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