

“The hardest part of leaving of leaving is accepting all the reasons that somehow we keep repeating endlessly.”

-Demi Lovato “Easy”

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In Love with Toxicity

In the fall of 2018, I met a girl named Maryanne, and she changed my life. I quickly became infatuated with her, and I gave her every ounce of love I could give. However, her struggles with mental health quickly took a toll on both of us, and I was left with all the pieces to pick up.

(For the sake of privacy, names have been changed)
Trigger warning: eating disorders, drug use, mentions of suicide

I began my junior year of high school in the fall of 2018. During the summer of 2018, I had gotten out of a two-year relationship, and I felt the emptiness in my stomach every day afterwards. It sounds crazy that as a 16-year-old I thought I had found the person I was going to spend the rest of my life with, but I always tend to love harder than what realistically makes sense. Love always seemed to hurt, but I longed to have someone I could give everything to. But at that point, I had no one to love in Crossville, Tennessee. Nevertheless, I started my junior year at Cumberland County High School, alone and vulnerable. There were times when I tried to find someone to fill a void, but no one ever held a candle to the love I experienced before. However, all of that changed in October of that year. I met a girl named Maryanne, and my whole world took a completely different turn.

I met Maryanne in a group chat I created. Some friends that I met online decided to make this group chat centered around true crime because that is what we all bonded over. This chat varied from text messages to actual videos and audios of each other talking and interacting.

Maryanne joined this group chat in late October after seeing a post about it on Tumblr. Immediately after Maryanne joined, I was drawn to her. She laughed at my stupid, self-deprecating jokes about school and got a kick out of my joy for everything SpongeBob-related. Even though she barely knew anyone in the group chat, she answered everyone with such confidence. There was never a moment where I could catch her sweating about how to respond to a large group of strangers. She radiated confidence, and I admired that. After a couple of weeks of interacting in the group chat, I worked up the nerve to directly message her. Being the awkward 16-year-old I was, the only thing I could think to type was

“Hi, I think you are pretty cool and would love to get to know you more 😊.”

To my surprise, she responded quickly and said she would be more than happy to talk one-on-one with me. We exchanged our Instagram usernames with each other and began to text on that platform. Our conversations began with little facts about our daily lives. Maryanne was a year younger than me and lived in Puerto Rico. She had a black cat named Peanut, loved to draw, and enjoyed music from Queen, specifically the song “Radio Ga Ga”. Living in Tennessee, I was saddened that we were so far apart, but that did not take away any of the excitement I had when I received a text from her.

My heart raced every time she enjoyed my rants about school or gushed about how cute my dogs were. I could not remember the last time I was so infatuated with someone. Maryanne quickly became the topic of discussion every time I spoke to my other friends. They would tell me how my face lit up every time I received a notification from her. Her brown eyes and curly black hair mesmerized me; she was a vision of beauty to me. After about a few weeks of texting non-stop, we had our first phone call.

Maryanne's voice became my happy place. Her Puerto Rican accent made me smile, and she enjoyed me trying to say certain words in Spanish, and failing miserably, I might add. One of our phone calls really solidified that I was head over heels for her. I laid in bed and she said this to me:

“I want you to look out your window and stare at the moon; I'll do it too. Isn't it crazy that even though we are so far apart, we can see the same moon right now? I love that a lot.”

My heart exploded, and I knew that I wanted her to be mine. A few weeks later, I confessed my feelings to her. She was hesitant because she feared relationships, but she said her feelings were just as strong as mine. On December 14, 2018, we officially began our relationship.

It sounds cliché, but I genuinely fell in love with her in the blink of an eye. Even though we were an ocean away, we were inseparable through text. We fell asleep every night on the phone, and always told each other what we were doing, no matter how mundane. Slowly, though, little things started to pop up. On Christmas Eve around 11 p.m., she went to a party and was extremely intoxicated. I had no clue how much she drank that night, but she could barely type or maintain a conversation. She texted me about her curiosities with hard drugs like cocaine, and I begged and begged her to stay as far away from it as possible.

Every plea led to a drunk text disregarding what I was saying. Once it was midnight in my time zone, 1. a.m. for her, she stopped answering my text messages, and I was mortified. Was she doing cocaine? Did she overdose? If she was doing coke, was it laced? I stayed up until 2 a.m., and there was still no response. Unwillingly, I fell asleep and hoped for the best.

In the morning, I woke up to a sober text from Maryanne that reassured me she did not do cocaine because she could not afford any of it. Blinded by my love for her, I thanked her for staying somewhat safe and moved on from that in our texts. However, that drunken night stayed in the back of my mind and filled me with anxiety. This was only the beginning.

After returning to school in January of 2019, Maryanne began confiding in me about her long-term struggles with an eating disorder. Though I had friends in the past who suffered from anorexia nervosa and bulimia, I knew every person struggled differently. I reassured her I would be here for her whenever she needed me, and I would stay here till the end. However, things quickly escalated, and I was not ready for what the next few months would bring. During our phone calls, she would exercise until physical and mental exhaustion. I politely tried to reason with her, but I knew it was easier said than done.

Our texts became flooded with calorie intake and strenuous workout routines. She told me about her fasting routines and the laxatives she would take on an empty stomach. I feared for her health, so I would always try to remind her of how beautiful she was and try to reason with her about the crash diets and laxative abuse. Some days were better than others, but when they were bad, they hurt even worse.

Through February and March, she sent me pictures of herself and asked me to do body checks for her. This meant she wanted to tell me if she was losing weight as the weeks went on. These photos would include pictures of her neck, arms, and legs with 2–3-week gaps between each time documenting them. Through each photo, her bones became more prominent, her skin became grayer, and her face lost more and more of its life and joy.

Watching her mentally and physically decay broke my heart every single day, but I loved her and did not want to leave her alone. She told me she had no one else she could hold onto like this. I felt the same way. Even though loving began to hurt, I did not want to be alone. Besides, I really was unconditionally in love with her. How could I leave her? She might get worse if I did. But as the days went on, it felt like I was slowly watching her die.

Before meeting me, her starting weight was around 125-130 pounds and 5'3". To Maryanne, her weight was astronomically high. She was miserable and wanted nothing more than to reach her goal weight below 100 pounds. Each week she seemed to be losing at least a couple of pounds, though it looked like she was losing more. Every text began to make me sick, but then she would tell me how much she loved and adored me. I would tell her the same thing.

After about only three months of being together, the end of March tanked more than ever before. She began to smoke marijuana heavily to escape from her pain, and her eating disorder took a turn for the worse. During one particular phone call, she fainted while working out. For a short moment, I thought she did from her body finally giving out. After about ten minutes, she called me back and reassured me she was "fine", but I knew there was nothing fine about what was going on.

As March concluded she became distant and stopped texting as much. I grew worried and feared she could be in the hospital, but she just reassured me she needed some time to take care of herself on her own terms. I respected her feelings and reminded her that I could be here whenever she was ready to talk. Just when I thought the situation could not escalate further, April 5, 2019, rolled around, and I was not prepared for what happened that morning. I woke up to a text from Maryanne that made my heart sink.

“I’m in the hospital”, she typed. “I attempted suicide. It didn’t work, obviously. I’m in the hospital.”

“Oh my gosh, my love”, I typed with tears falling onto phone. “Are you safe? I’m sorry I was not there. I love you. I’m so glad you’re alive. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you.”

I will never forget the picture she sent me from the ER. Her skin was gray, and her eyes were sunken in and red from crying. She wore that yellow sweater I had sent her and said it was keeping her warm. Her body was so frail, even the slightest decline in temperature made her feel frozen. After about 30 minutes of texting, Maryanne was sent to the mental hospital, and I was left alone with my own thoughts. I do not remember anything else from the rest of the day, but I remember hating waking up the following day. Without Maryanne, I felt nothing but emptiness. I felt as if her love was the only love I could hold onto. What was I supposed to do without her?

On April 17th, Maryanne returned from the hospital. I was hopeful that the staff would have helped her find ways to cope with her eating disorder, but that was not the case. She continued to lose weight, and her mental and physical decline began to take a toll on me. I felt like a shell of my former self. My face began to thin, and I looked like I had not slept in days. I stayed up every single night calming her from her panic attacks, even if I had class at 8:00 a.m. the next day. After all, my love was unconditional. This was real love, or was it? Quickly, she began to isolate herself, and I would not hear from her for days at a time. At around mid-April, she told me she wanted to break up with me because she did not want to hurt me anymore.

“Cheryl, I want you to find somebody else who can be with you and talk to you. I’ve been finding it hard to talk to you, and I have noticed your mood. I feel bad. I want you to be happy, but I am sad because I do not want to let you go”, she confessed.

I was heartbroken, but in a way, I was relieved. I missed her every day, but at least I was not watching her kill herself slowly with my aid. After about a month of not talking, Maryanne texted me to check on me.

“Hey, Lynne. How have you been doing?”, she pondered.

“Well, I have definitely been better. To be honest, I have missed you a lot.”

“I have missed you too.”, she quickly responds.

Before I knew it, we told each other we were still unconditionally in love. Her love gave me a sense of Stockholm syndrome, and we inevitably got back together. Friends would tell me she was not good for me. I knew this, but I did not care. For the first few weeks of being back together, it felt like we were back in our honeymoon phase. There was little talk about her eating disorder, and it appeared as though she was recovered. However, June began to feel like the month of April. She relapsed with her eating disorder and began to use more drugs.

June and July were a blur. When she wasn’t texting me during her LSD trips or adderall highs, I was drinking and crying to my friends about how bad loving her hurt. During one of her highs, she told me she did not love me and my heart shattered. I finally hit my breaking point. I told her I could not do this anymore, and she quickly redacted her statement.

“I would never do anything like this if I knew I would lose you. I fucked up. I’m sorry!”, she choked out. “I won’t be better without you; I’ll die without you. You’re the only person I can talk to!”

Immediately, I fell back into her toxicity. Even after months of emotional warfare, I still could not walk away. She was addicted to drugs, and I was addicted to her.

Her habits remained the same. Instead of wishing me a happy birthday, she was high on LSD and sent me angry texts telling me I did not love her.

“Go tell everyone you have survived a relationship with a sociopath who manipulated your feelings and used you.”, she typed.

I had to remind myself it was the drugs talking, not her. Every night I cried and asked myself why loving had to hurt so badly. I created a playlist called “April”. Each song took me back to the morning she attempted suicide. The song “The Night we Met” by Lord Huron was on repeat every single night.

At the end of July, she stopped answering my texts completely. Week after week I would send a message asking if she was okay, but there was no response. Since I had no idea who her family members or friends were, I had no way of contacting anyone she knew. Therefore, I believed that there was a chance she could be dead. Even though I was not religious, I prayed to God that she was alive somewhere getting help. I once again replayed the song and would quietly sing to myself with puffy eyes and a tear-stained face.

“When the night was full of terrors/ And your eyes were filled with tears/ When you had not touched me yet/ Take me back to the night we met/ I had all and then most of you/ Some and now none of you/ Take me back to the night we met/ I don’t know what I’m supposed to do/ Haunted by the ghost of you/ Take me back to the night we met.”

After about 3 weeks, it was the end of August. Finally, I received a message from Maryanne.

“Hi, I don’t have much time to talk. Can you tell me if I have gotten skinnier since the last time I took this photo? I love you!”, she exclaimed.

“Hi, I love you and have missed you so much. Please tell me if everything is okay. You do look different since then,” I said hesitantly.

She was the skinniest I had ever seen her, and I looked at my screen in pure shock. Maryanne was below 100 pounds and looked grayer than I thought was possible. After one body check, she could not communicate with me anymore. Three weeks later, Maryanne was permanently back and would not be disappearing again. She wanted me to call her as soon as possible. At that point, I knew I could not continue to live like this anymore. I could not keep waiting to get my heart broken over and over again.

The moment I answered the phone I said “Maryanne I can't do this anymore. I love you more than life itself, but I cannot watch you slowly kill yourself! I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry Lynne. I love you”, she whispered. “I guess this is goodbye”

“Bye, Maryanne. I will never forget you”, I muttered.

After exchanging our goodbyes, I laid in bed and stared at my ceiling for hours. All I wanted was to go back to the night we met. Even after months of pain, I knew deep down I would do it all over again.