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English 1301

October 9, 2011

### Let Love Ring

I was never much of a jewelry girl growing up. I remember receiving expensive pieces for birthdays, holidays, communion and other special occasions, and then almost instantly losing them. Once it became known that my jewelry box was a black hole, the precious jewels stopped coming and gift cards took their place. At the tender age of seventeen, I received a ring that I knew would be worth holding on to. I had no idea that ring would take on a life of its own and become so much more.

Throughout my adolescence, I moved eleven times. To some that may seem like a lot, but to an army brat like me, it's just another day. Getting the news of my family's move to El Paso was just like any other. I said my tearful goodbyes to my current friends, whilst anxiously waiting to find out what was up ahead. Upon arrival to El Paso, I immediately knew it would be a rough three years. The climate, the culture, the food, and everything in between felt foreign. Needless to say, I was happy when we finally made it on to Fort Bliss. My family and I settled in and feelings of normalcy slowly began to creep back into our lives. It was a small housing community and everyone knew everyone. I met a neighbor boy across the street and before long he and I were fast friends. It felt good to meet someone who understood the army kid lifestyle, and more importantly he was easy on the eyes. Months passed and our friendship grew into a relationship unlike any other I had experienced. I was lost in lust, steadily trying to convince myself love just wasn't possible at my age. Whatever it was, it felt too good to be true.

After a years' time, he and I were pretty serious, and in an effort to show his sincerity (I'm assuming), he bought me a ring. I almost laugh just thinking about it. Looking at the ring now, I can't believe the things I did to hold on to it. Looks or not, it didn't matter—I was in love with this ring and the purchaser. Several months later I proudly displayed my ring to my parents, and announced that I was moving out. Like most seventeen-year olds, I thought I knew everything. I shifted my hips exaggeratedly while my parents fussed at me about the catastrophic mistake I was about to embark on. I still remember my mom yelling at me “that ring can't put food on the table!” Little did she know how wrong she was.

The words my mom said have lingered in my head since that night. I was determined to prove her wrong. Looking back now, I think a part of me needed convincing as well. I knew living on our own would be tough, but I never imagined how hard it would be. Due dates of bills constantly loomed over our heads. The honeymoon phase was over and now we were staring reality in the face. Tina was certainly right when she belted out “what's love got to do, got to do with it?” I was so certain that this was what I wanted, yet I had not prepared my teenage brain for the possibilities of hardships.

I sat at the table with my boyfriend and both our eyes seemed to meet at the same time. I knew what he was thinking, but neither one of us could say it. I looked down at my ring and slowly turned my wrist to watch the tiny diamonds glimmer. The larger diamond in the middle always stole the show, while the smaller ones lining the side just emphasized its beauty. The design was so unique, unlike any I had seen. The cut fit my finger perfectly and the white gold suited me just fine. I brushed away a tear and slid the ring off my finger. My brown skin was several shades lighter where the ring had been since I had never taken it off.

I still remember waiting in line at the pawn shop as the salesclerk haggled with each customer ahead of me. I scanned the room thinking to myself, “I wonder what brought the rest of these people in here to sell their stuff.” The thought was almost comforting—knowing that I wasn’t the only one.

“Next!” The salesclerk’s firm tone quickly snapped me out of my comforting thoughts and back into the grip of reality. I quietly stepped forward and displayed my prized possession that was up for the bidding. I had already made up my mind before entering the shop: I just couldn’t leave my ring there for less than \$250.00. Now granted, I was seventeen, in love, and ignorant of the pawn system and how these things work. The salesclerk gently picked up the ring and began to thoroughly inspect it. I immediately could tell she wasn’t impressed.

“Pawn or sell?” she asked.

“Pawn,” I said, “I will definitely be back for it.” I remember the ‘yeah right’ look she gave as she began to process the transaction. Two hundred dollars was all she was willing to give me.

The small piece of jewelry glistened as the sun hit it through the window pane, each diamond speaking for itself. It was all I could do to keep from crying right there in the store. I felt defeated. The clerk wrapped up my ring, labeled it, and shoved it into a case filled with other small items. That moment seemed to last forever. I walked back to my car, two crisp one hundred dollar bills in tow. As sad as I was, I knew it had to be done. My pride had taken over and I was unwilling to let my parents know we were struggling. I was sure my folks were expecting me to break down and ask for help like I had done so many times in the past. Not only did that ring represent love, but it gave me a sense of freedom. At least I had the money I needed and wouldn’t have to go back to my parents with my head hung low. My mom and dad had

always been there for me, but this time was different. I had something to prove. I was no longer the little girl needing a kiss on a skinned knee, but a woman making adult decisions.

It's been ten years since the pawn shop incident, yet I still remember it vividly. I can close my eyes and those emotions flood my memory. That ring was and is so much more than just a piece of jewelry, but rather a representation of love and endurance. Like the ring, my relationship has had many scratches and moments where it has not shone its brightest. Just as my ring has needed repairing in the past, so has my marriage. This ring comes from a time in my life when I was learning and finding out who I was as a person—my strengths, my weaknesses, and definitely my breaking points. My husband and I reflect on it now and equate it much to a Bonnie and Clyde mentality. It was me and him against the world.

I still have my pawn ticket from the day I picked the ring up, and while I hope to someday pass the ring on to one of my children and watch him create memories of his own, I look at the ring now and love it more than I did then. The scratches, the dull color, and the missing diamonds all tell a story. I really believe it was those hard, struggling, unpredictable first years that carried us to where we are today. In those early years, we created a bond that could not be broken, yet it was this struggle that helped mold the backbone of our relationship and create a solid foundation for years to come.