

Not Sexy Enough by Anne E. Beall
Published in Beyond Words Literary Journal

Once upon a time I read Cinderella. And although I knew it was a fairy tale, I took it to heart. Like most women, I wanted to meet my Prince Charming. Although I wasn't as interested in being saved per se, I liked the idea of meeting a man who was charming, good, and kind. When I found myself single after a bitter divorce, I was still hopeful that I'd meet Prince Charming. But the odds were against me. The odds decrease over time that one will find a lasting relationship. The pool gets smaller, and frankly, some of the fish in it aren't that great.

I decided to go online to see if I could meet Prince Charming. I didn't have any luck. A few people responded to my profile, but not many. I did eventually meet Prince One Night Stand, his cousins: Prince Player, Prince Boring and Prince Nasty. I wasn't having any luck. And when you're single, people who are married start to give you advice. Especially people who are newly married and have met their loves online. They're pretty sure they've figured it out.

A good friend from college had met his wife online. After two months together, John knew that Janet was the one for him and they became engaged. Within 8 months, they were married at an elaborate and expensive ceremony at a California vineyard. She wore 2 wedding gown that day and they had Smash Mouth for their wedding band. When I went to visit them, we sat down at an expensive, posh restaurant in California where they decided to give me advice about what I should and shouldn't be doing. They were the experts and I was the novice. And apparently, I really needed the advice.

"Let's take a look at your photos," Janet, said.

I showed her my online photos and she scoffed.

"They're cute but they're not sexy enough. You need to really amp these up. When I got my photos done, I showed cleavage, I posed in suggestive ways. Let me show you some of mine."

She showed me her photos, which were indeed sexy. She had some alluring 'come hither' looks and she was showing off a lot of her body. In one shot she had a silver sequined gown and she had posed with her head back and her long brown hair falling backwards. Her dress was very low cut in the front and showed a lot of cleavage. In another shot she looked like she was at the height of ecstasy. It was clear that these pictures were taken by a professional photographer.

She explained what it was like: "I had to drink a lot of alcohol in order to get these photos done. I hated doing it. I felt like a piece of meat, but that's what I needed to do. It was awful. But you can see it worked; I found John. You'll need to get some different clothing and you're going to have to get your photos professionally done. Your current pictures won't work."

"But is this really necessary?" I whined. "I don't want someone to choose me just for my appearance. And that's not really my personality. I dress conservatively as you know."

“If you want to find a partner, you’ll have to.” She said very seriously. “The good guys are being scooped up by younger women who are posting sexy photos and who are 10 years younger than you. You look good, but you’re going to have to do what I did. I’m just telling you the truth.”

I thought about the fact that she had gained a lot of weight and currently didn’t look like her photos. She didn’t even look like her photos when he had met her, but somehow these images had managed to bring them together.

I thought my friend was trying to be helpful. And I thought it was possible that she might be right. I purchased some clothing that was a bit more revealing than I normally wear and I contacted a professional photographer. I had my hair and makeup done by a professional stylist in a room outside the studio. The tall, beautiful female photographer then took me into her studio that had a screen, white walls and some props like a Victorian couch and different chairs. Suddenly she was clicking away and I had no idea what I was supposed to do. I tried to act as if I wasn’t totally overwhelmed.

“OK, look to the right, now the left, look down. Give a small smile, now open your eyes,” the photographer said as the camera sounded: click, click, click

I felt completely uncomfortable. I didn’t drink any alcohol before the shoot, but I wished I had. There are times in life when you do things that don’t feel quite right. You know that you’re doing something against your better judgment, but you do it because you’ve had experiences in the past where you felt uncomfortable and it turned out well. And Jane had said that she felt uncomfortable, but she claimed it was what led her to John. So, I tried to be a bit sexier than I would have been.

“OK, now put your hands on this chair and kick your foot up and laugh,” the photographer said. Click, click, click

I mused that my discomfort during the photo shoot was probably due to my upbringing; I’m from New England and my parents were always conservative in their attire. My father wore a tie every time he stepped on an airplane, and I don’t recall my mother ever wearing revealing clothing. Never. In our home, my sisters and I didn’t wear short skirts, revealing shirts, or anything that was even slightly sexy. I’d been brought up to focus on things other than appearance—education, writing, and reading.

“OK, now sit on the Victorian couch and rest your arm on the armrest.” Click, click, click

I didn’t employ any ‘come hither’ looks or show any cleavage. But for me, it was completely over the top. We finished and I felt relieved.

The photographer and I went to a room in her studio where she displayed the many photos. I was impressed at how different I looked. I sent the pictures to my friends, and they responded immediately: they had to be redone. They weren’t sexy enough. They were better than before but would never work. I sent the feedback to the photographer whose response was: “I think you should be yourself. Are you trying to land a sugar daddy?”

I wasn't. And I had no intention of doing another photo shoot. The pictures already seemed like they were taken of someone else, and I just couldn't go through the experience again.

I posted the photos online and the response was immediate. I was inundated men who wanted to talk and to meet. Many of them referenced my appearance. I was "gorgeous," "had a great smile," "was so pretty." Few of my suitors mentioned anything in the long bio I'd written.

I met one man who was very complimentary about my appearance, and he said I didn't look my age. He was younger than me and he took me to a nice restaurant. We started to talk about what we did in our spare time. He told me: "I love to play video games and binge watch my favorite shows."

"That's cool. Do you like to read at all?" I asked hopefully.

"Not really. I read a book a few years ago and it was fine. But to be honest, that's not really my thing."

I appreciated his honesty, but as an author, I found his response disheartening.

Over the course of a few weeks, one man emerged from the pack. He had read my bio and he was interested in the books I was reading and the writing I'd been doing. He didn't mention my appearance. When we met, he was a perfect gentleman. He's a history professor who wanted to talk about his research and to read the recent book I'd published. We started to date and spent many hours talking.

Eventually we talked about my online profile and I got the courage to ask: "what did you think of my photos?"

He hesitated and then replied: "To be honest, they were a bit too sexy for me."

I found my Prince Charming. And I've been living happily ever after.