

**Esther Perel:** Just for me to hear it directly from you, rather than in writing, just tell me the question and a little bit about the context of your question.

**Caller:** Of course. Yeah. So, um, my first relationship ended, uh, around a year ago now. And, um, as I'm 29 right now. It ended when I was 28 and I've been having a really hard time ever since, uh, with ups and downs. Luckily, it, it hasn't all been completely depressing, but it has been a, a yeah, quite a hard time. And, I reconnected several times after a breakup with my ex, and that didn't help. But that's also part of the issue, I think, and the question that I have is how do I let go of someone that is not into me in a romantic sense anymore, and I know that's for the better because the relationship was very hard and had very, or had many toxic dynamics that were not good for either of us. And so my primary question is how to let go of heartbreak that, um, is your first heartbreak at the age of 29, which complicates things maybe a bit. And of course there are way more details to this, uh, in my own history as well that led up to this point.

**Esther Perel:** What's important for me to know about your first love, the ending, the troubles of the relationship, the relationship school that you went to in your childhood? What is important for me to know?

**Caller:** I think that the relationship itself, and it took some time for me to notice, but looked somewhat familiar to the relationship that my parents have, uh, still to this day. And...

**Esther Perel:** Which is?

**Caller:** Um, emotionally detached from each other as well, which also had an effect on me and my siblings. And, although they did their very best, they also, and primarily my mother came from quite troubled backgrounds with large families, and also no emotional or very little emotional, um, availability from their parents. And that's something that when I was younger, I never really stood still by, until my sister first like asked me the same question. Like, do you ever feel unheard by, emotionally unheard or, or not seen by, by my parents? And she first asked me that when I was like 18 and I didn't really connect to that question very much so I told my sister...

**Esther Perel:** Huh, what are you talking about?

**Caller:** Yeah, exactly, more or less. I was like, well, no, I, I was just too occupied with my own things at the time, and I was not, I didn't have any like real relationship experience back then. And so I was just doing my things, uh, enjoying myself with my friends and things like that. So yeah, I was like, I was surprised, like, no, I, I, I have no clue what you're talking about basically.

Um, and over the last couple of years that made more sense already, also before my relationship with my, my now ex-girlfriend. But now that that relationship concluded and also somewhat during the relationship, I felt so seen in that relationship by my first girlfriend, that I attached myself way too quickly to the relationship as well, and that was some, a dynamic that we created, um, together. It felt somewhat like love bombing, if you could say it like that. But I was just as much there as my ex-girlfriend was. So yeah, I think that that's a little bit of context like in regards to my youth.

**Esther Perel:** So I didn't know that I missed love, closeness, connection...

**Caller:** Affection as well. Physical affection. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Affection. Affection, yes. But when I met her, everything in me was screaming, longing, and yearning for all of it in big gulps.

**Caller:** Yeah. Very much so.

**Esther Perel:** And I allowed it? I welcomed it, I scared myself, I scared her or none of the above?

**Caller:** Um, no, no, because, um, I started dating and I was still a virgin before I started dating, and that was at 26. Um, I started dating and it's, uh, I met several wonderful girls, but none of them worked out. And I think I met around seven or eight girls that I dated at least a couple of times, most of them, um, some a little more, some a little less. And then I met my ex-girlfriend, and I was also so desperately looking for a relationship which wasn't healthy, but I had no experience whatsoever. So I was just like, like a fish looking for, for food in an open ocean without any food. And then I met her and she came out of...

**Esther Perel:** Hold on. Hold on. I was like a fish looking for food in an open ocean where there was no food.

**Caller:** That's how it felt.

**Esther Perel:** That is quite an image. Describe it for me.

**Caller:** Yeah. So, there were a couple of dates, um, back then that I attached the first one actually, which also felt quite wonderful after like the second date we, we kissed and after a couple of more dates we ended up in bed and that was my first time in, in that sense. I had experimented way before that time

when I was younger, but it was, it had nothing to do with, with love. So that was the real first time and, and I got so attached.

**Esther Perel:** And how was that for you? Slow down. Slow down. Slow down. You're telling me so many things and so many important things. Is it okay if we slow down a little bit?

**Caller:** Of course. Yeah. Yeah. If you can help me with that, that would be great.

**Esther Perel:** So let's take a deep breath first of all. Just to bring a different rhythm inside your body. So this was your first, maybe not your first sexual experience, but your first partnered experience that involved love.

**Caller:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** So you were a virgin? You were not a virgin?

**Caller:** I was a virgin. It was not my first sexual experience, but I was still a virgin. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Okay. And how was that for you? Was she or she had more experience than you?

**Caller:** No, she, I believe she came out of a relationship of eight years, so she had quite a lot of experience and I was quite open about the fact that I didn't have any experience. Um, and that first time was both beautiful, a little awkward and a little, um, a little forced almost on my end.

**Esther Perel:** Meaning I didn't really want to, but I thought I should? Meaning what?

**Caller:** No, no. I wanted to, but the forced bit is actually with a, a problem that I discovered, and I didn't really know that it was a, a larger issue until then. But it was that I had great trouble getting to an orgasm. And um, that was my first time, so I didn't think too much of it, but I almost like in my head I had that picture of, it must happen like it is supposed to happen, like I'm a man. Like, uh, so it was, yeah, it was in that sense forced, uh, in my own, uh, in my mind.

**Esther Perel:** And I felt that I was taking long in achieving an orgasm or in ejaculating?

**Caller:** In, I think, achieving an orgasm.

**Esther Perel:** They're not the same, you know that.

**Caller:** No, no. Yeah. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** And you experienced that how? You were surprised? You were curious? You were anxious? You were worried? You were, what, what, what did that represent, if anything?

**Caller:** I think I was somewhat worried that it would not happen. Um...

**Esther Perel:** Before?

**Caller:** Not so, no, not before, because I didn't have the experience to really know until then. And, uh, there came a point while we were intimate, me and, and that first girl that I dated back then, and, um, and she came to a point where she said it like, you don't have to, uh, orgasm per se. Like, we don't have to force anything. And, rationally that made complete sense but emotionally I was like, I'm not sure if I really felt like a failure, but I felt like, yeah, but it, it should happen, right? Like, why, why can't it happen? And that made it forcing the end, I'm not even sure if it happened anymore or if it happened, I did it myself. And I came to know after other girls that I dated that that was a larger issue. I think it's mostly caused by stress or performance anxiety or however you want to call it, something along those lines.

**Esther Perel:** What do you call it?

**Caller:** I think I would call it, um, yeah, there's a, a beautiful Dutch word for it. I'm not sure if you know the English translation. F... angst.

**Esther Perel:** Fear of failure.

**Caller:** Fear of failure. Yeah. I, I think that's maybe one of the key factors there. I would call it fear of failure to perform. And uh, what I noticed when I eventually met my ex-girlfriend, I had that same issue and initially the first time we were intimate, she was so much shocked that I tried to finish myself because I can imagine, you don't encounter uh, men with this issue every day, like there are most likely other men that have similar issues. There are men that have, uh, issues with coming too soon. But she was quite surprised and we talked about that and I explained that I've never been able to, uh, come from penetration before. And then we started working on that and I stopped masturbating and after a month she was able to let me come and then things improved and we were able to, or I was able to come during penetration and I think part of that

was the fact that we, uh, fell in love so quickly, almost unhealthy quickly that I was on cloud nine basically. I was out of this world. Like I just switched to a new job. I found my first girlfriend back then. We were not official, but things were going really great. So I just, I was elevated by that feeling.

**Esther Perel:** There's nothing wrong with that.

**Caller:** No, I know, I know.

**Esther Perel:** There's nothing wrong with that. That's why we call it falling in love. We don't call it, you know, climbing step by step.

**Caller:** No. No.

**Esther Perel:** Okay. Tell me something just on, on this issue itself. You had experience with, with orgasm and ejaculation, but primarily through masturbation?

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** And you basically have learned how to let go with yourself but not with a partner?

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Until then.

**Caller:** Yes.

**Esther Perel:** There are trust issues involved. There are control issues involved. And they are basically consequences of bad habituation.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** When you spend many years primarily masturbating, you develop a certain habit of pressure, friction, speed, you name it, and it becomes exactly...

**Caller:** The default. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Yeah. Tailor made.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** You know, as you exactly like it, and, and you don't have to temper with anyone else, and you don't have to synchronize and you don't have to learn how to stay connected to your own pleasure, to your own sensations, while at the same time staying connected with the other person. But it sounds like you were able to create that together, both of you.

**Caller:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Okay. And you were on cloud nine because it's a beautiful feeling and you had a new job and a new girlfriend and a very elated experience of nascent love. And so far, so good. So when does it start to turn that you say, I miss the woman, I don't miss the relationship? Or I miss the beginning, I don't miss what followed.

**Caller:** Yeah. So, I think that the relationship itself became quite difficult early on. And, uh...

**Esther Perel:** Difficult means what?

**Caller:** Yeah, my ex-girlfriend, two months prior to us meeting for the first time, came out of a, what you would call a situationship, I think, uh, that lasted, I'm not sure how long exactly, but four to five, maybe six months, which was also quite hard on her and, uh, yeah, was quite toxic for as far as I have heard her stories. And, I think that she, from the very start, was very scared of me leaving very early on. And, um, after a couple of dates with my ex-girlfriend, she sent me a screenshot, I believe, of her deleting her Tinder accounts. We met through Tinder. And I sent a screen recording of me deleting my dating apps, but I had paid for Tinder Platinum, for six months and I still had three months remaining. So I deleted the apps, but I didn't delete the account and she was quite surprised to hear that after the next day and, asked me like, why do you need a backup? Why do you need to keep your account as a backup? And I was like, well, we've only met a couple of times and I really enjoyed spending time with you, but I have no clue how this will go. So under some pressure, I also deleted the account because I did feel all the excitement of the connection that I had with her.

So that was the first little kind of discussion. It was not really a fight, but like I, I can also voice my opinion as well. So I voiced my opinion. I was like, well, I don't need a backup, but it's just because I paid for six months and that's expensive. So who knows what happens here. I'll not use it. But I think that she didn't really trust me not using it of, uh, because of previous experiences. She

had quite a few of relationships and dates and many of them had their own issues, like many relationships that we all have, I realize that of course.

**Esther Perel:** Tell me if I hear you well. When we met, there was a lot of beautiful elixir between us. But also very quickly did we bring to each other anxieties, insecurities, vulnerabilities, fear of abandonment, fear of lack of attention, fear of neglect that kind of pre-existed even meeting. We brought them in the suitcase and we opened the suitcase right in front of the other and said help me.

**Caller:** You could say that definitely.

**Esther Perel:** Save me. Cure me. Take all these bad feelings away from me. And both of you did so?

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** What did you learn about yourself and what did you discover? Since you're the one who I'm talking to. What did you discover about what you missed, what you wanted, what you needed, what you hadn't had? Yeah, let's start with that.

**Caller:** I think a couple of things that stood out to me pretty early on, um, that at the moment or at that moment I didn't fully comprehend yet but after a couple of months, I started to slowly understand that the lack of affection that I lacked, I think in childhood as well, but also in my like adolescence and growing up and becoming a teenager and my early twenties, um, the affection that I received from her matched the affection that, uh, suited my, uh, my inner child to say it like that too. That suited my, my, uh, my mental being.

**Esther Perel:** Here was the ocean with nutrients.

**Caller:** Yeah. That was the ocean with nutrients. Exactly. Um, and also the, uh, our conversations with which could both go very in depth about our insecurities and our, like, our pasts and things that I've missed and that she missed in previous partners or, uh, or also in childhood. And sharing those, those experiences, but also the feeling of, that primarily for me was so profound. The feeling of feeling so safe with someone else, to open up and be completely vulnerable and to feel like you are, or to feel myself like I was finally completely myself, if that makes sense.

Um, and when I, like, that relationship got so difficult, so quick, but there almost was no hair on my head thinking that I would ever let that feeling go. There was one time that I also considered ending it because it cost me like all of my energy basically. And still I couldn't do it. Still, I could not break that relationship because of, I think, because of the feelings of loss that I would have to endure, for the affection that I would lose, the emotional intimacy that I would lose.

**Esther Perel:** How did it end? Just to get a sense of the full circle. How did it end?

**Caller:** Um, so it's officially ended January of last year, and it ended, uh, there was no, at that point, no particular event that caused the breakup. But I think, and I had seen that like throughout the relationship that my ex-girlfriend also had to deal with a lot of internal emotions around the relationship as well. I think those were both a combination of the relationship itself and the past experiences that she had. And she, uh, it was right around Christmas 2023 and she, we were heading to her parents actually. And um, um, this is just one of the more clearer bits that I remember and she discussed with me that she thought that we should like end this after Christmas and that we should just do Christmas for our parents because of everything they have, uh, they had organized, we should just do that. And after that, call it quits. And that was not, not the first time we, uh, uh, broke up for a week, earlier that year at the...

**Esther Perel:** But you would break up because what? What would create the cycle? I understand that you try to break up a few times and you would come back or she would come back. So what, what, what was the circle? You know, when you say it became bad quick. I mean, you, you're very clear. It became bad quick, but I just couldn't bear the thought of losing the, the, the physical affection, the connection, the emotional intimacy. Even though it was becoming more and more fraught and I could rely on it less and less, I was holding on to what it once had been and what I now knew it could be possible and what I wanted to find my way back to. But that's not how it happened. So if you gave me, when you say that Christmas stands out. Why this thought we should end? That was part of the conversation? Every time there was an issue, one of you would say, this will never work? Or something happened that said this is fraught, this is not possible. And be as concrete as can be. I know I'm, I'm fishing with a broad net.

**Caller:** I understand, yeah. Um, so, uh, in the beginning of the relationship when we would face difficulties, we would both get into discussions that would end in dynamics such as, she would expect things of me that I felt like I couldn't give to her at that point, more time together, um, while the relationship was already quite difficult in the beginning. I was quite avoidant, I would say,



somewhat avoidant in the beginning primarily, and she was quite anxious. So she would need more closeness. I would pull back a little because the relationship got sour points or sour bits quite quickly. I still loved her dearly and I didn't want to lose the connection, but I felt like I needed a little bit of space to cut my hat back on my, on my body. And that would mean that she would think that I was just pulling away and like, that the relationship didn't matter to me or not as much as it mattered to her back then.

And that dynamic changed over time, like at the second part, let's say like the second half of our relationship, I wouldn't enter that dynamic anymore. I would just like hear, try to hear her points because I also felt unheard at many occasions when I tried to voice my perspective and I saw that her emotions were quite serious and she could get really emotional. And that's also something that she was very honest about from the very start, that she could get very emotional in both positive and negative ways. And I just tried to deal the second half of the relationship, I tried to deal with the turmoil, um, of the, yeah, of the relationship basically. So she would...

**Esther Perel:** And do what? And do what?

**Caller:** So, for example, the fact that, um, I made an, uh, an Only Fans account long ago, which I had used long ago and which I still had, did not use in a relationship. But she asked me in the middle of the night. I believe we were going to bed late that night, and she, uh, she asked me whether or not I have an Only Fans account. I'm not sure how she came to that. But I think she was also looking for reasons. And this is also where my intimacy issue comes into play, which also made her insecure about me maybe being with another woman, having somebody else on my mind. I think that that plays into why she was thinking things like that. Like, is there something else going on here that I don't know.

And she asked that and I told her, well, I still have an account, but I have not used it ever since and also not when I was dating, I believe. And she was quite shocked by that. And the fact that I didn't tell her, and then she wanted to look at my phone and I would become quite defensive because I, I was like, why don't you trust me? Because we've had trust issues before. So I felt, yeah, not, not seen before. There was also an, an instance where we were intimate together and she found, uh, a hair around my genitalia and she was convinced that it was somebody else's. And I think this also comes into an insecurity bit about our intimacy being so hot and cold as well because we developed, I'm going all over the place, so if you, if you want to intervene, let me know.

**Esther Perel:** I will. . .

**Caller:** Um, yeah.

**Esther Perel:** How did you know?

**Caller:** Yeah, because I, I know when I started to explain this that I go all over the place, but...

**Esther Perel:** But you get lost a little bit. You get lost and you create a kind of a, a distance between you and the emotions. So you're telling me there were trust issues from the start. That you may not have done big things, but you did just enough to elicit her worry, and her distrust and her suspicion. And then she would do just enough to instigate your distancing.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** You're not being emotionally available as you had well learned. And so quite early on, each of you set the other one up in their most vulnerable parts. You withdraw. She gets suspicious and agitated. What was the presence? Were there other women involved? Was there porn involved? Was there anything to play around all of this?

**Caller:** Um, I had a couple of dates before my ex-girlfriend, and, um, I still had a couple on my Instagram followers list and I followed them. But they were not at, uh, on my mind at all anymore. Like, I might think of them occasionally, but not in a romantic sense or anything like that. Uh, I watched porn back in the, back in the days before I started dating and, while I was dating, I, I think I still...

**Esther Perel:** You watched every once in a while or daily activity?

**Caller:** No, before I, um, uh, started dating, I think I watched almost daily with periods of maybe a week of not watching and then a week of each, um, each day of the week and then maybe every other day. So that fluctuated a little bit quite frequently.

**Esther Perel:** And how did it end? I asked you that before, but I don't think we got to your answer.

**Caller:** Um, the relationship?

**Esther Perel:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, how did it...There is the, the beginning of a series of endings, and then there is the final ending so to speak. And then there is the ending inside that hasn't happened.

**Caller:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** So there are three endings here.

**Caller:** Yeah. The real ending of the relationship, I would say we officially broke up in, uh, January of 2024. And then we tried, um, I, I called her maybe three or four times each week once after the relationship ended. And she was quite clear that she did not want to continue. And I just kept overanalyzing the end of the relationship. And after I called her that fourth time, we ended that conversation that, which also lasted a couple of hours, I believe. And a couple of days later she asked me to visit her and to talk. And she wanted to, to see and try if we could fix things, uh, last time, one last time. So we tried that from like February of 2024 until, uh, a little bit into March of that year. And then it finally really ended, I would say.

**Esther Perel:** May I stop you?

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** One thing I'm hearing you say is I grew up in a very detached way with people that were kind and loving, but not particularly expressive or emotionally attuned. And part of what I think you're telling me is when I start to feel, it's like opening a faucet at maximum capacity on the spot. I don't open the faucet a little bit and then increase the stream. I open it right to the maximum, and the first feeling becomes a watershed instantly leading to obsession.

**Caller:** Yeah, I, I think there's some truth to that at least, because, um, what I tried to say earlier, uh, that, that first girl that I dated, I noticed that I very quickly developed a lot of feelings for her. And I was quite aware of that as well. So I had that rational part of my brain saying, this does not make sense. I know that you're head over heels right now, but, this isn't, this is reality. And you, this is just the first girl that you dated, so get your head back on this is, uh, this is most likely not real. And it ended up not being real and it took a couple of weeks and I was somewhat sad about that. And then I continued dating and I moved on.

**Esther Perel:** But it's very, it is very real. The feelings are very real.

**Caller:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Maybe what you say is, I just met this person, on what basis am I already imagining a whole life, et cetera. But the feelings are very real. And there is no filter.

**Caller:** Wow.

**Esther Perel:** It's very interesting the gap between how you emotionally rush into something, flood it, flood yourself, try to hold back with reason, but don't succeed one iota, go at full speed and then sexually you practice in some way delayed gratification.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** You hold in, you hold in, you hold in with the person. It's the exact opposite from what happens to you emotionally.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** In one place you're like gushing out, and in the other one you are holding, holding, holding. And only alone under complete supervision and control of your own hand, can you let go. And I wonder if you've ever thought about that, the gap between the emotional gush and the sexual withholding.

**Caller:** I don't think so, actually. Not in that way. But it makes complete sense.

**Esther Perel:** Sit with this for a minute. You don't have to answer me right away, but just let this land and then tell me if, what, how.

**Caller:** I think that, um, the thing you just described as well with my, as soon as I get the chance almost, or feel safe enough of my, like, emotion gushing out and like just becoming a waterfall basically. That sense of safety that I feel at that moment feel so, um, or for me so rare that I think the fact that I, that I have the problem with getting to an orgasm is more or less or maybe even harder of a, of a, of a hurdle to overcome. I think those two are interconnected as well. Because as soon as I felt more and more comfortable with my ex-girlfriend, I noticed, and I knew that from the very start that it was most likely something that happens in my head.

**Esther Perel:** So the more unfiltered or what you may call out of control, that I, I don't think it's about that, but the more, the bigger the emotional watershed the bigger the sexual restraint?

**Caller:** I think so, maybe.

**Esther Perel:** You're controlling one with the other.

**Caller:** Do you mean that the, the bigger the emotional connection almost, the harder the...Is that what you mean?

**Esther Perel:** Yeah. But I'm not just talking about the quality of the connection, I'm also talking about the fact that you feel completely taken over and you like it's an obsession. Now falling in love is an obsession. It has all the features of an obsession of an but...

**Caller:** An addiction.

**Esther Perel:** Yeah. But it's, it's a qualitative connection. You know, resemblance. And so part of what happens is that after that we start to ground ourselves a little bit, you know?

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** Terra Firma. Lemme put my feet and ground myself so that I am not like a leaf that can be blown in every direction at any moment by anything the other person says, does, or doesn't. And because we have a regulatory system inside of us, sometimes our mind regulates our body and sometimes our body regulates our mind. I mean they go back and forth in a very interdependent way with each other, but I'm just noticing the contrast between the flooding of the emotional and the restraining of the sexual.

**Caller:** I think that's one part of the question deeper in me is how to gain control over both the emotion and my body as well and get those two in balance. I think that I am...

**Esther Perel:** No, no, no. It's not about gaining control. It's about not losing the connection with yourself while you are experiencing an intense connection with someone else. It's about staying grounded. If you stood now with me in the office, I would ask you to stand and I would come and I would just push against you, and you would actually resist by staying steady, while at the same time welcoming the push rather than falling backwards because it feels so unstable, so chaotic, so without structure. You know? We have always a structure and a loose movement. We go back and forth between structure and spontaneity. Between what happens and what is built and what you experience is it becomes all happens and the build gets lost and that gets scary.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** So you end your relationship, 'cause I'm going back to your original question, and you say it wasn't really good, what happened there? I don't exactly understand why you call it so toxic and negative and hard, but at the same time, when you say, I can't get over it, means what? I look for her in every other woman? I keep remembering the good and I forget where we landed and where we ended? I can't accept the failure? What are we holding onto?

**Caller:** Um, I always felt I also had some self-esteem issues, like I had, uh, severe acne in the past, which also left scarring on my chest and my back. And that played a huge role in why I always pushed woman away romantically. Um, until there came a point where I had a child wish and I hope to start a family one day and find a partner and hopefully for a long, long term. So I had to push through my own insecurities and started dating and each time I met a new girl, things improved in that sense. And after six months of dating and finding my ex-girlfriend, I felt so exhausted and it's almost felt like, like the coming of Jesus that, uh, that I found that that girl and that we had such great chemistry, it, it felt like, and we did at the time, that I now am so afraid, well, I know that I can find love again. It's not that I rationally don't know that, but emotionally my emotions just continue, uh, like continue to end up with her in my mind.

So I keep holding onto the, the things that we have and thinking about how difficult it might be to find that elsewhere. Forgetting the fact, rationally I know, but forgetting the fact that it might be way more healthy than the relationship that I had with my ex. And I understand that, uh, that relationship was so complex that you maybe don't, uh, it's hard to get a grasp of what exactly that toxicity means, but I also don't want to throw her under the bus. And I made mistakes. She made mistakes. We both have experiences that we carried over and carried into a relationship.

And, now for me, the most difficult part, and the thing that I struggle with the most is the fact of that I feel inadequate. That I feel that I'm also scared about how hard it can be to find a woman that is willing to accept me for who I am. And the right person will accept that, of course, but accept me for who I am and the struggles that I have with intimacy, because I love to be intimate. And I, I love the, the, the, the body of a woman that I love. But with that, I can completely understand that for many women that can be a great obstacle. And that's something that plays in my mind as well, like how, how I'm, I overcoming the, the fact that I need to start dating again. I hope to find someone who accepts that and is willing to discover that with me, which is also a beautiful thing actually.

**Esther Perel:** I agree. I agree. But, *and*, no but. And this may not be a watershed. This one may start very differently. Love stories, I was just thinking, they're like pieces of music.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** They start in a different key with a different rhythm, with a different volume, with a different introduction. You've known one.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** It's the first one. It's a very, very important one, but it's not by definition the one that shapes everything that follows.

**Caller:** No.

**Esther Perel:** You know?

**Caller:** I know that.

**Esther Perel:** So the next encounter may be much slower. The next encounter, you may basically say, Hey, I wanna tell you something about me sexually and emotionally. It changes as we get more connected, but at first, I have enjoy pleasing you more than anything but it may not be in this one predictable, heteronormative way that we are all taught is the net plus ultra. And to actually, instead of hoping it doesn't happen and trying to hide it, you actually put it right up there as a something about you that, you know, and that changes with time.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** It's the same in reverse. When a man has rapid ejaculation, they sometimes need to say, you know, I need to get really comfortable and things change, but sometimes at first I get a little, you know, ahead of myself and I don't really stay grounded enough in my own body.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** I think that just talking about it as a performance anxiety misses the boat. That's kind of, you know, adhering to a whole set of male competencies that, uh, that you need to be able to, to perform. Performing is much less important than the pleasing. Please them and you'll perform perfectly fine. Doesn't matter what you do. And put the focus not on can I

perform and can I be adequate and can I be competent and will, will my body betray me and will I, you know, not be able to control this and will my way into orgasm. That in itself usually kind of makes it worse.

**Caller:** Yeah, it does.

**Esther Perel:** So so less performance, more pleasing. But also different love stories, different musical introductions, different rhythm, different ambience and therefore different lyrics, different words, different story. And, anybody will talk about, you know, what have you learned from your relationship history? That's a beautiful question one can ask you. What's a mistake you hope you won't make again? What's something that you would like to do that you didn't do last time? Or be more than do. And as you grow older, everybody will come with more stories and you will come with more stories. And that will become your relationship resume.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** The one that you don't bring to work. That doesn't talk about all the jobs you've had, but the one that determines so much about how you live.

**Caller:** Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** So you asked me how do I get over my first relationship? And I don't know that that's exactly what we did, but tell me since we arrive at the end, what is this conversation like for you?

**Caller:** Very, I would say, almost refreshing in a sense. What I get out of this, uh, talk right now, right? I think perspective, most of all. How you just explained how the issue that I have around my sexuality, how that can actually also bring depth to my like my personality, and bringing my personality and that depth to a new partner. So that's also something along the lines of the insecurities that I have around the scars that my, that the acne left. That's also something that I almost started to wear as a trophy, as like, yeah, but this is me, so take it or leave it.

**Esther Perel:** No, this is not me. This is me at this particular moment of my life with you in this situation. You're not static, you're not unchangeable. And you're just learning, you're learning a whole new realm of experience.

**Caller:** Definitely.



**Esther Perel:** So that sentence of, you take me as I am, take it or leave it, you accept me because this is it, this is me, ain't gonna help you. That doesn't mean you find someone who constantly criticizes you. But you don't, don't put yourself into a box.

**Caller:** No.

**Esther Perel:** And I'm saying this in very short way because we have to stop. But don't put yourself into a box. Let yourself grow. Let yourself process, let yourself learn. Let yourself make bad mistakes. Or simply mistakes for that matter, or choices that you don't think lead anywhere. Be a good friend to yourself, in that sense. Speak to yourself the way you would speak if a friend was doing the same thing.

**Caller:** Yeah. That's also something, uh, that I've quite a lot of work on. Yeah.

**Esther Perel:** So it's not one thing, it's developmental. Meaning it's, it's history of life. Story of life. And I'm just gonna put three dots at the end of the sentence 'cause we won't be able to put a, a nice bow here.

**Caller:** No, no, no. I've learned a lot over the last year and I still do. And there are many times that I feel actually so alive because of this heartbreak as well. Maybe sounds a little weird, but...

**Esther Perel:** In pain but alive. These two go very much together as well. Thank you so much.

**Caller:** Thank you too.

**Jesse (Producer):** This was an Esther Calling, a one-time intervention phone call recorded remotely from two points somewhere in the world. If you have a question you'd like to explore with Esther, could be answered in a 40 or a 50 minute phone call, send her a voice message, and Esther might just call you. Send your question to [producer@estherperel.com](mailto:producer@estherperel.com).

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