

How to Fall (In Love and Literature)

When I recall the process of obtaining and reading what is now my favorite book, I can't help but think the steps are strikingly similar to falling in love. Not that I'm an expert at love (who is?) or literature (I question those who say they are), but I think I know about as much as anyone else, and that it is enough to draw this comparison. Discovering my favorite book proves to be a perfect demonstration to the four steps it also shares with falling for someone. So I'll start where it began: the first connection, at the bookstore.

Step one of falling in love begins with the initial contact. Even if it's not "love at first sight", you have to meet this person sometime. Some people simply walk through life, completely surprised when they meet them. Others look for love, but often it still pops up when you're off guard. I'm searching the shelves, looking for love if you will. In this case love is called "I Am the Messenger" by Markus Zusak, a book my best friend insisted I needed to read. And of course when I find it, it's where I least expect it. The best way to put it is comparing it to a blind date: you know when you get a really bad first impression? That was *I Am the Messenger*, located in the children's section.

Moving on to step two: the denial. In love, we have our friends who sort of smile and nod, as if they know a secret you haven't heard yet. "It'll happen," they say, "Just wait." And you sit there arguing with them against it; it makes no sense, because love likes to blind us, perhaps to make the fall less frightening. Standing in the bookstore, I can't understand why a book that was recommended to me would be here; my friend, the recommender, is a smart guy, so why wasn't the book at a higher reading level? Feeling out of place in an area of the store targeted to a younger audience, I grab my book and walk away. The silly looking playing-card

man on the cover just makes me wonder, “What’s so great about this; what does it have to offer?” Unsure, I decide it can’t hurt to give the book a shot.

Step three is the learning stage. This is when you start getting to know this person. It’s a gradual, sneaky process, and before long you can’t imagine *not* talking to them. The next thing you know, you’re getting butterflies and holding your breath until they come around. *I am the Messenger* is like that; the pages kept turning as I wanted to discover all it had to offer. It is surprisingly poignant, a great example of concise writing which includes living characters and great plot. Rarely do I pick up a book that grips my interest for both the story itself and the craft behind the writing. Beneath the witty dialogue and quotable paragraphs, the story is teaching me—*You have hidden potential*, it breathes. I’ve forgotten all the doubt I had at the bookstore, where I never would have imagined I’d fall for this book the way I have.

Step four is admittance. Realizing you actually have feelings for this individual can be bittersweet, depending on the circumstances. Do they like you, too? Are they single? Are they the kind of person you *want* to fall for? Really, none of this matters; the fact that you’re feeling something like this is enough to be celebrated. Finishing the novel, I was in a state of contemplation. I was ecstatic that the book not only gave me a new view on things, that the potential to be great is *right there*, but was in itself was an example of all things good writing is made up of. I wasn’t sure what this meant to me then, but as time went on the effects became clear: I hold my own writing to a new standard, and found the first book I feel worth reading more than once. Yes, I’ve fallen for the book with a silly cover, located in a section too young for me, as my friend suspected I would all along.

The tricky part about love is, past the last step of admitting your thoughts, it can branch off into so many different possibilities. Perhaps you bury it and do nothing, or perhaps you

pursue it. Will you be successful? For some, the chance of failure is too frightening, but without risking the fall, there is little to gain. There are many nuances which alter the course of it all, but when you think about it, reading a book ends up the same way. The story either loses us or moves us; it is either taken at face-value or pondered for some time to come. *I am the Messenger* showed me that I can (and should) become a better version of myself, until I am the most I can be. And as for my friend, the one who recommended the book to me in the first place? He's the one I fell for, following all the steps along the way.