

Esther Calling: It's a Matter of Pride

[00:00:00] **Esther Perel:** *Every season for "Where Should We Begin?" I receive thousands of applicants, and one of the most frustrating things is that I'm only going to be able to see ten couples. And I've been grappling with this. How can I connect with more of you? There are so many powerful questions, so many pain points that I would like to be able to at least address with you even if shortly.*

So this series is going to be different. It's you calling me with a very precise question, with your pain point, me calling you back, and together we think out loud. And we go from where should we begin to where can you start?

[00:00:55] **Him:** Hello. As a single young man in my early twenties, I keep finding that the high-achieving career driven young women I find myself attracted to are not in the market for the type of deeply committed long-term romantic relationship I'm looking for. It's as if the more I want this sort of relationship, the more likely I am to scare them away. Is there anything I can do to relax their fear of losing one sense of identity, achievement and independence? Or should I be approaching this situation differently?

Hello?

[00:01:38] **Esther Perel:** Hello, hello.

[00:01:40] **Him:** Oh, wow. Hi. It's very nice to talk to you today.

[00:01:44] **Esther Perel:** Yes. Pleasure to speak with you as well.

[00:01:47] **Him:** Can you hear me?

[00:01:48] **Esther Perel:** Yes. I hear you very well. Do you hear me?

[00:01:51] **Him:** Yes. I hear you perfectly.

[00:01:53] **Esther Perel:** Great. So I wanted to just call you and have an exchange about this beautiful question that you sent about how do you not scare high-achieving women away when you tell them that you actually would love to be in a more serious, more longterm, deeper relationship with them. And that somehow you have a sense that for them, it's a choice between either being productive and achieving, or being in a romantic relationship and the two don't go together. Did I understand that well?

[00:02:29] **Him:** Yes.

[00:02:30] **Esther Perel:** How do you know you scare them away? What's happened? Give me just a snapshot.

[00:02:34] **Him:** I get the sense specifically that I would scare her away and that when I became more vulnerable to her, she seemed to become less responsive and less willing to, spend time with me or do stuff with me. I felt that I would push her away by doing things that one would perhaps do in a relationship.

[00:02:53] **Esther Perel:** So there's a particular person we're talking about, right?

[00:02:55] **Him:** Yes.

[00:02:55] **Esther Perel:** There's one woman here. And what's an example of something that you were doing that you felt she reacted with greater distance to?

[00:03:04] **Him:** I would like propose to go out on date like experiences or. Be emotionally vulnerable towards her and tell her things that were happening in my life.

[00:03:18] **Esther Perel:** And she responded? Not by saying what, but she responded by implying what,?

[00:03:26] **Him:** That this was going too far in the direction that she felt was more looking like a sort of relationship that she was not ready for.

[00:03:37] **Esther Perel:** And did you ask it point blank? Do I scare you? Does this take you off your path? Do you have a feeling that I'm asking too much from you? Did you ever speak about it, point blank like that?

[00:03:50] **Him:** Yeah. I don't remember the conversation very clearly. I do remember that she did think it was strange that I was so attracted to her and that I wanted to be in that sort of relationship with her given how her personality was.

[00:04:02] **Esther Perel:** Meaning?

[00:04:04] **Him:** She thought it was very clear that she was not the type of person to be in a long-term relationship. And that I would not pursue that with her.

[00:04:13] **Esther Perel:** The phrase that just came to me was something like you strike me as a woman who sees herself as very curious, it's interesting that you seem to know in advance what this could or could not be for you. And I wonder, would you be open to just see where it goes, but that also implies that you don't need a commitment upfront.

[00:04:40] **Him:** And that was what ended up happening. We were sort of in an ambiguous zone where I was like, okay, we're not going to be in a relationship. We're going to be friends for now, but I am not content with just being out. And I made that very clear to her. And so when I did seem to veer into the direction of doing things that implied that we could, that we were more than friends, such as being more emotionally vulnerable to her, wanting to spend more time with her, then she would retreat.

[00:05:10] **Esther Perel:** Yeah. So she felt that you were coming on too strong and that you wanted more than she was willing to give her was interested in receiving for that matter. And in a way. You're asking me that... I hear two questions. I hear, one is, it's not the question you asked, but it's what I'm sensing is that you're heartbroken a bit, cause you had your eyes set on her and your heart on this woman on this girl and she wasn't responding, but then you ask was there anything I could have done? That could have been, that could have allowed, that would have made me succeed at seducing her and at winning her over.

[00:05:45] **Him:** I guess the more general the question is like her argument was that it was very risky to her, to lose herself and to get in a relationship that would distract her from what she was trying to do. And I, I didn't seem to find a good counter argument to that because it does seem to me that when you enter a relationship, you do change, your priorities do often change. So I wasn't sure whether or not to argue that, oh, no, everything will be okay if we be in a relationship.

[00:06:16] **Esther Perel:** Oh no, I would never take on the argument as such. Between love and work, what's more important? I would just simply say that, I can guarantee you a richer life. A life in which you are at the same time achieving and accomplishing and reaching. And a life in which you also are relating and developing a beautiful story with me. This is not about you know, either you enter a relationship and you forget what's important in your life, and you suddenly are delayed on your ambitions. Where did that kind of split come from? That's not an uncommon attention. This is part of the history of women, but it's also part of the history of men in reverse. And you could also say that in, in this very rich curriculum of courses that she's going to take, you would hope that she at least has one course that is called the school of life and the school of love. And that is equally important to have on your resume when you finish college.

[00:07:12] **Him:** I think you've perfectly captured what it is that I was hoping to achieve with her.

[00:07:16] **Esther Perel:** Is it still going on or is it over?

[00:07:19] **Him:** Oh, no, I think we're done with her, unfortunately. Because we're in separate colleges now. This was like my last year of high school when this happened. Although perhaps one day, like in a couple of years, maybe once she's more mature, I would definitely go back to her and try again, because what I experienced with her, I would say I had never felt before. And I haven't, since.

[00:07:43] **Esther Perel:** It was your first time falling in love?

[00:07:48] **Him:** It wasn't my first time really liking a girl. But I would say that with her, it was very different. It was a lot more intense. Every time she spoke, it was like, she was like holding me in her hand, but it was very, very intense.

[00:08:06] **Esther Perel:** And what was it about her that drew you in so much?

[00:08:13] **Him:** She would say the things that I would think, but wouldn't dare to act on her. Her personality was very much not caring what people thought about her. She would just say what's on her mind, do what she wanted, take what she wanted. And I, it was something I always admired about her.

[00:08:33] **Esther Perel:** And different from who you are, how you are?

[00:08:36] **Him:** I would say I'm very much the same. And I think maybe that's why I also felt an affinity towards her.

[00:08:46] **Esther Perel:** Did she ever think that what you were offering her was actually very rich? It's a beautiful gift by the way.

[00:08:57] **Him:** Yeah. I honestly don't think she saw it even remotely in those terms.

[00:09:03] **Esther Perel:** She thought you weird?

[00:09:04] **Him:** Perhaps yeah, for wanting that sort of relationship.

[00:09:08] **Esther Perel:** Like, what's wrong with you that you want such a thing. What's the matter with you? That's not what most boys want or you're coming on too strong or?

[00:09:16] **Him:** I think that's what it was. I think that it's not something that most boys want, especially at that age, like finishing high school. I thought she was more cynical of my intentions. And that's why she didn't really trust that that's actually what I wanted.

[00:09:28] **Esther Perel:** So that's a very beautiful word you just chose, right? It's like the conversation between the romantic and the cynic. And part of her kind of doesn't even know how to appreciate it, really. It could be another girl's dream, but this particular girl looks at it and just says like, "yeah, wow, where are you coming from? What is that all about?" is that what you have on your mind? And if you can stay confident. You basically say yes, does that make you so uncomfortable? The hard thing is to really stay confident about it because then, sometimes she can make you doubt yourself too. Did you succeed or did you stay steady?

[00:10:12] **Him:** I think I stayed pretty steady probably too steady where I probably should have given up on her before I did.

[00:10:19] **Esther Perel:** And why didn't you get the message? Because you're used to getting what you want? Because you were so smitten that you were not going to ?Stop or because you thought I can convince her otherwise?

[00:10:29] **Him:** It's a little, it was a combination of things. I'm also the sort of person that gets what I want, almost all the time. It was also like a matter of pride that we were both very stubborn people and I kind of wanted to win her over. And also just because I really am appreciative of the richness that a relationship brings to a person's life. And it's something that I've always really deeply wanted.

[00:10:54] **Esther Perel:** And when you didn't get it, what happened to you?

[00:10:58] **Him:** It was quite tough, I would say. Right before high school was going to end, we had a sort of goodbye date and we had a fantastic time. And at the end of it, we said goodbye, knowing that it was the last time we'd see each other in a long time. I would say there was romantic tension, but I kind of ignored it because I didn't want to spoil anything by doing anything. And then she texted me later that night that she really wanted to kiss me at some point. And I never got the chance to do that. So for me, it felt like I never really got closure. And it was really, really tough on me for a long time.

[00:11:43] **Esther Perel:** And at the same time, you never were totally rejected either.

[00:11:47] **Him:** No. I mean, she, she told me like at one point that the reason she didn't want to be in the relationship was because she liked me that much. Because she felt that I would be such a huge distraction, such a huge disturbance in her life. So that's another reason why I really wanted to win her over because I knew that she was actually feeling the same thing.

[00:12:09] **Esther Perel:** I hear you. That changes the story.

[00:12:11] **Him:** Yeah.

[00:12:13] **Esther Perel:** Do you come home? You live in the same town, right, I suppose?

[00:12:16] **Him:** Yes.

[00:12:18] **Esther Perel:** And have you seen each other on breaks?

[00:12:20] **Him:** No. So a year after this happened, I actually went to visit her university because that's also where my best friend is. And we went out for lunch or something like that. And it was very strange because the attraction I had for her was still there, but she definitely was not feeling the same for me anymore.

[00:12:42] **Esther Perel:** That's super painful, when your heart is still burning and the other person has no embers left. That's super painful.

[00:12:51] **Him:** Yeah. Since then when I've been back home and she was also in town, I did try once or twice to meet up with her, but she would not be very responsive or she would just ghost me basically.

[00:13:04] **Esther Perel:** And that's when you need to accept and not pursue further because A, she starts to really think that you don't get the message, even though it's really upsetting, but B what starts to occur if you continue to want, when another person says no, and you're not listening, is that they get a sense that it's more important for you to get what you want than actually to see who the other person is. That then it becomes more about you than about any feelings you have for her.

[00:13:40] **Him:** Yes. I completely understand that.

[00:13:43] **Esther Perel:** That's the element that is weird.

[00:13:46] **Him:** Yeah. I do see how it could cross the line into something that's more selfishness than yearning. I don't feel that that was the case with me. I don't see a relationship as something that I only I benefit from. I really feel that it's something that, something where I also help her become the best version of herself.

[00:14:12] **Esther Perel:** "I want you to eat some of my fruit."

"No thanks, I'm not hungry."

"But really, I promise you it's delicious. I've tasted it."

"I know you like it, but no, thank you. I know it would be really good, but I am not hungry right now. I don't want to eat right now. I'm not interested in this food right now. I'm pursuing other meals right now."

"No, but it's really, really good!"

[00:14:40] **Him:** Yes. That's a pretty good way of putting it.

[00:14:47] **Esther Perel:** You know, and at some point, if you really are interested in the other person, then you have to hear when they say I'm not hungry. Yeah. And that's where the sadness comes in and the oh God, I still, you know, I still believe, I know I was right. I know she would have loved it, but she is not there.

[00:15:12] **Him:** Yeah. So...

[00:15:13] **Esther Perel:** does that answer your question?

[00:15:16] **Him:** It sounds like then there's not much that I can do in this situation.

[00:15:22] **Esther Perel:** Well, one day when you run into her, you will say, you know, I try very hard to convince you, but obviously we were in very different places. Where do I find you now?

[00:15:32] **Him:** I definitely hope to do that one day.

[00:15:35] **Esther Perel:** That's it for now from me.

[00:15:37] **Him:** Okay.

[00:15:38] **Esther Perel:** And I really hope you meet. That girl with whom you can weave the story that you so ache to weave.

[00:15:47] **Him:** Yes, me too.

[00:15:48] **Esther Perel:** So good luck to you. Be well.

[00:15:50] **Him:** Thank you, you too. Bye.

[00:15:52] **Esther Perel:** Bye.

So I'm looking for many ways to stay connected with you as I continue to help you develop greater confidence and competence in your relationships. This time it comes in the form of a game. "Where should we begin - a Game of Stories" is a game that helps you connect and reconnect, deal with the social atrophy that so many of us have experienced, and unlock the storyteller within.

So gather your partner, your friends, or your date, grab a seat, pull a card and be my guest in sharing the stories that you rarely tell. Let's play along. [Estherperel.com/thegame](https://estherperel.com/thegame)