

The Proposal

A short story by Cheryl R. Lane

“Did you read my proposal?” Darren Conners asked me over the office phone. I was working late one evening in my office on the 26th floor overlooking the Hudson River. We were both working on the same project for an advertising agency. We had worked the whole afternoon together, coming up with a pitch we could both agree on. We actually came up with a pretty good slogan, and the graphics came out brilliantly. It had been a productive afternoon.

We hadn’t always worked so well together. When I first arrived at the company, I had been fresh out of college, and I was given this plush office with windows overlooking the Hudson. Darren still had an office with no windows, and had been working for the company for three years. He resented the treatment I was given, when I’d had no experience. My father, you see, was a friend of a friend who helped me get the job. Then when Darren was promoted to an office with windows, we started competing for the same projects, and we could both be ruthless when it came to hooking a prospective client. On more than one occasion, I ended up in tears as Darren was given projects I’d spent countless hours working on in the middle of the night.

This current project was an important one, and our boss decided to let us both give it a go together. Darren had just sat the proposal on my desk half an hour before. I had not had a chance to look at it yet, as I had been busy setting up a meeting with our clients for the next day to make our presentation. I looked at the file in my in-box tray.

“No, Darren. I haven’t had a chance to look it over yet. I’ll take it home with me and call you if I see anything that’s been left out.”

“You really should look it over before you leave. That way, if you don’t like it, I can make changes to it.”

“I trust you,” I said, picking up the file and reading the sticky label on the front, which read “The Proposal”. “I’ll see you bright and early in the morning.”

After hanging up the phone, I gathered the proposal file along with some other files and packed them in my laptop bag along with my computer. I drank the cold remains of my afternoon coffee and then reached to turn out the Victorian lamp on my desk, making Manhattan light up through the windows.

Once I was home, after microwaving a quick supper, I plopped down on my soft leather sofa, propped my feet up on the coffee table, and flicked on the TV for background noise. I took out the files for our ad campaign, and looked at the proposal file. Something about the way he asked me if I had read it yet made me curious. There was something different in his tone. Was it nervousness? It couldn’t be. He was actually much better at this job than I was. So why would he seem nervous about the proposal? Not waiting any longer to find out, I opened the file.

Inside was a single sheet of paper, which read, “I, Darren Conners, propose that you, Chelsea Cox, do me the honor of becoming my wife.”

Shocked, I re-read the line again before dropping the paper to the floor. *A marriage proposal?* That’s what he wanted me to read before leaving the office? So I could see if he needed to make any changes? What kind of changes would he make if I’d said, “no”? I actually laughed out loud. The thought of him proposing to me seemed ludicrous. We hadn’t really dated and, in fact, had only shared one kiss.

It happened last evening. After a long day of working, he'd taken me to dinner at a quiet little café around the corner from our office. We enjoyed getting to know each other on a more personal level and talked until well after midnight. We actually had a lot more in common than we'd realized. We were standing outside my apartment door when I said, "I've had a wonderful time, Darren."

He nervously pushed a strand of my hair behind my ear. "Me, too." Then he gently cupped his hand around my jaw and slowly placed his lips on mine. I closed my eyes, my heart fluttering. The kiss deepened, and he sighed softly. "I've wanted to do that for a long time," he said, surprisingly. Before we could take the kiss any farther, his coat pocket started buzzing, startling us out of our reverie. It was our boss calling on his cell phone.

I picked up the proposal sheet and read more. "I, your associate and boyfriend, think that you would benefit greatly from this proposal. Some of these benefits include: shared cohabitation, doubling your income, and protection on the subway. Other benefits include shared meals, making love any time you desired, and living with someone who knows and understands that you have to bring work home with you sometimes. Someone who could brainstorm with you into the wee hours of the morning, perfecting your proposals. We could make a great team.

I slept little, contemplating his proposal. It was true that I'd been secretly in love with him for a while. I admired him professionally and personally. More than once I'd caught myself staring at his big brown eyes and long eyelashes. Only last night did I think that maybe we were capable of a long-lasting relationship. Was I ready for marriage?

It wasn't until the sun came up that I realized I'd not reviewed the project before our meeting. I hurriedly gathered my things, chugged down some orange juice, and ran to catch the subway. At work, I walked past Darren's office cautiously, seeing him at his desk, talking on the phone. Not wanting to face him just yet, I hurriedly walked to my office, dropping my computer bag on an empty chair, files spilling out onto the floor. As I gathered the dropped items, Darren appeared in my doorway.

"You need some help?"

I glanced at him nervously. "No, no, I've got it."

"Did you read my proposal?" he asked, echoing the words he'd said on the phone yesterday.

"Yes, I did," I said, straightening, files neatly in my hands. "Can we talk about that after our meeting?"

"Sure. You ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

We took the elevator to the second floor and entered a conference room at 9:00 sharp, but our clients were not there. I looked around confused. Before I could say anything, the blinds closed and the lights went out as a dry erase board lit up, starting a DVD entitled, "The Proposal". It showed pictures of the two of us, interjecting phrases and quotes to help reiterate his proposal of marriage to me. He stopped at a photograph of the two of us at an outdoor reception taken six months ago. We were holding glasses of Chardonnay, laughing, the sun shining brightly behind my blonde hair. He was looking intently at me, and I was laughing at something he'd said.

Darren's voice startled me in my right ear. "I have loved you since the day this photograph was taken. It was the day you celebrated your first victory, and you told me it was the first of many times you would defeat me. I admired your confidence and zeal. Your beauty

and the smell of your hair in the sunshine intoxicated me. You made me want to work harder to succeed. That and the fact you had the office I wanted.” He smiled.

He turned the DVD off, and the blinds went up. He then put the remote down and knelt in front of me, producing a tiny black box which held a diamond ring.

“I realize that this may come as a shock to you, but you have turned my world upside-down in a short amount of time, and I am dizzy with happiness. You must have known I’ve been attracted to you for a long time. Why do you think I tried so hard to get your attention? Is it possible to love someone in such a short amount of time? I believe it is. I can’t imagine my life without you. I promise to love you and take care of you for as long as you’ll have me. Please accept my proposal.”

Before I could answer, I heard the blaring of a horn outside on the harbor. I looked out the window and saw a tugboat with a banner across it which read, “I love you, Chelsea. Marry me?” I laughed and looked back at Darren, who was smiling intently.

“Do you accept my proposal?” he asked.

“Well, you’ve produced an out-of-this-world campaign, Mr. Conners. You’ve really outdone yourself. I’d be a fool not to accept your proposal. You’ve got yourself a deal.”

Comments (as of 01/31/2018):

over 5 years ago [K M Carroll](#) said:

That's adorable! Very good job!

over 5 years ago [Jasper!](#) said:

Cute! One quick mistake; your description says Darren Conrad and your story says Darren Conners. Great job!

over 5 years ago [H.B. Titlebaum](#) said:

I'm a sucker for romance and this was right up my alley. Very cute, with a little bite of playful teasing. Perfect.

over 5 years ago [Traci Elizabeth](#) said:

That's amazing!! It actually brought tears to my eyes. You did a great job painting a picture of the characters and the setting. Great work!! :)

over 5 years ago [Lola The Lunatic O.o](#) said:

Aww

over 4 years ago [Lea](#) said:

Love it absolutely love it!

Reactions:

