

Dump Him: Alyssa Cole

Vanessa: I'm Vanessa Zoltan and this is Hot and Bothered. Do you know what the best part of a writing assignment is? An extension. So every other week to give you a little extra time to do your assignments, we will answer a Reddit question and speak to experts from the field of romance. Your assignments from Julia Quinn will come on alternate weeks and in between you'll find one of my best friends, Julia Argy and me talking about love. Julia, what are we calling the segment this week?

[music]

Julia: Dump him.

Vanessa: Yes.

Vanessa: [00:42](#) Dumped them, right?

Julia: Yeah. Gender neutral.

Vanessa: No, actually it's usually dump him. Men are the worst.

Julia: Yeah. But I don't want to put ourself in a box.

Vanessa: Right.

Julia: Or if you have multiple men, you have to dump both of them.

Vanessa: True. Also true. Um, so that is the voice of Juliet Argy. Julia, why don't you tell people who you are?

Julia: I work for Not Sorry Productions where I answer emails and look at spreadsheets.

Vanessa: Wow.

Julia: And do this.

Vanessa: I want that job.

Julia: You gave me that job.

Vanessa: That's amazing. Um, so something that we have discovered while working on this podcast is that romance novels are responding to real life. They are like the fantasy version of real life. And so we thought it was important not only to talk about romance novels but to talk

about current dating culture and current love culture. And so to that end, Julia had an amazing idea which was go to the people.

Julia: The people who did not ask for our advice.

Vanessa: Right, exactly that. So we got these questions from the very sophisticated system of Julia scouring Reddit. And the reason that we called this segment “dump him” is because our advice way more often than not is dump him.

Julia: Yeah.

Vanessa: Okay. So what love advice question are we answering against people's will today?

Julia: [02:04](#) I, 24 year old woman went on a date with an incredibly rich Indian guy, 25 year old man. How do I keep his attention? What are his intentions? We matched on Tinder. Caleb messaged me first. He works at an extremely well known and important company in the United States, and he's super brainy and smart. Caleb is Indian. He said he got on Tinder because his mother told him he wants to get married in the next one to two years, and she has Indian girls lined up for him to choose from for an arranged marriage. He has only ever dated Indian women and he said that he signed up for Tinder so he could meet different girls and see what they're like so he doesn't have regrets if experience with Indian women is all he knows. He could see if he happens to meet someone who isn't Indian who he falls in love with.

Julia: [02:48](#) Okay. You read.

Vanessa: On our first date, he told me how I got through his weeding out process on Tinder and that I can keep up with his intellect. Oh gee, thanks. We were to get dinner and drinks, but he tells me he has to drop by. I love that this is written in the present tense. I feel like I'm there. Okay. But he tells me he has to drop something off at his hotel. Then we go to his hotel and he wants to drink there, and at some point he kisses me, which was fine, but he wanted to start more intense kissing, me on the bed, which I stopped. Julia.

Julia: He said it's not a big deal and he respects me. And won't take either of our clothes off, and he just wants to kiss me. I don't know. It still felt weird to me doing all of this on a first date and I just met him around five hours ago. He keeps persisting. He says, getting to know me through talking is nice, but he also wants to get to know me on an intimate level. He begrudgingly lets it go and I have to sleep over because we are both drunk.

Vanessa: He tried making out a few more times in the middle of the night, but he stopped when I kept waving him away. He has a happy and chipper personality and wasn't acting any different in the morning. I really, really like him and I want to keep his attention, despite the kissing thing and the luring me to his hotel. He's very friendly, chipper and insanely smart, so it's stimulating

talking to him, but he's rich. How do I make myself stand out from the other girls? I have so many thoughts and questions.

Julia: I don't have questions. I feel like this is very straight forward.

Vanessa: Oh, I have questions like, okay.

Vanessa: [04:16](#) Despite the kissing thing and the luring me to his hotel thing, he's friendly, chipper and insanely smart, but he's rich. How do I make myself stand out? I don't understand the "but."

Julia: It's like among his other personality traits that would impair their relationship, the power imbalance of his richness versus her not richness is what she's worried about.

Vanessa: There must be a lot of women going after him because he's rich. Right?

Julia: Yeah.

Vanessa: Like that's the presumption.

Julia: Yeah.

Vanessa: And that even though he lured her, the fact that he's rich makes up for it.

Julia: I think she does not really care that he lured her. She's kind of written that off, I feel like.

Vanessa: She mentioned it like three times.

Julia: I know, but then she's like, how do we keep his attention? It's fine that he lured me.

Vanessa: Yeah. Okay. You said it's very cut and dry. It's obviously very cut and dry.

Vanessa: [05:13](#) He's a bad man.

Julia: Yeah. He super sucks. The place that I really start to get hung up is on the date itself. He talked about his weeding out process, and like at that point, how did she not say, "Oh no gotta run. Bye."

Vanessa: Okay, I agree with you. But like say more. If you were on a first date and someone talked about their weeding out process, why would you run?

Julia: It's so offensive. I feel like in high school I was like this or younger, where I would like to think that I was not like other girls, and this is the equivalent thing, where like if someone were

like, oh yeah, all those other girls that you're not like, I'm like, I'm like all other women. I love other women, and I am just like them. And so if someone was like, I weeded out those other bad ones who you are not like, I would be like, bye, sorry, no, goodbye.

Vanessa: [06:03](#) Right. Especially because he's like, I weeded you out. And you're smart. Unlike other women, you are smart.

Julia: Yeah.

Vanessa: Enough for me.

Julia: Mhmm.

Vanessa: The implication seems to be here that he assumes that most women are dumb. The other thing is the way, like he has set himself up as a prize to be won and she has clearly bought into this narrative that like the pinnacle of a relationship would be for a guy who has a lot of options and a lot of wealth to choose her. I feel like this is like a fairy tale, right?

Julia: Yeah. I think she recognizes there are a lot of at least some yellow flags. Like they might not be red for her. They're certainly red for me, but they're yellow for her, but that's still doesn't matter to her as much as getting his attention and like getting to the next stage of their relationship.

Vanessa: [06:59](#) I mean there is something natural about wanting something that's rare. I mean it's *The Bachelorette*, right? Like he had 50 girls to choose from. He chose me. That is a better feeling than, I was his only option so he chose me.

Julia: But what is rare, that it was like low odds? Like he's not rare. Men like that are everywhere.

Vanessa: Well A. it seems as though she does not think that regardless of whether or not he's rare, he has presented himself as having a lot of other options.

Julia: Mhmm.

Vanessa: I have this arranged marriage that can be arranged for me at any moment. I have all of these other women on Tinder who want to be out with me, and I'm this rare guy, this like rich guy who will molest you against your will. That's so special. Aren't I a find, you lucky lady. The other thing that this is reminding me of is just like, I'm trying to think about some of my favorite favorite romance novelists who are regency romance novelists.

[07:59](#) Almost always the men have more money than the women and I understand that in regency, like women couldn't own wealth but they can have like huge dowries and like that is

not exciting to women to read about because then it's not as much of a fairy tale because he could be marrying you for your money, or you'd like never really know if he wanted you for your money. And so there's something more desirable about reading a book where he has the money rather than she has the money.

Julia: But it doesn't seem like she cares about the money in the way that I would think she does. I would have been like and he's rich, what a catch. But she's like, but he's rich. His wealth is a problem for me now

Vanessa: Because it makes him more desirable and therefore there's more competition.

Julia: Yes, that's true. But if the wealth was...

Vanessa: The draw.

Vanessa: The draw, she would be like, great.

Vanessa: [08:57](#) But in romance novels, I don't think that the wealth is the draw. I think the wealth is that it makes him more desirable and therefore the fact that he chooses a poor woman means that his love is purer. It's the same reason that I think we love stories about like rehabilitated bad boys because he was bad to every other woman, but I inspired him to be good. It's a chosen one narrative.

Julia: Yeah. It makes the woman feel special.

Vanessa: Right. Which is like so destructive because in real life you want to be with a man who's nice to everyone, because if he's nice to everyone then he's really good at being nice, right?

Julia: But the standard, the standard that the only way you can feel special is to receive kindness is so low. Like that's what makes you feel special. Someone treating you with human decency, like that's so bad. Level up. Like, do better.

Vanessa: [09:51](#) Maybe the segments shouldn't be called dumb him. It should be called do better.

Julia: Well I think a lot of times I really believe everyone can, like

Vanessa: Our advice for this person, for this woman, is Caleb sounds like a rape-y jerk. Stay away. You can do better.

Julia: Yeah. And I think my answer to how do I make myself stand out from other girls is don't. Other girls are great.

Vanessa: But the question I still have is like if power dynamics further complicate relationships and make relationships harder, why do we still want men with more power than us? Like why is that a fairy tale? I don't want to be with a man who's richer than I am, but I want to read stories about men who are richer than the women. Why do we want like a prince?

Julia: I don't know. Let's ask someone smart.

Vanessa: So we found someone smarter than us. We found Alyssa Cole, who's one of my favorite romance writers and is currently working on a series called the Reluctant Royals, which I highly recommend. Alissa writes from Martinique where she also keeps chickens and cats and many other animals and is basically living my dream life as far as I can tell.

Alyssa: [11:20](#) My name is Alyssa Cole. I am a romance writer and an animal wrangler. I write historical contemporary royalty romance, uh, science fiction romance, and I live in Martinique, so I'm also an island hermit. That's also on my resume. Yeah.

Vanessa: [11:40](#) So I was wondering if you could just talk to us a little bit about the royal trope, the trope of one person being royal within romance novels. What is it and why do you think it's so compelling?

Alyssa: [11:54](#) Well I think overall it's compelling because in a way I see it as a form of like the chosen one, uh, journey, someone who is seemingly normal and then in comes this person who can turn everything on just by virtue of, you know, what royalty means. Um, in pop culture. And I think that's another thing too, like royalty is kind of part of the fairy tale fantasy, the glitz and glamour and the romance of that kind of lifestyle. They kind of approached the aspect of romance of, okay, here is this person living their everyday life and suddenly they get pulled into this world that is very different from their own.

Vanessa: Right.

Alyssa: And I mean, we see that play out across genres. It's the same thing that happens in science fiction or in fantasy. When someone steps through a portal into another world, it's kind of being lifted out of your everyday life into something greater than what you're used to.

Vanessa: [13:00](#) Yeah. Something with private planes with masseuses on the private plane, you have that in one of your books. And I was like, yes. Um, what inspired you to write your royal series? Was it just wanting to offer women the opportunity to walk through those portals or?

Alyssa: [13:19](#) Well sometimes I think about it, like when I think back on it now, it kind of is something that I think I've been building up to my whole life. Like not to be dramatic, but you know, I started writing at a very young age, and the first things I wrote were fairy tales, that I remember writing are fairy tales where the princess saved the prince. So I've always had this

kind of, I wouldn't call it an obsession, like I didn't, I was a tomboy. I wore, you know, I wasn't going around wearing princess dresses and stuff like that, but I really enjoyed reading all kinds of fairy tales. And of course I liked romantic stories and when I started writing, and this is something I was talking about with friends the other day, I would write stories that for myself to read. I would write them and then I would like sit down and read it like someone else wrote it.

Alyssa: [14:09](#) So when I have, in my writing career, I have kind of just still doing that, I guess. Writing story, the kinds of stories I want to read with the kind of people that populate my world. The royalty thing, I got the idea around the time when like the Nigerian prince scam...

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: Was a big thing and I was actually at work. Uh, I used to work at a scientific journal and I was get all kinds of weird spam now and I was like, but what if one of the scam mails was actually true, which is, you know, the hope of everyone who receives one of those, those emails. What if it's true, what if this is, there is this whole other world hidden from you, this other path for your future. And I just thought it would be really fun and also it would kind of fulfill this thing where that I have always kind of been thinking of, of like writing stories that I enjoy with characters that look like me and my friends and my family.

Vanessa: [15:13](#) So I am assuming that you think of yourself as a feminist?

Alyssa: [15:19](#) Yes.

Vanessa: [15:20](#) Okay. Yes. I think of you as a feminist, but I didn't want to put any labels on you. So I'm wondering what you think or how you think about what could be this patriarchal message of a woman needing a man to save her, even just financially. Because I mean you write very strong, very competent women, so they are on a path to success, but it's a precarious and dangerous path and then, sort of a man will come in and be able to offer her everything. So I'm wondering, I'm just wondering your thoughts on that.

Alyssa: [15:54](#) The way I look at it is that I never really see the man as saving the woman in the stories I write because for example, in *A Princess in Theory*, like she is working several jobs and like she does become a princess eventually. But because in my head she would still have succeeded. She wouldn't be fabulously wealthy, most likely, being an epidemiologist.

Vanessa: Right.

Alyssa: But she would have still succeeded and you know, had a happy life and you know, met some other person. And the way I saw it, she saved him...

Vanessa: Mhm

Alyssa: More than he saved her.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: And the way I've tried to look at my romances is that they save each other. But I feel like he definitely got the better, the better end of the stick because he has someone who you know will support him, who will call him on his shit, who will help him lead. And I think also part of this is like growing up in the age of Princess Diana, who, you know, was a huge impact on what my impression of what a princess was.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: And I was like Prince Charles who?

Vanessa: Right.

Alyssa: Like she was the one bringing everything to the table in that situation, in my eyes.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: So I was just like yeah, Prince Charles is there, whatever. But like he's not important at all in this situation.

Vanessa: [17:20](#) Oh absolutely. I just found out that princesses, or like Meghan Markle and Kate Middleton, both have weights at the bottom of their dresses and their coats so that they don't fly up and I was just like God, it literally weighs more to be a woman royal.

Vanessa: [17:44](#) I have like one more sort of like theme that I would love for you to help me think through. Cause I like we as a society in the last, you know, year and a half or so have been thinking a lot more about power differentials in relationships. And so I'm wondering what do you think is the moral component of a woman dating a man with a lot more money or somebody with more like soft power, like your character in A Princess in Theory who's brilliant and a hard worker and incredibly disciplined, with somebody who has more concrete power.

Alyssa: [18:21](#) So this is something that I, you know, I think about a lot because I write a lot of power differentials, like for, in my civil war series in the first two books, um, there are varying power differentials in the first book. The hero's whiteness in the age of the civil war is a huge power differential. In the second book, the hero is white, the heroine is biracial, black presenting, but she's rich. I do enjoy exploring those things. Um, and the way I kind of look at it, and this probably comes from something my mom always told me, and my parents are still married. But you know, when I was young, she would always tell me, I don't need your father.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: She would tell me I love your father. That's why I'm with your father. I don't need him. And make sure that you never need someone. Like, again, I'm not saying this is entirely healthy.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: But, but I think she was trying to kind of counter-program against that societal idea that you need a man to be complete or you need a man to take care of you because that, you know, that message is broadcast in so many ways.

Vanessa: [19:36](#) Yeah.

Alyssa: [19:36](#) So this is kind of something that I also think about. And my characters in my books do need each other in certain ways, but I don't like for those ways to ever be, um, really related to the power differential.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: Like they need each other emotionally, but not, I need your money or I need your protection or anything like that.

Vanessa: Right.

Alyssa: There's also the, you know, the aspect of this is a fantasy. And like sometimes the fantasy for people who are like working hard, coming home, working hard at home, who are tired and harried and just want to be taken away. You know, that's a different kind of fantasy, and one that is still also relevant I think of, okay, I've been working hard and now this like rich guy's going to show up and just give me everything I need and also is attractive and great in bed. I don't think there's anything anti-feminist about it when it's well written.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: I feel like you can have all of those different aspects of this fantasy without negating the feminist nature of the book or the story itself.

Vanessa: [20:46](#) Here's the thing, it's like restorative justice, right? For how long have we been paid 72 cents on the dollar.

Alyssa: Yeah.

Vanessa: Whenever a man holds the door open for me, I'm like, yes, make my life easier. You make my life harder by existing. Hold that door. So...

Alyssa: [21:02](#) So yeah, I think, you know, there are so many different nuances to the whole, you know, the billionaire romance trope or the royalty romance trope. But at the base of it, I think there is wanting, you know, safety and security.

Vanessa: [21:18](#) Right. Which is precarious in the world.

Alyssa: [21:20](#) And love. And that's also, you know...

Vanessa: Yeah.

Alyssa: The same basis of most fairy tales.

Vanessa: [21:26](#) I just have two more questions for you. The first is, if you could mandate the impact that your books have on women's lives, how would you want them to be experienced? What impact do you want your books to have in the world?

Alyssa: Hmm. I guess I would want my readers to feel like that they're seen.

Vanessa: Mhmm.

Alyssa: And that they're worthy of love...

Vanessa: Mhmm.

Alyssa: Even if they feel that they aren't, and even if the world tells them subtly or directly that they're not. So yeah, it's that they're worthy of love and happiness and happily ever after.

Vanessa: [22:07](#) That is such a beautiful answer. Thank you.

Vanessa: [22:14](#) So for my last question, something else that we're going to be doing in these episodes is picking on-theme love advice questions from Reddit and answering them. So I was wondering if I could read you this question and if you could tell me what you think about it.

Alyssa: Okay. I love this. Yes.

Vanessa: Okay, great. So I, 24 year old female went on a date with an incredibly rich Indian guy, 25 year old male. How do I keep his attention? And so I'll just read you some of this. So we matched on Tinder... and I really, really like him and I want to keep his attention despite the kissing thing and the luring me to his hotel, ugh, sorry. He's very friendly, chipper and insanely smart, and so it's stimulating talking to him, but he's rich. How do I make myself stand out from other girls?

Alyssa: [23:02](#) Who cares if he's rich? Um, I don't think this man is a serial killer, but he seems to be like an average fuck boy. Um, like if you go on a date with someone and they say, you can keep up with my intellect, and I like that, just stop the date. That, that's over.

Alyssa: [23:20](#) I mean all that other stuff that the luring to the hotel was also shitty. But I think that one little thing is what stood out to me a lot because that's, you can just see how that will progress in a relationship and especially one where she's already trying to keep his attention like just to take it back to romance. This is not how the fantasy goes of meeting a rich man, you don't meet a rich man and then have to figure out how to keep his attention. His attention should be on you already, so by romance rules, this guy's already out and by Alyssa rules, this guy's already out, so, sorry.

Vanessa: [24:02](#) I love it. It's like don't walk, run. We should create a button where we just hit it and it's "dump him." Alyssa, thank you so much. It's, was like so fun talking to you. I feel like you can really keep up with me intellectually, I'm just kidding.

Alyssa: [24:24](#) That needs to go into someone's book. I'm sure, I'm sure it's there, but it's like the point where you need to like in a romantic comedy, get up and be like, I'm going to the bathroom and then not come back.

Vanessa: [24:34](#) I did that once to a guy. We were like three minutes into a date. We had ordered margaritas and he said something, I mean this was in the early 2000s but he said, oh, that's so gay. And I went, did you really just say that? And he went, did that really upset you? And I put down a 20 and I left. I was like, why? Why go through the pieces of this? This is going to be terrible.

Alyssa: [24:58](#) Sometimes you just gotta go.

Vanessa: [25:00](#) Alyssa, thank you so much. It was just such a pleasure. And I am a huge, huge fan. So thank you.

Alyssa: [25:08](#) Thank you. It was fun talking. And also I am very excited that we ended on an r/relationships question. This has been my favorite podcast experience thank you.

Vanessa: [25:25](#) So Julia does that, how does that make you feel about our question? Never mind. Be With Caleb forever.

Julia: Yeah, he's a real winner.

Vanessa: He's the prince.

Julia: No, I mean he sucks. So I'm glad that there's a consensus among the people, the people being us. And Alyssa.

Vanessa: I think the thing that I've really come away with is that we have anxiety about our own ability to pick the right person. And so I think that in wanting someone who has more choices than us, then it feels like, well they, they had all these choices and they chose me and so it makes it feel more faded and takes the unknown and like the decision making fatigue out of it, and I think that that's what's going on there, right? We want someone who has all the choices and chooses us and then it's not up to us.

Julia: [26:21](#) Yeah, and I think in terms of what Alyssa said about our advice question, the other thing that I'm glad that we both thought is that you should feel really hesitant to be in a relationship with someone who makes you feel special by putting other people, and especially other women down.

Vanessa: Yeah. I never understood that compliment of like, you're funnier than most women. I'm like, meh, I'm funnier than most everyone. Thanks, Julia, I'm hungry. Do you want to get food?

Julia: Yeah. I also want to work on my personal finance and figure out how to invest money smartly. Do you want to join?

Vanessa: Yes, let's do that on our lunch break.

Julia: Great.

Vanessa: [27:13](#) This has been Dump Him, an episode of Hot and Bothered. If you would like our amazing advice, send us a love advice question of your own and we will answer it either on Patreon or we'll have my mom answer it on Patreon for you or we'll post the answers on social media, but go to our website, hotandbotheredrompod.com and submit a question there. We're so wise. Follow us on Twitter and Instagram [@therompod](#) and leave us a review on iTunes. We are a coproduction of Not Sorry productions and Spoke Media. We are executive produced by me, Vanessa Zoltan and Arianna Nudelman. Our Reddit question was chosen by the elegant Julia Argy and we are edited by the Fabulous Chelsea Ursin. Special thanks this week to the fabulous island hermit, Alyssa Cole and the birds who provided our soundtrack to our interview in her backyard. Our production team is Brigid Goggin, Janielle Kastner, Caroline Hamilton, Jenna Hannam, Will Short and Alex Mark. We'll talk to you next week.