

Love me, love me not – B2/C1

Two people fall in love. But is their experience real? Or is it just a side effect of the medicine they're taking?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to wear off
2. a trial
3. through/with rose-tinted glasses
4. to fine-tune
5. to pay someone a compliment
6. heightened
7. a side effect
8. a dimple

Definition

- a. a series of tests to discover whether something is effective and safe
- b. to make very small changes to something so that it works as well as possible
- c. an effect of a medicine that is not intended
- d. increased or stronger, especially about an emotion or effect
- e. a small, hollow place that appears on a person's cheeks when they smile
- f. to gradually disappear, especially the effects of something
- g. to say something to someone that shows admiration, approval or respect
- h. an excessively optimistic way of looking at something; only seeing the positive and pleasant things about a situation

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Kate looked around the room at the other participants: ten men and ten women all around the same age.

'Thank you for coming today and offering your time to help advance medicine! Limeren, the medicine we're testing, is in what we call the Phase 4 stage, which means previous human trials have shown us the drug is completely safe ...'

Kate stopped paying attention. She'd read the information the medical research company had sent her so she knew the vitamin tablets, Limeren, had already been approved for sale and that they were just fine-tuning now, not testing side effects. She didn't know any of the other people in the group. Presumably, none of them had jobs either or they wouldn't have signed up to a medical study to earn money. But otherwise it was impossible to know if she had anything in common with any of them. She hoped so, or it was going to feel like a very long four days stuck in the hospital-like research centre.

'... known side effects are that some people experience heightened emotions and psychological states as well as a feeling of general well-being,' the lead researcher finished off his presentation. 'We'll be interviewing each of you and taking standard physical tests through the day and night. So if you can all sign the consent forms, we can get started.'

Kate signed and dated her form without reading the information. Hopefully, this was going to be the easiest money she ever made.

'I hope the food's better than last time,' said the guy sitting next to her as he handed in his form.

Kate smiled.

'I'm Michael.'

'Kate,' she said. 'You've been here before?'

'As often as they'll let me!' He laughed. 'Easiest money I ever made.'

She smiled back. Someone she had something in common with after all.

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A few hours later, eating dinner and having taken her second dose of Limeren that day, Kate couldn't deny she felt extra relaxed. Maybe it was the drug, or maybe it was just being in a place where nothing was expected of her. There were books to read, films to watch and even board games and puzzles. It was nothing like her normal days, sending job application after job application and going to stressful interviews that never led to a job.

She looked up and saw Michael smiling at her. 'Fancy playing a board game?' he asked. His eyes were such a deep shade of brown, Kate thought. She couldn't think why she hadn't noticed earlier. To her annoyance, she felt her cheeks going red. 'Sure,' she replied. 'I'm very competitive, though,' she warned.

'Perfect,' he said. 'Me too!'

Was it her imagination or did his cheeks look a bit pink too?

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For the next two days, Kate and Michael hung out all the time, playing games, chatting and watching films.

'I feel as if I've known you for months, not days,' she said. She already knew he lived not far away, that he was a student studying for his PhD and that he had dimples in his cheeks when he smiled and a cute way of putting a pen behind his ear when he was reading. She couldn't be completely certain, but she thought he seemed to be making sure he sat next to her for meals and hung out with her whenever he could. Or maybe she was the one who was always looking for him.

'So, do you think you're feeling any side effects?' he asked her one evening. They were sitting on the sofa, watching a film. Michael's knee was almost touching her leg, and if his hand moved even a tiny bit, it would be touching hers. Her heart beat faster and all she could think about was closing the gap and feeling his skin touch hers. She was blushing again, she knew it.

'Any what?' she asked, forcing her mind back to the conversation.

'The side effects of Limeren that they told us about at the presentation,' he said, moving his hand away. Her skin immediately felt cold, as if the presence of his hand had been warming the air between them.

'Oh, I was only half-listening,' she said. 'We still get paid anyway though, right?'

And then he did it. He moved his hand so that it covered hers. A warm feeling went all the way through her fingers and across her skin. She turned her hand over and held his hand. He smiled and leaned towards her slightly.

'Can everyone line up for their evening dose of Limeren, please?' called a nurse. Michael dropped her hand and followed the rest of the group to the nurse's room. Kate couldn't remember ever feeling so happy.

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'Thank you, everyone, for taking part in this trial. You're now free to go,' the lead researcher said the next morning as the trial ended. 'Any side effects will wear off over the next few days. Those of you who have experienced strong feelings, emotions and happiness will find that the feelings lessen but we don't expect anyone to become depressed. However, we will follow up with all of you in the next few days to make sure everything is fine.'

'We can have our first date now,' Michael said to Kate. 'Breakfast?'

Over breakfast, they talked and talked. Kate knew she was in love. It was stupid, but it was true. Michael said it first.

'I can't believe I met you. I've never felt like this about anyone before.'

'This does feel amazing,' Kate said. And then a quiet worry that she had been ignoring became too loud to ignore.

'You don't think ...?'

'What?'

'What if it's the Limeren making us feel like this? What was it he said about heightened emotions?'

'There's only one way to find out!' Michael said. 'If you don't want to be my girlfriend any more after a few days, we'll know it was just the Limeren.'

She felt herself melt at the word 'girlfriend'. 'Maybe your side effects will wear off first!'

'Maybe!' He laughed. 'But I don't think so. This feels real to me.'

'Me too,' she said.

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Four months later

Looking back, a few months later, Kate had to admit, nothing was ever going to be as perfect as those first days together. Eventually, real life had to interrupt. She got a job a few days after the trial ended and he went back to the library and his books and research projects. It

was the end of her money worries but also the end of spending all day, every day together and all the excitement of falling in love. But still, they saw each other when they could and met each other's parents. Everyone expected them to get married, and when he finally produced a ring and asked her to marry him, she felt that old excitement again.

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Three years later

'You do it!' Kate shouted. She hated doing the weekly shopping. Why couldn't he do it?

'I *will*, but I can't go right now, I'm sorry,' Michael said quietly. He never shouted, but sometimes Kate found his quiet patience irritating.

'Fine, I'll go then,' she said, slamming the door.

Kate felt as if these kinds of arguments were happening more often. As she walked around the supermarket, she thought about how they'd been before, when they were in love. 'Can it ever feel like that again?' she wondered.

Walking into the health section, she spotted a word she recognised on the shelves. Limeren. The vitamin's name reminded her of a time she was really crazy about Michael. She picked up a box and put it in her basket.

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When she got home, Michael was already in bed so she ate dinner alone, taking her Limeren tablet with a big glass of water. The next morning, she woke up early as usual, but instead of jumping straight in the shower, she joined Michael downstairs for breakfast.

'Good morning!' she said, feeling a sudden desire to kiss him on the cheek as she sat down next to him at the table. He was eating in front of a big pile of books, looking cute with a pen behind his ear. 'What are you working on?'

'I'm writing a grant application for my next research project,' he said.

'Oh, good luck! What's the project about?'

After breakfast, she reflected on how nice it had been to see him talking about his passions. She'd forgotten how cute his dimples were when he smiled, she thought. Or maybe she hadn't seen him smile much recently. Anyway, she decided to have breakfast with him every day, since it had been such a lovely start to the day. It couldn't hurt to make a bit more effort, could it?

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Two years later

The baby hadn't stopped crying for two hours, but now she was calm, her little face peaceful as she slept. Kate sighed with annoyance. Where was Michael? She walked out of the bedroom angrily and went downstairs to find him filling bottles with milk for the baby.

'Well done!' Michael said. 'That didn't sound easy.'

'No!' she said angrily. 'It isn't!'

'You're doing an amazing job,' he said. 'OK, so I've done all the laundry, made your lunch for later and arranged to come home early this afternoon so that you can have some time for yourself.'

Kate managed to smile and say thank you. He really was being very sweet, even if she was too tired to feel grateful or to be nice back. As soon as he had left for work, she reached for the box of Limeren. By the time he came home, even earlier than he'd promised, Kate's smile matched his smile at seeing her.

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One year later

Kate was putting clothes away while her daughter slept. She picked up one of Michael's favourite jumpers and held the soft fabric next to her cheek. She missed him and he had only been out an hour. Putting it back, she noticed something hard underneath the rest of the jumpers in the drawer. The something turned out to be boxes and boxes of Limeren.

She was shocked to see them even though, by now, she took Limeren every day. And every day she felt madly in love with her wonderful husband. She thought of it as a quick way to those feelings she'd always had for Michael. Everyone said marriage was hard work and she just didn't have the time or energy to work at love as well as her part-time job and a young baby. She found that when she took the tablets, she made more effort at all those small gestures that made their life together nice. If he did something nice for her, she said thank you, but most of all she actually felt thankful. She paid him compliments and noticed things about him. She asked him about his day and remembered things that were important to him. She'd seen nothing wrong with the shortcut. Until now, that is. Now she knew why he had always been so good at doing those same things for her. It was all fake!

Instead of being all smiles when Michael got home, she was angry. Clearly the Limeren only had a limited ability to make everything perfect. Her rose-tinted glasses were definitely off now.

'What are all these?' she asked, pointing to the Limeren packets she'd taken from the drawer and piled up on the kitchen table.

Michael moved closer to the boxes and tried to read the writing. 'They're vitamins, aren't they?'

'Don't act as if you've no idea why I'm asking!' said Kate, angry he was acting innocent. 'These boxes,' she said dramatically, pointing to the pile again, 'are our relationship.'

'Oh!' he said. 'It's Limeren!'

'Yes, it's Limeren,' she said. 'I know exactly what they are.'

He looked confused. 'So why are you asking me what they are? I remember the name now you've said – from the place we met, right? – but I've not taken those for years.'

'What?'

'I just ... I don't know. It's better to get vitamins from fruit and vegetables, isn't it?' he said. 'The medical trial company sent us a load of them years ago, but I put them away somewhere and

forgot to throw them away. We eat a balanced enough diet so there's no need to take vitamins.'

'What about ...' She felt her voice getting louder and louder, but also something made her feel a slight doubt as she planned the words. It sounded ridiculous. 'What about the falling in love part? The side effects! You're always so wonderful and perfect, the ideal husband. And now I know why!'

'Er ... thanks?' He laughed. 'I know they told us there were some side effects, but we were just joking when we said we fell in love because of the tablets, weren't we? Besides,' he added, turning the box over in his hands, 'they must have changed the ingredients or something because it doesn't say anything on the box anywhere about side effects. See?' He held it out for her to look. 'Maybe they changed the recipe after we did that trial. Who knows?'

He gave her a big hug. 'This perfect husband is all natural, don't worry.'

He went off upstairs to check on the baby and then she heard him banging pots and pans in the kitchen as he started to make dinner. She too examined the boxes and it was true. There was nothing written on the box about side effects, or even on the leaflet inside. The tablets were just vitamins after all. Limeren wasn't a shortcut to love and it never had been.

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Tasks

Task 1

Match the sentences (a–f) with the person (1–2).

Person

1. Kate

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2. Michael

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Sentences

- a. was unemployed when they met.
- b. was a student when they met.
- c. didn't think their feelings were because of Limeren.
- d. said their relationship was not real.
- e. said 'I love you' first.
- f. didn't listen carefully to what the researcher was saying.

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. During the trial, the researchers kept the side effects of Limeren secret.	True	False
2. Just after the trial ended, both Kate and Michael thought their feelings might be caused by Limeren.	True	False
3. Kate got angrier than Michael when they argued.	True	False
4. Kate's feelings of love towards Michael increased when they had breakfast together.	True	False
5. Kate thought Limeren would solve all her relationship problems.	True	False
6. Michael had hidden the Limeren from Kate.	True	False
7. The ingredients for Limeren might have changed since the trial.	True	False
8. Limeren was the reason their marriage was happy.	True	False

Discussion

Did you like the story?

Answers

Preparation task

1. f
2. a
3. h
4. b
5. g
6. d
7. c
8. e

Task 1

1. a, d, f
2. b, c, e

Task 2

1. False
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. True
6. False
7. True
8. False