

Megan Scott

## You Just Can't Escape it

February is rough. It's the beginning of a new semester, midterms are around the corner, there is a variance in the number of days of the month. But it's the end of the second week of the second month that really gets you. Suddenly everything is pink and red and hearts and roses and teddy bears with spoken messages. And then you realize, it's fucking Valentine's Day.

I don't even know why I have such a problem with it. I mean, I've never really liked it. I've considered it a "Hallmark Holiday" since I was too young to understand the concept of capitalism. But my utter disgust is rather inexplicable. I'm in a long-term, committed relationship and most days I walk around with hearts in my eyes like some hopelessly devoted cartoon character. I mean I know I'm definitely getting a box of candies and a bouquet of roses. Just like last year. Maybe that's the problem, there's no spontaneity. I know what I'm getting and when I'm getting it. It's the one day of the year when you are expected (and forced sometimes against your will) to express your undying affection for someone. And when you don't have a someone, the swooning makes you sick. No, the swooning should always make you sick, regardless of relationship status.

So much significance is put on gifts from such a young age. Valentines have to be just right, clad with the appropriate character and accompanying candy. I'd have a conniption fit if my mom got me the lame Valentines with Barbie. If she didn't know better to not get those in the first place, she should have at least expected that she'd have to go back to the store and remedy the issue immediately. We all knew the inevitability of being judged based on the lunch box and

backpack our parents bought us, and there was even more riding on a paper Valentine and a tiny box of Nerds.

Even though you had to give an equivalent Valentine to every single person in the class, even the mean one that spread some rumor about, oh I don't know, how you sometimes pick your nose even when you definitely do not, ever, a special effort is made to make some of them exceptional. An immense amount of time is taken to ensure that you use your neatest cursive on the card the boy you secretly fawn over and pretend to kiss while you are wrapped around some inanimate object standing in for said boy. You also try really hard to covertly give clues as to how much you truly adore this boy. Or if you had many suitors, you made sure each gift was somehow special in a unique way, so none of them would suspect each other as competition.

This is twisted obsession for a seven year old to deal with. I mean, I was always a pretty anxious kid, so naturally I took it to an unnecessary level, but everyone felt at least a little nervous about giving gifts to crushes and non-crushes.

### ***14 February 1997***

Walking in the classroom from the bathroom, I notice the entire class low key giggling. Carla F. and Stephanie R. are snickering in their corner of the grouped desks. Uncomfortable, I scurry to my own desk, only to see rose petals sprinkled on top. Infuriated and humiliated, I brush them off onto the floor. But it's only when I open my desk that I fully understand the gravity of the situation. There are more rose petals and a full flower head sitting atop my set of Junie B. Jones's books.

The audacity!

A severe heat hotter than the hottest day in Death Valley emanates from my solar plexus up and outward through my body. I can feel the blood rush from my head to my stomach, and a sensation of my stomach dropping out of my body and onto the floor. I could feel my face turn incarnadine and the dew accumulate in my fisted palms.

As soon as I become aware of the identity of the perpetrator, I stare at him hard as I move from my desk to the trash can with the collection of plant pieces in my hands. I dump them in the bin with hatred impressive for a first grader, and then rush to the desk of my teacher, who had been watching the entire ordeal and was probably in on it. Fighting back tears, I plead to go to the nurse's office.

As soon as I leave the classroom and turn left down the hall, the tears begin to roll. I can't believe someone would like me and then humiliate me in front of all of my scholarly colleagues. These weren't even legitimate rose petals, it was from one of those half-rate bushes by the water fountains, light pink with a weak stamen and pistils that get everywhere. There is no question that this is going to be the talk of the grade for who knows how many months. People like scandal, and it's even more appealing when it's fueled by romance.

### ***14 February 1998***

It's 9 PM. It's late. My sister and I are in our room, lights out. She's playing with her Beanie Babies, making them perform some ceremony while I'm on the top bunk reading with a flashlight. Suddenly the phone rings. Startled, we both shuffle under our sheets and pretend to be sleeping, as to avoid disobeying bed time yet again.

My mom slowly opens the door and the light from the hallway shines in.

“Megan, honey,” my mom says, “I know you’re awake.”

I rub my eyes, pretending that the incoming light is just too much for my abruptly awoken self. “What?”

“Megan, there’s someone on the phone for you.”

“What? It’s late though.”

“Come here and pick up the phone.”

Unsuspecting, I climb down the stairs of the bed and pick up the phone from the wall.

“Hello?”

There’s silence.

“Hello?” I inquire again, this time with a little more attitude.

“Hi, Megan. This is Tommy. I was wondering because I like you and, will you be my girlfriend?” a high pitched voice speedily said.

“What? No! I will not be your girlfriend!” I slam the phone against it’s housing.

My mom stands there, slightly shocked but still grinning as I hold my knees to my chest.

“So, who was that?” she asks, even though she already knows the answer.

“Tommy Clark. He wants me to be his girlfriend.”

Suddenly my younger sister chimes in, and taunts, “Somebody likes Megan! Somebody likes Megan. Megan has a boyfriend!”

“Shut up! No, I don’t!” Quoting my new favorite movie, *Romy and Michelle’s High School Reunion*, I shouted, “I don’t give a flying fuck about him!”

And that was the second time I dropped the “F” bomb.

***14 February 1999***

There's this boy in my class that I'm friends with. Our last names are very close on the roll call, so we are frequently positioned near each other. Our desks are next to each other, we have to sit on the same seat on the bus for field trips, and we are always in line together when we take pictures. Everyone teases me for being friends with him, claiming we like-like each other, even though that's not the case, and if it was, it wouldn't be reciprocated by me.

Although we also live three blocks away from each other, he mailed me an invitation for a three course dinner in honor of Valentine's Day. He clearly spent a lot of time on it. The invitation had ribbon laced through holes as a border and the where, what, when, why details were in a fancy cursive font.

I didn't want to go because I knew that would be serious fodder for the entire fourth grade class, but my mom made me. I wore a floor length green skirt with a matching checkered green sweater. My mom crimped my hair and set it with glitter hairspray. Before I knew it, the doorbell rang and there he was, in a pressed suit with slicked back hair. His older brother was also in a suit and a cap, acting as the chauffeur. We drove the three blocks back to his house where his mom was waiting with a three-course meal and a table set with lit candles.

It was any thirty-something year old's dream come true. But not mine. He had been enrolled in cotillion and despite my pleas to my mother to enroll me too, the only etiquette training I had came from *Beauty and the Beast* and *Titanic*. I knew not to slurp soup, but like Jack Rose, was overwhelmed by the artillery of silverware on either side of my plate.

After his brother, who had transformed from chauffeur to waiter and butler, cleared our plates, it was time for some real fun: board games. He had a game of Monopoly set up in another room and let me pick my piece first.

By the end of the night, the glitter in my hair had moved to my sweater and the crimp marks regressed into frizz. His dad drove me home and he walked me to my door and kissed me on my cheek. *Dang it, he likes me.* I denied this last interaction come Monday.

### ***14 February 2006***

Dreading a surprise after school, I frantically collect my belongings from my locker and rush to my mom's car. I have a strong inkling that he's going to show up after school, so I make my mom flee the scene as fast and as far as possible, and duck as she's driving.

She knew how anxious I was about the situation and decided to take me to a store to get a new outfit. Ten minutes later, my cell phone rings.

"Hey, where are you?"

"Shopping. Why?"

"I'm at Notre Dame! I came to surprise you!"

"Oh no...really?"

"Yeah! I brought you flowers!"

"Ooh, that's too bad. Yeah, I'm already gone...Thanks though."

"Okay, do you want to come over later?"

"Uh, you know, I have a lot of work in my AP Euro class. Maybe this weekend."

"Oh. Okay. Well, happy Valentine's Day."

*14 February 2012*

It took a lot of convincing from my roommate for me to give in and get my beau a gift. I agonized over the level of appropriateness for weeks and finally decided on a block of chocolate that represented both my interests and feelings towards Valentine's Day. After a long and stressful day of class and work, we plan to see each other to exchange goodies.

I open the door to see him standing there with a bunch of flowers and a card.

Then, he opens my card and reads, "I may hate Valentine's Day, but I certainly love you."

I try to justify the present before he unwraps it all the way. "I got you a chocolate version of Han Solo in carbonite. Because that's how I feel on Valentine's Day."

"Thanks. That's romantic."

Forget microwaves and carcinogens from overly barbequed food and Beijing smog. It's the Valentines that will get you.