

19 fuck valentine's day (that saturday)

"Valentine's Day is such bullshit," I said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Natalie asked in a motherly tone. You could tell there was a hint of defensiveness in there.

"It means that Valentine's Day is ridiculous. You can't win. Some girls want everything, and you can't get them enough. Other girls don't want—"

"We all read your column, big shot," Matt said from the other room. He loved to bust on me when it seemed like I was using material on them.

Matt walked into the living room where Natalie and I sat watching TV. He tossed us both bottles of Bud Light. Almost as if they were triggered by the sound of the beer being opened, Chris and Colin came downstairs, headed for the beer fridge located to the right of the main sofa in the TV room, and sat down.

"I don't *bate* Valentine's Day," Colin said.

"You would fucking say that," I said, throwing a nearby

bottle cap in his direction.

"Leave him alone, you no-love-having motherfucker," Matt said.

"Oh, here we go," I laughed.

"What?"

"You? I know you. You love Valentine's Day. Go ahead, tell them the story."

"What story?" Matt asked.

"You know..."

"Oh. Freshman year? They have to know that one by now," Matt said.

No one said anything. They hadn't heard it.

"You tell it," Matt said to me.

"Listen, we both know I tell it better, but it's your story. You tell it. I think you've earned it," I laughed.

"Fine," Matt said. "Remember Jennifer, from freshman year? Well, I sent her a gift for Valentine's Day. She was still home. In high school. And, well, I wanted to send her a gift for Valentine's Day, you know, something—"

"Damn, man, I'll tell it. You can't tell a story for shit," I interrupted. "He must've spent like two or three weeks—"

"More like a day, or two at the most. But whatever," Matt shot back.

"Agree to disagree. So, what he did was, he bought pink, red, and white construction paper, cut it into about a hundred small pieces, and then wrote on each one something different that he loved about her. Then he put it all in a clear glass Mason jar. And he sent it to her."

"Aww...." Natalie said. Though this was barely audible above Chris and Colin's chorus of something in the area code of "You are *such* a pussy."

"No, easy with that," I said. The group looked quizzically at me, wondering why I'd be defending Matt about this. "He wasn't being a pussy. That wound up working out. They stayed together for at least...what, three more weeks after that?"

"Shut the hell up," Matt laughed. "You've got a better

one? Something more manly, I'm sure."

"I once got head on Valentine's Day in Newhouse."

"Get out! Where?!" Chris asked. Part of him had to hope it was nowhere he'd ever been. The chances of that being the case, however, were slim as Newhouse was the main building for broadcast journalism majors, and it wasn't exactly a warehouse.

"You know, I'm not exactly sure," I said, "but it was at night. We were there working on something, Katie and I, and I think it was in the bathroom."

"Now...*that's* romantic!" Matt said.

"I've got one," Chris said.

Pause.

"Well, are you going to actually tell us?" Matt asked.

"Uh, yeah. Sorry. I thought you'd ask. Anyway, it was sophomore year—"

"Oh, yeah, I remember this one," Colin chuckled.

"Let me tell it, okay? So it was sophomore year. There was a girl in a psychology class of mine. She was all right-looking, I guess."

"What are we talking about here?" I interjected, as the resident girl-ogler.

"Uh...I'd say a 6-1-7? Good, not great."

"Okay, sorry. Needed a visual. Continue," I said.

"This girl, we'd talked a few times after class. One day, I'm not sure what came over me, but I just asked her to go to dinner with me on Valentine's Day. I wasn't even thinking about doing it. I just did it. I just went up to her, no lines, and just said asked. She said yes, which absolutely amazed me."

"Eddie, come on," Natalie chided. Chris always tried to put himself down, especially his looks. He was no David Cassidy (dated reference, hi-yo!), but he wasn't anywhere near as bad as he'd lead you to believe.

"You know what I mean. I guess I was more shocked at the fact that I just did it. It was like one of those movies about being possessed by another being. Anyway, I invited her to Delmonico's," he said, winking at me. "Twenty, thirty minutes

go by, no sign of her. No call, no text, nothing."

"Wow, this is a real pick-me-up. Thanks, Ed," I said, taking a swig of my beer.

"Hold on now; let me finish. You'll see. So, as you can guess, she didn't show. So I left. Not before I had a steak, which is beside the point, but you know how good those steaks are...."

"On with it," Matt laughed.

"When I left, it was around eight, eight-thirty? Point is, around ten-thirty I'm in my room, watching television, and my phone rings. It's her. She's apologizing and wants to come over to see me, and sounds completely bombed. So she comes over and we hook up—but I made it a point not to get in touch with her again. The way I look at it, I had the last laugh. Sure, she stood me up, but I'm not the one who wound up on my knees at the end of the night."

"Thatta boy, Ed!" I said. Not only was it a nice ending, but it was decidedly out of character. Normally, Chris wouldn't even have phrased it this way, let alone not call her again or take sexual pleasure from a girl as drunk as she seemed to have been.

"Okay, now that we're all sharing stories—" Colin began to say.

"Wait—sorry to cut you off—but that's not the end of the story. A few weeks later, some time near the end of the semester, she calls me on a weekend night. Might have been a Friday night. Or Saturday. Either way, we hadn't really spoken since that night, so, needless to say, I was shocked to hear from her."

"Needless to say? Who are you?" I mocked.

"It's an expression, you dick. One that doesn't have the word 'fuck' in it—you should try it some time. She calls, all hysterical, crying. For the first bit of the conversation, she's completely incoherent. I can't get anything from her. Eventually though, she calms down enough to tell me she just did cocaine and is freaking out—"

"What the fu—" the group gasped out.

"I know, right?" Chris continued. "And that she's down on Salina Street, and can I come and pick her up? So what was I supposed to say? I couldn't say no, so I spent the rest of that night walking her off her coke high. How's that for an ending?"

"That's it?" Matt asked.

"What do you mean, *that's it*? That wasn't enough?"

"No, I mean, what else happened? Did you speak to her after that?"

"Well, like the first time, we didn't speak much after. And since then I haven't had any classes with her, so that was that. Why she called me that night, I have no idea. But that will forever be etched in my mind when it comes to Valentine's Day."

"Wow, my story sucks compared to that," Colin said, sounding deflated.

"No, go ahead, Colin," Natalie said.

"Okay, mine is from high school. There was this Valentine's Day dance for sophomores. It was because we didn't have our own prom yet and obviously juniors and seniors did. Honestly, I had no intention of going. There was a big Celtics game on the night of the dance, so I was planning on staying home."

"Sounds like reason enough to me," I chuckled, and another swig of beer was had around the room. Interjections were frequent and seemed to serve not only comedic purposes but also as a natural point for the original storyteller to have a drink break.

"That year, my gym class shared the room with a group of the, the...uh, the special-ed kids. So this girl from that group, Rachel, comes up to me, and point-blank asks me if I want to go to the dance with her. Mind two things: I'd never spoken to her before, and the dance was two days away. I said, 'I can't. I have to work.' I thought I was in the clear. Without missing a beat, she goes, 'Where do you have to work?' She wasn't even being demanding; I think she was just curious. I completely froze. I had no idea what to say. So I paused for a

second, looked her in the face and said, 'I have to work at a factory that night.'"

The room burst out laughing. Matt nearly spilled his beer.

"You told her you had to work in *a* factory? No specification, just *a* factory?" Chris gasped out between fits of tear-inducing laughter.

"Basically, yeah," Colin chuckled.

"And she didn't question this?" I asked.

"No, *that* was the most amazing thing, at least to me. I said it and then she smiled, so I did, too. And then I walked away."

"A *factory*!" Matt howled.

Once it died down, Colin asked, "How about you, Nat?"

"You guys don't want to hear mine," Natalie said. "Dinners with Kent. Roses, chocolate. Typical, romantic and girly. No factories, no cokeheads." She was a girl, after all. Sometimes hearing the word "cooter" from her as often as we did allowed us to forget that fact.

These were the moments, trapped inside our otherwise meaningless days, that we would soon miss. We took them largely for granted. This was the way it went and it had been this way for four years now. Who thought, for more than a fleeting moment, about what things would be like *afterwards*? It just wasn't often considered.

Matt and Natalie and Chris and Colin lived upstairs. I lived downstairs. Rarely were fewer than three of us at home. That was enough for a trip to Chuck's, a drinking game at home, a Mortal Kombat challenge, or even just a bullshitting session about women, food, or sports (the only three things on our minds most of the time). In all of this there arose a familiarity, a comfort. The kind so intrinsic that it only became apparent when it was gone.

