

V.D.

By Pete Malicki

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Cast

Sophie Wong: a neurotic woman in her mid-thirties.

V.D.

Sophie: Today's the thirteenth of February and it's looking like I'll be getting flowers from no one but my mother for the sixteenth consecutive Valentine's Day. Not that I care. The day's nothing but pure commercialism. All the taken men out there are guilt-tripped into buying long-stemmed bloody roses and taking their ladies to expensive restaurants. The kind of restaurants where you don't have *bookings*, you *make reservations*.

Hang on, does this sound bitter? I don't want to sound bitter. I'll be the first to admit I want a special day tomorrow. My girlfriends are always getting diamond-studded watches and white gold necklaces while I'm sitting at home alone eating three bowls of ice cream and watching *Sex In The City*. Every year since I turned twenty-five I've been so lonely on Valentine's Day I've gone out and bought a cat. I have ten cats.

Did you ever notice how Valentine's Day shares the same initials as venereal disease? V.D. I feel like that's not a coincidence, like there's a close relationship between letting someone near your vagina without a medical certificate and having to put out to thank him for the diamonds.

A voice distracts me from my fourteenth game of Spider Solitaire. "Sophie Wong? These are for you."

The "these" this person is referring to is the most exquisite bouquet of flowers ever wrapped in green and pink cellophane and courier-delivered to an Executive Assistant in her cubicle. I thank her then shake her hand then decide to up the ante and give her a hug. She backs carefully into the elevator.

My boss gives me an appraising nod as he walks into his office and for a sinking second I realise they're from him. But no. He's married, and gay, and it's not his handwriting.

So *who* sent them? I look closer at the card and there's a message. "Pick you up. Your place. 6pm tomorrow." Okay, that's a little scary. Who are these damned things from?

Maybe it's a co-worker. One of these bastards is playing with my feelings, or, well, maybe they genuinely like me? I get up and go to Rod's desk. I look him in the eye. It's not him. I watch *Lie To Me*; I can read any face. I stop by every male's desk in the office, one by one. Damn it. None of these nerds are responsible. Who sent me these goddamned flowers?

When I get home I feel the greatest ambivalence. I'm hopeful and excited about my date but the whole thing is so suspicious. Is it some bastard ex-boyfriend playing a cruel prank. Will anyone even turn up?

I pour myself half a dozen gins and sort out a microwave dinner. You probably won't believe this, but I've had boyfriends every year for the last six years. Thing is, they always dump me before Christmas. My birthday's in January so they're probably sitting there thinking, "Christmas, birthday, Valentine's Day. I can't commit to three gifts in three months!"

I finish my gins and pour myself another two. How many's that? Four? I get up to do a wee and pass out in the bathroom with my knickers around my ankles.

For the sixteenth Valentine's Day in a row I wake up with a monumental hangover. My landline is ringing. This will be my mother. "Hi mum. Guess what? I have a dinner date! I met a guy at... well, I won't confuse you with the details!"

"It's Michael Lee," says my boss. "You planning on coming to work or are you getting those Botox injections you've been googling all year?"

I'm embarrassed for so many reasons. He laughs and tells me to take the day off to get ready. What a bastard! Am I so pathetic I need a whole *day* to make myself presentable? I resist the urge to have a gin breakfast and stagger into my bedroom to get dressed.

Two hours later I wake up feeling human. I shower and dress, then I check my Facebook and my Tweets and five email accounts and blogs and forums and the comments on my YouTube videos. There's nothing of interest, so I check everything another eighteen times then switch off my Mac. I look at my watch. Half-past midday. I call the animal shelter and tell them to put down the kitten they'd kept aside for me.

The doorbell rings. It's flowers from my mother. I call her and tell her I have a date. She doesn't believe me but I don't care. I *do* have a date. A date who... (*realisation*) knows where I work and live but wants to remain anonymous.

I suddenly realise how bad this looks. Who the heck is this guy? It could be some psycho who wants to kill me! This is the stupidest thing I've done in my life. I'm about to have dinner with a stalker.

Six pm comes around and the doorbell rings. My heart is racing and I'm hyperventilating and it's a struggle to make it out of the living room. I open the front door feeling blindingly dizzy.

A man I've never seen before is standing there. He is clean-shaven and cute as pie, slim, about my height and radiating quiet pleasantness. His eyes are bright and blue. "Hi Sophie." His voice is a soft murmur. "You're probably wondering who I am." I manage a nod. "We actually went to the same school. You were three years below me. I found you on Facebook and hunted you down through a mutual friend who I swore on the Bible I would never name."

His calm manner relaxes me. "What's your name?" I ask.

"Dan. Dan Hunsford."

He takes my hand and walks me to the car, even opening the door for me. The date passes in a blur of nerves, but I quickly get the impression that Dan Hunsford has no intention of killing, raping, scamming or religiously converting me. He is a perfect gentleman who drives at the speed limit, makes eye contact, listens to every word of my nervous babble, and buys me lobster. Polite, charming and perfect in every way.

Naturally, this makes me suspicious. Suspicious of what Dan's real motive is and suspicious of Murphy's Law, which dictates I will screw him, wake up, see the photo of my grandma on his bedside table and realise we're cousins.

He drives me home and walks me to the door and I badly want to take him inside and shag him. The angel on my shoulder screams "Do it!" We stop on the threshold.

"Thank you for an amazing evening, Dan."

He smiles. "Thanks for coming. I was scared I'd scared you."

"No. Well, a little. But luckily for you I'm desperate enough to go on dates with complete strangers."

There is an awkward pause.

"So what's wrong with you?" Instantly regretting my word choice! "I mean, you're just so perfect. You're handsome, charming, funny. You should be married to a supermodel."

Dan smiles again with a hint of sadness. "Before I answer that, may I kiss you?"

I don't actually say "Hell yeah" out loud but from the way I'm leaning forwards with my lips puckered the comment would be fairly superfluous. We kiss passionately and I'm inches away from clubbing him and dragging him to bed.

"I was born a woman," he says.

There it is. There's the "something" I knew he was hiding. Thanks Murphy, you *motherfucker!*

"I'm sorry," Dan says, and he turns to leave.

Instinct makes me reach for his shoulder. His slender, feminine shoulder. "Don't you think you should've told me?" The question is more or less a reflex.

He snaps. "I told you within *two* hours of meeting you. You think it should be my introductory line? 'Hi, I'm Dan, I used to be a chick, but I always felt like a man trapped in a woman's body so I got my tits hacked off and take bucketloads of hormones. It would take me *all night* to tell you what they did down there.'"

After an evening of politeness and charm, this outburst comes like a slap in the face.

"Why'd you tell me at all?" I ask. Tears are rolling down his cheeks but I feel strangely empty.

He looks me in the eye. "Because I wanted to sleep with you. It would be far more awkward if the first you heard of my sex change was when I use the penis pump."

Now he refuses to look away. I bite my lip and frown. Is it gay to do it with a guy who used to be a girl? Is it so bad to be gay?

Sophie's mood and expression darkens; she is genuinely disgusted. The lights dim.

Sophie: I am suddenly filled with bile. No, I will *not* do this. I would *never*. This person before me is a transvestite; not a he, nor a she, but an *it*. How emotionally retarded and weak must it be to have its *gender* changed? *It* kissed me, knowing I'd like it, trying to trick me into feeling something. This "perfect gentleman" act was nothing but a disguise to hide the sicko underneath.

The manipulative, disgusting bastard.

In a fury, I unlock the front door, step inside, and slam it behind me.

The lights return to normal.

Sophie: Three seconds later I open the door and say, "Do you drink gin?"