

V.D. – extended version

A monologue by Pete Malicki

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V.D. Extended

Cast

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

Part I

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 Tom'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... well, I won't confuse you with the details."

“It’s Michael Lee.” 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?” I ask, 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.”

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?"

Part II

Two years have passed.

Sophie: Some people say life starts when you fall in love. For me, it was when my mum died on the anniversary of my transsexual boyfriend dumping me.

Things with Dan Hunsford didn't work out the way I'd expected. I'd *expected* we'd last about a week, but we made it all the way through Christmas, my birthday, and even a second Valentine's Day. I was so proud of myself I sold all my cats except Arnold. I didn't want to keep Arnold but he knew what was going on after Carrie, Miranda and Mr Big disappeared and the little bastard scratched me whenever I went within two metres of him.

Things were strained with Dan right from the beginning. We started out pretty heavy; I nicknamed him "Every time Dan." One day after some brunch lurvin' I said, "You really know what a woman wants," and he gave me a look like he knew he was cheating. It's bad, I know, but things like that bothered me, even after a bottle of wine.

One day mid-year I had a complete change of heart. I embraced who he... was. I started boasting to my girlfriends. "Cindy, meet Dan. Dan's my boyfriend. He used to be a woman. If you find that weird or disgusting then you're a narrow-minded, prejudiced bitch. Get off your damned high horse, Cindy." Whenever I booked us tickets or filled out paperwork on his behalf I'd circle both genders and write "ex" next to female.

A year to the day before mum died, Dan said, “You can’t love me for who I am. You’re either creeped out by me or showing me off to prove how forward-thinking you are.”

At least, that’s what intensive therapy uncovered. I blacked out after he said “we need to talk” and didn’t come to until spring. The first thing I remembered in months was Arnold licking my face. He knew he was getting a new family and this time he’d be king of the brood.

When I got back from the funeral I began to seriously question my life. My brother was there with his wife and three kids, each of them taking turns to bawl their eyes out. Only one of them was ever crying at the one time like it was the most morbid game of pass the parcel in history. After three full rounds of this they started throwing me dirty looks so I left as soon as the service ended. I was single again with a crap job and no family. It was time to restart my life.

So here I am in the offices of Brown, Leyton and Smith, ready to be interviewed for the position of Senior Executive Assistant. I’m not quite sure if that means I’d be the boss of the other Executive Assistants or the assistant to a Senior Executive but I know it’s a step up. It’s my second interview since the funeral and I’m going to do mum proud.

“Sophie? Come on through.”

The secretary sizes me up as she takes me in. I decide I’m going to make her life miserable when they make me her boss. The new Sophie is tough.

Five suited men are sitting round a table and as the door shuts behind me I suddenly feel about two feet tall. They ask if I want some water. I nod and drink straight from the jug. Shit! That’s a bad way to start. I think about showing a breast to recover but the only guy under forty laughs and says he likes a chick with a sense of humour. I get a small confidence boost, but he doesn’t laugh the second time I do it.

The one-hundred-year-old lawyer asks the first question and I say something sensible. Yes! It happens again and I know I’m going to nail this. It ends up going really well and I leave before realising their questions weren’t about anything. They know more about my cats than my work ethic. Did they just want me because I look pretty in a skirt? I mean I do, but that’s not the point.

I find out the answer two days later. (*answering phone*) “Hello? Yes it is.” (*to audience*) It’s the guy who laughed in the interview. “Today at six? Sure, of course. Okay, I’ll see you there.”

So Rod Smith just called me back for a “follow-up chat.” We’re meeting at the café downstairs. I have four hours to get ready so I print my CV and try on fifteen outfits before settling on what I was already wearing. I hunt down the details of my last three employers – they all loved me – determined to win him over. He *will* make me an offer, damn it!

Six o’clock rolls round and I’m waiting in the café, sipping a latte with just the slightest bit of added gin. My CV and references are spread out before me. Rod rushes in ten minutes late and sits opposite me, taking off his tie and apologising. “How was your afternoon?” he asks.

“Oh yeah, fine thanks. Here are my last three referees, and I never got to point out my typing speed in the first interview. Seventy-two words per minute.”

“Impressive. Do you like salmon? They do a mean salmon here. On me, of course.”

“Um, sure. I’m a great multitasker, too. I can type while talking about something totally different. Got loads of practise texting while my ex was yammering away about his feelings.” (*Sophie laughs, then trails off awkwardly*)

He nods distractedly, then lightens up and gets something from his suitcase. “These are for you.”

It's chocolates. Favourites. I suddenly realise he's hitting on me. "I thought this was a second interview." He looks embarrassed. He *is* hitting on me. I slap him as hard as I can; my fingers leave marks on his face. I get up but he stops me. "I'll hire you if you stay!"

I knew he'd make me an offer but I didn't expect the bastard to blackmail me into a date. The worst thing is, the job's great and the guy's cute. I lean forwards and slide my resume under his nose. "You see this? I'm worth at least eight grand more than what you advertised."

I know he wants to protest so I stop him before he can. "No! You can't trick me into a date then complain about some run-of-the-mill extortion. You give me the pay rise, *and* you pay for the salmon, *and* you let me leave at five forty-five on Fridays so I can get to yoga."

"You finish at five thirty every day. And I'll only do all that if you kiss me after dinner."

"You're on."

It's the most competitive date I've ever been on. He eats faster than I do. I make him get me the most expensive dessert. He tries to talk me into sex and I ask for another four grand. He backs down and ends up getting second base instead – for free! Rod is one smooth customer and the date slash interview goes really, really well.

Seven days and two dates later, I get an offer from the first guys who interviewed me. I haven't heard from Brown, Leyton and Smith so I tell them I'll call back in an hour and I try Rod's mobile. "You didn't get the call? Fucking Janice. This is why we're hiring you, Sophie. Too many Janices in this world have jobs they suck at."

"I thought you hired me for a date."

"I'll have her call you."

He hangs up without another word. Twenty minutes later I get a call from Janice, who's a total sweetheart, by the way. She offers me the job and I accept. Before I hang up, I check the salary. "As advertised," she says.

I am livid. He lied to me. I let him touch my boobs and he lied about an eight grand pay increase! Ooh I'm going to make him suffer for this.

I ask him round for dinner. I'm serving an authentic family recipe. So authentic I even get my Nan to cook it. Music, wine and the implied promise of sex; it's going to be the most romantic breakup dinner ever.

The date comes round and he's running late. I try to retain my cool but tardiness makes me fidgety so I knock back a wine glass of gin to relax. I stroke Arnold. He arrives with flowers, chocolates and apologies. "So sorry, hun. We lost a major client and now I have to drop this pro bono case I'd taken up. It's the only decent part of being a lawyer and this kind of thing really bums me out."

I struggle between feelings of sympathy and getting a kick out of how much more I'll enjoy dumping the wanker. "Sweetie, that's terrible. Have some wine while I massage you."

I rub his shoulders and he melts in my hands. "I made a really good call with you," he says. He gives my hand an affectionate squeeze. "You're so funny and kind. You have no idea how much I'm enjoying getting to know you."

He's making it so much harder – for both of us. I serve dinner and merlot and we have the loveliest evening. The conversation is good, the dessert delicious. It's wonderful. He asks where the bathroom is and I direct him to the front door. He laughs and asks if I want him to water the pot plants.

"No, I want you to go and never come back."

He's stunned. He asks why. "You lied about my salary. Janice told me I was getting paid the advertised rate."

“Fucking Janice! I specifically told her to tell you it was ‘as discussed’ not ‘as advertised.’ I’m so glad you’re taking her job.”

I suddenly hope I haven’t made a huge mistake. “Did she get it wrong?”

He shakes his head. “No, she’s right.”

Thank God. “Then what are you still doing in my house?”

“I was going to pay it myself.”

It’s my turn to be shocked. “You were going to pay eight thousand dollars for a date?”

He nods. “Per year.”

This is unbelievable. I ask him why.

He shrugs. “I had a good feeling about you. I always trust my instincts.”

It’s so unfair. My instincts are bloody useless. “You were going to do that for me and I arranged the most spiteful breakup in history. I’m such a horrible person.”

“You’re alright. You were looking out for yourself. But I’ll tell you who *is* a horrible person: fucking Janice. That silly old cow’s incompetence has filtered out of the workplace and into my private life. If I had a dollar for everything she screwed up I’d double my salary...”

I cut his rant off with a kiss. It’s a full minute before I break it off. “Rod, I have something to ask you.”

He looks at me.

“Don’t get me wrong when I ask this and it totally doesn’t matter what the answer is. I just want to know.”

“What is it?”

I put my hand down the front of his pants. “Were you born with this?”