

Love Through the Ages

Marissa Bylo

Love was...

a tangible thing in elementary school; the special holographic Valentine's Day card she selected just for him; how they held hands under the table like secret lovers in rebellion of the prude lunch ladies' rules; their forbidden conversations on Neopets.com. Love was bold, disobedient. He smooched her cheek at a birthday party because his older sister dared him. She would never forget the name of the first one to cheek-kiss her (though she entirely forgot how his lips felt on her face). They picked on each other five days of the week, but this meant they liked each other. When they declared their future marriage to their first-grade teacher, she could only smile and nod. Their hand-drawn pictures sealed the deal.

That is, until the drama ignited and burned the blue and pink stick-figures standing in front of a church. Several boys lined up for her attention (and she couldn't resist elementary-aged boys fawning over her). Administrators assigned the lovers different teachers, and he eventually left the school. She was sad...for maybe a second. Other boys poked her sides, substitutes to hold hands with her and give upmost devotion. She forgot him soon enough, and he met other mean girls.

Love was... singling her out during the movie night and performing her favorite piano piece while in middle school. She closed her eyes, smiled that smile, and he hoped she felt the same about him. The butterflies killed his stomach as he watched her read the red

Candy Gram he bought her, acknowledging her disdain for Valentine's Day "but here was candy anyway". He never admitted his feelings out loud though (surely actions alone were enough). Classmates cracked jokes about them being a couple. He just wished it was the truth.

Instead of him, she busied herself with Facebook, asking the wise guru behind the screen the initials of her soul mate. She and her best friend fit their crushes' name into every song ever and sang the lines over and over until they exhausted the joke. Taylor Swift understood their boy problems. "You Belong with Meeeee" echoed off white ceilings; if only he could understand that, then love would bloom, and they could be soul mates. If only.

He faded into oblivion as she chased after fantasies. She reveled in the miniscule amount of attention given by her older brother's band mates; older boys were where it was at, whatever that meant. She braved the metal concerts, the flailing body limbs and crushing music, as their little fan-girl. That is all they ever saw in her. She didn't mind; they jokingly called her Shawty and the nickname deemed enough for her.



As the years passed, her cheeks and lips remained un-kissed while other girls went through boys like a game; love was a competition. She was losing. She knew it. He was losing. He accepted it. Thirteen and fourteen-year-old lip virgins- it was surprising even at a private school.

The Friend Zone welcomed another victim to its clutches while they labeled her a Villain, a heartbreaker for not returning his ardent feelings. How could she not love someone who loved her so? But no one asked her who she loved. The band-mates and Jocks were a distraction from the boy she loved- her best guy friend. His gift of a wooden red rose clung to her mirror. She sang the Taylor Swift songs about him in the car rides home. The Friend Zone was a cruel abyss though. They wallowed in the abyss together, but alone.

Love was...

writing #60, his jersey number, on her face at a high school football game; congratulating him on the win and him asking the whereabouts of another girl; sitting side-by-side at a bonfire with his enormous Letterman jacket draped over her shoulders like a cloak. He asked her to the homecoming despite the confusion of his friends; love knew no social bounds. They matched in their teal attires and danced the night away to corny love songs and dub-step. He lent her his favorite book, and she began running so she could join track with him. A couple that trains together stay together, even if they weren't "officially official" just yet. They couldn't even drive themselves to dates. His

16th birthday on February 14th would come soon enough. They could hold out forever.

She wore a red sweater the chilly November day that it ended. She finished the book (it turned out to be just as good as he swore) and left it on his desk; the book was like their kid, but she couldn't claim custody of it. She cried on her best friend's shoulder when she got home; no one had died, just a young love and the optimism of a teenager.

The next few months played like the typical breakup scene. Ice Cream? Check.

Tears and Taylor Swift? Check. Angst-stricken poems about "young love now lost"? Done and Done. Independent vows bound her now -either cat lady or to a nunnery. Love belonged to the movies and pretty people. She found saving power in being the 5th wheel when she and her friends (and their significant others) dined and watched movies. She was an independent woman "who didn't need no man". She could bat her eyes, giggle, and spend her time with any boy that would allow it- even if he was still in the closet or a fellow-nerd who didn't know how to declare his feelings for her.

She didn't need anyone. Two years passed by in this fashion.

Love was unattainable, stupid, selfish, painful, silly, make believe...



until a Senior high school boy in plaid asked her to Dairy Queen on the fateful night of February 14th. Some important basketball game played on the television before them; they stayed enthralled with each other's words. They spoke of future college plans, and the daunting realization that they would be split up soon hit; he put his arm over her shoulder in comfort. Then confessions of feelings spilled from chapped lips in cheap, red booths while ice cream melted. Their fingers intertwined during the car ride, and they declared to the world (or rather the people at the party) that they were, in fact, boyfriend and girlfriend. Now they needed her parents' permission; they would need some convincing.

Love was... two heart-broken teens resurrecting their old-fashion ideals for love; conversing for hours in parked cars; eating breakfast foods for dinner; being wrapped in separate blankets while wishing on falling stars. It was tears and long hugs and not running away after dark secrets spilled out. It was losing lip virginity after a movie night. Love took on many forms as they were growing up. Suddenly, all the other loves became obsolete,

false.

Love is... two twenty year olds arguing at Steak N' Shake and him calling her dumb (she wasn't even angry because he was right); the "I miss you/Can't wait to see you/ Let's elope" text messages that travel 200 plus miles between cellphones; staying together despite the naysayers who "just don't understand our relationship". Love isn't this tangible object- no butterflies, rainbows, or fireworks after every kiss (minus one). Love isn't competition- who can get the largest flower bouquet or be granted the status of "relationship goals". It is celebrating three years of a relationship on Valentine's Day even though deep down the day itself still annoys her. Greatly. Love means not giving up on each other. Simple as that.

What will love look like when they reach their 30s? Only time can tell. She only hopes that February 14th has nothing to do with it.

