



ARTIFACTS

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My Misadventures in Love, Like, Lust, & Other Attractions

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My ~~Adventures~~ Misadventures In Love, Like, Lust, & Other Attractions

"I regard romantic comedies as a subgenre of sci-fi, in which the world operates according to different rules than my regular human world." - Mindy Kaling

Disclaimer:

If you're looking to read something along the lines of "How To Land Your Dream Man In Less Than A Week", I would suggest picking up any edition of *Seventeen* magazine instead. If you're looking to hear a steamy love story that beats all the odds and ends up in a romantic kiss on a beach in North Carolina, I recommend you any Nicholas Sparks book/movie. Don't get me wrong, I love that sappy bastard but we'll come back to him.

Anyways, if you're looking to read about some of my most salient, embarrassing, cringe-worthy, and tear-jerking interactions I've had with the male species or read something that will make you feel like maybe, just maybe, you're not the only person who is a failure at love — this essay is your friend.

My first crush was in the second grade. His name was Brad and he was dreamy. He was blonde-haired and blue-eyed and could have passed for a child GAP model.

Then there was me. While everyone in the second grade was wearing Limited Too, I was wearing my sister's hand-me-down flannels and overalls and wore white headbands that constantly fell, due to my abnormally thin hair, and would lie around my neck collecting all my food droppings. I was quite the catch.



Most of my elementary years are fuzzy, but I can clearly remember two interactions with my soon-to-be future husband, Brad. During recess all the popular girls would "chase" the boys on the field in a very damsel in distress manner. I was never into running or any sort of physical exercise for that matter, a strong rooted moral I still uphold today, so during recess I would sit by my lonesome under the shade of a big tree and write in my journal. The only thing I can think of that would make this image even better were if Evanescence music was quietly playing in the background. Anyways, one day I decided I would join the girls on the field and flirt with Brad by chasing him. I tried to slyly insert my way into the pod of girls running after him and that's when things got weird. There I was, panting in my overalls with my spaghetti-stained headband

flopping around my neck when his frightened eyes met mine and screamed, “Who are you? Stop chasing me!” Oh sure, it was cute when the popular girls did it, but when I did it I was a creepy stalker. Then again, I did have an uncanny resemblance to a small gremlin in those days so I can understand his fear. I turned bright red and retreated back to my tree. That was the end of my days on the field.

My second encounter with him was a very eye-opening experience in our relationship. Yes, this is my essay and I am going to classify it as a relationship. We were partners on a spelling test and he was convinced that you spelled the word “halves” as “halfes” even though I relentlessly tried to explain to him that he was wrong. I guess you could say that was the moment I realized we were on two very different intellectual spectrums and I decided to call it quits with him. He never showed it, but I’m sure he was very distraught to lose me. In fact, I can’t seem to shake the feeling that the reason he now looks like a member of Florida Georgia Line and still lives at home with his parents must be somehow linked to the aftereffects of my rejection.

Next came the pre-pubescent jungle we call middle school. I would like to take a brief moment and state that I did, indeed, have a boyfriend. His name was Jason and we were hot and heavy for about a week. So to all of my relatives that may be reading, you can all stop asking me when I will get a boyfriend. In fact, I find it both offensive and concerning that you all don’t remember the meaningful relationship Jason and I shared. So how did this happen? He professed his love for me in his AIM profile for all to see. And how did it end? I heard he was going to dump me so I jumped to the chase and texted him “It’s over.” What a ruthless little wench I was back then. I wish there was some more to that story, but there isn’t. Our “relationship” lasted about as long as this paragraph.

The next middle school suitor in my quest for love was Grant. He was a short little thing that came up to about my ribs but I didn’t care. He had bright blue eyes and the type of eyelashes you only see in a Maybelline commercial so that was enough convincing for me. I suppose I could say this has been my second most successful almost-relationship. Things were going great — we barely talked so we never fought and hung out about once a month. I would always do this cute little thing where I would double, triple, and sometimes quadruple text him the same message if he didn’t reply to me fast enough. Surprisingly, he ended it.

When high school rolled around, I was almost certain that this was when love would finally strike me. And why wouldn’t I believe that? Countless romantic comedies have repeated this story line over and over again. It goes something like this: Geeky girl meets boy. Boy is popular. Popular boy ditches popular girl and ends up with the down-to-earth, sweater-wearing girl. I would have liked someone to warn me that that doesn’t actually happen. I wish someone would’ve told me that that girl actually ends up going to four homecoming with “just the girls” and later her dad pulls her aside and nervously asks her if she’s a lesbian. Not that that happened to me or anything.

I suppose I’m just bitter because my high school years consisted of the first three-fourths of a romantic comedy but never reached the final scene. I met Dylan my sophomore year in my honors English class and I was smitten. He was blonde and blue-eyed (surprise, surprise) and was tall and muscular and beautiful. He was shy and reserved and always had this air of mystery that surrounded him which intrigued me. Luckily, our lockers were right next to each other and so as the next three years went by I got to know him little by little. We didn’t talk much, mostly because I was a nervous wreck and he was terribly shy, but when we did talk it was this insane kind of butterfly-in-the-stomach, heart-pounding feeling.

Over the years we seemed to have several classes together and we would edit each other’s papers and work on

projects together but I never, ever did anything remotely close to flirting. Mostly because I didn't know how, but also because I was the sweater-wearing girl in the movie and he was the star quarterback of the football team and it was his job to come after me. When he started dating the captain of the cheerleading team (I know, could this be any more cliché?), I just assumed we were in the middle of the movie and that by the time the credits rolled I would have my shot with him.

I didn't.

His girlfriend's name was Haley. She had curly, brown hair that effortlessly flounced around and was the epitome of high school perfection. I say that, because she is one of those people who had an amazing high school career, but ultimately comes to the realization that she has peaked once she's hit college.

Once she entered the picture, Dylan and I's locker conversations, while scarce and maybe unmemorable to him, were a thing of the past. I would sit on my knees at my locker gathering all my necessary books and notes for the night, while the two of them would make goo-goo eyes at one another and make plans for the weekend. I was so jealous.

Haley was a year older than Dylan and was heading off to college, so I just assumed that they would break up. They didn't. In fact, I saw her more than ever. She would commute back and forth every weekend from Illinois State to make it to every single one of his games and would come donned in either his oversized jersey or his warm-up sweatshirt. Not to mention, she also had a long sleeve tee made for her own mother that had his last name, Andrew, printed on the back to show her support. Yes, *her* mother wore that, if that tells you anything about this family. However, I am the one dedicating over a page to a boy that rarely acknowledged my existence so I guess that makes me a little insane too.

Anyways, they did eventually break up when he went to college. I was overjoyed, but soon came to realize that meant nothing for me. He now plays football at a small college in Minnesota and probably has a trophy wife-in-training. Haley was kicked off the cheer team at her college for unknown reasons. I guess things really do work out in the end.

Prom is always a stressful time, especially for a girl with no prior experience in the relationship department. I had bought my dress, planned my hair and makeup, made my nail appointments— but I had yet to find a date.

The day was nearing closer and closer and my dad felt it appropriate to sit me down and explain to me an arranged-prom date he had been working on. Yes, you read right. My dad decided it was acceptable to use his referent power as the executive chef to coerce one of his cooks, a 24-year-old Asian man, to take me to prom if need be. In fact, he only had a few rules:

1. We could not “dance sexually together”
2. No kissing/hugging
3. Take me home straight after prom

While every 17-year-olds dream is to take a strange man who could be considered a sexual predator to prom, I nicely declined.

Instead, a boy named Cody asked me to prom. It didn't matter that it was technically over Facebook chat and that I barely knew him — I had a date! I spent the next month trying to get to know him, but unfortunately, Cody wasn't

much of a talker. The most I could get out of him were slight smiles that looked as if they were fueled by constipation and a small head nod every now and then. But he was nice, or so I thought.

Prom went as usual. We took cheesy pictures with the whole group and pretended to be having the time of our lives, while really my head was throbbing from the dozens of bobby pins that were intricately weaved throughout my hair. We loaded the party bus and headed off to the venue. However, I had never seen Cody with his friends before. It was like he was a different person. There was coincidentally a stripper pole in the party bus and he decided it would be funny to dry hump it and incessantly yell at me to “get up there and show them what I’ve got”. The song “Get Lucky” blasted through the bus’s speakers and every time the lyric “We’re up all night to get lucky” repeated itself, he would point at me and wink. I tried to ignore his blatant and frankly, uncomfortable, horniness.

I don’t have much to say about prom, except the food was bad, the dance floor was too small, Cody ripped the train of my dress by repeatedly stepping on it, and that I grinded for about 4 hours straight with one water break.

But, I suppose the real action happened on our weekend trip after prom. Cody, his group of friends, and I had decided to all rent a place in Wisconsin for two days after prom to celebrate. Two moms decided to chaperone the trip, but they were more interested in living out their lost teenage years than actually chaperone. The place was in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do and because of that; everyone decided drinking all day and night long was the best option. Let me interject here and say before this, I never drank. Still, till this day, I am not a big drinker, so this trip was not necessarily my cup of tea. For most of the group, this trip was just a buzzed out blur of events, but I remember it perfectly.

Everyone was playing beer pong or taking hits out of the beer bong or dancing on tables and I was just sitting there, trying to somehow look normal. The first night was a little more tame than the second, with the main events consisting of:

1. Preston, a heavy-set football player who surprisingly graduated high school, fell onto the pull out couch and broke it.
2. One of the mom’s coming downstairs and asking to take a hit out of the beer bong
3. Becca spilling half a bottle of tequila on me, drenching my clothes, and seeing my drunk date, Cody, laugh hysterically with his friends in the corner

The second night came and I kept thinking it had to get better. It didn’t. The night consisted of Cody asking me to “twerk” on him, people having sex in the questionably sanitary hot tub, and people streaking and running around the basement. I felt hopelessly out of place and so I went upstairs to make a pizza for everyone, like the good mom of the group. When I went back downstairs to distribute the pizza, everyone was huddled by the door of my room. “What’s going on?”, I asked. Everyone shushed me and then I heard it — moaning. Supposedly, Cody and another girl, Sarah, whose mom was actually chaperoning the trip, were having sex. All the guys were hooting and hollering and slipping condoms under the door, while I stood there awkwardly. I wasn’t really sad or upset, just embarrassed.

After a while, he strutted out of the room, chugged an orange-flavored Gatorade, and sprawled out on the couch while rubbing his junk.

If you’re curious as to how this ends, he ignored me the whole next morning and he half-heartedly apologized to me via text. When I never spoke to him again, he pleaded for forgiveness and dodged all responsibility for the

event. He now goes to Mizzou actually and I ran into him several times my freshman year. In fact, one of the most memorable instances was when I unknowingly walked into his fraternity on the rare occasion that I was semi-drunk, saw him, and publicly berated him for being such an asshole. It was glorious.

I had my first kiss when I was 17. Whenever I tell someone that they almost can't believe it, but it's true. I'm picky about everything else in my life, so why wouldn't I be about the boys I kiss? His name was Tyler and it was the summer before college.

Tyler was one of those guys who were gorgeous, but drastically underrated. He was somewhat short and skinny, the polar opposite of Dylan, but was still undeniably handsome. He had light brown hair and pale blue eyes and had this sort of cute half smile he always did. We both loved old people and animals and he would always try and chat with me in his level 2 education of Spanish — and I loved every second of it.

Our first date is something I'll always remember because it was weird and awkward, but sweet just like our relationship. Instead of honking or texting me "here", he came up to my actual front steps and rang the doorbell. I will never forget how endearing that was. We chitchatted on the car ride to downtown and he let me look at his sketchbook. As I flipped through the pages, he had drawn a picture of a sloth and labeled it "To: Andrea". I haven't told you this yet, but I love sloths almost as much as I love cats and receiving this was way better than any flowers or chocolates he could've given me.

When we got to downtown, we got ice cream from Coldstone and as I scoured all the toppings and flavors and concoctions that could be made, I heard him say to the cashier, "One scoop of vanilla, please". We were at the mecca of all ice cream places where anything under the sun could be made and he just wanted vanilla. "What? Are you sure?" I prodded in disbelief, but he was content with his order. I never mentioned it to him again, but it still makes me smile.

The rest of the date seemed like a page ripped out of a romance novel. We got caught in the rain that evening and spent hours talking and walking, our clothes drenched and clinging to our bodies, but we didn't care. The only non-picturesque moment of the date was when Tyler went to throw his ice cream cup away a raccoon lunged at him from inside the garbage can. I have never heard a guy scream that loud or run that fast, but that's a story for another time.

He drove me home like a perfect gentleman and we laughed about all the night's occurrences. I never thought I'd be so sad to see my own driveway. The night had ended and it was time to go home. I unbuckled my seat belt and tried to give him a hug goodbye, but ended up in me awkwardly side-hugging his shoulder and saying "Ah, awkward car hugs!". Yes, I really did say that. But he just laughed and smiled his sweet little side smile. I was on cloud nine.

I don't know what date number this one is, but I feel it necessary to include. It wasn't a big or lavish date or even as memorable as the first one, but it still holds a special place in my heart. We were having a movie night and he agreed to watch *The Notebook* with me, which he shyly admitted is one of his favorite movies as well. I was so nervous. As you have already probably deduced, I am quite behind in the boy department and this was my first every movie night with a boy I liked. I kept having these mini panic attacks inside before our date — *what was he expecting? Was it going to be awkward between us? What if he made a move? Did he expect me to have sex with him at this*

point? It was nothing like that, though. It was perfect. I cuddled up to his chest and caught hints of his cologne. He stroked my arm and made me feel comfortable and even quoted lines from the movie with me. I just remember my body sinking into his, not even paying attention to the movie. All my attention was focused on that moment in time, trying to engrave every sensory detail into my mind before it was gone.

People always say your first kiss is going to be awkward and weird, but I feel as though my case is an extraordinary one. One night, Tyler and I were all snuggled up on the couch watching a movie and I was desperately trying everything in my power to let him know I wanted him to kiss me. It didn't help that his wiener dog, Casey, was snuggled right in between us letting out silent but deadly farts every ten minutes. All I can say is that dog is a major wiener blocker. I'm sorry, I would be doing my essay a major disservice if I didn't include that pun.

Things were going just fine until his mom came home. She said nothing and then began weeping at the kitchen table — her friend/co-worker had apparently just died in a motorcycle crash. I sat uncomfortably on the couch as Tyler consoled his mother, not knowing what to do. *Should I say something? Should I just leave?* My mind was running a million miles per hour. When she realized I was there she promptly wiped her tears away in embarrassment, shook her head, and took comfort in her room upstairs. I suggested I leave and Tyler agreed and walked me to the front door. He obviously wasn't going to kiss me now, I thought.

Turns out, I was wrong.

I leaned in for a hug and he went in for the kiss and it is to this day one of the most awkward memories I possess. I just stood there knowing I had just messed everything up and that now he felt uncomfortable and I felt uncomfortable and the whole thing was ruined — and then he kissed me. Yes, that's right, my first kiss was accompanied by the sounds of his hysterical mother sobbing upstairs. I don't know if I was just shocked or confused or what, but I truly remember nothing after that moment. I can't remember if I said anything or even looked at him, I just remember opening the screen door and leaving.

I'm not sure if it was the confused kiss or me seeing him and his mom in a very vulnerable state, but nothing was the same after that. Every time I reached out, it was met with no response or a short, cold message. I kept replaying all wonderful times we had that summer to help distract me from what was falling apart, but it wasn't strong enough to put off the inevitable. We had talked about going our separate ways for college and such, but I never thought that meant shutting me out completely. I was heartbroken, but too embarrassed to admit it.

He returned my movie to me in my mailbox the night before I left for college. No note. No nothing.

I entered my freshman year of college with a hopeful heart and an open mind. My roommate, Kaitlyn, was a beautiful, all-American, blonde girl who all the boys on our floor drooled over. She was smart and funny and flirtatious and just about everything I was not. In a lot of ways, she was good for me. She pushed me to get out of my shell and meet new people, but at other times, she pushed me a little too far.

At one fleeting moment, Kaitlyn had a crush on a guy on the third floor of our dorm, Justin. He had golden, sun-stained skin, dark brown hair that had a flow that could sell the baldest of men Rogaine, and was rugged and very masculine. She would hang out with him all the time and then pop back into our room and dish about all the flirtatious banter they had exchanged. I didn't know him too well, but I was happy for her.

Before spring break that year, Justin invited her to his family's farm in Missouri and told her to invite me and a few other of her friends. I was hesitant to go, not wanting to be a third wheel, but went anyways. But to my surprise, Justin was flirting with *me*. Not Kaitlyn or any of the other girls — me. After the major disappointment of Tyler, I admit, I felt special. It was nice to be wanted by someone again.

I was surprised at how much Justin and I spoke over break. I had heard such great things from everyone about how nice of a guy he was, that I really put myself out there for once. When I got back, he texted me and asked if I wanted to watch a movie with him in his room. My heart immediately beamed with excitement as I told all my floor mates and got their opinions on how to respond and what to wear. As I put the finishing touches on my makeup, I began to feel a pit in my stomach. *What if he wants to do more than watch a movie?* I thought. All my friends assured me he was such a gentleman and wouldn't put me in an uncomfortable position, especially on our first date. They were wrong.

My heart pounded in my chest and I knocked on his door. I had spent over an hour getting ready, full makeup, curled hair, comfy but cute outfit — he answered the door in basketball shorts and a ratty t-shirt. He casually greeted me in and offered me a seat in his roommate's desk chair. I tried sparking some conversation, in particular, about how sloths are my favorite animals and showed him a picture of one. He gave me a weird look and said he didn't like those animals. When the conversation shifted onto the topics of pets, I showed him a picture of my dog and jokingly mentioned how goofy-looking he is, to which he responded, "I'm glad you said he was ugly before I did."

The conversation obviously wasn't flowing, so I suggested we watch the movie. Which movie you ask? *The Notebook*, but of course. I had deemed it my good luck movie since watching it with Tyler, despite how it all ended with him. We situated ourselves on his twin bed and popped the DVD into his laptop. As the movie continued, I could see him getting more and more disinterested. He was checking his phone and asked me to prop up his pillow several times — not the ideal first date. The scene where Allie and Noah finally kiss came on and he just shut his laptop and said, "Perfect timing", and began to make out with me. I guess I looked as uncomfortable as I felt because he said, "Well, get comfortable!". I didn't know what to do, so I decided to just go along with it. I was an insecure, inexperienced, college freshman and I felt that this was what "normal" college kids do — hook up.

I laid like a corpse on his bed, while he sucked on my neck for what felt like hours. I was trying to enjoy myself and pretend to be into it, but I wasn't. He proceeded to take off my shirt and my bra and I just let it happen. I remember feeling cheap. I laid there, trying to keep my eyes closed like a normal person, but I just kept thinking about how out of control I felt. He tried to take off my pants, but I resisted which I am proud of, but he kept trying. Finally, when he realized I wouldn't go any farther, he said, "How mad would you be if my roommate came in right now?". I looked at him with a puzzled face and he laughed and said I should probably leave now so nobody sees us together. I scrambled to find my clothes, put them on, and then turned around. He laughed when he saw me — I had a huge, purple hickey on my neck. I pretended to brush it off and he waved to me as I left his dorm room. I got into the elevator, closed the doors, and sobbed.

Part of me thanks Justin. For one, it led to me realize the anxiety and depression that had been simmering inside myself for quite a while. I suppose it was the straw that broke the camel's back, because I fell apart. Emotionally, mentally, and physically I was broken. I had a large splotch of his existence on my neck and I felt used and hopeless. I came home that summer, got medication, talked to a therapist, worked on my insecurities, and built my

self-esteem back up.

It sounds simple, but it wasn't. I was embarrassed that I had been so affected by a random hook up, something that college students do on the daily. I was embarrassed that I had no self-respect to leave, when that is what I should have done. I was embarrassed that I had to walk around campus with a hickey that branded me as a slut. But most of all, I was embarrassed that I thought this was the answer to any of my problems.

I just want to say that this essay was not intended to be sad or emotionally-charged and was more towards being a comedic relief about the ups and downs of love, but I feel like it's important to show an accurate portrayal of love or like or lust or whatever it is. It's not always funny and it doesn't always turn into a hilarious anecdote you tell to your friends, sometimes it's painful and dark and hardens your heart a little bit.

We've all had our Brad's and our Jason's and our Grant's and our Cody's and our Tyler's and Justin's — but I have to believe that they are all just stepping stones, people who get you to the person you really need to be with.

And if that doesn't bring you solace or you're not buying it, just know that there are always cats looking for a loving home. That helps me sometimes.

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