



A Person Worth Ignoring Your Phone For

IT'S A DAY LIKE ANY other. The sun is shining, kids are swinging on the swings and playing kickball on the playground, and I'm with my friend Taylor, a fellow first grader, sitting at the back of the school building. We're talking about life, global warming, politics, and our hope that there will be macaroni and cheese for lunch—you know, the usual six-year-old stuff.

Taylor, being the little troublemaker she is, asks if I want to go down to the dumpster; she has something to show me. So we venture down to the secluded, smelly area and stop behind a container holding garbage. *This better be good, Taylor, I think. This place stinks.*

"You ever been kissed before?" she asks brazenly, with a mischievous look in her eyes behind her cute, round glasses—almost as cute as the jeans and T-shirt she's wearing.

I immediately feel my cheeks blush. "Um, what? Uh, no?"

"You want to try it?" she asks, a little forcefully. Typical Tay.

"Um, okay," I say, completely unsure. "I think so."

She closes her eyes and leans in. I mimic her. Our lips touch, and then we both quickly pull away. Our eyes dart open and we look at each other—half embarrassed, half shocked—before giggling and running off in different directions. Once out of sight, once I've stopped running, I gather my infantile thoughts. *I think I'm in love*, I tell myself.

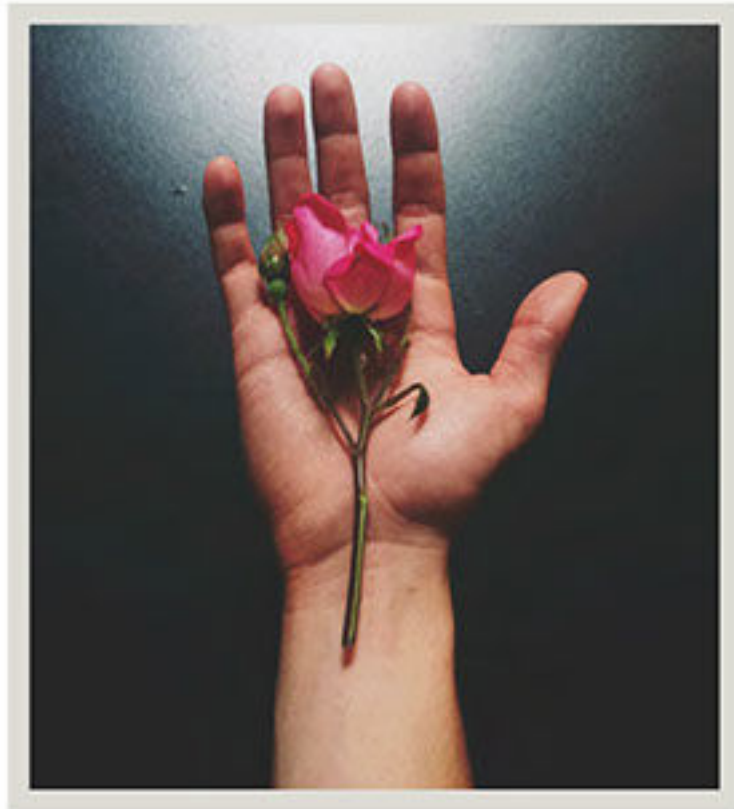
Whatever that means.

I wish I could say that matters of the heart become easier as we get older, but whether you're six, ten, fourteen, eighteen, or twenty-one, love—or what we think is love—is capable of reducing us all to children. It's truly an indescribable feeling that you won't understand until it hits you, rendering you out of control and feeling all sorts of irrational things. We're all struck dumb by the spell it casts over us. I don't get it. But I like it.

Love is complicated. Anyone who's felt it, whether fleeting or lasting, will tell you the same thing. You never see it coming until, BOOM, it smacks you right in the face like a football. (Or something. Maybe not like that. I hate football, so I wouldn't know, but I imagine you're never expecting its impact—or for it to hurt.) What I'm trying to say is that love is unpredictable, capable of striking from any direction. I mean, Taylor snuck up on me behind a dumpster! How more unpredictable can it get?!

But going beyond first grade, it has been the same for me ever since. I didn't plan on it. I barely even sought out relationships. One day, this person was just there and I was thrown completely off guard.

My first relationship was with a girl named Carlye. She was petite, beautiful, and bubbly. We were on the cross-country team together and it was love at the first 5K. Okay, maybe not "love," but I was smit-



ten, to say the least, I think. I mean, I was, like, twelve. *She's very pretty and nice*, I thought when her friend told me, "Carlye likes you!"

Very subtle, friend.

"Yeah, I think I like her, too," I replied, shyly.

She walked back to Carlye and her other friends, and they all giggled. And just like that, I had my first girlfriend. Kinda.

Dating is strange when you're in your preteen and teen years, and this new relationship consisted of awkward conversations, hanging out in groups, holding hands, and, well, that was about it. But regardless of how little we actually did, it all seemed very heavy. Everything felt new. Everything felt as if it was life or death. This was huge! Kinda.