

CAN BUY ME LOVE

from

Kick Me by
Paul Feig

The whole time I was in school, from kindergarten all the way through graduation, I can't remember a time when I didn't have a crush on some girl.

But I never had fleeting, casual crushes. I had terminal, obsessive crushes. The kind that would last all school year and occasionally flow into the next. The kind that make you sit up at night and stare out windows and walk around in Hallmark stores. The kind that make you misty watching romantic movies, wishing that it was you and Beth or Tina or Julie and not that good-looking movie-star couple who were walking down the beach at sunset, totally and passionately in love. I have a feeling I spent more class periods staring longingly at girls who didn't know I existed and wishing they were mine than any other kid in the history of the educational system.

Or at least it felt that way to me.

One of my biggest crushes was on a girl named Yvonne. We were in the eighth grade together, and she sat across from me in homeroom. Our class was laid out with two groups of thirty desks facing each other on opposite sides of the large room, creating an open area in the middle where our teacher lectured from—sort of an educational theater-in-the-round. Because of this, I had a di-

rect view of Yvonne each day as she sat forty feet away from me, completely unaware of my existence.

She looked like Veronica Lake with black hair. My mother had made me watch *Sullivan's Travels* that summer on the afternoon movie, and I thought that Veronica Lake was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen, even though she only existed in black and white. Even when my mother told me that Veronica Lake was dead, I still couldn't stop thinking about her. And on the first day of eighth grade, when I saw Yvonne for the first time, I felt as if she had been sent to me from afar, that perhaps Miss Lake had come back to Earth in this form when she heard that the gangly kid with the John Denver haircut had been dreaming about her every night. Yvonne had the same kind of long straight hair as Miss Lake and always had it partially covering her face. Her eyes were very big and exotic-looking. Like the eyes of an Indian princess, I thought poetically. And I would wish for hours on end that those eyes could be staring longingly into mine.

Unfortunately, her eyes were usually staring at our homeroom teacher, Mr. Parks. He was a handsome young guy with a neatly cropped beard like Kenny Loggins', and I was convinced that she had a huge crush on him. Mr. Parks would always bring his guitar to class and sing sappy 1960s love songs under the guise of opening us up to the music of his generation. But I knew he was just doing it to steal Yvonne away from me. I was sure of it. It didn't matter, though. Even the way she looked while she sat and watched Mr. Parks with passion in her eyes made me love her all the more. She always wore short skirts and sat at an angle, extending her exposed legs out into the aisle while resting her cheek on her hand. The effect was stunning and only strengthened my resolve to make her my girlfriend with each passing day.

I'm not really sure if I had any idea what it would be like to have a girlfriend back then. I knew I wanted one, but beyond that the image was murky and undefined. I guess more than anything

I wanted a girlfriend so that she would walk around with me and hold my hand and I could point to her when I was with my friends and say, "Hey, check it out, you guys. That's my girlfriend." But how I would make this happen without actually physically having to talk to her was the unknown part. Because there was no way I could simply walk up to her and start chatting. That was far too terrifying a prospect. No, a sneaky little plan was needed. How could I make her come over and throw her arms around me with a minimum amount of risk on my part? How could I make her realize that out of all the guys in our school, I was the one she should fall in love with—the shy kid with the plaid dress pants and the romantic thoughts who sat silently across from her, staring at her longingly instead of listening to his teacher and learning things he might really need to know later in life?

Well, there was only one way that I could think of, and that was to buy her off.

I was going to give Yvonne a present.

You know . . . bribe her into it.

The idea was based on the time I gave Pam McGovern a forty-five record of "I Honestly Love You" by Olivia Newton-John. She was my sophisticated seventh-grade science lab partner whom I also had a crush on, and she had told me one day that it was her favorite song. So, that night, I went to the mall and bought her a copy. The next day, sweating profusely, I gave her the record. She gasped and kissed me on the cheek, and I was on cloud nine for the rest of the day, head over heels in love. It was this feeling that prompted me to do what I consider to be one of the dumbest things I've ever done. I wrote her a syrupy note thanking her for the kiss. I left it in her science book the next day. The day after that she didn't mention the note, but she was never quite as friendly to me. She moved her chair farther away from me than usual and I kept catching her looking at me weirdly. And that same day, Kevin

Phelps threw gum in my hair. The note had been a bad idea, but the bottom line was that the actual gift had done what it was supposed to do.

And now I was going to try to repeat history.

I went home that night and tried to think of something I could give Yvonne. Something special. Something that would scream “Look what a great boyfriend I’d make.” I looked around my room, but all I could see were dragster models, magic tricks, and hand puppets. Not exactly items that made girls want to kiss you. The problem was I had no way of knowing what Yvonne liked or needed. All my friends were too chicken to go over to her and do any investigating for me. And without the proper reconnaissance, the wrong gift could be a disaster, an accidental “Gift of the Magi” that could possibly drive her away from me and end our affair before it had even started. And so, figuring I needed to approach this from a woman’s point of view, I decided to consult my mom.

“Mom,” I said, approaching her timidly, “I’m . . . uh . . . I’m in love with this girl who’s . . . uh . . . kinda my girlfriend and . . . um . . . I wanted to give her a present, but I don’t know what to get her.”

My mother had a very surprised look on her face. I knew that she was aware of my crush on my next-door neighbor Mary, but beyond that I don’t think she even thought I interacted with girls at school.

“Oh, Paul, that’s so sweet,” she said in a tone that made me feel kind of creepy. “What kind of things does she like?”

That was a stumper. I felt like saying “If I knew what she liked, I wouldn’t be asking you in the first place.” But feeling that this was my only chance at doing things right with Yvonne, I decided to suck it up and navigate my way through this weird moment with my mother.

“Well, she’s really into dressing up. She always wears nice clothes to school.” That *was* true, even though it was information

that could be gleaned by anybody with a pair of eyes and wasn’t necessarily the intimate knowledge of a beau. But *my* mother didn’t care. I could see that she was already getting an idea.

“I have *just* the thing,” she said, getting up.

Feeling a bit guilty that I had fooled my mother into thinking I had a girlfriend who actually liked me—or at least knew my name—I followed her into her bedroom to see this perfect gift. She opened up her jewelry box on the dresser and pulled out a dark gold necklace. It was an exotic piece of jewelry that looked like a bunch of miniature boat chains that had been welded together and then driven over with a steam roller. Looking back, I think it was copper or bronze, but at the time I entertained the thought that it was solid gold. It wasn’t a very pretty piece of jewelry by any means, but it was substantial.

“This belonged to my mother. She gave it to me when I was a little girl!”

Geez, this is great, I thought. Yvonne’ll want to *marry* me if I give her something *this* good. My mom looked at the necklace a little sadly, because my grandma had just died. But *this* made me feel happy because I knew the necklace would now stay in the family. Yvonne and my mother could have long talks comparing their childhoods and swapping stories about all the things that happened to them while they were wearing the necklace.

“You sure you don’t mind?” I asked her, reaching out for the necklace. It was even heavier than it looked.

“No. Besides, it’s your first girlfriend,” she said with a smile. “And I don’t have a daughter anyway, so this is the next best thing.”

That made me want to cry. I started thinking that maybe I should just give Yvonne a copy of “I Honestly Love You.” But the song was no longer a hit, and the necklace *did* seem like the perfect gift. And when Yvonne found out how valuable *it* was, she’d be putty in my hands. I didn’t know what I’d do with *her* once she *was* putty, but that wasn’t a concern yet. First things first.

I didn't sleep much that night. I tossed and turned, imagining what Yvonne would do when I delivered my mother's heirloom necklace. I kept drifting into dreams that would alternate between Yvonne's giving me a soul kiss and Yvonne's laughing in my face. By the time I got to homeroom that morning, I was a wreck.

Until I looked across the room.

There she was. My love. Sitting the way she always did. Short skirt, legs crossed, out to the side. And today she had a mysterious black beret on, looking quite French. Just when I thought she couldn't get more beautiful, I said to myself, newly excited about my plan.

My stomach started to hurt. I felt like I had to go to the bathroom. This could only mean that it was time to go into action.

But how? I hadn't actually thought about how I would deliver the present.

The task seemed easy enough. Get the necklace from point A (me) to point B (Yvonne). Logistically, it made perfect sense. But emotionally, it couldn't be done. I ran over my options in my head:

Option #1: I could walk the necklace over myself but that would mean I would actually have to talk to her.

Option #2: I could sneak over and put it in her coat pocket, but she'd never know it was from me and think it was from Mr. Parks and then he'd profit off of my mother's priceless childhood heirloom.

Option #3: I could drop it on her desk wrapped in a note, but my dad had always told me to never write notes to girls. "You should never write down anything that somebody could hold you to legally." I didn't know what kind of lawsuit my dad thought I'd get into in eighth grade, but I figured he must know better than I did.

And so, I realized I had only one other option.

Option #4: Have the necklace delivered.

The problem now became which one of my friends would

even consider going up to a girl. None that I could think of off-hand. We were all about even when it came to the amount of female-phobia surging through our veins. No, it would have to be somebody outside my circle of underdeveloped peers.

I looked around and immediately saw the answer.

Chris Nubelski.

Chris was the most polite kid I knew, which is unusual for an eighth grader. At that age, everyone is pretty much socially retarded. But Chris was just this friendly thirteen-year-old father figure who seemed out of sync with his age. He was the only kid I didn't worry about introducing to my mother. With other kids, you always had to worry about whether they were going to be rude or clam up or make fun of your mom's hair or burp or fart in front of her. But the one time I brought Chris over to my house, before we went to see *Young Frankenstein*, he was the most sincerely polite kid my mom had ever met. And so, he was the perfect candidate to act as my delivery service.

I went over to Chris and told him my predicament. Once before I had mentioned to him that I had a crush on Yvonne, so my request for his help came as no surprise to him.

"I'd be happy to, Paul," he said in his usual brotherly tone. And before I had time to think, he grabbed the necklace out of my hand, immediately leaped up, and headed over to Yvonne's side of the room. I wasn't expecting him to deliver it that very second and so was completely unprepared emotionally. I wanted to stop him but he was already halfway to her. In a panic, I hurried back to my desk so that I could hide behind my math book. As soon as I hit the chair, Chris bent over to Yvonne, handed her the necklace, said something to her, and pointed right at me. My heart stopped. My stomach imploded. Everything around Yvonne went black, as if I were looking at her through a long tunnel. All I could see was Yvonne, in slow motion, turning her head to look at me. I started to feel dizzy. All I could think of was that I wished I hadn't done this. I wished I could have somehow magically transported Chris

back and erased the last few seconds of my life. In my suspended perception of time, Yvonne's head was still swiveling to look at me. What would I do when our eyes met? Should I wave? Smile? Act cool? Pucker up? Throw up? My brain was spinning. Maybe I'll just run out of the room. No time. Her eyes were almost at mine. And what if she's so happy about the necklace that she runs across the room and kisses me right here? That would be great. Everyone would see it and it would secure my place in the Junior High Hall of Fame. But I've never kissed a girl before. And now maybe I'd have to do it right in front of Mr. Parks and everybody. It was all happening too fast. I should have thought this through more. Oh, God. She's gonna know I exist now. Somebody help me.

The moment of truth was here.

Her eyes hit mine. My body went numb. She gave me a puzzled look that said "Who the hell are you?" I think my legs fell off. My face immobile, I quickly looked into my math book and stayed there. The whole hour I could feel her gaze burning through the top of my head. I wanted to look up at her, but my neck wouldn't bend. All the sounds in the room became loud and fragmented, like they do right before you doze off in study hall. I felt like there was an enormous spotlight on me. Everyone in the room had to know exactly what was going on in my head at that moment, I thought. I've gotta look up at her, I've gotta look up at her.

But I never did.

The hour somehow passed. I didn't hear a word Mr. Parks said the entire time. Everything in the room sounded like a foreign language to me. And all I kept thinking was how I wished I hadn't done this.

The thing is, if you're a kid and you have a crush on a girl and you never do anything about it, I think you ultimately enjoy it more. You can enjoy the thoughts of what might have happened with her and what you would have done with her and how cool you would have been with her, when in reality, you know you

never would have done any of the things you thought about. You would have ended up talking to her and not having much in common and finding out that she had friends that you couldn't stand and a big brother who didn't like you and that you could never muster up the nerve to even hold her hand, let alone kiss her. She'd think you were a goofball and that you were boring and that your friends were immature and she'd start looking around at other guys and then you'd start to feel all jealous, even though you really didn't want her to be your girlfriend anymore. And you'd end up not talking to her after a few days and then you'd have to spend the rest of your junior-high and high-school career avoiding her in the hallway and answering the question "Hey, weren't you and Yvonne going together for a while?"

"Well, yeah, but we broke up."

"What the hell's wrong with you? She's a fox."

You know what's wrong with me. I'm a loser, that's what.

Well, Yvonne never did talk to me or thank me for the necklace or give me the time of day after that, and I avoided her more diligently than I avoided the bullies who wanted to beat me up. My romance had ended before it even started. Which was fine with me, because I started listening in class again and actually ended up learning stuff.

Once, however, a couple of months later, some friends and I put together a band for a class project and played an extremely terrible rendition of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" during homeroom. During it, I looked out at the class and saw that Yvonne was staring at me. Trying to be cool, I made an "oh, brother, these guys are bad and if I had some better musicians up here with me I'd really wail on this guitar" face at her. She gave me a smile and an expectant look that made my heart skip a beat and realize why guys are in bands. But then Mr. Parks asked me if I wanted to cut loose and jam on my guitar and I realized that I couldn't and Rick McBane jumped up on stage and took my guitar and played an incredible version of the guitar solo from

Chicago's "25 Or 6 To 4." The class rocked out and I saw that Yvonne's eyes were filled with passion for Rick. Of course. And that was the last time she ever looked at me.

The next year, when I got to high school, I heard that Yvonne and her family had moved away and no one knew where they went.

And my mother never asked me what happened to her necklace.

I guess when you give an eighth grader an heirloom for his girlfriend, you've just got to figure that you're not going to get it back.

Araby by JAMES JOYCE

North Richmond Street, being blind, was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two storeys stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest, had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper-covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp: *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant*, and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*. I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes, under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle-pump. He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came, dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses, where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits, to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea, we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us, her figure defined by the light from the half-opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed, and I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the soft rope of her hair tossed from side to side.

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her, except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to go to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come-all-you* about O'Donovan Rossa, or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me: I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand. My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to

her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about to slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring: `O love! O love!' many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*. I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar; she said she would love to go.

`And why can't you?' I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent. Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps, and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. At fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

`It's well for you,' she said.

`If I go,' I said, `I will bring you something.'

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised, and hoped it was not some Freemason affair. I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness; he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazaar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly:

`Yes, boy, I know.'

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I felt the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school. The air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room. I mounted the

staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high, cold, empty, gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old, garrulous woman, a pawnbroker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-table. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs Mercer stood up to go: she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said:

'I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord.'

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the hall door. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hallstand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go to the bazaar. He had forgotten.

'The people are in bed and after their first sleep now,' he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically:

'Can't you give him the money and let him go? You've kept him late enough as it is.'

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying: 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.' He asked me where I was going and, when I told him a second time, he asked me did I know *The Arab's Farewell to his Steed*. When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin tightly in my hand as I strode down Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous houses and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors; but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girded at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words *Café Chantant* were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

Remembering with difficulty why I had come, I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

'O, I never said such a thing!'

'O, but you did!'

'O, but I didn't!'

'Didn't she say that?'

'Yes. I heard her.'

'O, there's a... fib!'

Observing me, the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured:

'No, thank you.'

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

Think in Threes

Name _____ Date _____

Project _____ Page _____

