

Well, the Valentine's Day circus has rolled in and out of town.

How has it left you feeling? Left out? Short-changed with a card and a bunch of gas station flowers? Or did you get the whole hog complete with a red bow around its neck?

Valentine's Day is nothing to rival Christmas when we are guilt-tripped into telling all our family and friends how much we love them in pounds and pence, but Valentine's Day is giving Xmas a close run for the money.

In times past, a card was sufficient. Now that barely registers on the scale of romance. You need to be thinking chocolates, flowers, dinner out, a weekend away, jewellery, underwear. "Men, remember this is a gift for your partner as well as you" - says the Valentine's Day guide for men buying lingerie, "So, makes sure you can both get into what you buy." (OK, I made the second bit up).

I remember how a few years ago I was shocked and a little worried that to learn that my mum and dad were not going to get each other even a card. But that was when I lived a couple hundreds of miles away to them. Now I'm around the corner, I can see that everyday is... no, I am not going to say it. It's too Disney. But I will say that their daily life is so full of little considerations and sacrifices for one another that it makes any sentiment expressed in a card seem as shallow and fleeting as a puddle on a summer's day.

If Valentine's Day sentiments aren't based on this kind of foundation, extravagant gestures on the day can seem hollow and, just as Christmas serves to stress weaknesses in our family relationships, Valentine's can highlight difficulties in our love life. The disappointment can cause more problems than a box of chocolates can solve.

I'm not anti-Valentine's Day. There must be numerous couples who wouldn't be couples if it weren't for that little nudge that Cupid gave them to get together. For fledgling relationships, it can test how interested the other person is in deeper commitment. But for true romantics, like my mum and dad, it would be sure sign something was wrong if they needed Hallmark to say "I love you!"

On the subject of love, let's talk about Charles and Camilla.

Despite the media debate, not a single person I know has passed comment on the forthcoming marriage, not a word, and this silence speaks volumes.

It shows the growing irrelevance of the monarchy to people's lives. They are losing their role as national figurehead and this marriage can only accelerate that loss. A figurehead serves to unite people of vastly different backgrounds and concerns. Being controversial is definitely not in the job description and, among the few people who do care, this marriage is controversial. It serve to split their dwindling band of supporters.

It makes it more likely that the crown will skip a generation and the next head to wear it will be William's.