

LOVE Has NO Boundaries



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#FIRST IMPRESSIONS

#SECOND CHANCES

Heidi Belleau

Love Has No Boundaries

An M/M Romance series

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By Heidi Belleau

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love Has No Boundaries* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a free gift to you.

What Is Love Has No Boundaries?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what they do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love Has No Boundaries*.

Whether you are an avid M/M romance reader or new to the genre, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader

review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

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Photo Description

Instagram picture of two young men sharing a surprised kiss, both of them with eyes wide open.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

He's always been a little shy and anxious in social situations, making it difficult for him to meet new people. Most nights he stays home. Even though his long-time friend calls trying to get him to go out every once in a while, he makes excuses and stays in where he's away from strangers and crowds.

After a long week, he wants nothing more than to relax into his typical routine when his friend shows up at the door.

Sincerely,

Jilly

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: first time, coming of age, friends to lovers, reunited, young adult characters

Content warnings: mention of suicide

Word count: 13,483

#FIRST IMPRESSIONS #SECOND CHANCES

By Heidi Belleau

first day of class and i'm already late

#oops #but totally worth it #fashion #ootd #comme des garçons

Jonah uploaded his Outfit Of The Day selfie—taken with his iPhone a few minutes ago in the full-length mirror behind his dorm room door—hit post, and slammed his laptop shut before he succumbed to the urge to watch the notes, and more importantly, the compliments, roll in.

He'd only planned on giving himself one last hasty look-over before he slipped out the door, but he couldn't help stopping to take just one more second to smooth back the cowlick in his black hair and practice his best dead-eyed male model expression, which he promptly messed up by grinning. Oh yeah, so *totally* worth being late.

His first-day-of-school ensemble was bright and cheerful and optimistic, which perfectly matched how he was feeling. College. He was a new man. Moving forward and never looking back. The striped black-and-ivory Comme des Garçons sweater with its bold slash of teal across the waist was sharp and clean and eye-catching, casual enough that he wouldn't stand out too much from his T-shirt- and rugby-jersey-wearing classmates, but those in the know would *know*, and that was the best feeling of all.

To fit in and stand out at the same time, sending subtle signals to the people who *mattered*, that was the person Jonah wanted to be from now on. Which was also why he'd accessorized with the little ring that up close looked like a tiny bondage shackle, wink-wink, not that he was expecting to get laid any time soon... or ever.

Probably ever, so it was a lucky thing being a somewhat emaciated and sheltered mid-twenties gay virgin was a romantic selling point in the fashion world instead of something to be ashamed of. *Too beautiful for this world,*

wasn't that what one of his twee pastel-addicted followers had called him? You'd think he was some kind of doomed high-rent French prostitute dying of consumption in the 1800s, the way some people talked about him.

Kind of a complete and utter contradiction, but then, the line "I am large, I contain multitudes" came to mind. Speaking of which, Jonah snatched his battered Moleskine out from under his pillow and stuffed it into his Mismo backpack alongside his Introduction to Poetry textbook before finally slipping out the door. Twenty minutes late, now.

One benefit to being late: eating on the run meant Jonah didn't have to do any agonizing over cafeteria seating. He just grabbed a bagel toasted to go and hustled right past the social minefield of half-empty tables and bacon-and-egg small talk.

Jonah mostly avoided socializing with the cafeteria crowd by eating at off-times, lunch at eleven in the morning and dinner at four like an old person, and if there wasn't a table where he could sit alone, he took his tray back to his room to eat at his desk. Which seemed pathetic until you considered the fact that last time he'd sat with a stranger that stranger had called him "bloodmouth" and described the living conditions of cows in lurid detail while Jonah nobly tried to choke down his cheeseburger.

His fault for going to a hippie university, he supposed, but if it hadn't been a militant vegan, it would have been a homophobic jock making fun of his faggy taste in scarves. The world was one big lose-lose situation and Jonah would have done this whole damn thing online if it weren't for the part where his dickhead stepfather was gonna cut him off if he didn't "learn to leave his fucking room once in a while."

Which he'd have been happy to do, *Terry*, if leaving his fucking room had meant moving to New York to chase an internship or go pro with his fashion blogging instead of enrolling in some shitty second-tier Canadian college to do a journalism degree. Who even cared about journalism degrees anymore? Nobody relevant, that was for damn sure. Waste of time and money, was what it was, but then Terry and Jonah's mom had piles of money to spare. Too bad the same couldn't be said of Jonah's time.

He pulled his teal bomber jacket over his head to shield his hair from the rain drizzling down as he dashed across campus, cursing the way his canvas sneakers soaked through pretty much instantly. By the time he made it to the lecture hall, he was forty minutes late and soaking wet and he looked like shit and suddenly being late wasn't worth it at all. Fuck. Damn. Well, he'd just slip into the back row anyway, maybe leave class just before the professor dismissed them, and maybe then nobody would notice him.

Going from gagging for attention to desperately terrified of it in the span of a half hour? Yeah, that sounded like Jonah to a T. Maybe he should have taken up Doctor Jamieson's offer to forward his file to a local psychologist.

Eh, no, maybe not.

Taking a deep breath to ease the oncoming panic attack, he slipped as inconspicuously as possible through the door at the back of the lecture hall.

Which was right about when everything went to hell.

So much for his discreet entrance, because the professor down at his podium snapped his head up with a murderous glare at the sound of the door swinging shut. The man paced across the front of the class to his projector, which he turned off peevishly. The whole time, he never stopped *staring* at Jonah, his sharp eyes following as Jonah slipped into the back row and sat down.

"Name?" the professor asked, picking up a clipboard next to the projector and pulling a pen from the chest pocket of his shirt.

Really? The dude was taking attendance? There had to be three hundred people in the hall. Everybody said college profs didn't give a shit about that kind of thing. Everybody, and Jonah had believed them. Had kind of been depending on it, actually.

But the professor hadn't stopped glaring at him, so apparently he really was serious and holy shit how was this even happening right now. Jonah took another deep breath, this one even shakier than the one at the door. "Jonah Gilchrist," he said, relieved that his voice rang out clear and confident instead of squeaking, at least. Small mercy.

The professor scanned his clipboard and finally gave it a tick. “Do you *want* to be here, Mr. Gilchrist?”

Not right now I sure as hell don't. “Um, yes? I think so.” The high collar of his sopping wet jacket threatened to choke him. He fumbled with shaking hands for the zipper, drawing it down a couple of inches.

He was suddenly absurdly unwilling to reveal the *Comme des Garçons* sweater he'd been so proud of this morning. He didn't want anyone to see it and associate it with *this*. This fucking very public shame.

“Really? Because sauntering in here forty minutes late doesn't seem like the actions of someone who wants to be here, Mr. Gilchrist. In fact, I'd go so far as to say they are the actions of a person who doesn't appreciate or deserve the *opportunity* of being here.”

Jonah squirmed, slumping in his seat and wishing he could melt right into the floor.

They were all looking at him now, three hundred heads turned, some of them smug, some of them righteously annoyed, some of them pitying, but the expression didn't matter to Jonah, only the stare.

“Let me guess, Mr. Gilchrist. Your parents are paying for you to attend this institution? Perhaps you have a trust fund? And meanwhile hardworking students desperate for an education stay at home because their scholarships and bursaries still aren't enough. *Deserving* students, Mr. Gilchrist. So I'll ask you again. Do you want to be here?”

“Yes sir,” Jonah mumbled, when all he wanted to do was put up both middle fingers and yell “Fuck no, New York or bust!” and maybe, “YOLO!”

Yeah, and then as he stormed out the door, the whole lecture hall would applaud and he'd write the incident up as a text post on Tumblr and it'd get a hundred thousand notes and wind up reblogged by those **YOU WILL LOVE US ON YOUR DASHBOARD ABSOLUTE FUNNIEST POSTS** vultures and Anna Wintour herself would see it and hire him right on the spot because she admired his gumption.

Except this was the real world, not a fucking episode of *Glee*, and Jonah was no rebel, and walking out of this class wouldn't bring him any closer to New York, especially not once his stepfather drained his bank account to zero.

Sure, he could hawk all his Mr. Porter clothes to make up bus fare and maybe a month's rent in slum housing, but then what? No way he was going to get any kind of respectable job dressing out of Walmart, and the job he *could* get wouldn't be able to pay rent on anywhere decent.

He'd last two months, tops, before he'd wind up busing back to Canada in defeat—or maybe hooking, but not the romantic eighteenth century version. And he wasn't sure how many people would follow a blog all about Failing At New York.

He scrubbed his face miserably, relieved at least that the professor had moved on to droning about sonnet forms and his classmates had returned—with renewed determination, thanks to the recent lesson on how slackers were treated in this class—to their notes.

All but one, that was. Two rows ahead, a tubby blond-haired guy who looked a little like a poor man's Seth Rogen was still staring at Jonah, brows stitched together and his big brown eyes full of liquid feeling, like a puppy's.

Oh, of course. Because this day wasn't shitty enough.

Sebastian Rose.

that moment when you think college is gonna be a fresh start and then you're sharing a class with your junior high crush

#personal #fail #seriously though #why god why

And that wasn't even touching on the whole fiasco with the professor publicly dressing him down. What did it say about Jonah that the professor's pointed accusations barely even rated in his mind compared to who had heard them?

Sebastian Rose.

Sebastian *fucking* Rose had heard them.

What were the odds? Well, Jonah supposed the odds didn't really matter, not once the thing actually happened. The real question now was what to do about it.

The immediate solution was, of course, to withdraw from the class entirely—after all, the professor clearly hated him—but if he did that, he'd be getting an angry call from his parents the minute he hit the button, and he did not relish the thought of having to explain any of this to them.

Which left: skulk around hoping neither Sebastian nor the professor ever noticed him again, get through the class by the skin of his teeth, and then try and forget all about it; *or*, do really fucking awesome, prove his professor wrong, and rub his success in Sebastian's face.

Wait, what?

Since when did Jonah need to rub things in Sebastian's face?

Sure, he was humiliated, but that was because Jonah cared enough about Sebastian that he didn't want to make a bad impression, not because he thought Sebastian was a judgmental person.

Was Sebastian a judgmental person? Jonah's first instinct was no, he couldn't possibly be, but then maybe he'd changed since they'd been in school together, or maybe Jonah had too rosy a memory of him.

As much as Jonah's paranoia wanted to think the worst of the guy, though, Sebastian had always been a teddy bear. Kind and charismatic and funny and friendly and he always gave Jonah the time of day, even though Jonah was weird and socially awkward and shy and way too obsessed with clothes. Even back in eighth grade, Sebastian hadn't known the difference between George by Walmart and Giorgio Armani, but he'd still complimented Jonah on his shoes or scarf or even his glasses.

In fact, Sebastian had been the only one to compliment Jonah on *anything*.

Jonah had been practically friendless all his life, mostly because he just never could quite get the hang of people. He'd started junior high awkward

and hyper-focused on fashion and design, and ended it hateful and snobby, mostly as a defence mechanism.

It was easy to look down on everyone when you had good reason to believe they were all plotting to stomp your face into the smoking pit at recess. Easy to feel superior to a school full of cruel and petty homophobes who didn't understand your... *sensitivity*, as Jonah's mother so delicately phrased it. The problem with Jonah was, even though it had felt like it was him against the world, it wasn't, not really. But acting like it was—tarring the friendly or the indifferent with the same brush as the bullies—hadn't earned him any allies.

Except for Sebastian, who was so big and dumb and naive that even the nastiest barbs from Jonah at his most defensive never quite seemed to ruffle him. He never got offended at Jonah's snobby superiority and nose-in-the-air ways. Even stood up for him a few times when the hockey team had used him as practice for their shoulder-checking technique.

No wonder Jonah had had such a blazing crush on the guy, right up until the day Jonah had come home with one black eye too many and his parents had finally agreed to pull him out of school. Good thing, too, because God knew what would have happened if Jonah had gotten stupid or lovesick enough to actually come on to Sebastian versus just making googly eyes when he wasn't looking. Even if Sebastian himself was too damn good of a person to judge, the rest of the troglodyte bullies in their school sure wouldn't have been. Sebastian was popular. Well-liked. Funny. One of their own. They tolerated his pitying Jonah on account of the fact that Sebastian was just that nice of a guy, but there was no way in hell they could hold back their gay panic on his behalf.

Completely oblivious to the mortifying implications of his post—which included a webcam shot of him biting his lip in distress—sixty or so followers still liked it. Another twenty-some reblogged it, mostly without adding anything but a few with the usual gushing, meaningless comments. Which normally did wonders for Jonah's ego and made him preen and want to put together new outfits, but today just made him kind of annoyed, because what

did the love of faceless Tumblr followers matter in the face of disapproval from *Sebastian*? Nothing, that was what, but just then a new notification popped up on his dash.

thestarsjustblinkforus replied to your post:

omg u are living in a rom com. get it!!!

Jonah stared at the message a long time, caught in some kind of existential horror he couldn't quite name, and for a while he had to clap his hands over his eyes, but even then he spread his fingers so he could peek at the message between them and—

A second chance.

His heart pounded. That wasn't the anxiety of imminent failure he was feeling, that was—that was—

That was the feeling of infinite possibilities. *Promise.*

He'd thought college was going to be a new beginning, and in a way it still was; he was surrounded by people he didn't know, who likewise didn't know *him*... or his shameful past. His fantasies of first impressions hadn't been completely spoiled quite yet, although that incident with the professor sure hadn't helped on that front. He could still bounce back from it, though. If he could bounce back from being bullied right out of school he could bounce back from *anything*.

And as for Sebastian? Well, it might be too late for a first impression with him, but it *wasn't* too late for a second chance.

so tell me, tumblr. and be honest.

this outfit: rom com hero, or villain?

#first person who says gay sidekick will be required to write me a four page essay on the meaning of soft grunge as punishment #i mean it #this is my story dammit #i will not be a

*sidekick #fashion #ootd #henrik vibskov #mr porter
#cardigan love #glasses*

This time when Jonah hit post he wasn't tempted to watch the notes roll in at all. Too anxious and excited and full of butterflies about today's class to even think about his Tumblr fame, really. He'd had an entire week to make up a game plan for how he was going to get back into his professor's good graces and maybe-possibly Sebastian's heart and/or pants. Which was only barely enough time to plan a suitable outfit, but absolutely *plenty* of time to worry himself to pieces over an increasingly apocalyptic series of anxious what-ifs.

What if Sebastian doesn't remember me? What if he does remember me, but doesn't like me anymore after what went down last week? What if I'm banned from class after last week? What if I'm expelled from school after last week? What if the professor cancelled the class altogether? What if the whole school collapses on our heads? What if a comet strikes the earth?

Oh yeah, apocalyptic was the word for it, all right.

At least today he was well on his way to being early for class, thanks to setting his alarm and laying out his outfit the night before with a strong self-reproach *not* to deviate from the plan at the last minute, which was a recipe for disaster.

And sure, now that it was morning he was eyeing the blue Etro wool sweater hanging in his closet, but he'd made a promise to himself, and if he tried the Etro on, it would be something else next, and something else, and then he'd need to change pants and of course shoes, and then he'd have to switch bags...

So he picked up his pre-packed bag and slipped out the door before he had a chance to second-guess himself further.

He grabbed breakfast to go on his way past the cafeteria, even though he had plenty of time to sit down and eat before class started. If he was going to be early, he was going to be *early*. Not the first kid in class, since that was just a little bit *too* keen and ass-kissy, but maybe the fifth or sixth. He'd stop and

grab a coffee at the shop on campus proper, loiter by the door a bit, and then stroll in all casual when the time was right.

Twenty minutes later, chai latte in hand, it finally was. Jonah brushed non-existent lint off of his gorgeous Henrik Vibskov cardigan with its blocky orange stripe, proudly lifted his chin like he was posing for a mirror-selfie, and walked into the lecture hall like he owned the place. So far so good. Nobody pointed or stared. Nobody said, “Hey look, it’s the rich slacker kid!” The professor wasn’t even in the hall yet. No sign of Sebastian, either. Jonah found a seat safely in the middle of the lecture hall and settled in, pulling out his laptop in its matching Henrik Vibskov sleeve—oh yeah, he was *that* well-accessorized.

He was totally going to pull this off!

Or so he thought, right up until Sebastian plopped down into the seat right beside him.

“Hey,” Sebastian said, not even bothering to look over at him, “On time today, I see.”

Jonah’s heart jumped into his throat, his hands seizing up like he had rigor mortis. “What?” he squeaked, too stunned by Sebastian’s presence to even begin feeling offended by the gibe.

“You. On time.” Sebastian smiled, and the fact that it was so charming and asymmetrical just made Jonah freeze up all the more. “Gotta hand it to ya, man, if that was me I’d have probably dropped the class.”

Jonah blew out a shaky breath. “Ha. Yeah. Well. I almost did.” He combed a hand over the top of his head—probably completely destroying his hairdo—but he was so full of anxious energy it was either that or explode from the built up pressure.

Sebastian just kept smiling, like he was talking to a normal guy instead of a homeschooled virgin having a panic attack. “Glad you didn’t, bro.” No trace of insincerity in his voice. Jonah had forgotten just how fucking *earnest* Sebastian was. How unassumingly kind. It was like being back in eighth grade again, Sebastian helping him up from where he lay smashed against the

lockers in a daze, taking him by the hand and asking gently, “You okay, kid? Those assholes...”

“Um, thanks,” Jonah mumbled, and turned away before Sebastian could see the hot blush covering his face and neck.

“So you’re Jonah Gilchrist, right? I’m not imagining things? We went to junior high together?”

Speaking of humiliating blasts from the past. Well, not like Jonah hadn’t rehearsed for this exact scenario. He’d come in here assuming Sebastian would remember him, would remember all of his past shame. The plan was to shrug it off and act like he wasn’t damaged at all and maybe even admit to having a huge crush—ha-ha wasn’t that so pathetic—but Sebastian was always so cool and could you blame him? Self-deprecating humor meant to make Sebastian smile, and maybe if he was lucky, Sebastian would respond favorably to the admission of attraction.

But then Jonah turned to him and said, a little coldly, “Yeah, that’s me. And you are?” And Sebastian’s expressive face fell, just for a fleeting second, and Jonah’s heart seized, and he babbled, “Sorry, I’ve just kind of blocked out that part of my life, it’s nothing personal.”

Yeah, now *those* sure were the words of a man who’d completely left the traumas of his past behind him. Sure, buddy. Right.

“Oh.” Sebastian rubbed the back of his head. “No biggie. I’m Sebastian. Sebastian Rose. I was a year ahead of you back in the day.” *And was pretty much the closest thing to a friend you ever had, and now here you are snubbing me just in some lame attempt to save face.*

“Right. Sebastian,” Jonah replied, feeling like the biggest asshole in the world and not sure how to make it better. “Of course. How have you been?”

“You know. Graduated, in college now.” Sebastian’s eyes twinkled, and he seemed to revive a little, like a thirsty flower watered for the first time in days.

Jonah let himself laugh, a sound he wasn’t used to making. “No kidding, me too. What a coincidence.”

The tension between them eased a little, after that, and by the time their professor arrived, they were able to turn from each other and listen to the lecture in companionable silence, all the awkwardness drained away.

Class went off without a hitch. Jonah made eye contact when his name was called at attendance, the professor didn't make a big deal of what happened last week, and in return Jonah listened attentively and took notes and tried to put the whole mess behind him, too.

It was what happened *after* class that totally fucked Jonah's newfound equilibrium.

Because as he was packing up his laptop, more than ready to just pick up a sandwich or something from the cafeteria and go hide in his room for the afternoon, Sebastian suddenly turned to him. "You got another class after this?"

Jonah shook his head, forcing himself not to look too antsy about getting out of his seat.

"Oh! Well! Me and a couple guys usually go to the pub every week. I meet them over in the science building and then we go get some lunch and a couple drinks. You wanna come along?"

Jonah winced, remembering all the times a well-meaning Sebastian had tried to include him back in junior high. Sebastian had liked everybody; his friends most definitely hadn't. Despite Sebastian's assurances that they were "totally cool," Jonah could tell they *weren't* cool with him. They'd sit around staring at him, giving him the cold shoulder, and the minute Sebastian was out of earshot—to take a piss, or to throw something in the trash, whatever—they'd instantly turn from cold to outright cruel. Jonah never stuck around long after that, and eventually he'd stopped accepting invitations from Sebastian at all.

Speaking of which...

"Uh, thanks, but I really, um, I really shouldn't. You know. Because. Um, I have stuff. To do."

Sebastian's shoulders dropped a little, but he still managed a smile. "Well, if you wind up with some free time, you know where to find us, right?"

Jonah nodded, trying to match Sebastian's unflappable optimism but probably failing on every conceivable level. "Totally. Thanks for the invite, though. See you next week?"

"Next week," Sebastian agreed, and why did it feel like they'd just made some kind of second, unspoken promise?

thestarsjustblinkforus asked you:

but is he cute tho???

Jonah didn't know how to answer that question. Was it pathetic that he didn't know how to answer that question? He'd been so stuck on his memories of Sebastian—memories of kindness and patience and caring—that he hadn't even really taken the time to acknowledge the fact that the guy was more than just an amorphous blob of attractive traits and warm fuzzy feelings. He wasn't just a memory, he was a human being. A man, specifically.

An *adult* man, who'd changed *quite a bit* from the fifteen-year-old of Jonah's rosy memories.

But was he cute, though? Jonah surreptitiously looked up from his open-but-carefully-angled laptop screen to Sebastian sitting beside him.

It was like he was seeing the guy with new eyes. Luckily, Sebastian was focused on his own computer, so he didn't catch Jonah blushing.

This was the guy he'd dismissed as a poor man's Seth Rogan?

Sure, Sebastian had the round face and scruffy beard and bad fashion sense, but he also had... arms. Muscular arms that bulged in the confines of his T-shirt sleeves. Long legs that stretched out in front of him, the worn denim of his jeans clinging to his thighs. A broad, totally manly chest that dollars-to-donuts he didn't wax or shave. The same kind good-humored smile Jonah remembered, but now with fuller lips than Jonah had ever seen on a guy who wasn't an international male model.

And yeah, with that pot belly and scruff and unkempt hair, Sebastian was definitely no male model.

He was something better. Real, approachable, someone Jonah could touch and talk to and really know, so much *more* than just a striking but changeable image, selling him Burberry outerwear or Omega watches.

Sebastian wasn't selling him anything.

Nothing but his smile and *oh God he's smiling at me he saw me staring abort abort abort.*

"What?" Sebastian asked with a chuckle, raising an eyebrow.

"Oh, nothing," Jonah spluttered, acting offended at the mere implication that he'd been looking. "Just wondering when you last got your hair cut."

"Ouch! Catty as ever, Jonah. Methinks the lady doth protest too much."

"Not a lady." Jonah crossed his arms and just *knew* he was pouting, too.

Sebastian gave him a slow, exaggerated once-over. "That you are not. That you are not."

God, now what was that supposed to mean?

Jonah's face flushed even hotter and he squirmed in his seat, finally sniffing in non-response and returning to his laptop.

yes, he's cute. i'd even venture so far as sexy, in a grungy working class beer-drinking kind of way. thanks for making me look at him in that light, i'm sure it won't result in any awkwardness from here on out.

#it totally will #damn you #i already can't look at him without turning beet-colored #asks #personal

Three pages of notes and one droning lecture on the importance of neatness later, class was over, and Sebastian was turning to Jonah with that same seemingly unflappable smile, which now made Jonah's knees weak and his face as hot as a sunburn.

"Going to the pub. You in this week?"

Jonah winced. “Sorry, I should really study for next week’s quiz.”

“Oh,” Sebastian said, looking like a kicked puppy. “Honestly, I should too.”

Ask him to study with you! Jonah’s brain screamed at him.

Yeah right, loser, like he’d want to spend the next three hours talking about poetry with some charity case from junior high.

“Yeah,” he wound up saying. “See you next week.”

He left before he could embarrass himself.

*if you’d have asked me before semester started if i
would rather a class with a professor who publicly
humiliated me over a class with my junior high crush i . . .*

*would probably still say my junior high crush, actually
i am the literal worst*

*#at least i’m humiliating myself in this brand new j
crew tee #ootd #fashion #steven alan #scarf #j crew
#stripes*

Another class, another several pages of boring notes on modernist war poetry.

Another invitation to the pub from a well-meaning but clearly somewhat clueless Sebastian.

Another awkward refusal.

Another look of brave-but-crestfallen disappointment from Sebastian.

Another pang of guilt.

“Look,” Jonah said, unable to stand Sebastian’s expression anymore. Something had to give. “Don’t take it personally, okay? I do want to hang out with you outside of class, get to know you again, all of that. I do. I just...”

Sebastian's eyebrows curved sympathetically. "Still not too good with people?"

Jonah bristled somewhat, but nodded. He was meant to be comforting Sebastian, though, not fighting with him. "Something like that. The flattering term would be 'shy' or possibly 'introverted'."

"So wait, are you saying that if we went out one-on-one, then..."

"Yes!" Jonah cried. Oops, that was a little too enthusiastic.

Sebastian ran his hands through his dirty-blond hair, mussing it up in a way that absolutely *begged* for Jonah to lean in and straighten it again. "I'm confused," he said. "Let me get this straight, okay? Because you're fucking confusing and I don't want to misread you and mess this up. Again."

Jonah kept his hands at his sides. No hair touching. "Okay, shoot."

"If you and I go out one-on-one, would you want to go as friends or... as a date?"

"A date?" Jonah gulped. God, did his voice just break? Yes, it had just broken. Eighteen and with a breaking voice. Yikes.

"Yeah. A date. You *are* gay, aren't you?"

His cheeks burned up. "Is it that obvious?"

Sebastian crossed his arms and did that up-and-down look of his. "How much does that outfit you're wearing right now cost, exactly?"

The (embarrassing) calculations ran through Jonah's head. "Um, including shoes?"

"Yeah, exactly. Not to stereotype, but it's pretty obvious."

Okay, that was kind of uncalled for. Jonah raised his chin and fixed Sebastian with a glower. "Look, okay, yeah, I'm gay. But I'm not a predator or something. I don't want to *turn* you. I respect boundaries." He sighed in dejection. "Actually, I'm too inexperienced on the whole dating... thing to ever have had to worry about boundaries before, but I understand the concept in theory."

Sebastian nodded along with Jonah's whole speech, face showing no judgment. Because of course he didn't judge Jonah; how could he judge anyone? Guy was practically perfect. "Well, that's nice to know, but you know I'm gay too, right? Perhaps not as fabulously dressed, but definitely gay."

"Ugh. The 'F' word." Jonah shuddered dramatically.

"What, 'fabulous'?"

"Yes. Please never use it to describe me again. I prefer 'fashionable' or hell, 'vain' even, if you don't feel like being complimentary. Just anything but 'fabulous'. Please," he finished lamely. Sebastian smiled back at him, like he was waiting for Jonah to realize something, something he hadn't keyed into because of his kneejerk reaction to the F-word and—"Wait wait wait. You're *gay*?"

Sebastian nodded like a proud father that Jonah had finally caught on. "Three dollar bill, etcetera."

It was like it was too hard to take in, really, so Jonah fell back on his old defense mechanisms and scoffed. "Oh, well, that's news. But I understand that it doesn't mean you want to date or jump my bones or anything, I mean I'm hardly your type, just because we're both gay doesn't mean we're, like, fated to be together."

"Dude. Dude. Breathe." Sebastian put out both hands, like a hostage negotiator. "You need to take a valium or something, there? I brought it up because I *do* want to go on a date with you. If you're interested, I mean. Are you?"

"Yes!"

Sebastian grinned so wide at his outburst that Jonah didn't have time to feel embarrassed by his enthusiasm, this time.

But still, he coughed and tried to smooth the boyish excitement off his face. Poise. Sophistication. Aloofness. "Yes, I mean. Yes, I'd like to go on a date. Definitely."

Sebastian picked up his backpack and swung it over his shoulder. “Perfect. Let’s go, then.”

Jonah gawked. “What, now?”

“Yeah, duh. No time like the present. We can head off campus for something to eat, maybe catch a movie or go back to my place—no pressure on that front, though.”

“Well, um, that’s very, um, motivated, but I’m not exactly... I mean, it’s kind of sudden, isn’t it?”

“Is it? Not to sound pathetic but I haven’t really gone on any dates with guys of your caliber.”

My caliber. Jonah’s stomach fluttered, and he wasn’t sure if he was flattered and in love or just so anxious he was on the verge of puking. “It’s not exactly how I picture a date. Shouldn’t we set a time in advance, agree to meet somewhere, something like that?” *You know, give me at least enough time to plan an outfit?*

Sebastian narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “You need to pick out an outfit, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. Is there a problem with that?” Jonah asked archly.

“No problem. Just don’t go making me look like a schlub, okay? Friday, then. Six o’clock. I’ll meet you at the residence cafeteria and we can go from there.”

“You live in residence?”

“Um, yes? Two floors down from you, which you’d know if you came out of your room to do anything but use the common area kettle.”

“You’ve seen me using the kettle?” Jonah squeaked, trying to remember all the times he’d gone to make a cup of tea in the last several months. Had he ever left his room in pyjamas, or his sweatpants, or—God forbid—his robe? He just couldn’t remember, which was a terrifying proposition.

“Yes. I was watching TV with a buddy of mine in his—and your—common room and you walked in, didn’t return his or my waves, just stood there silently staring at the kettle until it ticked off. And then you poured some water into your mug and walked out again. I’d say you were sleep-walking, except for the fact that you looked like you were in a prison shower.”

“How awkward,” Jonah said miserably.

“Yeah, well, I still like you.” Sebastian knocked Jonah’s shoulder with a loosely-curved fist. “Friday, then?”

“If I can gather my dignity by then.”

“Gather it, buck-o. I’ve been waiting for this since ninth grade.”

Now those butterflies were *definitely* lovesickness.

you guys i am freaking out

because

because

my junior high crush?

asked me out???

on a date??????

so yeah here is me with my paper bag

because oh my god my junior high crush asked me out and i have no idea what to wear but he told me not to ‘make him feel like a schlub’ and he may have made some comments about how expensive my clothes are and i don’t think he’s like judging me or anything but maybe he feels inadequate and is that a bougie thing to be concerned about, that you make other people feel inadequate?

oh my god i’m terrified somebody help me before i faint

#wasn't joking about the paper bag thing #oh god #where did this paper bag even come from #personal

Okay, so the paper bag wasn't really helping his panic attack at all, because he was more in the "mind-spinning and coming up with terrible scenarios" mode versus the "hyperventilating" one. He had to admit, though, it added a certain *je ne sais quoi* to his selfie, hair and eyes wild, bag inflated in front of the lower half of his face. He uploaded the picture, hit post, and turned from his laptop to the next, horrifying task: sorting through his closet for an outfit.

Sure, it was only Wednesday and his date was on Friday, but he'd been set a particularly complex task: to pick out a date-worthy outfit, as a man who'd never been on a date before, with a guy who'd specifically said not to make him feel like a schlub. Jonah didn't know the first thing about how to accomplish such a thing.

Or if Sebastian had even been serious in saying it. It wasn't like the guy didn't joke about, um, everything.

Jonah leaned back in his computer chair with a groan, scrubbing at his eyes, then shocked up out of the chair like somebody had put a literal fire under his butt. He stalked toward his closet and started ripping items off the rod, tossing them to his bed in vague outfit-shaped piles.

The Stephan Schneider blazer and shirt. Lanvin bowtie? Was that too much? What if he added the whimsy of the fly-shaped cufflinks?

Did he seriously want to go on a date wearing something he labeled "whimsical" in his head?

He snapped a couple shots of the individual pieces and uploaded them as a photoset, hashtags: Stephan Schneider, Lanvin, bowties are cool, whimsy, I hate my life.

toopinkforpunk replied to your post:

just wear whatever u want baby, u will look cute no matter what!

pradamascus replied to your post:

any man who feels inadequate around you doesn't deserve you, you should date me instead or at least be my gay best friend ok

waisting-away *reblogged your post and added:*

I must have these cufflinks. Yesterday. [stephen colbert give it to me.gif]

thestarsjustblinkforus *replied to your post:*

my best guess: joking? he knows what u look like already, right? why would he ask u out if he didn't like your style?

anonymous *asked you:*

first world fucking problems, jesus fuck I hate you and I hate hate following you

anonymous *asked you:*

he means straighten out your fucking wrist for five minutes

Ugh. Anons. Right on time. Well, maybe the blazer and bowtie was a little... much. Jonah pushed them aside, groaned in frustration, then went to hang them all up again. When he was done, he stepped back from the closet like an artist stepping back from a painting and rubbed his chin in contemplation.

Okay, maybe the grey Hope sweater. With... black chinos and a skinny black tie and... *oh yes!* his black and silver oxfords. He snapped a couple pictures and uploaded them.

embracevanity *reblogged your post and added:*

Too precious xx

annawintourhatesyourpolyvore *replied to your post:*

where is this date to? love the sweater!

Good question. Jonah wasn't sure. The movies, maybe? Dinner? A bowling alley? That could be fun. He posted a reply to that effect. Of course, the anons were quick to latch onto that.

anonymous asked you:

well unless this dude is rich enough to take you to some five star restaurant for lobster and foie gras or whatever I think you're barking up the wrong tree with the fucking ties, seriously have you ever heard of a fucking T-shirt? did they have those at your preparatory academy for rich fags?

He snarled at the message, unable to take his eyes off it even as a hundred compliments rolled in around it. Wasn't that just the way of things, though? All the kindness in the world never was enough for Jonah, he just focused on the negative until it was all he saw, until it drowned everyone and everything else out.

He knew he should just close his laptop and take a breather, or turn off anon for the night and carry on his merry way with his leagues of teenage girl followers, but he still hit the answer button.

Insult my fashion sense all you like, insult me for being rich if that's what gets you off, but leave my sexuality out of it. It's 2013.

#asks #anon hate #fucking anons #tw: homophobia

He hit publish. The supportive messages rolled in. But of course, the only thing Jonah saw was a message from some throwaway grey-face blog—not technically an anon but the effect was the same.

er15384 replied to your post:

it's not about your sexuality, it's about you being a faggot. all faggots are gay but not all gays are faggots, that's simple fact. seriously, the dude couldn't have been clearer about the fact that he wants you to just

tone

it

down

*but go ahead and die alone from anorexia, surrounded
by vogue magazines and six pugs with diamond collars.*

you're fucking hopeless.

kill yourself

thestarsjustblinkforus replied to your post:

*be yourself and don't apologize. he asked you out. if he
likes you enough he won't care that you're overdressed.*

Too little, too late. Jonah turned his ask box off, typed up a generic thanks-for-your-support-but-I'm-outta-here text post, then deleted it. Shut his laptop with a shuddering sigh. Returned to his closet and hung up the Hope sweater. Put the nine-hundred dollar oxford shoes back in their box, and the box back on the shelf. Pathetic. Nine hundred dollar shoes, what the fuck was he thinking? That was exactly the kind of thing Sebastian had been asking him not to do, and there he was forging ahead regardless, physically fucking incapable of toning it down.

Pathetic.

kill yourself

Oh, he'd tried that already. Couldn't stop thinking about it now, about how he'd been fifteen and trying to figure out if you took the pills two or three at a time until they were all gone, or if you took them by the fistful like eating bitter candy.

Killing himself like a girl.

Pathetic.

Dropped out of school.

Pathetic.

Couldn't even handle going on a date.

Pathetic.

Letting fucking Tumblr get to him, for fuck's sake.

Pathetic.

Why did he even bother?

nope, not going.

#mind's made up #personal

Jonah hit post, and to prove his conviction, he tore off the so-called “casual” date outfit he'd dressed in not ten minutes ago: bright blue Gucci trousers, worn leather boots, an MP Di Massimo Piombi houndstooth blazer—all of it layered with a plain grey jersey T-shirt. A hundred dollar T-shirt, but a T-shirt nonetheless. Suck it, anons.

Of course, ten minutes ago when he'd dressed and posted the selfie, he'd done so with hashtags: hi haters and date night—on top of the usual string of fashion-related tags of course—which stated pretty clearly that he intended on actually going on a date tonight.

Yeah, well, he *wasn't* going, dammit.

Because it was a hundred dollar T-shirt, and obviously this thing with Sebastian wasn't going to work out. And yeah that anon had been full of shit about that gays-versus-fags line, and definitely wrong about Jonah needing to kill himself—they weren't getting rid of him that damn easy—but the likelihood of a down-to-earth guy like Sebastian sharing those feelings, even if he wasn't quite so cruel about it, was still high. And of course Sebastian would be *wrong*, but hey, sometimes people were wrong and sometimes life sucked and Jonah wasn't toning it down and if that meant dying alone, or at best becoming somebody's kept boy to support his designer fashion habit, well then, there it was. He wasn't going back to the apologetic kid he'd been in junior high. Not for Sebastian, not for anybody.

He took the whole stupid outfit and deposited it in a stack on top of his dresser, too dejected to put it away properly. Instead, he opened his pyjama

drawer and pulled out the first ratty piece of fabric his fingers closed on. Another T-shirt, nearly worn through: his musical theatre shirt from grade eight. The year he'd been in chorus and Sebastian had been a lead, which in their topsy-turvy high school somehow made him as cool as a jock because there had been a weird not-tainted-by-gays popularity to musical theatre, likely thanks to the participation of Sebastian and Co. And definitely *not* helped by kids like Jonah.

He still treasured that year, treasured that brief feeling of belonging Sebastian and the class had given him. So very, very brief, and yet so powerful.

He pulled the T-shirt on, then rooted around for a pair of sweatpants.

Turned off his cellphone. Brought his laptop to bed and booted up Netflix.

Tonight seemed as good a night as any for a *Buffy* marathon.

Three episodes in, six o'clock came and went.

And sure, Jonah felt miserable, but at least he also felt *safe*. Which meant he hated himself even more, but still.

Safe. That was what mattered, right?

Wow, he really was a loser. He tossed his laptop down the bed and smashed his pillow over his face, letting out a smothered howl. Which meant he almost didn't hear—

The knock.

At his door.

Shit.

At first, he tried to convince himself that it wasn't Sebastian—that it was his floor's Residence Advisor, or a pizza delivery guy who'd taken a wrong turn somewhere, or somebody going door-to-door looking for signups for a weekend dodgeball league. There were always plenty of reasons for door-knocking in residence, and Jonah's desperate brain cycled through them all.

But of course, ultimately there was only one person it could *really* be: Sebastian.

Stupid, stupid, stupid! Of course Sebastian would show up. He knew where Jonah lived, after all. It was only logical that after Jonah didn't show up for their date, Sebastian would come looking, if only to make sure Jonah hadn't been hit by a car on the way there.

On the other hand... couldn't the guy take a fucking hint?

Obviously Jonah didn't want to see him. Obviously Jonah had rethought the whole dating... thing. Why couldn't Sebastian leave well enough alone? He threw himself out of bed and stormed up to the door, swinging it open dramatically.

Too bad opening a door "with feeling" didn't quite have the same effect as slamming one closed.

It was only once the door had opened and Sebastian was standing *right there* that Jonah realized he totally wasn't dressed for this occasion. He made to half-close the door and hide his shabby state, but Sebastian got his foot wedged in before he could manage it.

"You stood me up," Sebastian accused. He didn't look angry so much as disappointed, which just aggravated Jonah more.

He rolled his eyes, flopping against his doorjamb. "Yeah, so? Don't tell me you planned your busy schedule around little old me."

"Um, kinda, yeah. I did." Sebastian crossed his arms over his broad chest. "Can you at least let me in so we don't have to have this argument in the hallway?"

"Are we arguing right now?" Jonah crossed *his* arms over *his* chest and pursed his lips.

"We're about to be if you keep up this fuck-the-world 'tude. Gotta be honest, you're giving me some serious junior high flashbacks right now and it is *not* pretty."

Jonah flinched and practically wilted back into his room.

Sebastian followed him in and very gently, very calmly, shut the door behind them. “Okay. That’s better. Now, do you mind telling me what crawled up your ass tonight? You’re big time on the defensive right now and I don’t get it. Did I do something wrong?” He sat down on Jonah’s computer chair and spun himself lazily back and forth. “Because if you seriously thought I wasn’t going to come get you—”

“Why *are* you here, Sebastian?” Jonah flopped down onto his bed, halfway to a swoon.

“Um, because I asked you out and you said yes and then you stood me up with no explanation and I may be a nice guy but I’m not a saint, and I think if you’re gonna blow me off, the least you can do is tell me why.”

“Honestly?” Jonah asked, plucking at his sweatpants. “I don’t know why. Right up until this afternoon I was totally gung ho and then I couldn’t anymore and I don’t know why.”

“Kind of lame.” Sebastian raised his eyebrows and tilted his head, looking way too much like a disappointed dad for comfort. “But honest, at least. Look, I’m not going to get all ridiculous here and say ‘If you didn’t like me you should have said so!’ because I *know* you like me, Jonah. I know it, and I’m into it. And just happen to like you too, so I was willing to overlook your eccentricities and try this thing out. And yeah, I did have to shift around plans with my friends in order to do this thing with you—”

“But why? We’re nothing alike. We haven’t talked to each other in years. I mean, I get why I like you—you were the only person who was ever fucking nice to me so I have that whole puppy love thing going—but you? You seriously would rather be with me than your friends? I don’t get it! I just don’t.”

Sebastian sighed. “I knew it. I knew that you were one of those balls of yarn. They look neat on the outside—maybe a little too tightly-wound—but then you pull on the end and a big eldritch horror knot comes out of the middle.”

“You—”

“Yes, I knit. I’m not the macho dude you have me built up to be, okay? But let me talk. One, we’re obviously alike enough to have chosen the same college class, so I was kind of hoping there might be something else there. Two, I concede the point that we haven’t talked in years, but I don’t know why that matters since people go on dates with complete strangers all the time.”

“Well that’s—”

“Ah, ah, ah. I’m talking, you’re listening, Mister Knotty Guts. Now where was I?”

“Three.” Jonah hunkered his head down between his shoulders like the scolded child he was.

“Right. Three, I don’t know your motivations for liking me all those years ago, and I hardly think they matter now, because you’re a different person now and so am I, and I’m glad being nice to you back then helped even a little, but you were never a pity case for me, and you’re not now, either.”

Fat chance. Why else had Sebastian asked him out, if not because of the same pity that had guided him to kindness all those years ago? It wasn’t like there was anything about Jonah that was remotely attractive or interesting or worthwhile on its own merits.

“And don’t think just because you’re not speaking now, I don’t know you’re still arguing with me. I can see it all over your face. I said it once and I’ll say it again, Jonah. I. Am. Not. A. Saint. This isn’t charity. I asked you out because you’re cute and funny and you don’t take yourself seriously. So yes, there’s something in it for me, even if it’s just some arm candy for the night.”

“How the hell do you know I’m funny? How do you know I don’t take myself seriously? Are you like, making up stories about us in your head? We’ve barely interacted.” Jonah screwed up his face in disgust, not willing to even touch the stuff about arm candy. Partly because the thought of being *anybody’s* arm candy was a thought completely foreign to him—while also being simultaneously intoxicating when it came to stroking his—er, vanity.

“Well, I wouldn’t count being pretty good friends in junior high as having ‘barely interacted’, personally, but uh... I guess in the interests of transparency, I have a confession to make.”

That didn’t sound good. “In the interests of transparency? You’re kind of freaking me out.”

“Okay so uh, after you left school and basically disappeared off the face of the earth as far as any of us knew?”

“Uh-huh?”

“I kind of... kept tabs on you. Did a little online sleuthing. Tracked down your Myspace. Livejournal. Uh... Tumblr.”

“T-Tumblr?” Jonah’s eyes nearly popped out of his head. “Did you say Tumblr? Tumblr?”

“Yeah, Tumblr. At first it was just to make sure you were okay, you know. I really did like you, Jonah. I wanted you to be happy and safe and for a while there I was worried you were gonna do something stupid like—”

“Don’t say it.” Jonah didn’t want to remember those days. Didn’t want to relive them, not with Sebastian right here beside him, Sebastian who he could have really *hurt*, and wouldn’t have even known he was hurting.

For the first time, Sebastian’s shameless open face seemed to close off a little. He looked down at his knees, playing with the frayed edge of a hole in his jeans. “But the more I followed you around, the more I just started enjoying your perspective. It stopped being about knowing you were okay and more just about *knowing* you.”

“So you’re basically my online stalker, then?”

“Kind of? I mean, I didn’t dox you or send you anon hate or anything...”

“Oh my God. Wednesday when I got all those messages. You saw that, didn’t you?”

“Um, yeah.”

“So you kind of knew I was going to stand you up, didn’t you? And you knew why.”

“Yeah.”

“And then you come here playing dumb and get up in *my* face? What the hell, Sebastian!”

At least Sebastian had the good conscience to look chastened. He just kept staring at that hole in his jeans, like he could stitch it together again just by looking at it. The same way he thought he could stitch Jonah back together just by staring at *him*. “I’m sorry I didn’t come forward, Jonah. I just didn’t want to piss you off or weird you out and I felt really dumb for doing it at all, like jeeze talk about a puppy crush, right? And then I saw you were in class with me and I thought, well, I thought the stars had finally fucking aligned.” Now he was smiling, just grinning at his knees like a madman. “And before you say it, no I didn’t come to this college because of you. I applied *before* you, thank you very much. And I forced myself not to read the posts you made about your class schedule because—God, this is embarrassing—because I wanted for us to be in class together for real, if we were. Not because I orchestrated it or planned it or whatever. I just wanted it to be real.”

Jonah gawped at him. Put his head in his hands. “I feel like the whole world just flipped upside down. Are we in fucking Wonderland right now? All this time I thought *I* was the loser with the years-long crush on the unobtainable guy from my past and—”

“I should have told you right away.” Sebastian frowned, the tilt of his eyebrows more annoyed than sad. “It was a violation of your privacy to not tell you I was reading what you wrote about me, and I’m sorry. I really am sorry. You have a right to be mad.” He paused, agitated, and ran his hands through his hair, mussing it up even more than usual. Jonah didn’t reach out to fix it, even though he felt himself wanting to. Because here was Sebastian: Sebastian the guy, the real person, not the ideal. And he’d fucked up pretty big with this, it was true, and Jonah should be angry at him, but all he was was falling for him more than ever. “I’m sorry, but also I’m not sorry, because dammit, *I liked* it. I liked knowing you liked me too. I could never get a read on you, Jonah.

Back in school, I never knew if I was annoying you or if you liked me too or if you just hated my guts, and then here in college, with you refusing my invitations every week, I didn't know either."

"I never hated you," Jonah admitted. "Sure I distrusted your motives, and sometimes I resented you for being so fucking cool all the time, and sometimes I was angry at you for not doing more for me, like it was your fault bullies picked me as their fucking target. Sometimes I was jealous of you. But I never hated you. I liked you. I... I still like you, Sebastian. I don't know you, but I like you. I want to know you more."

Sebastian's eyes lit up, and he was suddenly out of his seat, on his knees at Jonah's feet, both of Jonah's hands clasped within his own.

Please don't propose, Jonah thought, absurdly. He could overlook the online stalking for years. Sort of. Mostly.... Not like he was much better.

What he *couldn't* overlook was the kind of delusion required for Sebastian to throw a ring at him.

But Sebastian didn't. He just dropped his head onto Jonah's knee with a loud, gusting sigh and went boneless with relief. "Damn. You have no idea how good it feels to tell you all this after all this time." He chuckled. Pressed a kiss to Jonah's lower thigh, chaste and thankful, and for the first time in his life, Jonah didn't feel like a scared little boy anymore—even a scared little boy pretending at being an above-it-all Internet celebrity—he felt like a *king*. And wasn't that an interesting turn of events. "I can't even remember how many confessions I've written to you over the years and then deleted them. E-mails. Comments. Asks."

Now it was Jonah's turn to laugh, the sound hoarse and rough, like he'd been crying. "Uh, yeah, I think I do know how it feels. Exactly how it—wait. Did you ever? Contact me at all?"

Sebastian sheepishly turned his eyes up, still with his cheek resting against Jonah's leg. It felt... surprisingly good there. Right, somehow. Almost religious, if such a thing were possible between two guys on the verge of—whatever they were on the verge of.

Cautious, wide-eyed, totally, *adorably* nervous, Sebastian nodded.

*oh you know, just me 'n **thestarsjustblinkforus** hanging out, admitting our deepest darkest secrets nbd*

#yes i'm wearing a t-shirt #and sweatpants #yolo #personal #by the way he was my junior high crush the whole time

All those sweet, considerate messages. Supportive and kind and funny and going months back. They'd never been more than acquaintances for any of that time; Jonah hadn't even been following Sebastian's account back. All this time, Sebastian had been there, and Jonah had written him off as just another follower, just another yes-man looking for promo and status and reblogs.

Not anymore.

"Well, c'mon," he said, looking up from his phone and giving a little circular wave. Sebastian was still sitting on the floor, head between his knees in what looked to be the recovery position. It seemed his series of confessions had finally taken their toll on him, because seriously? Dude looked like he'd just run a marathon. Well, he had responsibilities now, so he was going to have to pull his shit together. "My public demands photo evidence."

Sebastian looked up and pointed to himself. "Me? Really?"

"Yes, you. Yes, really. I already typed up the post, see?" Jonah held out his phone in illustration. "Tagged and everything. All I need is a shot of us."

"You don't have to do this," Sebastian said, even as he clambered to his feet and sat down next to Jonah on the bed. So close. Sebastian's weight on the mattress sent Jonah listing sideways against him, their shoulders and thighs thumping together.

Neither one of them seemed all that interested in moving apart again, though.

"Yes I do." Jonah held up the camera at arm's length above them and pursed his lips coquettishly, unabashedly examining the image he saw

reflected in the phone's screen. "You were one of the most important people in my life growing up, and for the last however long I've been treating you like an absolute *nobody*. Well, that stops tonight. If we're going to try this, if we're going to do this thing, then I'm going public about you. Now, look sexy."

Just as Jonah snapped the picture, Sebastian grabbed his cheek, pulled him in, and kissed him right on the lips.

Jonah's brain nearly shorted out.

He'd spent so many cynical, lonely years telling himself that kissing wasn't like movies or photographs, that it wasn't glossy and beautiful and life-changing, while simultaneously still falling into the fantasy that it was all those things and more. The reality was so much more profound, so much more complex. Both more mundane and awkward—and more sweet and heart-wrenching—than he'd ever imagined.

And all Sebastian had done was smooshed their lips together for the briefest moment. Jonah couldn't help but wonder what kind of magic might happen between them if they did something more.

"How's that for sexy?" Sebastian asked with a grin, his hand sliding from Jonah's cheek to his shoulder and resting there. Jonah couldn't stop thinking about the weight of Sebastian's palm, the heat of Sebastian's skin, like every single nerve and every ounce of awareness in his body had dedicated itself to experiencing that single touch.

"Oh, uh," he stammered, then opened the photo to see. *Yikes*. He grimaced. "Terrible!"

But he was laughing as he showed Sebastian, and he knew that even if it didn't fit the tone of his blog, even if he looked awkward and was wearing a ratty old T-shirt, it was definitely going to stay. The camera had captured them at the exact "moment of impact", as it were—Jonah's startled face, Sebastian's splayed palm, their lips pressed together, and both of them with their eyes wide open, that split second before either of them seemed to realize the kiss was actually happening.

“Is it really that bad?” Sebastian asked, looking a little ashamed now with spots of red on his scruffy cheeks. “Do you want to take another one?”

“No way!” Jonah hit post before he could change his mind, or before Sebastian could change his mind for him. “I love it.”

“I love *you*.” Sebastian clapped a hand over his mouth.

Jonah’s heart leapt like it’d been shocked. “What?”

Sebastian slowly lowered his hands, flinching like he expected to get hit. “I love you,” he repeated, and the nervous, apologetic expression washed away, replaced by something bold and reckless and life-affirming. “Jonah Gilchrist, I love you. I know to you I’m just a memory, but to me, you—I grew up with you, man. I kinda-sorta had to stalk you on the Internet to get there but... you were always there with me. Always. So I’m sorry if it’s sudden, or too soon, but I love you.” He cleared his throat. Stared down at his hands, which were now in his lap. When he spoke again, his voice was soft, but not ashamed. “I’ve loved you for a long time. I understand why you can’t say it back but—”

No, Jonah couldn’t say it back, not just yet, not to the man who sat in front of him as opposed to the fond memory, but what he *could* do was kiss the confession right out of Sebastian’s mouth.

So he did. A slow, sweet kiss, the exact opposite of the one in the photograph. He savoured Sebastian’s mouth—the way Sebastian’s lips softened under his own, the way the hair on Sebastian’s upper lip scratched lightly—and let those sensations lift him to that same hyper-reality he’d felt with Sebastian’s hand on his shoulder. Oh, but this was so much better. Exhilarating, not peaceful at all, not calm or comforting or steady, just hot and needy and—ouch!—a little painful when Sebastian nipped at Jonah’s lower lip. And yet the pain didn’t make Jonah shy back, it made him arch and growl a little and thrust his hands into Sebastian’s soft bedhead hair to pull him close.

He even liked Sebastian’s tongue in his mouth. It certainly wasn’t neat or elegant, but maybe he didn’t need those things. Maybe he didn’t need to be in control of this. It didn’t need to look good, it just needed to feel good, and it

did. He sank back on the bed, tugging Sebastian down with him. Didn't feel frightened or threatened by the weight of Sebastian on top of him... and didn't let Sebastian shift to relieve the pressure.

Which seemed to be just fine for Sebastian, who flipped like a switch from considerate make-out partner to incongruous sex-kitten. Or wildcat, maybe, was the better word for it. His elbows pinned Jonah's shoulders to the bed and there were those biting lips again, and now something new and irresistible as Sebastian's hips dipped down and Jonah felt the thick length of Sebastian's cock straining against the denim of his jeans.

A moan escaped Jonah's lips, high and urgent, not nearly as masculine as the deep sounds resonating from Sebastian, but the borderline-girly sound of it didn't make Sebastian laugh or pull back; he just thrust his tongue deeper and swept Jonah's mouth with it more hungrily.

Good God it felt amazing to arch his back and try to rise but find himself pinned by Sebastian's solid weight. He felt... not possessed or conquered, but precious, like something worth holding onto as tight as possible.

Don't let up, don't let me go.

Sebastian's arms framed Jonah's head on the pillow, his hands cupping Jonah's jaw. One thumb swept Jonah's swollen, tender lip, and Jonah let himself moan his girly moan again.

This time, Sebastian did pull away a little, but not to complain about the noise. His bright eyes stared down into Jonah's. "I don't want to do anything you're not ready for," he said, panting.

"I'm ready"—Jonah tried to reply, and realized he was panting, himself.—"for you to take off your shirt." He went boneless on the bed, feeling downright spoiled as he lounged there, Sebastian straddling his legs. The view when Sebastian peeled off his worn grey T-shirt—revealing that broad pale chest with its thatch of dark blond hair and hard nipples—made him feel like the luckiest awkward virgin in the history of awkward virgins. And when Sebastian lifted his arms over his head? Jonah hadn't realized armpits could be so sexually appealing, but he most certainly knew now.

Sebastian cocked his head and grinned. “So I meet your exacting standards? I know I’m no Lucas Mascarini.” He gave his own belly a simultaneously self-critical and confident slap.

“Exceed them, actually,” Jonah told him, not lying at all. Sebastian was the very *definition* of sexy, in a way that specifically couldn’t be defined. All Jonah knew was, he wanted him. Wanted him now, wanted him wholeheartedly, wanted him exactly as he was. “Can I... can I touch you?”

Sebastian nodded, that blush appearing again, and his arms fell obediently to his sides. Was he... posing? His posture was so strangely receptive, so expectant, like he existed solely for Jonah’s pleasure, like he would wait a lifetime for Jonah’s touch.

Well, maybe he already had.

If that was the case, then Jonah wasn’t going to torture him any longer. He sat up. Shimmied back in the bed until he had a good view of Sebastian’s body. The rise and fall of his chest. The soft V of his torso. The jut of his hipbones. Jonah reached out with both hands, greedy for tactile sensation. He touched Sebastian’s arms first, feeling the bulge of muscle that shifted hidden under Sebastian’s unassuming soft skin, then swept his palms inward. Traced collarbone, followed the subtle swell of pecs to the rough hair nestled at their centre. Scraping his fingernails through it made Jonah shudder with desire and Sebastian flopped his head back with a throaty groan.

Jonah wanted to hear more of that. He scratched his way down the narrow trail of hair that led from Sebastian’s chest past his navel and down to the waistline of his boxers. It made him feel like a model in some pseudo-pornographic edgy editorial spread, especially when he lounged back and licked his lips, asking, “Can I see this, too?” The coyness in his own voice surprised him. Maybe he was a little bit of a sex-kitten himself.

“Hell yeah.” This time Sebastian didn’t wait; his hands fumbled to his fly and threw it open. He shamelessly yanked down both jeans and boxers and there it was, his big uncut dick bobbing between his legs, meaty foreskin welled up with a drip of pre-cum.

Jonah's mouth was suddenly full of saliva. He bit his lip and swallowed and forced himself to tear his gaze away from Sebastian's dick and look at his face. Sebastian smiled back at him, and the earnest look in his eyes—*This is for me. It's all for me.*

He thought he'd be afraid, or feel awkward or stupid or misshapen, but all he felt was touched and privileged and fucking turned on. And he wanted to get Sebastian off.

"Can I make a suggestion?" Sebastian asked, voice playful, and thank God for that not-judgmental thing he had going because otherwise that half a laugh in his voice might have made Jonah want to melt into the floor.

"Uh. Sure." Jonah wet his lips. How had his mouth gone from being overflowing with spit to dryer than the Sahara all of a sudden?

"Maybe you could get your junk out too?" The sweet hopefulness in Sebastian's voice soothed any potential insult inherent in the reminder. Somehow, Jonah felt powerful instead of inept. Maybe because Sebastian wanted him. Wanted him bad. Wanted something only Jonah could give... something Jonah could very well refuse.

Not that he would.

"Go ahead," he said with a smirk and leaned back on his elbows. Oh yeah, he was a sex-kitten, all right. And say what you want about sweatpants, but they made his boner look *good*.

"Now I *definitely* love you," Sebastian growled, lunging forward, and suddenly his thumbs were hooked in the waistband of Jonah's sweats and then the sweats were gone, yanked down, and Jonah's cock was sliding along Sebastian's and both of them were encircled by the tight heat and rough friction of Sebastian's fist and Sebastian was bullying him down onto the bed again, pinning him and kissing him hard as their trapped cocks moved together, just two desperate horny guys fucking into Sebastian's hand as Sebastian's tongue fucked just as desperately into Jonah's mouth.

Jonah had never come so hard and fast in his life, but then, he'd never come like this, bucking into such a strong hand, kissing such a sweet and giving and earnest man, sharing pure pleasure without an ounce of shame.

Sebastian laughed when he came, that kind of pained laugh people got when you tickled them too hard, but there was no questioning that he was fucking happy.

So happy he could burst, Jonah thought, and then he laughed, too.

i have gained new appreciation for sweatpants

#personal

Jonah glowered at the compose screen, puffed his floppy hair out of his eyes, and closed his phone's Tumblr app without publishing his post. There were some things that his followers just really didn't need an update on, now that he was thinking about it.

Sighing with strange relief, he set his phone aside and turned back to where Sebastian lay sprawled out on his bed, shirtless still and absently toying with the hair below his bellybutton. Just looking at him now made Jonah want to simultaneously squeal with joy, find his paper bag again, and jump the guy's bones.

Which might be awkward to do while breathing into a paper bag, now that he thought of it.

"Well?" Sebastian asked, holding out an arm so that Jonah could lie down snuggled beside him. "Am I going to have five hundred angry anons howling for my blood?"

Jonah hid the lower half of his face in Sebastian's armpit and peeked out at him sheepishly. "Um, maybe? I mean, I didn't... I didn't post anything new just now, if that's what you're asking, but you might want to disable your ask box just in case."

"I have a better idea," Sebastian said, wrapping his arm tight around Jonah's shoulders and giving him a little jostle. "How about instead of sitting

around here waiting for your heartbroken followers to attack me en masse in a fit of jealousy, we go out on that date I had planned?”

Jonah blinked. Looked from his own dishevelled sweatpants to Sebastian’s shirtless chest and back again. “What, now?” He hadn’t been expecting Sebastian to fuck and run, or anything, but spending the evening together in bed maybe watching a couple movies before Sebastian went back to his room seemed like a more sensible option for them at this point.

“Yeah, now.” Sebastian sat Jonah up and practically pushed him out of the bed, then went rooting through Jonah’s tousled blankets in search of his discarded shirt. He threw it on and hopped out of bed himself, nudging Jonah toward his closet. “Believe it or not, as fantastic as that hand job turned out to be, I really was looking forward to seeing you in those Gucci pants you posted.”

Jonah reached for them, still folded in a neat pile on top of his dresser with the rest of his abandoned date outfit. “Really? You wouldn’t prefer that I just wore jeans and a T-shirt or something?” He hugged them to his chest, biting his lip. “You know, like a normal guy?”

Sebastian rolled his eyes and closed the space between them, cupping Jonah’s cheek and pressing a soft, undemanding kiss on his lips. “I don’t want a normal guy, Jonah Gilchrist. I want *you*, Lanvin bowties and all.”

“You won’t feel like...” Jonah lowered his gaze, twisting his lips in consternation. Sebastian’s warm, gentle hand never left his cheek. “A schlub?”

The sound of Sebastian’s laughter surprised him, nearly humiliated him, until he remembered this was Sebastian, here, not someone who’d so callously minimize Jonah’s insecurities and neuroses. “Of course I will. You’re fucking gorgeous and fashionable and yes, more than a little bit vain. How could I not feel like a schlub?”

How could he say that and still sound so happy? So carefree? Jonah’s face burned with shame.

“But you know what? I’m a *damn lucky* schlub, and that’s good enough for me.”

I think it's me who's the lucky one. Jonah looked up again with a tentative smile, and saw that Sebastian was grinning right back. "You promise?" he asked, and God, it made him sound like an insecure fucking fourteen year old again, but then, if there was anyone in this world who could accept that part of him, it was Sebastian.

And Sebastian was just as good and just as patient and just as accepting as Jonah had built him up to be, because he didn't scoff at Jonah's juvenile self-doubt, he just accepted it for what it was with a kind look and a reassuring kiss on the forehead. "Promise. Now get dressed. I can't wait to see you trying to sell bowling shoe chic to the fashion blogger set."

"Two words," Jonah quipped as he stepped out of his sweatpants and into the blue Gucci trousers. "Hashtag Rockabilly. Don't think I can't make it work."

"Oh, there is no room for doubt in my mind when it comes to you. If you can pull off a schlub for a boyfriend, you can do anything."

Boyfriend. There came those butterflies again. "Knit me something, then," Jonah teased, not missing a beat as he traded T-shirts and ducked into his blazer, "And then we'll see just how much I can 'pull off'."

Sebastian opened the door and stepped aside to let Jonah through, smiling mischievously. "Oh, I plan on it. Can you say 'toque with a pom-pom'?"

Yikes, but still totally doable. Jonah smiled right back. "I don't know, can you say 'this winter's must-have accessory among fourteen- to seventeen-year-old girls'?" With that, he stepped out into the hallway, out into the wide world of strangers that suddenly seemed just slightly less scary with Sebastian at his side. He took his boyfriend's hand.

THE END

Author Bio

Heidi Belleau was born and raised in small town New Brunswick, Canada. She now lives in the rugged oil-patch frontier of Northern BC with her husband, an Irish ex-pat whose long work hours in the trades leave her plenty of quiet time to write. Her writing reflects everything she loves: diverse casts of characters, a sense of history and place, equal parts witty and filthy dialogue, the occasional mythological twist, and most of all, love—in all its weird and wonderful forms. When not writing, you might catch her trying to explain British television to her daughter or sipping a drink at her favourite coffee shop.

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