**Going out**

“I’m sorry, but I just can’t do this anymore.”

He says to me, on what was supposed to be a romantic, moonlit night. He lets go of my hand, looks me straight in the eyes - the most sincere expression I’ve seen on him in all our time together – and continues:

“Let’s break up.”

“What the fuck!?” I yell out in exasperation, while faceplanted onto the table. “The hell does he mean *I can’t do this anymore,* huh? That almost makes it sound like *I* was the problem. Meanwhile, this little fucker can barely pull up his goddamn pants on his own! How does that make any sense? You get what I’m saying, right?”

I look up to the other side of the table, where my last solace in these dark times was sitting. She just nods solemnly, taking another sip from her very responsibly non-alcoholic juice, before reaching out and rubbing my head for a moment.

“You tried your best, didn’t you?” she says.

“I did! I really tried to make it work with this dumbass…”

I down half my beer, yelling ‘Fuck you, Devin!’ out for the whole world to know.

“Shit,” I say, laying my head on the table again. “Maybe I just need to spend less time per guy…but then I feel like I might kick ‘the one’ to the curb without realizing it, you know?”

I heave a heavy sigh, while she flags the waiter for another drink.

“At the same time, wasting months on every fuckass dude I ‘click’ with on a dating app doesn’t exactly give me many chances. That’s like, five guys a year at max. Six if I swap ‘m out *real* quick.”

“A tag team?”

“Pft, yeah. Like all of them lining up going, ‘Mom says it’s my turn on the Triss Train – destination Disasterville.’”

She covers her mouth and lets out a muted giggle. I smile a little as well.

“You know, I’ve never seen you with a partner before,” I continue. “Are you not interested in dating?”

She tilts her head a little and thinks.

“I’m happy as I am,” she eventually says.

“Mm, that sounds nice. Yet here I am, a chick with no apparent head to be found, chasing love like I won’t survive another day without it.”

I heave another sigh, as the waiter brings over her drink – which she promptly nudges over to me instead.

A perfect timing, as my ample mug had been relieved of its contents not long ago.

“You’re so nice, Tessa,” I say in response to her gesture. “If only that Devin had learned a thing or two from you.”

She smiles softly at me as an epiphany strikes me.

“I should just go out with you instead!”

By the time I finish my sentence, Tessa has become occupied nibbling on the complimentary cashews served with our drinks.

“Tess?”

She turns back to me.

“Sorry, I assumed you were saying something nonsensical again.”

“You’re so mean, Tess,” I say in response to her comment. “If only you could know how serious I am.”

She has a puzzled look on her face, as if asking *How serious?*

“I am more serious than I’ve ever been,” I say, grabbing her hand firmly with both of mine.

She does her little giggle, immediately brushing my comment off as a joke. It was, *to be fair,* but somehow it still annoys me just enough to want to tease her a bit further.

At least until she takes it seriously.

“I’m not joking,” I say, putting on my most sincere face.

“Really?” she asks with some hints of surprise.

“Really,” I respond. “I want to give it a shot.”

She considers it for longer than I’d expect, as I prepare the line that’ll leave her howling in laughter after she says no.

“Okay,” she answers.

Hm?

“Okay?” I ask.

“Okay,” she answers with hints of a sweet smile. “Let’s do it.”

I stare at her for a moment.

“No, sorry, I, uhh…was joking actually,” I awkwardly let out.

“Is that so? Never mind then.”

She nonchalantly returns to her cashews, as if nothing of significance had just occurred.

“Jeez, this is the worst,” I say, faceplanting once more as I lament the death of both my joke and my relationship.

I wake up with a splitting headache. I grasp my head, as if I might be able to mould the pain away.

I get up groggily, before realizing that, to be honest, it really is not as bad as I was expecting. Considering how early in the evening my last memory was, combined with my infamously high ability to hold back while drinking, this has ended up quite manageable. Which, frankly, can only mean one thing.

I look over to my nightstand to find a full glass of water. Wedged under it, a paper note is peeking out.

‘*Make sure you drink it all.*

*I’ve left a get-well present for you in the fridge.*

*Love,  
Tess.*‘

As expected, it seems I’ve been taken care of again.

The drink does not go down easily, but I know better than to ignore instructions. I then try to drag myself out to the living room – with moderate success. Meanwhile, I think back to the last time I went drinking with that fucker Devin. Although it (quite literally) pains me to use my head in this state, I clearly recall him getting plastered way before me, then having to drag his sorry ass home first – before stumbling back myself.

I vow to give Tess the princess treatment next time she’s over, as I open up the fridge to scour for breakfast – as well as see what this alleged present is all about. Inside, I find a batch of home-made scones.

You baked fucking scones? Am I King fucking Charles or what?

I generously spread out the jam and cream (which she must’ve bought on top), and, with a quick bite, am immediately reminded why these are my favourite.

Feeling like a god damn princess myself, I snap a picture with the cone still in hand.

*‘They were delicious,’* I add as text, before sending it Tess’ way. As I see the message timestamp come up, it finally dawns on me that it’s almost afternoon already.

I mourn the loss of my morning classes while effortlessly deciding that I’ve missed them now anyway and might as well take my time.

As I await my response, I absentmindedly scroll up our chat. Ignoring everything from yesterday (it was mostly me crying), I laugh at our silly joking around before ending up on a selfie she took a few weeks ago. *“I’m changing barbers,”* written under some of the bluntest bangs I’ve had the pleasure of laying eyes upon.

*Cute,* I find myself thinking, before her response snaps me out of my thoughts.

*How’s the hangover?* She texts.

*Manageable, no doubt thanks to you,* I respond

After that, she just sends the slight smile emoji.

*Aren’t you supposed to be in class right now?* I send her back.

Another slight smile is all I get, before she (presumably) goes back to focusing on classes - unlike a certain someone – who’s instead sitting at the table, casually eating breakfast two hours after classes started. I absentmindedly open Instagram and go to Tess profile, scrolling through posts.

Ah, this was at the concert last month, wasn’t it? That was kind of a disaster.

I’m in quite a lot of these photos, aren’t I? Seems like she posts more pictures with me than I do. Which, to be fair, might be due to my incessant lurking – hard to say, really.

On a different note, Tess, how do you always look so good in these? What’s your secret? I should ask for some tips next time – maybe that’ll help me keep a relationship for once.

Oh, this one is from when we went to Thorpe park, wasn’t it? That was a good time – although I don’t think I’m ever going on a thrill ride again after that.

I do feel a bit bad, since I kind of dragged Tess along with me into every single ride – and she’s not exactly one to start loudly complaining the moment I start taking things a bit too far.

Actually, wasn’t that more than a year ago already?

I start scrolling downwards – which goes on for a long time before I’m even near the bottom. I quickly shut down the app and wonder what the hell I’ve been doing, before finally heading out to uni.

I exit class, remembering none of it. As I walk into the hallway, my eyes immediately gravitate towards a wild Tessa, who appears to be chatting with Levin from her course. With just a cursory glance, I immediately understand the situation – poor, lonely Levin is looking for a lover, and my kind to a fault Tessa is, of course, candidate number one.

I understand where you’re coming from, you poor old sod, but I can’t allow you to hit on her so blatantly.

She does that cute thing where giggles into her hand, and I immediately start to make my way over at high speed – there’s no way that move won’t be an instakill, after all.

Before I arrive, however, another challenger enters the ring – a lady who looks vaguely as if I may have seen her in past. She reaches up and plants a kiss on Levin’s cheek.

This is obviously her way of trying to pull his attention away from Tessa. There truly are too many losing heroines in this world – I truly weep for you, random lady, being faced with such an unbeatable opponent.

Lucky for you, my Tess is way too high aimed for just some guy anyway – all things considered, it’s still a win for you.

However, don’t think I’ll just stand idly by while this war takes place.

While I’m thinking all that, Levin puts his arm around the new girl, before kissing her back. The two then walk off, while Tess waves goodbye.

Hm.

Before I finish contemplating the errors of my ways, Tess has already closed the distance – showing up directly in front of me.

“I see you’re feeling better?” she asks.

Finally snapping out of my strange trance, I answer, “Thanks to you.”

She smiles softly at me without a response. Then, she beckons back to the other two.

“Do you know them?”

“I’ve met Levin before, although I wouldn’t say I know him.”

“I actually introduced those two, you know?” Tess says, with a sweet & satisfied smile. “It’s like they’re made for each other.”

“That’s nice,” I answer noncommittally.

Then, Tess covers her mouth as if she’d just gaffed with a cute little *Ah!*

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking…” she says, feeling obviously guilty about bringing up a successful relationship to someone who’s just broken up with their s/o.

Really, it’s not like it’s a problem, you know? I’m made of tougher stuff (even if it may not seem it).

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” I laugh it off. “I’m over it already.”

“Isn’t that what you said last time?” she continuous, now switching to teasing mode.

“Well, this time it’s true.”

*I’ve had my mind on other things*, I think, while I find myself staring blanky at her face.

Hm? Why does she look so worried? Could it be because I’m staring directly at her face without giving a second thought to the fact that people don’t do that normally?

I shake my head to normalize my increasingly strange thought patterns.  
  
“Are you sure you’re okay?” she says, looking worriedly at me.

“You’re always so caring, Tess,” I respond, thankfully.

Honestly, even my own mother doesn’t care for me this much. In fact, I can still clearly recall her advice when I complained to her about my situation before:

*There’s men waiting around every corner…just pick a good one.*

It’s really not so easy to pick a good one, mum…

Ah, I was still mid conversation.

“All thanks to your *Tender love & care,*” I tease, while leaning down to her height. This, of course, is meant to show how I tower over her with my incredible additional 10 (or so?) centimetres. It also has the side effect of giving me a full frontal of her cute face, hitting me with a sudden desire to caress it.

In fact, aren’t I already doing that?

I pull my hand back. Seriously, what the hell am I doing?

“As long as you’re okay,” She says with a sweet smile, while reaching up and doing the same. Then, she gives me a pat on the back.

I guess it was supposed to emulate how Henry and I always do it to each other – an ongoing contest to see who can smack more wind out of the other – but because she cares too much, it feels more like someone gently smacked me with a pillow.

“Yup, perfectly fine!” I say, while pumping my chest. “How about I cover lunch tomorrow?”

Tess just smiles. “You already covered the bill at the bar. Just walk me home and we’re even.”

While strolling through the streets of our truly scenic urban hellscape, I get to thinking.

Does this girl seriously like me? I mean, come on…who in this world is so magnanimous? I call her out to complain and get shitfaced, then she makes fucking scones and all she wants in return is *getting walked home?* Fucking scones! She’s either an angel or seriously in love with me.

Ah, actually, didn’t she say yes when I asked her out, still merely in the process of getting shitfaced? Wouldn’t that make it actually possibly true, rather than just me joking around?

But then, it’s not like she was enthusiastic about it. In fact she didn’t care one bit when I took it back.

Plus, she’s been this way about as long as I’ve known her.

So she is just an angel? I understand. Also, I haven’t said a word on our way back so far, have I?

“You don’t *have* to take care of me every time, you know?” I say to her. “Maybe if you leave me to wallow and suffer my mistakes, I might actually learn my lesson.”

“Well, aren’t we *BFFs Forever and Ever*?” She responds, with a cheeky look. “How could I not?”

“Huh?” I let out in surprise. “What does that mean?”

Before I can even finish my sentence, she pulls up a video on her phone.

In it, I am shown evidently clinging onto her, proclaiming my love for my aforementioned and self-proclaimed *BFF, Forever and Ever.*

“That’s photoshopped,” I say.

She just giggles.

That was so fast. How she pulled up that video, I mean – like she prepared it before we met up so it’d be raring to go when relevant. Isn’t that cute?

What is wrong with me. I can’t think straight.

Okay, get your thoughts in order, Tess. You are a soon to be actual physicist – you are perfectly capable of having 1 (one) coherent thought. Think back to what your mother said:

*Just pick a good one.*

No, not that thing she said. Then again, I probably should think about that one more.

What *does* constitute a good man? Let’s put some requirements in preparation for my next relationship.

First of all, someone with a sense of humour. If I can’t even joke with someone, how am I supposed to enjoy dating them? Even if it’s only performative, I want my partner to laugh at the dumb shit I spout.

Then, he obviously has to be loyal. Someone who will stick with me, even in my lows. Someone who will drop me when I’m going through a rough time will get dropped long *before* I’m going through a rough time.

Someone a bit cute would be nice. I’ve had enough of rough ‘manly men’ after that fucker Devin.

He should be easy-going as well. Someone who wouldn’t mind me pulling them along to this or that – instead of being all belligerent about it.

Ah, speaking of: someone caring to give me a picker-upper when I inevitably go in too far with this or that and get burnt again.

Speaking of burning, he has to be able to cook as well – no way I’m doing all the meals. In fact, I’ve had more than enough of picking up after guys who’ve been babied by mommy dearest all their life, so I’ll add the other chores in as well. He has to be at the very least independent.

Then, he should have at least a degree as well. This is just preference really.

Oh, and they have to understand a woman’s situation as well. Clueless Jimbo who gets scared when he sees a tampon in the trash can go fuck himself, for real.

Okay, let’s recap where we’re at.

A cute, caring, easy-going, educated man who *gets* women, is a good cook and picks up after himself.

That should be doable, right? From now on, these are my criteria for my partner – I’m not dating anyone unless they can fulfil them.

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I have a feeling I might end up being single for a while. I mean, not only do I have to find a guy like this, but they have to be not taken (probably the hardest part) AND interested in me as well?

But then, it can’t be helped if it takes a while. In the meantime, I’ll just have to learn to be satisfied on my own – if I’m going to end up without a partner for a long time anyway.

Something about how if you’re not happy on your own, you won’t be happy in a relationship? I’ll figure it out.

Actually–I think, as I look over to Tess walking beside me – don’t I have a perfect example right here of satisfied without a partner? I mean, I’ve never heard of her dating, before or after I met her, yet she’s always sweet and calm – unlike my bitter and emotional self after every break-up.

She finds the time to help me out, even when she must be plenty busy with her own things. Even asking me to walk her home was probably just because she was worried and wanted to keep me occupied, and when we arrive she’ll invite me in for a home-cooked meal and a movie.

Once she catches me staring, she smiles at me as if it’s totally normal to randomly stare.

Look, she even does cute shit like that? Isn’t my Tess amazing?

While thinking that, the thought dawns that the ‘guy’ who passes the whole checklist is right in front of me.

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I need to think this through. I mean, it’d be easy to just say fuck it and pursue my very own *BFF Forever and Ever* with reckless abandon, but that just wouldn’t be sincere to her… I mean, I wouldn’t be with her if I didn’t like her, obviously, and I wouldn’t be with her all the time if I didn’t like her quite a bit – but that doesn’t make it romantic all of a sudden. I feel like it’d be wrong to try to change our relationship based on some off-the-cuff impulse.

Speaking of changing our relationship – there’s not much I’d hate more than if we broke up and it ended with making our *Forever and Ever* just a liminal whatever.

In the first place, I can’t even assume she’ll agree, can I? I mean, she just as well could’ve been playing along yesterday – or maybe it was just a whim and it’ll be different now…

But then, it’s also not like saying no would end our friendship, would it? Even if we got together and broke up, we could still get along, right?

I say that, but…I don’t (willingly) talk to a single one of my exes anymore.

She could easily have been worrying about our friendship ending as well when she said yes, thinking that saying no would make me distance myself.

That doesn’t even make sense…

Why was I thinking about this again? My mum’s advice? What does she even know in the first place? If I told her I found a good man, she’d just say *Are you blind? That is no man!*

In fact, what am I worrying about? I can just throw it out there casually and see what comes of it.

Oh, but, I already did that, didn’t I? And then immediately took it back? Why am I like this?

“Triss?”

I snap out of my thoughts.

“Are you okay?” Tess asks.

“Never been better,” I respond, while I reorient myself. As it turns out, we’ve already at her place.

“Do you want to come in?,” she asks, while she starts to fiddle with the keys for the door. “I’ll brew you a cup.”

I consider it for a moment. Normally, I would take her up in a heartbeat – but I probably shouldn’t this time. I already bothered her more than enough yesterday, and I doubt I’ll make for much better conversation that during the walk here.

Yeah, just this once, I won’t be impulsive and carefully consider this whole thing. I’ll sleep on it, think it through, and tomorrow I’ll make my decision.

“I think I’ll just go home for today.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah,” I pointedly respond. I can’t read her response well enough to know what she’s thinking, while she quietly goes back to fiddling with her keys.

“Actually,” I speak before I think any further, “I was wondering something.”

She looks to me as if to say, *Go on*.

Must I always open my mouth? Well, whatever…I’ll make something of it.

“Why’d you say okay yesterday?” I ask. “When I drunkenly asked you out?”

Taken slightly aback by the sudden question, she seems to think on it for a moment – while I frantically consider my options.

I mean, realistically, she was just playing along, right? If that’s the case, I’ll just play it off and we can continue our lives.

And on the off-chance I actually landed on some deep-rooted feelings, I’ll respond in kind.

Yes, that works – let’s do that.

Whichever of the two it is, I’m more than ready.

“I just thought it seemed nice.”

I stare at her blankly for a moment.

“You thought it ‘seemed nice’?” I ask, in slight exasperation at her lack of adherence to my binary. “Is that really enough?”

“It’s enough for me,” she responds, as if the most natural thing in the world.

Reneging even further on the ‘not being impulsive for once thing’, I find myself having already closed the distance and boxed her in, stretching one arm to the wall beside the door.

While low-key able to hear my heart beating in my chest, I say:

“What would you say if I asked again, then?”

“Depends, ” She responds with a teasing smile. “Are you going to take it back again?”

I wonder if she can hear it too.

“Not this time,” I say.

Then, I feel a soft sensation on my lips.

*She just kissed me right away, did she?* I think, as I see her come down from her tip-toes with a self-satisfied grin.

“I never knew you were so forward,” I tease.

She giggles softly in response.

“Are you sure you’re not coming in?” she asks. “I bought your favourite.”

Really, how can I say no to that?