

BONUS CHAPTER: THE STRAIGHT GUY WHO WASN'T

It started, as these things often do, with a text I should've ignored.

"You're actually kinda cute for a guy."

I should've deleted it. Should've rolled my eyes, blocked him, and gone back to watching something appropriately numbing. But no. Instead, I stared at those words like they were prophecy. My phone glowed like a Ouija board, spelling out future heartbreak.

Let's call him... Ben. Not his real name, obviously. The real Ben is out there somewhere, probably still denying he's into men, possibly engaged to a woman who thinks his "close friendships" with gay guys are just... deep and meaningful.

Ben was tall. Stupidly tall. He always smelled like a mix of laundry detergent and something vaguely herbal — like eucalyptus tea left out too long. It was oddly comforting, and it clung to my pillow long after he'd left. He wore hoodies like armor and only smiled when he thought no one was looking. Naturally, I fell headfirst into the fantasy.

We "hung out." That's what he called it. Never dated. Never slept over (until he did). Never kissed in public (except that one time in the elevator, when he kissed me right as the doors opened and a neighbor stepped in with a startled cough that said, 'I saw nothing, but also everything'). He swore he wasn't gay. He wasn't bi either. Just... open. To experiences. To connection. To blowing me and then ghosting me for three days straight.

There was also the night he made me take a relationship personality quiz he found on some random forum. He got "the wall"—closed off, emotionally unavailable, impossible to decorate. I got "the sponge"—absorbent, eager, and constantly cleaning up other people's messes. He said that sounded

about right, then rolled over and asked if I could massage his back while he processed a dream he had about a shark attack. I did it. Like an idiot.

With coconut oil and everything.

The next morning, he said he “needed space to think.” Then asked if I could transfer him money for the sushi.

I, of course, played the role of Understanding Queer Mentor-slash-Free Therapist-slash-Occasional Fleshlight. I told myself it was temporary. That he was figuring things out.

That I was helping. That maybe—*maybe*—if I was kind enough, patient enough, hot enough, he’d stay. He didn’t.

There was a moment, though. Just one. The night we watched that old sci-fi movie he swore was ‘life-changing’ — not because of the plot, but because of how the aliens communicated through silence. At some point, he leaned over, brushed popcorn crumbs off my shirt, and rested his head on my shoulder for a full five minutes. I remember thinking: maybe this means something. Maybe this is what progress looks like — slow, weird, crumb-covered.

One evening, after a week of unusually consistent texting and three whole nights of spooning (a new record), he dropped it casually between bites of pasta: “I think I’m gonna start seeing this girl I met at work.”

I blinked.

He chewed.

I blinked again. “Wait, what?”

“Jessica. She’s cool. Yoga teacher. We’re just vibing, you know?”

I did not know.

He assured me it wasn’t serious. That we were still “cool.” That I shouldn’t be weird about it. That no, he hadn’t told her about me, but like, why would he? We were just friends.

Right.

Friends who had sex. Friends who cuddled. Friends who cried together over a Pixar movie once, drunk on cheap wine and even cheaper intimacy.

I wish I could say I dumped him with grace. That I walked out of that dinner with dignity and a dramatically tossed napkin. But no. I paid for the

meal, wished him luck with Jessica, and then cried in the Uber while hate-listening to a playlist titled "Straight Men Are a Scam."

Two weeks later, at 2:17 a.m., he texted: "U up?"

Reader, I blocked him.

Then unblocked him a week later.

Then blocked him again.

Growth is not linear.

I don't regret him. He taught me something valuable: Never fall for a man who flinches when you touch his hand in daylight.

Also, if he says he's straight but still wants to sleep over, that's the start of a limited series where he gaslights you into thinking you're just roommates with benefits, and you end up crying into cold pizza while watching reruns of *Friends* and wondering if Ross was right all along.

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