Whatever this is

by cian1675

Summary

In hindsight, maybe signing up for an introductory gender studies class on impulse had been a bad idea. Also, Kihyun's TA kind of looks like a fuckboy and just... no. So much no.

Notes

A TA is a teaching assistant, so essentially a student-teacher, in case that's confusing.

See the end of the work for more notes

In hindsight, maybe signing up for an introductory gender studies class on impulse had been a bad idea. Kihyun sighs, fumbles his way about the Arts building, trying to find his tutorial class. He’s never had classes here before – never had to step out of the music department really – and he’d given himself half an hour to find the right room to avoid being late. The thing is, maybe he’d severely overestimated the amount of time he needs because he’s just gone up the stairs and already, there it is. Room 03-01. Found with 22 minutes to spare. Great.

Kihyun peeks through the sliver of glass on the wooden door, lets out a breath when he finds it empty. Good. He can work on his composition while he waits, he thinks, except apparently the view from the door had a blind spot, because there’s already a student in class, bent over the table, cap obscuring his face. He’s dressed in a light grey sweater and plain black joggers but somehow
manages to make it look good. It’s probably the build, Kihyun thinks, eyeing the muscled arms, thick thighs and prominent pecs.

“Hi,” he accidentally says, before he remembers this is a stranger. This was never an issue with his regular music modules. Kihyun sighs a little and the guy looks up.

“Hi.”

There’s a tiny smirk on his lips, curled and plush, and it’s attractive but that’s not the only attractive thing about the stranger. His eyes are bright, his fringe messy under the cap in the I-spent-ages-perfecting-my-bed-hair look and Kihyun’s first thought is he looks like a fuckboy, followed swiftly by no no no.

His mouth clamps shut, and he scoots to a seat near the back without saying anything else.

He knew signing up for this class had been a bad idea.

Five minutes before class, students start streaming in. By then, Kihyun’s barely managed to fill four bars on his scoresheet but he’s noticed a dozen useless things about the unfairly attractive fuckboy. Things like how he wears those faux diamond earrings (his ears stick out under his cap) or how nicely he filled out his sweater, back muscles shifting when he moves. How he’s constantly scribbling something on the stack of papers in front of him, then slumping and sighing, peeling his cap off to run a hand through his hair. Some of the things point towards fuckboyness but other things don’t really add up – like how worn his shoes are, how his bag is barely holding itself together, how diligently he’s filling up his stack of notes – and in the end, Kihyun gives up trying to form any more assumptions about the maybe-fuckboy. He’s just another student in the class, albeit one of the few male ones in this module, and honestly Kihyun could do without interacting with him for the rest of the semester. Or so he thinks, until the minute hand of the clock hits twelve, and fuckboy (not-fuckboy, whichever) stands up.

“Hello. Thank you for coming to class on time. I’m Lee Hoseok, and I’m your TA for this semester.”

His voice is warm, smooth. And then he smiles, a proper one instead of the small smirk earlier, and it’s even more attractive than before and well, there goes Kihyun’s plan of not interacting with not-fuckboy his TA Hoseok.

“You know, for some one that you’re not supposed to care about, you sure spend a lot of time talking about him.”

“Who,” Kihyun asks, not looking up from his score. The quavers he’d drawn are blurring together and he’s erased the melody enough times that the paper’s grey in spots. Minhyuk jabs him in the side after a while when he doesn’t continue, and Kihyun rolls his eyes. “I didn’t even mention his name.”
Minhyuk just sighs, too used to Kihyun’s antics, but he does make it as long and exasperated as he could to annoy him. Kihyun ignores it, mostly because he’s used to Minhyuk’s antics as well, but also because he’s sort of right. “Well, that doesn’t solve the problem, does it? You’re still talking about him. I know your ex did a shitty thing but like –”

“Minhyuk,” Kihyun gets out, suddenly tired. “I don’t really want to talk about this.” Minhyuk stops suddenly, mouth still open mid-sentence, and Kihyun softens a little. “Look, I know you’re trying to help but I’m just dealing with this the only way I know how, okay?”

It takes a while, but eventually Minhyuk just sighs.

“Okay.”

Cheating, as it turns out, is not one of the topics covered in the introductory gender studies course.

“Well, it was in last semester’s syllabus but they took it out this time. Still, you can write your first paper about it if you want,” Hoseok says when Kihyun hesitantly asks after class.

“Oh.”

He must have sounded as surprised and disappointed as he feels, because Hoseok’s brows furrow.

“Were you really interested in the topic or something?”

“No,” Kihyun cuts in before Hoseok asks anything else. His TA still sort of looks like a fuckboy with his pretty features and well-built body, and even though that impression’s since been tempered after three weeks of seeing Hoseok’s unexpectedly dorky side, it’s not an easy one to ignore it when the guy turns up looking attractive as hell every time despite being in typical university student attire of sweatpants and t-shirts. Still, that’s what Kihyun tries to do – tries to think about how Hoseok goes over the lecturer’s summary every week with what is clearly passion (to the point where he sometimes stumbles over the ‘s’ sounds in his words when he gets too excited), tries to think about how Hoseok smiles really brightly and far too genuinely to hate on whenever his students participate enthusiastically in tutorials and, most of all, tries very very hard not to see Hoseok as just a beefcake. Because, even after just three weeks, Kihyun can tell that there’s clearly a brain behind that pretty face, and probably a decent character as well.

(Unlike him.)

Anyway, Kihyun really shouldn’t be focusing on his TA, nice as he is. He should be thinking about the paper he has to submit next week, a paper with a topic he’s researched for the last few days only to find out today during tutorial that it’s not in the syllabus.

“Eh, actually, it’s fine. I was just asking because it’s the only thing that was taken out from last semester’s syllabus, and I got confused ‘cause I borrowed a senior’s notes,” Kihyun lies. It comes out lame, but Hoseok can’t read him the way Minhyuk can, so it probably doesn’t matter.

“You can still write about it if you want,” Hoseok says, brows still creased. His nose crinkles a little between his eyes and it should look at odds with his overall appearance but it doesn’t. “If you want, I can lend you my notes for it so you would have some reading materials to start you off?”
The offer is unexpected, but then again, it isn’t. It’s something that Kihyun’s been realising about Hoseok in the short time he’s known him. The guy’s unexpected. A walking bundle of contradictions. Still, it’s not what he needs – not what he’s looking for – so Kihyun just shakes his head.

“It’s alright. I’ll just go for a different topic.” He’s one step out of the door, before he remembers.
“Thanks for the offer though.”

Hoseok looks up from packing his things, smiles.

“You’re welcome.”

In the end, Kihyun ends up writing a paper about bisexuality, pansexuality and the erasure of these identities even in queer communities. The paper is rushed, research half-assed because he ran out of time and also, he had to rewrite his composition project with Minhyuk. He doesn’t expect to get a good grade, and he doesn’t, but there’s a long paragraph of comments at the back, with a small drawing of two thumbs up. He glances through Hoseok’s neat handwriting, then decides to stop by Hoseok’s desk after tutorial ends.

“I… My paper…” He’s not sure where to start, but Hoseok seems to get it.

“Ah yeah, my comment was a little confusing for you, probably.”

Kihyun nods.

“Well, the content itself is pretty alright, though your title and argument didn’t really match. Your paper was titled ‘Erasure of bisexual and pansexual identities in queer communities’ but you seem to be talking more about the tension between bi and pan-identifying people protesting about the erasure of their identities against the fact that their identities inherently make it more easy for them to hide their queerness compared to homosexual folks.”

Kihyun blinks.

Hoseok rubs a hand over his cap, looks sheepish.

“That wasn’t any clearer than my comment, was it?”

“Not really, no,” Kihyun says, but it’s with a laugh, the sound slipping past his lips without him realising.

“Well,” Hoseok starts again, a short nervous laugh, nibbling on his lower lip. It’s already pink enough as it is, but his teeth leave marks that darken it to a deep plum. “Basically I just meant you wrote a lot about how bi and pan people often got their identities erased in queer communities because whenever they’re in a monogamous relationship, they appear either straight or gay to an unknowingly person. “

“Uh-huh.”

“And that’s erasure, which is an issue, but this ability to be hidden, to be seen as straight or gay
accidentally can sometimes be a blessing. Like, gays and lesbians don’t have that option, to pretend to be ‘straight’ while dating a gender they’re attracted to, but bi and pan people do. Especially for the people who don’t wish to come out, or have their reasons for wanting to appear hetero, being mistaken as straight can be one of the …well, ‘benefits’ of being bi or pan.”

Hoseok makes quotation marks in the air at ‘benefits’, a weary smile on his face.

“Right…” Kihyun knows this well, but he hadn’t realised he’d wrote it quite like that in his paper.

“Anyway,” Hoseok continues, “This ‘hidden’ characteristic of being bi or pan can be both a good thing and bad thing, which is why I thought you were talking more about the tension rather than just erasure in itself.” He tilts his head, like he’s waiting for Kihyun to say something, so Kihyun nods a little even though most of what Hoseok had said had gone over his head.

“Ohkay.”

Hoseok raises a single eyebrow.

“Are you just saying that or was my explanation still confusing?”

The way Hoseok says it, it’s like he wants feedback but is also a little scared of it even though he’s the TA here and Kihyun’s just the student. Kihyun finds the corners of his mouth twitching.

“I get the bit about bi-erasure being potentially a bad yet somewhat a…good? …thing? Like I’ve experienced it myself firsthand, but the bit about how to structure the paper kind of flew over my head.”

Hoseok’s the one blinking this time, and Kihyun suddenly realises what he’d said.

Firsthand.

He’d forgotten who he’s talking to, too used to Minhyuk and a few other close friends knowing, but before Kihyun could panic on his slip-up, Hoseok says, “Well, if you want to know how to structure your paper better, you can always ask me before starting the next one. It’ll probably boost your grades because you already have the content so you just need to know how to make your point in a better way.”

Kihyun nods woodenly then, bows while thanking Hoseok with a promise that he’ll think about it, but all he’s really thinking about is whether his face is as red as he thinks it is.

(It is. He checks in the mirror of the nearest bathroom, then spends another ten minutes with his cheeks red because he’s embarrassed by the fact that he’d gotten embarrassed.)

“Kihyunnie, it’s probably not a big deal.”

“I accidentally came out to my TA, how is that not a big deal?”

“Because,” Minhyuk explains, though not without rolling his eyes first, “He’s majoring in gender studies, and I don’t think this is something that would faze him.”
That’s a reasonable enough explanation. Kihyun takes a calming breath, tries to release his grip on Minhyuk’s sleeve. “Okay.” Another breath, and then, a little surer. “Okay.”

“All right,” Minhyuk says, patting his arm soothingly despite the face he makes, “If he talks about bi-erasure the way you do, then he’s probably highly likely to be bi or pan as well, you know. And not the type of bi that that asshole was either. Like I mean, who would even cheat on his boyfriend with a girl then turn around and expect you to understand that it’s ‘easier’ for him this way because you’re also bi? That’s –”

“Please don’t speak about him,” Kihyun mumbles, but his remark comes out more reflexively than because he can’t bear to be reminded of his ex now.

Minhyuk promptly shuts up, but gives him a look. Usually, this is when Kihyun would keep quiet, cast his eyes away in half-guilt, but today, he just closes his eyes, says –

“Fine, I get it, I keep harping on my ex myself.”

“I won’t call it harping exactly,” Minhyuk says slowly, voice neutral like he’s trying to be objective about this, and Kihyun’s oddly grateful for his effort. He knows Minhyuk’s really trying. “But yeah, you know you do keep… talking about him, letting what he did before affect you now, and dictate how you live your life. Like, isn’t he the reason why you signed up for this introductory gender studies class to begin with?”

It’s hard to pretend when the facts are laid out like that, especially when Minhyuk was the first person Kihyun had called when he’d broken up, and also when he’d signed up for modules impulsively the next day, eyes wet and puffy from crying the night before, so he just shrugs.

“You already know the answer to that.”

“You could have just said yes, you idiot.”

Sure, Kihyun could say. But with Minhyuk still patting his arm, he feels oddly sentimental for no reason.

“Thank you, you know. For… everything.”

This time, when Minhyuk mutters idiot, it’s right by Kihyun’s ear, and the hug he gives turns into them watching action movies for the next five hours but somehow, it’s okay.

He feels okay.

The rest of the semester goes by quickly. Kihyun too caught up with his music modules to consult Hoseok on writing. He figures he’ll just aim for a pass on the gender studies module since he doesn’t need it to graduate, and Hoseok starts noticing the declining standard in Kihyun’s papers but he doesn’t point it out, only gives an understanding smile. It makes Kihyun vaguely guilty whenever he submits his papers or collects his grades during tutorials but he tries not to think about it, knows that it’ll all be over when the semester ends. And end it does, the last gender studies tutorial done a week before exams, and Kihyun thinks that’s the last he’ll see of Hoseok.
But as with everything else so far, Hoseok ends up doing the unexpected. He emails Kihyun two weeks into the holidays, asks to meet up for coffee.

“How are you?” Hoseok asks when Kihyun arrives at the café near school. He’s dressed in a t-shirt, which isn’t unusual, but he’s also wearing shorts that expose most of his thighs. They’re as muscular as Kihyun had suspected from Hoseok’s tight joggers and it’s not entirely out of place with summer in the air but still, the shorts are shorter than what most guys would wear and it takes Kihyun by surprise.

(Also, Kihyun can’t help but think that the shorts are probably not that appropriate for a café meetup when Hoseok was his TA just two weeks ago. Anyway, he tries not to think about that, especially after he noticed a line of inked words disappearing into the hem of Hoseok’s orange shorts and just… nope.)

Kihyun takes a sip of his Americano, hopes his cheeks aren’t flaming.

“Fine, mostly. How are you?”

“Busy with part time jobs so I’m really glad I’m off today.” Hoseok replies with a gentle smile, stretching his body side to side like he needs to loosen up and it’s easily the most relaxed Kihyun’s seen him so far.

“Ah.”

Hoseok chuckles, and Kihyun’s right, this is the most relaxed he’s seen his TA – or really, not-TA now. It’s kind of weird, but also not. Kihyun’s not sure why. He takes another sip of his drink, glad he got the iced one or he’ll be scalding his tongue right now.

“You’re probably wondering why I asked to meet up.”

Kihyun nods rather than reply verbally, and Hoseok continues easily.

“I’ve actually been meaning to do this, but I thought it wasn’t a good idea while I was still your TA.”

Just like that, Kihyun thinks he might know where this is going, but he doesn’t want to make any assumptions – not when he doesn’t know Hoseok’s preferences – so he just waits. When Hoseok doesn’t add anything else, Kihyun ends up saying –

“Are you… Did you like, ask me out without me knowing? Is this a date of sorts?”

Hoseok doesn’t meet his eyes, blinks at his drink instead, stirring with his straw.

“I don’t know, do you want it to be? I would love to, if you’re okay with this being a date. But if you’re not, we can just hang out in general.”

For a man that broad, it’s kind of amusing how small Hoseok can make himself, the way he’s hunched into his body right now. He glances at Kihyun from under his fringe, and it really shouldn’t be as endearing as it is, but well, this is Hoseok, man of many contradictions. Kihyun’s not sure if he’s still surprised or not.

“I…” Kihyun licks his lips, tries for the most genuine answer. “I don’t know actually.” He runs a hand through his hair, decides Hoseok deserve an explanation. “I broke up just half a year ago and I like you but I’m not sure if I’m… ready to start something so soon.”

“Ah.”
Hoseok has a look of something like understanding on his face, which doesn’t make sense until he says –

“That’s okay, I get not wanting to jump into anything so soon after a breakup. At least you like me?”

He’s peeking from under his fringe again, voice unsure at the end, and it’s cuter than anyone should have the right to be.

“I do, I think,” Kihyun says, tries not to be bashful about it. There’s a light flutter in his chest when Hoseok grins at that, eyes curved and teeth showing, and he takes a quick sip of his coffee to distract himself. “Want to just hang out in the meantime?”

“Sure,” Hoseok answers, still grinning. It feels like it shouldn’t be as easy as this, slipping from TA and student to whatever this is, but it is. Kihyun feels his cheeks round as he grins in return, heart lighter than it’s been in a while. Maybe signing up for an introductory gender studies class on impulse hadn’t been an entirely terrible idea.

“So… now that you’re not my TA and not in charge of my grades, wanna know what my first impression of you was?”

“Why do I feel like I won’t like the answer?”

“Maybe because you won’t? I… kind of thought you were a fuckboy.”

“Why… Wait, why does everyone think that?”

“…Oh hmm, why indeed.”

“Yah, Yoo Kihyun.”

“What?”

“… Nothing. Never mind.”

“Spit it out, it’s not nothing.”

“I can’t get angry at you cause you’re too cute.”

“What?”

“I said, I can’t get angry at you ‘cause you’re too cute.”

“…Yah, Lee Hoseok.”

“What…?”

“The pot can’t call the kettle black.”

“… did you just call me cute like, backhandedly?”

“…maybe?”
“Yahhh –”

End Notes

This is my first fic in this fandom and uh, I hope you enjoy the story? Let me know what you think :) Constructive feedback is welcome as well :)

Thanks for reading~

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