Look At Him, Look At The Book, Remember

by teenuviel1227

Summary

The one where Brian is a librarian, Wonpil is a baker, and they meet when Brian leaves his favorite book at the bakery and Wonpil reads it, annotates it, leaves it out for Brian to find the next time he comes in. They pass it around for a while, not speaking, until one day Brian opens it and Wonpil’s left a paper napkin with his number on it between the pages.

Notes

The title is a quote from The Time Traveler’s Wife by Audrey Niffenegger.

I have signed my name in blood to YoungFeel wherever it says on the fangirl contract that you pick a rare pair to love alongside your OTP and populate their tag with fics because FOR FUCKING REAL?!?!?! THERE ARE ONLY 19 YOUNGFEEL FICS?~ Jesus. Okay. This cannot be our lives. We gotta live our best life in 2018.

Anyway.
Wonpil wakes up to the sound of Brian snoring softly. He grins, looks up to see Brian fast asleep beside him, limbs splayed out, his glasses still on the bridge of his nose, the book he was reading last night--Han Kang’s latest novel--laid face-down on his chest. Wonpil shakes his head fondly, taking the glasses from Brian’s nose and setting them down on the bedside table. He fell asleep reading again. Brian shifts in his sleep. Wonpil carefully picks up the book, dog-earring where Brian had stopped before setting it down on the night stand by his glasses.

Wonpil plants a soft kiss on Brian’s cheek. Brian’s eyes flutter open, still heavy with sleep.

“‘Morning, babe.” Brian’s voice is deep, gravelly. He smiles, pulling Wonpil toward him, bringing his arms around his waist.

Wonpil rests his head on Brian’s chest. “What do you want for breakfast? I brought some baguettes in from last night but I also have some blueberry danishes, a couple pieces of pan au chocolat.”

Brian grins. “I didn’t know you started working so early.”

Wonpil lets out a giggle, starts to tickle Brian, pinning him down with all his might but to no avail. Brian thrashes against the sheets, his laughter loud, booming in the bedroom of their small but cozy apartment. Brian strikes back, slipping a leg around Wonpil’s and turning him so that their positions are reversed, Brian looking down at Wonpil, pinning him to the bed.

Wonpil grins mischievously, corners of his eyes creasing in that way that reminds Brian of the spine of a well-loved, well-read book.

“I see what you’re doing,” Wonpil says jokingly. “Just trying to get me to get into some morning shenanigans with you.”

Brian laughs in disbelief, the tremble of it humming against them both. “Hey, who started the tickle fight?”

Wonpil plays at innocence, shrugging with feigned nonchalance. “What tickle fight are you talking about?”

Brian ruffles his hair fondly. “You’re my favorite idiot.”

Wonpil seizes Brian’s collar, pulling him down toward him before kissing him softly on the lips. “No. I’m your only idiot.”

Brian smiles at that, holding Wonpil close. “The only one. The most handsome, charming, wonderful idiot I’ve ever met.”

They spend a moment like that, watching each other: Wonpil thinking to himself just how handsome Brian is, how much he likes the comfort of his broad chest and shoulders, the softness in his hips, Brian wondering what he did to deserve someone like Wonpil with his pretty eyes and gorgeous smile and kind heart. They’re both thinking of the past year or so and how happy they’ve both been, thinking how lucky it was that they’d met when they’d met--a lucky accident, a happy mistake.

Brian eskimos his nose against Wonpil’s.

Wonpil kisses Brian’s cheeks, his nose.

Brian’s stomach rumbles.

“Shall we go get that breakfast?”
It was a beautiful Monday in April, spring in full bloom, the flowers lining the street on which The Seoul Boulangerie sat, its white exterior bright in the sunshine. The bakery is small but welcoming, with two small tables outside for customers who opted to order some of their brewed coffee along with the bread. Chimes shaped like cakes hang by the door next to an old-fashioned brass bell. There is a chalkboard outside which back then, read SPRING SPECIAL: Buy 1 Pastry, Get 1 Cuppa Coffee Free! in blue chalk and elegant script.

That day, Wonpil had taken care to buy flowers on his way to work, putting them in jewel-toned mason jars that he lined up by the window sill: blue daffodils in the saffron-yellow jar, magenta carnations in the tangerine jar, white peonies in the sky blue jar. He’d bought some new vinyls for his birthday and was excited to listen to them, setting the needle down onto the record as soon as he’d gotten to work. That fateful morning, it was an old one from 2002: Norah Jones’ Shoot The Moon.

He found himself closing his eyes a little to enjoy the piano playing, savoring the little tickles and turns of the melody as he set up day’s baguettes in their woven baskets lined with cloth. He was singing along, half-waltzing with himself as he lay the profiteroles down in the chiller display, giving them a last dusting of confectioners sugar. And then the track changed, sweeping into the first broken chord of Turn Me On and Wonpil found himself laying the sugar shaker down to emote a little, pretending to play the piano on the cash register while singing at the top of his lungs.

Like a flower waiting to bloom  
Like a light bulb in a dark room  
I'm just sittin' here waiting for you  
To come on home and turn me on

“Uh sorry to interrupt but you serve coffee, yeah?”

Wonpil almost jumped out of his skin—he hadn’t heard the chimes ring on the door. He found himself looking up into the face of a tall, handsome man with the most beautiful expressive albeit tired-looking feline eyes, a hesitant smile on his lips at having walked in on Wonpil holding his own personal concert to an audience of bread and pastries.

He took in the sight of the man’s broad shoulders, his dark hair sweeping into his eyes, the glasses that sit hooked on the collar of his sweater, the book that he has tucked under one arm. Cracked spine, dog-eared to death. A leatherette messenger bag is slung over his shoulder, the face of it splitting open to reveal even more books.

Master’s student? Literature professor?

His hands were stained with blue ink, the inside of his wrist sporting a faded OVERDUE FINE PAID stamp. Librarian?

Of course the one day that someone cute comes in here is the one day that I have to be an idiot.

“Yeah we do. We’ve got a Spring promotion going on if you’d like to avail of that. For any pastry, you get the coffee free.” Wonpil replied, finding his voice.

“Hrrrrm.” The man looked around, lingering by the trays of pan au chocolat before moving on to survey the cream cheese danishes in their wicker baskets. “Does a cream cheese danish count as a pastry? I mean technically it isn’t sweet but I feel like the bread of a danish counts because it needs to get all....crispy.”
Wonpil grinned. “Yeah, it’s made with pastry dough so it counts as a pastry.”

“Do you guys have like, seats here? And wifi? Maybe a socket?”

Wonpil blinked. “This isn’t a cafe, it’s just a bread store.”

“And yet you sell coffee.”

“Just brewed. We don’t do espresso.”

The handsome man shrugged. “I just need caffeine and a place to type things up.”

Wonpil nodded toward the front stoop. “We’ve got a few tables out there. No sockets and no wifi but you can type things up for as long as you want.”

“That’ll do.” He plucked a cream cheese danish from the basket with one of the tongs, stuffing it into a paper bag and handing it over to Wonpil to be wrung up.

“7,000 Won.”

“Including the coffee?”

Wonpil nodded.

“That’s so cheap. I’m never going back to Starbucks ever again.”

Wonpil laughed, pouring coffee from the pot into a takeout cup. “Good. Give back to the people.”

The morning got busy after that, the breakfast crowd coming in and buying loaves of bread, the sweets selling out completely. Wonpil hadn’t seen the handsome man leave but he did notice something he’d left behind: the book, its pages weathered, its spine in danger of blooming like the pages it held together.

The book was a Hangul translation of The Time Traveler’s Wife by Audrey Niffenegger. Wonpil didn’t really know what to do with it so he’d started reading it on his lunch break and couldn’t put it down, sneaking glimpses whenever he could, whenever there were lapses of free time between customers coming and going. Wonpil loved a good story and this one had all the trappings of romance but turned up: love fallen prey to the ultimate adversary--time.

He was well past halfway when he began to notice the small notes in the margins, written in messy hand using bleeding, blue ink that smudged in places. He thought of the handsome man’s hands. He flipped through the book in search of his name but found nothing.

Oh fuck that’s tragic.

He’d written in the margins of a paragraph describing Henry introducing Claire to his father for the first time.

An all-caps HAHAHAHAHA was scrolled along the entire side of a page where Claire and Henry fight over who the most handsome Beatle is (Wonpil thinks it’s Paul, but the handsome man had underlined John enough times for Wonpil to deduce he didn’t agree) and it makes Wonpil laugh.

By the time that he closed up shop at half-past six, he’d finished the book and decided to add his own notes but in neat, carefully penciled-in print--in case the handsome man ever came back for it, which he doubted.
Brian didn’t realize that he’d left his book until he got home from the library that evening, exhausted, his eyes beating when he shut them from a day of cataloging. Work at the library had been its own kind of hell ever since Jinyoung got promoted to the Arts & Cultural office. It meant he had to process almost everything alone: not just cataloging and filing but also sorting through the books donated by publishers, filing and re-filing overdue notices and paid slips. He’d gotten so groggy that he’d stamped himself with the OVERDUE FINE PAID stamp the night before. He had to give library ink one thing: that shit stuck. He’d rubbed and rubbed and rubbed at it that morning but to no avail: it was on him until further notice.

He’d been re-reading that old favorite of his to help and blow off steam. Also, he’d been asked to host Author Talks which focused on the body of work of one particular author at the library every Saturday (by asked of course, they’d meant invited which meant Brian could most definitely not say no or I’m so sick of the library I feel like if I throw up, I’ll vomit paper) and he planned on doing that the first installment on Audrey Niffenegger.

She was his favorite author and artist since he was in middle school: there was something about the darkness and placidity of how she wrote—the material was creepy but she said things so soberly that you just had no choice but to believe her. That night, he sat at his kitchen table, ready to gorge on the ramen he’d bought from a take-out place nearby and catch up with Henry and Claire, who were just about to get married where he last stopped, when he reached into his bag and realized that it wasn’t there.

Where in the world— the image of the bread shop pops into his head: white and flower-lined, the curling awning on the white, metal table where he’d typed up his weekly report and of course, left the book sitting with his discarded table napkin.

He sighed, popping open the plastic cover on the take-out bowl and devouring the hot sesame ramen. At least I get to go back and see the cute guy.

To Brian’s surprise, when he came back for it the next day, the book was sitting on the table right where he left it, alongside a steaming cup of coffee and a cream cheese bagel in a paper bag on which is written bagels don’t count as pastries FYI—he saw the cute baker inside through the glass, singing along to a different record this time, something more lively, upbeat. He kept it.

Brian grinned, taking a seat and sipping the coffee, biting into the bagel. He leafed through the pages, smiling as he saw the small notes in pencil that the cute baker had written in.

He squinted at a particular page, grinning as he read: they’re both wrong. George Harrison is the most handsome Beatle.

Brian grinned, ready to head inside to say thank you and maybe ask for the cute baker’s number, when his phone rang.

PSJ LIBRARYBOSSMAN

Fuck.

“Hello?”

“Bri, get your ass over here. We’ve got a problem with the purchasing for the Fiction division. They didn’t know whether to file Emily St. John Mandel under M or S—”
“--it’s literally on her Twitter bio. Why do they need me?”

“Well, she’s Canadian.”

“Jesus what does that have to do with anything--”

“--the Purchasing Officer only speaks English.”

Brian sighed, throwing one last longing glance at the cute baker.

“Fine. Give me like, ten minutes.”

Wonpil didn’t expect to see him again, not really--when he’d seen that the book had been taken along with the bagel and the cup of coffee, he could only hope that they’d been taken by the right guy. He’d gone out to check and found a quick note scribbled on a paper napkin, held down by the mason jar in which yellow daisies sat.

*Thanks, sorry couldn’t say hi had to run*

Wonpil grinned, wondering if he would be back and then hating himself for getting his hopes up. That whole day, he’d tried to get the handsome guy out of his head, to focus instead on coming up with different combinations for pastries, wondering if he should expand the Sunday meat pie range to include something like a bulgogi meat pie, something more close to home.

He succeeded for the most part, that is, until the clock struck 5:30 PM and the chimes rang and in ran the cute guy, breathless and in a hurry, but there: all five-foot-ten of him, today in a leather jacket over old graphic tee.

He put the book down on the counter.

When he spoke, it all came out in one breath.

“Okay so I’m really busy and I have to go but I read your notes and I absolutely agree about the fact that Ingrid should’ve been treated better and Gomez is a dick but I have a lot of insight to share on both of those things so I wrote them down and if you want to you can borrow it for a while but I need it back by Thursday.”

Wonpil blinked, picking the book up. “Okay, sure.”

“Alright great. Okay, I’ve got to head back--”

“--hey! What’s your name?”

The handsome man grinned. “Right. Brian.”

“Wonpil.”

Brian’s smile softened at that. “How fitting. You wrote in pencil. Don’t be afraid of inking it, Yunpillie. I’ll be by on Thursday.”

“Come back tomorrow. I’ll be done by then.”
With one last grin and nonchalant wave, Brian was out the door, running back to wherever work was.

Wonpil couldn’t stop smiling. Yun pillie.

They passed the book around for a couple of weeks, half because Brian was busy and also half because Wonpil wasn’t sure if this guy was digging on him or just trying to educate him.

*Maybe he’s one of those guys who’s really into literacy,* he’d told his bestfriend Jae as they sat at a samgyeupsal restaurant the weekend after.

He’d been met with an eyeroll and a *seriously, no guy is that into literacy, trust me.*

But what did Jae know, anyway? The last guy he’d dated turned out to be one of those people who thought Tinder was a great way to *make friends* and kept up the habit long after they’d gotten committed.

The blind leading the blind-folded.

Wonpil decided to do what he did mostly because they were running out of spaces in the margins and it was getting really confusing. He’d had to buy different colored pens to denote when he was writing something new and Brian had taken to writing on the cover of the book with small addendums as to which page he was referring.

- page 32- the description of the blood and milk
- page 67- how the graphic love scene adds to rather than distracts from the plot

Pretty soon, even the covers were filled with writing so Wonpil had done the only thing that seemed reasonable.

On a paper napkin, in blood-red ink:

**KIM WONPIL 02-8372038**

Call me.

Brian had called and hung up around twelve times in the past week. He hadn’t dated anyone in a while, he wasn’t sure if he’d still *had it.* And also, there was that fear of disappointing Wonpil or being disappointed by Wonpil: what if they were both better on paper?

“Jesus Christ, just call him. You’re making *me* anxious,” Sungjin said, not looking up from that month’s attendance sheet.

Brian grinned apologetically. Sungjin had the unfortunate job of being the boss of him which meant he got to hear about pretty much everything that happened to Brian as payback for working him so hard: sure, I’ll catalogue that for you but anyway, this cute guy who works at the bakery is adorable and I don’t know what to do.

“What if he finds me disappointing? What if I write better than I socialize?”

Sungjin snorted, hitting Brian upside the head. “Don’t flatter yourself. You don’t write *that* well.”
Brian chuckled. “Right. Thanks for the pep talk, boss.”

Sungjin grinned, stamping the last of the month’s paperwork before closing the folder.

“All right.”

“Hello?”

“Well, it only took you three days.”

“Sorry, I was nervous.”

“It’s like my friend Dowoonie’s favorite quote from The Princess Diaries—courage is not the absence of fear but rather, the judgement that something is more important than fear.”

A nervous laugh. “He isn’t your boyfriend or anything though, right?”

“Depends on who’s asking.”

“Very funny.”

It’s Wonpil’s turn to laugh. “No, he isn’t my boyfriend.”

“Okay. Good. Do you want to go out to dinner with me?”

“Sure. As long as we don’t have to pass around a book all evening.”

“The only pass I’ll be making is at you.”

“Brian?”

“Mmmm?”

“That is the worst joke I have ever heard. I feel absolutely zero laughter broiling up in my being right now.”

Brian laughs. “I was just testing to see if you had sound judgement. You pass!”

“What’re you wearing?” Wonpil’s voice turns soft in its lower register, sultry.

“W-what?”

Laughter again. “Now that was making a pass. Pick me up at eight on Friday?”

The date was at a cozy Italian place that specialised in brick oven pizza and imported wine. The place was candlelit, warm. Wonpil found himself giddy with excitement for the first time in a really long time. Brian looked incredible—he was dressed in a gray blazer worn over a crisp, white shirt and jeans, his hair parted to the side and swept back a little, highlighting his handsome features, his bright eyes. When he put his glasses on and rolled up his sleeves to read the menu, Wonpil felt himself swoon involuntarily. Pull yourself together.

In turn, Brian found himself being extremely nervous. He usually wasn’t, was usually a pretty confident guy—but it was something else getting to know someone through reading and already
knowing just how smart, how witty, how insightful they are and then having them look the way that Wonpil does tonight. He’s really put it on: a blue button-down that brings out the honey tone of his skin, the warm brown of his eyes, dark jeans that show off his legs, a dark cardigan that pulls everything together.

Brian liked how Wonpil was calm and graceful, confident but sweet, sassy but never impolite.

Wonpil liked that brash confidence Brian put on display and how it was undercut by the rest of his personality which, now that Wonpil thought about it, boiled down to a kitten amused by everything.

They ordered the four-cheese mushroom pizza and caesar salad, opting for a white Chardonnay to go with.

By the time the date ended, both of them had one thing on the mind--and it wasn’t dessert.

“Do you ever think about that first date and wonder what would’ve happened if I hadn’t gone home with you?” Wonpil asks, as today, he lays the pastries and bread out for himself and Brian.

Today’s selection consists of butter croissants and blueberry danishes, pan au chocolat and batard bread with Brie. Their table is set with a bright white tablecloth, the centerpiece this season’s fresh flowers in an emerald green wine bottle they’d kept and repurposed: sweet red, it reads on the label.

Brian is taking care of the coffee, brewing a latte for Wonpil on the espresso machine while pouring his own double-espresso Americano into his YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT GUYS WITH BIG BOOKS mug. After, he pours the milk and froth for Wonpil’s latte into a smaller, blue cup, trying his best to form a heart but ending up with what looks like an apostrophe.

It’s okay. He knows Wonpil can tell what he meant it to be.

Flowers sit in mason jars on the kitchen windowsill.

Brian brings the coffee over, sets the cups down.

“Not really.” He looks up to meet Wonpil’s gaze. “I would’ve just asked you out again and waited for you.”

Wonpil raises an eyebrow, his voice taking a coquettish turn. “Even if I made you wait forever?”

Brian rolls his eyes but grins back. “What was that quote from The Time Traveller’s Wife?”

Wonpil bursts out laughing. “Which one? Ah, if people knew how hard I had to work to get a date with you they’d absolutely judge me--”

“--time is nothing, you idiot.” Brian takes a sip from his cup of coffee.

Wonpil smiles at him, fond, taking his hand over the table, intertwining their fingers together. He turns his attention to the daily paper, pretending not to notice the way that they’re both blushing, even now, even after all this time.

“It’s a good quote.”

“Damn right, Yunpillie. Damn right.”
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