somewhere, beneath this sky

by annangst

Summary

the love, simon youtube au no one asked for
Simon Rambles

„Hey, what’s up you guys, it’s Simon from SimonSays, and I bet y’all can tell I’m not in my usual set-up. Actually, I’m in bed and you’re propped up on a pile of books I have yet to read. I doubt that’s ever going to happen since the only books that I actually read is the Harry Potter series over and over again, but — Anyway, that’s not the point.“

The boy in front of the camera drives one of his hands through the perpetual mess that is his hair. He sits cross-legged on his bed, a wall covered in posters of Panic! At The Disco and the like in the background.

He’s silent for a few minutes, a very unusual thing for him, fumbling with his fingers, before grabbing one of his pillows and hugging it to his chest.

„There’s something I need to tell you guys. Because I love you. All two hundred freaking thousand of you.“

He’s not his usual quirky self. The dark circles under his eyes don’t say I have stayed up all night reading HP fanfiction, but rather I haven’t had a good night’s rest all week.

He takes a deep breath, biting down on his bottom lip, something he’d normally cut out of the video.

„So, the thing is… Shit’s been going down in my life for the past couple of weeks, and I don’t want to sound whiny or whatever, but… God, I just need to get this straight.“

He lets out a snort.

„I don’t want this to change anything. Which is also why I’m titling this video ‘Simon Rambles‘ and not…whatever. What I’m about to tell you is really freaking hard for me. Like, saying it out loud is. I’m about to show you a part of myself I’ve been hiding for all the two years I’ve been on YouTube. Not on purpose. I just never felt the need to talk about it. I was always okay with myself, I’ve never struggled with self-hate or not accepting who I am, but I know that, if I came out, others would push me into it.“

He stares at a point right next to the lens of the camera, his eyes a little glassy.

„So, yeah. I bet you guessed it already, but for those of you who haven’t: I’m gay.“

He swallows.

„Hey, what’s up you guys, it’s Simon from SimonSays, and I’m gay.“

He quietly smiles to himself.

„Yeah, alright, I don’t want this video to end on a sad note. I don’t want you to think I’m ashamed or something. Because I’ve obviously known that I am gay for…quite some time. I just didn’t plan to make a video like this. But that’s life, I guess.“

He tosses his pillow aside.

„Alright, lemme think of something funny real quick for the end of the video.“ He makes a grimace that’s probably meant to symbolize his thinking process. „What about poop? That’s funny,
right? Poop. Poop!"

The screen goes black and the video ends.
I stare at the black screen, my mind seems to work slower than usual, as I’m still processing what’s been said in the video. What the hell did just happen?

I’m one of the first people to watch the video, so there are only a few comments. From what I can tell they’re all quite positive.

It’s real. It’s not one of his prank videos.

I refresh the page, watching the video again, and again. I can’t believe this is Simon. I started watching him back when he only had about a thousand subscribers and he did all kinds of challenges during summer break because he was bored. His channel blew up when he started the truth-or-dare videos with his best friend Nick.

I’ve seen Simon do all kinds of things, stuffing his face with marshmallows, getting drunk on camera (he never says that he’s actually drinking alcohol. He uses a tea mug, and says „he’s drunk on life”), and even drinking a glass of toilet water for a dare at one point — and never had there been tears in his eyes if it wasn’t for laughter.

It’s not like I’m some obsessive fanboy, I don’t lurk on his youtube page to be the first one to see when he uploads — today was just a coincidence. I just came home from soccer practice when the bell gave me the notification that SimonSays posted a new video.

„It’s Simon from SimonSays, and I’m gay.“

I pause the video.

I wonder what has happened that made him look so sad about the whole thing. I wish I could comfort him somehow, leave him a message (technically, I could leave a comment, but he gets so many, mine would be buried within minutes).

My mom says I have a thin skin; I always let things get to me, even if they don’t affect me in the slightest. It has nothing to do with Simon in particular, I just can’t see people being sad.

Especially not for this particular reason.

I’ve known that I’m gay forever, really. I’ve never had crushes on girls, and there definitely was a time in my life — the angsty years between thirteen and fifteen — where I wondered if there was something wrong with me.

But there’s nothing wrong with me. There’s nothing wrong about a boy liking boys. Yes, I know, big news here in Georgia, but it’s the truth.

I’ve never really kept this part of me a secret, but I haven’t come out with it either. It’s not like I have an astonishing crowd of friends gathering around me at all times. I mean, I do have friends, but we connect over more irrelevant stuff like football, or Assassin’s Creed.
Before I realize what my hands are doing, they’ve already written down a couple of lines in the comment section. *It doesn’t matter*, I think, *he’s never gonna read it anyway*, but I keep writing.

**Bluegreen118** Sorry to see you so upset about the whole thing. Of course, I have no idea what exactly happened that caused you to come out, but I’m going to take it this far and guess you haven’t really been ready for it, yet.

I just want to let you know that life’s kind of like a ocean, and we’re all lost in it, trying to find a safe shore to swim toward, and I guess it doesn’t really matter where you’re shore is, as long as it saves you from drowning.

If you ever want to talk, feel free to email me at bluegreen118@gmail.com

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I go on with my life for the rest of the following week as if nothing happened. Because generally speaking, nothing did happen to me, and yet I feel strangely called out when I overhear other people at school discussing Simon’s video.

Since he is one of the few more popular YouTubers that are still living at home, and in Georgia for that matter, people in said state do know about him quite a bit. But I don’t understand why Bryan Sullivan, a dude in my football team with really pretty blue eyes, feels the need to announce to everyone that he is, in fact, not gay just because he watches SimonSays videos.

Breaking news: Watching a gay person talking doesn’t change your sexual orientation. If it would, everybody who’d ever talked to me would turn out to be very gay.

„I hope he’ll continue with them drunk live shows“, my friend Garrett says while simultaneously stuffing his face with French fries during lunch, „That dude is hilarious. Plus, Abby is steaming hot.“

Bryan points his index finger at him, agreeing.

„Those“, I say, „It’s those live shows, not them. You’re making my ears hurt.“

„Okay, sorry, Greenfeld. I forgot you’re allergic to slang.“

„It’s not slang, it’s torture.“ I drown my fries in mayonnaise.

I have one earbud plugged in my left ear, the other dangling loosely in my lap. I’ve listened to a lot of Elliott Smith and Bleachers ever since Simon started a video series called Music Monday. It’s more of a chatty series where he rambles about the music he recently liked, and it doesn’t get as many views as some of his other videos, but everyone can tell he just loves talking about songs, lyrics, and bands.

My phone gives a slight buzz inside my jeans’ pocket, and I’m a little worried it might already be low on battery when I fish it out. But the battery is still at 80 percent. The buzz was caused by an email that just came into my inbox.
Garrett and Bryan are already lost in an argument over who of them gets to invite Michelle, a pretty Chinese-American girl that sits in our stats classes, to our next soccer game.

The notification simply says *You’ve got mail!*, so I tap on it to open the Gmail App. I rarely get emails on this private address. I wouldn’t be that stupid to turn the notifications for my school and facebook related email address on — I’d be drowning in useless emails within minutes.

The only people who know of my private address are my mom, dad, who is really the only one who sends me emails occasionally, and my old pen pal from middle school, Rufus, who lives in California — we haven’t spoken in four years or so and I doubt he even remembers me.

My heart skips a beat, and for the fraction of a second, I get the feeling of missing the last step on a flight of stairs — tumbling, but not falling. The email I received is neither from my parents, nor Rufus; in fact, I have no idea who the sender behind hourtohour.notetonote could be, but my guts seem to have some kind of premonition as they twist a little when I open the email.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE: Nov 15 at 12:27 PM
SUBJECT: Hello

I don’t really know how to start this.

Hi, (I don’t know your name…is it Blue?),

I just read your comment under my video. Like, the Coming Out Video, or whatever that was. Oh, it is Simon from SimonSays, by the way. In case you haven’t figured that out by my obvious Elliott Smith related email address. God, I am so awkward, I’m sorry.

So, Blue (?), thanks for your comment in the first place. I got loads of kind words, and also loads of bullshit, but your few lines really stuck out to me somehow. Everyone was so nice, telling me I’ll be fine, and wishing me that I get to be my true self from now on, and I guess that’s awesome of them, but you were the only one who were, like, picking up on the note that I’m not that happy to be out. And your words spoke to me somehow. They were really poetic, did you come up with them on your own?

Anyway, you said if I ever wanted to talk I should just email you, and here I am, because I’m literally always down for a conversation. I’m sorry, if you were just trying to be nice and not actually expecting me to appear in your inbox.

I don’t even know what I want to say to you. It’s just… I feel so strangely understood by your words about that shore, you know, it’s kinda creepy. Sounds like you’ve been in a similar situation as I am? Again, sorry if that’s too fast forward for you.

You don’t have to write back. Just know that I appreciate your poetic words.

— Simon
So, I started this on a whim, but I'm still SO excited about this (plus I have like 36 other fanfic ideas for Simon/Bram and I want to write them ALL because I'm trash)

For those of you wondering: I'll try to update both my fics every 2/3 days. <3
My fries remind more of a mushy soup when I finally stop staring at Simon’s words. I got an email from Simon. *The Simon.*

„You alright?“, Garrett asks, getting up from his chair to leave for our next class — history, which I could really do without.

„Yeah…“ I drag the word out longer than it needs to be. „Or actually, no. I feel quite nauseated.“

„You feel nauseated every other day“, Bryan says.

„That’s what happens when you eat mayonnaise with fries and not vice versa“, Garrett nods knowingly toward the mush on my plate.

I get up as well, not bothering about what’s left on my tray. „I think I better go and see the nurse. Can you tell Mr. Reagan?“

„Sure“, Bryan shrugs.

I’ve never actually done this before, I realize, as I strut past my fellow students, on my way out to the parking lot toward my car.

Technically, Seniors are allowed to leave school ground during breaks, but definitely not during lessons unless they have a good reason to.

My car is my dad’s old Honda Civic, which he left behind when he moved away to Atlanta three years ago. I wasn’t allowed to drive back then, so it stood parked on our porch for almost another year, unmoved.

Inside, I twist the key and activate the heat, simultaneously rereading Simon’s email. I can’t believe he noticed my comment. I can’t believe he made time to write to me.

Hourtohour.notetonote. I smile quietly to myself as I get the Elliott Smith reference at last.

Not to lie, I might have a small crush on Simon. Which is pretty inconvenient since I don’t know anything about him other than what I get to see in his videos — I don’t even know his last name.

All I do know, however, is that it is practically impossible to *not* develop a crush on him. He’s just an over-the-moon cute ray of sunshine, with old-fashioned wire-rimmed glasses and a perpetual blonde bed head.

When I slowly roll up to the security guards that watch the gates to our school, I put on a rather
sick looking face, waving them a piece of paper. They don’t even ask me to let down my window and show them the what they think is a sick pass; they just nod tiredly at me.

I toss the front paper of my English essay back into my backpack before I get on Main Street.

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My mom isn’t home yet. She works until at least 6 from Monday to Thursday, so I get inside and upstairs inside my room without interruption.

My backpack lands in the corner next to my hamper, and I throw myself onto my bed, grabbing my laptop from the nightstand. It wakes up soon after I open it, showing me the last tab of Safari I didn’t close before shutting it the night before.

*It’s definitely not a Simon video if you were thinking that.*

Once I signed in to Gmail I open Simon’s email back up. Rereading it once again. By now I can almost recite it word for word.

I have no idea what I’m supposed to answer. I mean, he didn’t exactly start a conversation, he basically just said that he wanted to talk to me.

Which is pretty much enough to get me going, really.

Most of the time, I overthink things until I don’t remember where I was coming from originally. My comment wasn’t such a case. I just let the words flow out of my brain, kind of like I do whenever I write about something I’m really passionate about. The world shuts down around me and I don’t even know the words I’m typing, but when I wake up from that trance-like state, I’m usually looking at pages full of sentences and metaphors I couldn’t come up with at any other time.

I wouldn’t show anyone what I’ve written for the life of me, though. Garrett and Bryan? Would most definitely laugh at me. Bryan would probably say something like: *You’re quite like that Oscar Wilde dude. Wasn’t he gay? Wait a minute!*

And my mom? I love her, but she’d look at my works and go *That’s awesome, sweetheart, but you better know that being a full-time writer doesn’t work out for about ninety percent of the people who start out as such. You better get a real job and leave writing for your free time. It’s a good story, though!*

The thing is, I don’t even know if I want to become a writer. Probably not. I mean, it’s hard to make money of just your written work, my mom’s got a point there, but I’d love to have just one person reading my papers and appreciating what can come out of my mind.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com

TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
Hey, Simon.

Wow, I actually did not expect you to write to me, but not because I wouldn’t be down for a conversation with you, but because I thought you’d never see my comment.

Yes, I did come up with those words myself. Don’t ask me how, I’m definitely not a poetic person in real life. Or maybe I am, but none of the people around me ever listen close enough? Who knows.

Also, my name is not Blue, but you can call me that. I quite like it. It’s like my superhero identity now, I suppose. You’re welcome to come up with your own as well. Until then I’ll continue calling you Simon.

You asked if I’ve ever been in a similar situation as you are right now. As I’m not a YouTuber who just made a Coming Out Video or whatever that was, no, but as in I’m gay? — Yes. I’m just like you in that sense. Gay.

I stop for a second, reading the last paragraph. I’ve never actually come out to someone. Does typing I’m gay in an email count as such?

A Coming Out must feel weird. I wouldn’t know. Do you want to talk about it or are we doing just smalltalk? Because I’m terrible at that.

— Blue

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 15 at 1:55PM
SUBJECT: Re:Hello

Blue,

I didn’t expect you to answer right away. Aren’t you in school? Or, wait, are you in
college? Are you forty? Because I didn’t imagine you as forty, but if you are, that’s cool, I guess. (???)

Also, smalltalk? I don’t do that, I jump right into deep conversations about the sense of human existence. So, if you’re not into that, please just leave me alone.

I’m actually thinking about taking that Coming Out Video Or Whatever (let’s just capitalise that shit) down and make a real one. I was just a hot mess a few days ago. But honestly? I don’t even feel like talking about it online. There’s so much I would like to rant about but can’t for obvious reasons.

You’re not out? I’m kind of jealous now, if I’m being honest, and that’s kinda morbid, so sorry for that. But the thing is, I didn’t plan to come out just yet. I mean, I know I couldn’t hide that part of me forever, but it’s not like it was a big deal for me.

Except everything is a big deal where I’m from.

I originally planned to just sit my parents and my sisters down at some point after I graduated High School, and get it over with. We’re not religious, and I knew everyone would be fine with it. A few days of awkward silences whenever I enter a room, sure, but it eventually would all go back to normal, and I would leave for college and then just casually introduce my first boyfriend in one of my videos. No Coming Out needed.

Do I even need to mention that this plan failed?

I don’t know if you really want to hear me rant. You might get bored.

— Simon

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE: Nov 15 at 2:10 PM
SUBJECT: Re:Hello

Simon,

I’m not forty. I’m seventeen. And I’m glad we’re not doing the smalltalk thing. The introvert in me is very happy to philosophise about the sense of human existence.

I’m actually home from school early, because I got really nauseated after lunch. I probably shouldn’t eat mayonnaise with a side of fries. You must think I’m gross now.

And I want to hear you rant. Your plan sounded well thought through, what made it fail?
FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com

TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com

DATE Nov 15 at 4:54 PM

SUBJECT: Re:Hello

Blue,

What made it fail? Ugh. Well, I didn’t include any Monkey’s Asses who would out you on the school’s Tumblr just for attention in my brilliant plan.

I’ll tell you the whole story in short, Blue. (Incase you don’t really care about the details, just skip the following paragraph, I wouldn’t mind.)

So, I had this thing going on with a guy I am in Drama Club with. He’s really, really cute (I’m talking ocean blue eyes and bangs), and it seemed like he liked me back — more than just a friend.

So one day we stayed behind in the auditorium to clean up some props, and somehow — Don’t even ask me how I made that happen! — he ended up kissing me. Like, as in making out.

What’s the problem, you might wonder? This other dude, previously referred to as Monkey’s Ass (it fits, trust me), saw us and snapped a picture. He’s pretty much an outcast and I swear, he’d sell his soul to the devil to get the least bit of attention. So he posted that picture on the school’s Tumblr. Everyone saw it before me. Even my sisters. So I was forced to either deny it (How would I deny a freaking picture of me making out with a boy?) or come out. So I came out.

I texted the boy that kissed me — wait, we’ll call him Calvin Harris for now, okay? Okay. So I texted Calvin Harris about it, but he never responded. And when I walked up to him the next day at school, he was holding hands with this Brianna-girl, and had told everyone who wanted to hear it that I had insisted on kissing him, and that he didn’t want to, and that he’s not even one percent gay.

Sigh. So yeah, that’s it. That’s how my A+ plan failed, and now there aren’t awkward silences when I enter a room, it’s the opposite. Either people are calling me homophobic slurs or, in my mom’s case, try to hug the shit out of me.

I said I was a hot mess a few days ago, but the truth is, I still am. My mom allowed me to stay home from school this week as long as I do all my homework and eat something else than Oreos.

What’s holding you back from coming out, Blue, if it now isn’t my horrible experience in doing so?

— Simon
Chapter End Notes

There are going to be a lot of Simon/Blue emails in case you haven't figured that out yet O:-)
So you might want to pay attention to the date stamps in the emails so you won't be confused if a few days pass in-between them :-)
"I'm going to write this story from Bram's POV", she said. She lied. Sorry.
I'll be switching to Simon every now and then because...I have plans.

Simon's Point Of View

It’s been two days since I told Blue about the reason for my Coming Out, and at this point, I’m obsessively checking update accounts on Twitter as well as online newspapers for my leaked email. I mean, I can’t trust Blue, right? What was I even thinking when I told him about all of it?

I’m typing bluegreen118 in the search bar on Twitter, for the hundredth time already, and am left with nothing. Same with Google.

Everything that shows up is his YouTube channel, which has no content.

My phone buzzes on my nightstand. It’s Friday and all of my friends have been texting me all day, asking when I’ll be back at school and bombarding me with Happy Birthday wishes. I’m dropping out, I think as I grab the phone, unlocking it.

But it’s not a message from Leah Burke, Abby Suso, or Nick Eisner, aka my best friends — no, this one is from Cal Price, or previously referred to as Calvin Harris.

Cal (14 Nov, 5:55PM): When will u be back at school?

Cal (15 Nov, 1:55PM): Si??

Cal (16 Nov, 6:57AM): Hey...

Cal (17 Nov, 12:11AM): Si, honestly, text me back...it's your birthday after all

Cal (17 Nov, 3:11PM): I get that you're mad but I'm worried

Worried? I can imagine Cal Price as anything but worried. And yes, I’m most definitely still mad. And a little disappointed, I’m not going to lie. It hurt to see him holding Brianna’s hand the morning after.

I lock my phone and put it back at its place on the nightstand, right as a swooshing sound erupts from my laptop, announcing a new email.

There’s a sudden tingly feeling in my guts, the same you get when you send a risky text when I see
that the email is from Blue. I lay back onto my back, my legs propped up as triangles with my laptop resting against them.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE: Nov 17 at 3:13 PM
SUBJECT: People are like houses

Simon,

First of all, happy birthday! Wow. You’re eighteen now. Officially an adult. What are you going to do with that new won freedom? Oh wait, we’re in America, I forgot, you can’t even buy liquor yet. Anyway, I hope you’re having a great day that is filled with Oreos.

Wow, I don’t really know what to say about the story behind your coming out. Calvin Harris sounds like a total jerk, and you should probably never talk to him again. But that’s just my opinion — needless to say that it’s kind of my thing to run away from problems. Is that considered cardio?

I guess people really are like houses with vast rooms and tiny windows, if you really think about it. One moment you know them and in the next they completely surprise you with something you thought they could, or would, never do.

Is it weird that I didn’t know you had sisters? Like, as in plural. You only ever talk about Nora in your videos, right? Okay, forget it, I sound like a stalker.

What’s holding me back from coming out? Well, now it’s definitely your horrible story. No, but honestly? I don’t really know. I’ve never really felt the need to tell anyone, mainly because the amount of crushes I’ve had is pretty limited (one… I’ve had one crush), and even if I had feelings for someone, I’m the last person to actually make a move. Of course, sometimes, mostly at family gatherings, I keep going back and forth between wanting to just burst it out and wanting to sew my mouth shut. It’s not the easiest news to break when your family is crazy religious, let me tell you.

Anyway, I hate to ask this question, but when did you realize you were gay? I mean, I can clearly recall the Girlfriend Tag video from last year so don’t try to fool me. ;)

— Blue

I don’t even realize I’m smiling at my computer screen until my cheeks start to actually hurt. It’s crazy to think that I haven’t used these specific muscles in my face for a couple of days, and then when I do again, it’s for an email from a guy I don’t even know.
okay, you are totally a poet. Come on! „People are like houses with vast rooms and tiny windows“*. I’m impressed. Also, you’re totally right, of course. I get the impression you’re almost always right — you’re a smartass, huh, Blue?

Ugh, I can’t even begin to imagine what it must be like to be gay in a religious household. But then again, there’s hope, right? I mean, I’ve read stories about people in Texas who came out to their priest family and the next month they were all marching at a Pride Parade. Don’t give up, Blue.

Oh, yeah, the Girlfriend Tag… *sweats nervously* Funny that you mention it… *goes to take the video down immediately* No, but really, I must have realized when I was around thirteen. Probably when the forth Harry Potter movie came out, and I saw Daniel Radcliffe with his adorable longer hair. I guess I’d known even before, but kind of oppressed it (don’t tell my mom that, she’ll therapis the shit out of me).

About that video, you’ll probably laugh at me, but Anna (the girl in the video) wasn’t my first girlfriend. I’ve had three. The first one was in middle school and things didn’t get more intense than holding hands when no one was looking. But I’ve actually had my first kiss with the second one, Maria, and I clearly remember thinking ‘People actually LIKE doing this?’*. The relationship ended pretty soon after that kiss, too. With Anna, as that was only last year and I was sure I was gay, it was really weird. Let me tell you, girls are confusing. And everything about their bodies is confusing. Like, one moment you’re allowed to put your hand on one place, the next you’re not because the moment has passed. Okay, I should probably tell you that I’m still a virgin. The oppression didn’t go as far as actually having sex with a girl. I probably wouldn’t be able to…you know…get ready to do it.

Wow. Okay, now, I hate to say this, especially after I poured so much of my heart out to you, but please don’t show these emails to anyone. I’m talking, like, online magazines and stuff. I really like talking to you, but it’s also kind of weird that I have no idea what you look like.

— Simon

PS: You only ever had one crush? Wow. Have you seen Chris Hemsworth?
(i don't like this chapter but it's getting better I promise)
'M SO SORRY. I couldn't update because I was stuck in Egypt for the past few days
(why do flight cancelations ALWAYS happen to me)
But good news is: I wrote a freaking TON of this story. and lemme tell you, y'all should prepare your tiny cute selfs for some heartbreak I'm sorry (idk in which chapter /it/ is about to happen, though, because I pre-wrote a bunch of scenes that I need to weave into the whole complexity of this)

if you're still here I love u

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I dedicate the rest of the afternoon to catching up on Game of Thrones when my phone buzzes once again.

**Cal (17 Nov, 6:21PM):** I’m coming over

I roll my eyes, shutting my laptop and sitting up straight on my mattress.

**Simon (17 Nov, 6:22PM):** Don’t you dare

**Cal:** Ur alive!!

**Cal:** Listen, I’m really really really sorry

**Cal:** But I didn’t lie u know

**Cal:** I’m not gay

I let out a snort. For what I know he seemed pretty gay when he shoved his tongue down my throat.

**Cal:** I’m bi

**Simon:** Just leave me alone

**Cal:** It’s nothing serious with Brianna, trust me, Si

**Cal:** I really like you

**Cal:** Give me one more chance

**Cal:** Let me make it up to you ;)
My face turns into an obvious cringe when I see the winking emoji. I hate Cal for this, and I hate my body even more for immediately reacting to his text. I feel all my blood rushing south, and I have to close my eyes for a second.

I’m not gonna lie, I have no idea what a blowjob (or the like) feels like, but there’s got to be a reason for basically every boy going absolutely mad about it, right? And Cal Price has a pretty mouth, I guess.

Okay, I gotta stop thinking about this! I try to concentrate on Bieber, who’s wiggling on his back on the floor, exposing his belly and chewing on his favorite toy. I wish I could be that carefree.

I don’t even really know Cal. What I do know, though, is that he dated Megan Carter in sophomore year and all the girls gossiped about her losing her virginity to him.

Maybe I should do just that — pull a Megan Carter and just go and lose my virginity to Cal Price. Maybe I’ll be able to be more chill about the whole gay thing after that. Except I can’t stop thinking about vast rooms with tiny windows, and the safe shore it’s worth swimming to, and that it’s not Cal waiting for me there.

Suddenly, my phone starts buzzing like an angry swarm of bees. I almost drop the thing out of my hand. Abby’s face stretched in an award-winning grimace, is spread all over my display, announcing the incoming FaceTime call from her.

I take it.

After a few cracks and wildly flying pixels, her face formats on the screen. „Simon Spier!“, she says.

„Abby Suso“, I say, mimicking her tone.

„We thought you died“, she says, flashing my a death-glare which is more like a pout with a face like hers. Abby Suso is what you’d typically call every straight guy’s dream. She has a perfectly symmetrical heart-shaped face, deep brown eyes, and a mouth that permanently rests in a faint smile.

„Listen, asswipe“ Leah pops up next to Abby, her dark hair messy from the cold wind outside. „We’re coming over. Seven thirty. Change your underwear and wear deodorant.“

Nick, my best friend who isn’t a beautiful girl, is in the background of it all, lifting one hand that holds a to the rim filled plastic bag while simultaneously shooting me a finger gun with the other.

„I’m not—“

„Shut up“, Leah says.

„It’s your birthday!“ Abby’s smile is so wide it could embrace the whole world.

„We’ll see you“, Nick says, coming closer to the camera, „Seven thirty. Your house. No excuses.“

„Fresh underwear and deo—“, Leah shouts again before the connection ends.

I let out a long sigh — so freaking long even Bieber looks at me worryingly, like he’s asking „Everything alright, buddy?“. Maybe it is time to get back on track after a full week of self-pitying.
I need to get over the whole thing at some point anyway, it’s not like I can take the words I’m gay back, so why not start now? Out and proud, right?

I return to the chat with Cal, scrunching my nose at the poor choice of emoji once again.

**Simon (17 Nov, 6:44PM):** Thanks but no thanks, don’t have time anyway

Then I mute him and go on Twitter. I’m logged out of my account since I haven’t had the courage to go on there all week. It actually takes a lot of self-control not to get lost in the mess that is my timeline. I mean, I follow all kinds of users — Harry Potter and Hamilton stan accounts, my favorite celebs, of course, other YouTubers, my friends, you get the jizz of it — because I’ve had this account even before I started my channel and people started to notice me. I have since deleted a few old tweets for Reasons™.

The thing is, I never planned any success with my Youtube channel. I was just bored out of my mind this one summer after freshman year, and somehow people thought I was funny. Nick’s had his first girlfriend, Amy Wiser, and Leah hated hanging out outside during summer, so there was really nothing left for me to do since I didn’t want to play *Spin The Bottle* with Nora and her Middle School friends.

I tap my thumb against the New Tweet icon and start typing:

@SimonSaysYT: THANKS SM FOR ALL THE BIRTHDAY WISHES❤️ (also, sorry for not being on here that much…live show at 8 pm tonight?

***

It’s almost eight when my three best friends finally arrive. I can hear Leah’s old car as soon as she enters my street, and by the time they arrive, I’m already outside, waiting.

Abby wraps her arms around me as soon as she sees me. „I’m so sorry, Si.“

„What?“

„About Martin“, she nuzzles her face against my neck. I can feel Nick’s eyes laying on me, so I gently push her back.

„U-uh“, Leah makes, wiggling her index finger, „What do we call him again, Abs?“

„Monkey’s Ass“, she says, as if they’d been practicing it all evening.

„Fine. No one’s allowed to use the M-word ever again“, Leah announces, „Or I will haunt them with my very own…“

„If only you were actually as frightening as you make everyone believe you are“., Nick laughs.

Leah shoots him a death glare that is, admittedly, very frightening.

We get inside and up the stairs. My older sister, Alice, is at Wesleyan Uni, and Nora almost never leaves her room if no one forces her to. Inside my room, Nick finally lets go of the plastic bag that
he’s been holding onto for what seems like they left the Publix parking lot.

„Jägermeister, Captain Morgan, Vodka, or good ol’ plain beer“, he pauses, „Spier?“

„We get it.“ Abby rolls her eyes. „The beer - Spier joke is old tea by now.“

„Still hilarious“, Nick says.

„Still accurate“, I agree, fishing a bottle of beer out of the bag. „Oh, I’m doing a live show at eight, by the way.“

„Yeah, we have your notifications on, dumbo, thanks for asking for our consent“, Leah says.

„Abby’s in all of my live shows“, I object.

„Do I look like Abby to you?“, she asks, plopping down on my bed, crossing her legs under her body.

No, she doesn’t. Leah’s pretty much Abby’s opposite. First of all, she’s white. That out of the way, she’s probably about double of Abby’s size, and her eyes are a bright green, almost a little mesmerizing. You’d come to Abby when you needed advice, or maybe a hug, but you’d go to Leah if you needed someone to fight by your side.

„Don’t be a baby, Lee.“ Nick clings his bottle of beer against mine, then he hands the vodka to Leah. „Loosen up, will you?“

„No“, she says. „Y’all can do the live show. I’ll be right here, waiting.“ She stares deeply into Nick’s eyes for a moment, as if she’s trying to remind him of something, and I swear I can see him nodding faintly.

One second later Leah’s on her stomach and gets her sketchbook out of her backpack. She’s probably the most talented artist in all of Shady Creek, except she won’t believe anyone who told her this. I mean, her style isn’t quite the portrait, so-real-it-looks-like-a-photograph style, it’s more comic- or manga-like, but everything she draws has so much of her heart in it, it could easily be worth thousands of dollars. Okay, maybe I’m a little biased on the whole thing since she is my best of all best friends. I know I shouldn’t have a favorite out of the three of them, but I kind of do.

Abby’s on the floor by now, mixing her Screw Driver.

I set up the laptop in front of the three of us. Only now do I realize my palms are sweaty and my breathing has gone kind of uneven.

„Si?“, Abby reaches out with her left hand, touching my thigh, „You nervous?“

„Freaking nervous“, I admit, swallowing hard.

„It gon’ be alright“, Nick says between two gulps of beer, „The internet is crazy about you. They won’t love you any less because you’re into butt stuff.“

„Butt stuff“, I repeat.

Leah snorts.

***
The live show goes fine for the most part. At least until my phone buzzes and I see the notification of a new email from Blue. My mind is so foggy from the alcohol now that I actually have to bite the insides of my cheeks to not let out a sigh that’d rather belong into an amateur porn movie than a YouTube live show. I don’t know what it is, but whenever I get a new text from Blue I get this tingly feeling in my guts, like ants being released inside my stomach. It tickles a bit and even gives me a little rush. That kind of rush you get when your parents let you go onto the Ferris wheel at the fair all one your own for the very first time. You’re so proud because you’re a big boy now, even though going onto a Ferris wheel alone is probably considered one of the Top 3 saddest things in the universe, and you just can’t fight the oblivious grin on your face.

I do have the most amazing friends in the world, no doubt that, but none of them actually understands the situation I’m in. Nick is all heart-eyes for Abby, and I’m not even sure if Leah does stuff like love outside the fandoms she’s in. But if she did it would probably be all hetero as well. But Blue does. He understands. Because he’s also gay and not ready to be out. And I wasn’t ready too, I was pushed out of the closet.

„What is Simon grinning about?“, Nick reads from one of the live comments, then pauses for a second, looks at me, and adds: „Well, I have no idea if it isn’t for the fact we’re taking him out right now.“

„What?“ I snap my head away from my phone, almost causing whiplash for my drunken brain.

„We’re taking you out“, Nick repeats.

„Surprise!“ Abby raises the bottle of beer she’s been nipping on for the past thirty minutes.

„What?“, I ask again.

„You’re literally the dumbest gay alive, Si“, Nick grins, „We’re taking you out. As in party. As in bar.“

„And bar as in gay bar“, Abby adds.

Chapter End Notes

ps: drunk simon next chapter? drunk simon next chapter! :)

pps: can you see the emojis in si's tweet? (I'm writing this on a Mac so I can see them but I never know how it works on non apple related devices) (ohmigod this just made me sound like a spoiled brat) (I'm deactivating)
"All The Night's In Shitty Bars, Throwing Up In Taxi Cars"

Chapter Notes

Okay, yes, hi, I'm back with this story, yay.
1. I finally changed the name and now it’s semi-presentable. Go me!
2. This is a filler chapter and I'm. Going. To. Update. Again. Later. TONIGHT. (Y'all can beat my ass if I don't)
3. THIS IS FREAKING CHEESY AND IM HALF DYING AND HALF LIVING FOR IT OK BYE

„Yeah, no. Not going in there“, I say as soon as we arrive in front of a small highlighted building just outside Atlanta City. Its walls are practically shaking of the music plastic from inside. A small group of tall, handsome men stands in a small circle in front of the front door, smoking cigarettes.

I try to turn around to get back to Leah’s car, just like prey fleeing from a lion, but I’m flanked by Nick and Abby, who each grab one of my arms to hold me back.

„You are getting laid tonight“, Nick says, dragging me toward the front door. The men lift their heads to watch the spectacle.

„What? No. Nonono. I’m not going into a gay bar with the intention of having sex“, I protest.

„Too bad“, one of the men says, lifting his cigarette toward me as if greeting me with it. He looks a little like Cal on first sight. Except he doesn’t have bangs, and his hair is that blonde it’s almost white. But blue eyes — ocean blue that kind of make me go a bit week in the knees.

Too embarrassed, and definitely too confused, to answer, I let Abby drag me inside. We show our IDs to the security guard and once he’s checked that we all passed the eighteen mark, he waves us in. Even he is a pretty man.

Inside, the music is even louder, but the remix playing is not too bad — which is probably my drunk mind speaking. One of the first things I see is two girls on the bar making out, almost knocking over their glasses of bright pink liquor.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Leah and Abby exchange a quick look.

Nick starts for the bar, ordering drinks for all of us (a coke for Leah). Abby wraps her arm around my waist, dragging me further forward to an unoccupied spot at the bar. „So, Simon“, she says, pushing me down on a stool, „Any potential smexy love interests?“

„Smexy“, I repeat, raising my eyebrows at her.

„Sorry, I figured you’re kind of into nerds“, she shrugs, „But if you more the jock kinda guy…“

„I like nerds“, I admit, welcoming my drink from Nick.

„Alright.“ Abby scans the room with a seriousness as if it was her profession. „What about Game Of Thrones dude there?“ She points at a guy with dirty blonde long hair, which is probably the thing that reminds her of Game Of Thrones because he’s dressed in an actual tuxedo.
„He looks like he could be my dad“, I say.

Abby catches my gaze.

„And I’m not into that.“

She makes a pout, „Fine. But could you elaborate your taste in men a little further?“

„I don’t know“, I say, taking a sip from my drink, „I guess I like when they are around my age, first of all.“

„Got it.“ Leah nods as if she’s actually taking notes. „Taller or smaller than you?“

„I don’t care?“ It’s more of a question than an answer. The truth is, I have no idea if I even have a type. Of course, I do imagine myself with a handsome dude from time to time — that’s just what you do in your teens, right? Masturbate to the obscure image of a perfect person — but the dude is kind of faceless in my mind. And when he has a face it’s usually Cal’s. I down my drink in one huge gulp.

„Easy“, someone chuckles close to my left ear.

I almost fall off the stool when I turn around, only to find the cigarette guy from outside in front of me.

„Miles“, he says, pointing at himself, then he eyes me up and down with a questioning look.

„Simon“, I say.

„And what, Simon, is your excuse to sit on my stool and drink my drink?“

I almost get whiplash from turning my head back around too fast. And it’s true. The drink I gulped down wasn’t my own, mine is still sitting on the bar right next to it, untouched. The next thing I notice is that my friends have vanished. I crane my neck but I can’t make them out in the crowd of people.

„I thought…“, I start, „I thought it was mine."

„Well…“ He leans in a little closer to my ear again, his hot breath brushing over the sensitive skin. He smells of fruity drinks and cigarettes. „You know, you gotta pay for that, right?“

I feel a slight shiver creeping up my spine because I don’t think he’s talking about money as a method of paying.

„D-Do I?“

„Definitely.“ His left hand strokes against my right underarm a couple of times, and I almost immediately feel all of my blood rush away from my brain.

I don’t dare to look up, because I know my lips would be too close to his if I did.

Suddenly, though, I feel his fingers beneath my jaw, lifting my face up towards his. I swear to God, I’ve never jumped off a stool that fast. I almost knock all the other drinks on the counter over.

„I - uh -sorry. I feel very bad“, I stutter. „I-I have cramps."

„Cramps“, he repeats slowly.
„Yes. Ouch.“ I lay one hand on my stomach. „Really, really bad cramps. I gotta leave. I’m sorry. Here you go.“ I place a dollar bill in front of him then I back away as quick as possible.

***

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 2:41 AM
SUBJECT: Re: People Actually Like Kissing?

Blau,

I mean Blue, sorry, I’m typing this on my phone and I’m one hundred percent dependent on the auto correction. Did you know Blau means Blue in German? My mom’s side of the family comes from there and I know a few things to say in German. (Mostly the basics of „Ja“, „Nein“, but of course also „Du bist wunderschön“)

That’s what I’d like to say to your face right now, Blue. Du bist wunderschön. Because I bet all my enormous fortune that you are.

Anyway, dunno if you watched me liveshow (this feels weird, knowing that you might have watched or even commented and I wouldn’t know), but I’m currently in a bar. A gay bar. On the toilet. Like, I’m actually in the men’s room sitting on a toilet with my phone in hand, thinking about you.

I hope that tells you something, Blue.

Wouldn’t it be funny if I ended up going home with you tonight? Like, if you also happened to be from Atlanta and happened to be at the same gay bar as me. I’m not saying I’m going home with anyone but my friends tonight, but I would go with you.

I’m gonna dunk my head in the toilet bowl now because I’m getting two hot.

— Simon

Bram’s Point Of View

I don’t need to look up what Du bist wunderschön means. It’s also the kind of basic thing you can say in German when you are not actually German. My eyes are watering from the brightness of my phone, but I can’t even waste one thought about going back to sleep. My mind is awake and racing. I’m reading Simon’s words over and over again, imagining him sitting in a stinky bathroom stall in Atlanta, thinking about me — me, Blue — being beautiful and cute.
I suddenly feel like my head could use a dip in the toilet bowl as well. I press my hands against my cheeks, feeling the heat — well, my one hand lays against my face, the other is slowly moving underneath the duvet cover.

I can’t believe I’m doing this.

But I can’t get the image of Simon out of my mind. Simon with his blonde, messy hair, his glasses that always slide down his nose when he turns his head a little down. Simon, with the moon grey eyes.

I feel my body trembling a little.

*I would go with you.*

I bite down on my bottom lip, muting every sound that wants to escape my mouth. I, too, imagine what it would be like to actually meet Simon. To take all of my courage and talk to him when I see him at the bar. Having his eyes sparkle for my words, and my words only. His hands on my chest, his lips on mine.

All the tension in my body loosens up at once and leaves me alone in my bed at 3 am, feeling like a soaked gummy bear.
Bravery

Chapter Notes

2500 word chapter, here you go :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mom and I always spend the Sunday with the Masons. We meet them in the morning at church and get lunch with them after. They are a family of four: Teresa and Logan, the parents, their son Luke, and his girlfriend Jessica, who’s been pretty much adopted into the family at this point.

The Masons are what you’d call the right people to be around. Meaning they’re no fun at all. If they were a color they’d be grey — not the grey of Simon’s eyes, of course, but a dull, flat grey.

„So, Luke, what were your first few weeks of college like?“, mom asks in her high-pitched I’m trying to be socially accepted even though I got divorced fifteen years into my marriage voice. She always does this. Trying to fit in. I mean, she’s black, and she’s a woman, of course she needs to fight for acceptance, because, let’s be honest, we live in a shitty society, but she shouldn’t need to fight for it within her own community.

Luke shrugs the question off politely. He’s a freshman at Harvard, if that tells you anything. He got in on a basketball scholarship that I watched him work his butt off for the most of last year.

I scroll through my phone under the table, careful not to stare at it too much. Mom hates it when I bring that thing to church. I hope it looks like I’m staring at my noodles instead.

The email I got from Simon is still opened and still unanswered. By now, he’s probably home and long sober, and I’ve kind of been waiting for another email that would say something along the lines of lol sorry the last email was for somel else .

„Bram will probably go to Harvard as well“, Mom says, nodding knowingly although she knows nothing, „We thought Columbia was the one but after visiting Harvard last Spring...“ She sighs.

I sigh as well. I’ve reread Simon’s email yet again. I’ve seen his words — I can’t believe these are actually coming from him — close to a million times, and it almost feels like they’re tattooed on the insides of my lids by now. I wish I could hear him say those words.

„That means I can give you a private tour when you come to Harvard next year“, Luke says, nudging his foot against mine under the table.

I jerk my phone back into my pocket and force my gaze up to him. „Sorry. What?“

„I told you to leave that at home!“, mom immediately cries out.

I fight the urge to roll my eyes, and then have to hold back an actual laugh when Luke does it instead.
After lunch, we go on a walk through Presley Park — because the Masons want to and my mom isn’t going to say No to them. Mister and Misses Mason are sauntering arm in arm next to mom and Jessica, who are babbling away about shoes.

Luke and I are a few steps behind them. I managed to keep a conversation about basketball going until about two minutes ago.

„You didn’t seem too excited about Harvard“, he says into the silence.

I let that sit for a minute. It’s not like we’re friends — we barely know each other on a personal not-parents-related level. But somehow that always tends to make things easier for me. I’m not typically one to talk a lot, and when I do, there’s usually a lot of stuttering going on, but I haven’t seen Luke in so long, and we know nothing about each other except that we share an allergy for hazelnuts.

„I just can’t see myself even finishing High School“, I say, „It all seems so far away, and yet it’s almost tomorrow.“

„Well, you’ve got a few more months left, so don’t worry too much.“ Luke kicks a small pebble to the side of the path. „And if I remember correctly you won’t have any trouble getting the grades you need for any college. You’re really smart.“

I feel his eyes laying on my profile for a few moments longer than needed.

„I’m a nerd.“

„Yeah.“ Luke grins. „But that’s cute.“

I almost get whiplash from turning my head so fast towards him. He looks a little caught in the moment for a second, but then his smile is back.

„Sorry.“ I swear, I can almost make out a slight blush under his brown skin. „I thought…I thought you played on my team.“

„You’re gay?!“ I blurt out, but in a low whisper-shout so our families won’t hear it.

„Yeah“, he says, „And I thought you were too, which is why I’ve been low-key flirting with you all day. So, this is awkward. I’m sorry.“

„I — You — Jessica?“

„We’re best friends who each use the other one as a cover-up whenever we go home to meet our families. I’m all out at college, but here? Forget it.“

„I feel this“, I say without thinking.

„So you are gay“, Luke observes.

I throw a look at my mom who’s roughly ten steps in front of us before nodding.

„Thank goodness, I thought my gaydar was broken. I can basically smell a closet from miles away.“ He elbows me lightly. „Hey, don’t make that face. It’s okay.“

We walk on in another silence. This is a lot to take in all at once.
„When…uhm, when did you know?“

„For sure?“ He tilts his head to the side as if to show his thinking. „Probably when I had my first kiss with a guy. But I kinda suspected it before. You know, I’ve always been like that, I guess. What about you?“

„I’ve known forever“, I shrug.

„If you just knew and never had to figure it out in the first place, then why aren’t you out yet?“, Luke asks, „I mean, it’s different for me, I’ve had girlfriends before I kissed a boy for the first time."

„Really? I mean, you’ve said it. Being out here? Forget it“, I say, „I’m not that brave."

„You seem to be that way, though.“ His arm is touching mine, only slightly. „I wish I could be brave. I love my parents, obviously, but I chicken out every time I want to tell them. They tell me they love me, and all I can think about is that they’re not loving the real me.“ He pauses. „At this point, so many years down the line, it’s almost impossible for me to come out to them. It will crush them. Like, I’ve been hiding it from them for so long, and, God, I mean I even have my own beard so they won’t get suspicious!“ He shakes his head in slow, long motions. „Honestly, Bram, I wish I could have been brave. But now I’m just in too deep."

***

I think about that long after our walk has ended. Mom and I are back home, and I stare at a blank screen of an unwritten email. I think about every single word Luke has said, but mostly about being brave. Maybe there is a time in your life where you just have to be brave. For some, it might be whenever they decide to go Bungee Jumping. For others, it’s the decision which college they want to go to — if they want to go at all. And for me, it’s coming out.

Simon is brave. He’s incredibly brave. Not only did he come out to his friends and family, no, he came out to the whole world. He decided to just be himself, and it didn’t wreck him.

That’s what I’m dreaming of. A life in which everything stays the same, except I can be in love with boys without people hating me for it — without my own mother hating me for it.

Don’t get me wrong, my mom is not a bad person. Honestly, she isn’t. She’s maybe not the most embracing, warmest mother there is, but she’s still loving. When this one dude, Malcolm, used to take my lunch money away from me in middle school, she came to school and totally handbagged him until he swore he’d never do it again.

She used to stay up with me so many nights before important exams, asking me the same question about biology for the hundredth time. And she always put me in front of everything. She worked her butt off in order not to make more hours at work so she can help me with my math homework in freshman year. She stays home with me whenever I’m sick. She gets me my favorite slurpy from the gas station every time she has to fill her tank because she knows it’d make me happy.

And what do I do? I lie to her face.

Suddenly I feel dirty. Like the lie that I’m living in front of everyone except myself could actually stain me.
I’m close to getting up from my chair when my laptop makes a chiming noise. A new email appears in my inbox.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 5:41 PM
SUBJECT: Oh mY GOD

Blue,

fuck. Sorry. I was really, really, REALLY drunk when I wrote the last email. I just woke up. I’m so sorry. I mean, I guess I meant everything I said, but I probably shouldn’t have actually said it.

Sorry.

If it helps anything, I’m so hungover I might throw up. Maybe that would actually help.

Please tell me I didn’t scare you away, Blue.

— Simon

It’s silly, but while reading this email from Simon, I realize that’s all I want. I want to be out, and I want to be happy, and I want to be proud of who I am. I want to be with the guy I like. I don’t want to end up in a fake relationship with a girl.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 5:47 PM
SUBJECT: Re: Oh mY GOD

Dear Simon,

first of all, I love the subject of this email. It sums me up pretty much, or at least how I’m feeling at least 90% of the time.

Second of all, I don’t think there’s a world in which you could scare me away, Simon. I like you too much already. And you’re pretty cute yourself, in case that wasn’t clear.

I hate to disappoint you, but I didn’t go to any gay bar yesterday. I probably should have, just to celebrate you on your birthday. But I don’t go out, like, ever, so sorry. And I’m also not from Atlanta. I won’t tell you the city in which I live, but it is in Georgia, and I really, really don’t like it here.
I’m living for the fact that you mom’s german. That’s literally the coolest thing ever. Do you get to go to Europe often? How did I not know that, by the way? I mean, I do watch your videos. Is this some kind of trivia fact that I’ll only ever get asked about when I sit in the chair of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire in front of the one million question? Exciting!

— Blue

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 6:24 PM
SUBJECT: Re: Oh mY GOD

Thank God you replied!

Also, I’m laughing so hard right now?! I doubt I’ll ever be involved with Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, but then again, a boy can dream, right?

Anyway, yeah, you’re now one of the few people that know that I’m half german. I don’t know why I’ve never talked about it in my videos. Probably because I’m not a cool half german. I can’t speak the language, neither do I wear leather pants nor like Sauerkraut. (What I do know, though, is that all the germans will hate you if you tell them you still think all of them wear leather pants and like Sauerkraut.)

I’ve been to Europe quite a few times, but then my grandparents died and now we don’t really go anymore.

If you’d like to see an actual cool half german, you have to meet my sister, Alice. She’s fluent in the language, and she bakes the best bread ever. Honestly, Blue, if we ever meet in person, I’m getting you my sister’s self-baked German bread.

— Simon

PS: Sometimes she bakes cookies into the bread. That’s just pure porn if you ask me.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 6:57 PM
SUBJECT: Re: Oh mY GOD

We love a good carb, am I right?!

Wow, Simon, honestly, that’s so interesting. I’d love to go to Europe! I mean, who doesn’t, really? (Oh, I know! I met this lady a few weeks ago in church, and she actually didn’t know that Europe existed. And Asia. She legitimately did not know. She thought all of that was also America. Just another part of it, with oceans in
between. She didn’t know other languages existed. I don’t know how that came to be but it felt so weird, because she wasn’t even kidding!

Also, please attach a loaf of your sister’s homemade bread to your next email, thank you very much. Although, I’m not even really hungry. I had such a weird day today…

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 6:59 PM
SUBJECT: Re: Oh mY GOD
Tell me about it.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 18 at 7:17 PM
SUBJECT: Re: Oh mY GOD
Honestly? I don’t really wanna talk you through my boring day of church and family stuff, but let me tell you, I came to the conclusion that I have to come out. Or more that I want to come out.

Oh god, my hands just got so sweaty. See, just thinking about it makes me nauseated. You’re so brave, Simon, honestly. I’ve been thinking about that all day. Like, you actually did it. I don’t know why, but it makes me so proud. Maybe because I’d like to be more like you. Brave. And open. Andcuteandadorable.

At the same time, though, I just cannot do it. I don’t know if you’ve gathered this already, but my mom is very religious. She’s such an analytical person, but then again, she lets some dude above the clouds decide how she has to feel about things.

I think I could manage to be out to the world easily. It’s not like I have a lot of friends that could turn away from me. And I’ve had people bullying me for years, and at this point, I don’t even care what about me they despise. It’s just that I’m so terrified to disappoint my mom. I’m getting physically sick when I think about her turning her back towards me.

But I also don’t want to lie anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, like, how do I say this...uhm...just don't forget about Luke, I guess ;)))
And also I hope I did an at least semi-okay good job describing Bram's feelings about coming out of the closet ._. sometimes words and me are just enemies
I'm sorry I didn't update for so long. The truth is, though, I have pretty much all of this story written already, but there was this huge chunk missing from the last update to the next one. So I had to come up with this in order to fit the two parts together. I hope I did a semi-okay job.

„Okay, so in conclusion, y’all should listen to Waterparks’ new album — and also sign a petition for me to stop saying y’all. I swear, I just started doing it for fun and now I’m that basic Georgian boy who starts all his sentences with y’all.“

It’s weird. Seeing this boy in a video frame on YouTube, passionately talking about music, and imaging him turn on his laptop after, writing an email to me. I wonder if he feels strange about this too; knowing that I’m watching.

„Anyway. This has been Music Monday, thank y’all — you all for watching!“ He trails off into his usual outro and I shut my laptop. Only to open it again seconds later to reread the last email he sent me.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 19 at 9:19 AM
SUBJECT: A half nosy, half creepy email
Dear Blue,

First of all I’m glad that you think I’m cute and adorable. I think you are cute and adorable too. And probably hot as well. Wow, did this go too far? Am I being creepy?

But wow. I can’t even wrap my head around how things must go down in a religious household. You yourself don’t sound that religious, though, so I’m guessing it’s just about your mom?
I obviously don’t know her, Blue, but I’m going as far as to say that if she is a good mom she will be fine with it. She loves you, you know? That’s what moms do. And she will continue to do so, I’m sure.

The decision to come out must be pretty…overwhelming? I mean, I wouldn’t know, haha. Any idea when and how you’re going to do it (if you really end up doing it)?

— Simon

PS: Reading that people at school are being douches toward you is breaking my heart.
Although I have never seen you I can tell there’s nothing about you that is worth bullying. Not that anything is worth bullying. Bullies are the worst.

PPS: Please keep writing to me so I know you’re okay.

I stare at the last post scriptum. I feel a little bit thrilled by the fact that he wants to talk to me. Actually asks for it. As sad as it sounds, this has never been the case. I’ve always been on the outside. Like there’s a one-way mirror between me and the others; I can see them, but they can’t see me.

Of course, I have Garrett, and also David, I guess, but both of them are semi-douches if I’m being honest. Truth is that I only hang around them because I get bullied less the more time I spend with jocks. At least I am the black, Jewish kid (that is also gay) — it’s almost like an open invitation for everyone to come and discriminate.

I haven’t figured out an answer to the email yet. It’s kind of hard because I don’t really want to think about all these things. I want to go back and bury my face in poetry — another thing I used to be bullied for, now I simply don’t bring the books with me to school — and feel understood. Sometimes it gives me the strength to know that other people have been going through this and it resulted in this, in art.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 20 at 9:17 PM
SUBJECT: Re: A half nosy, half creepy email

Dear Simon,

As much as you can’t fathom what it must be like to exist in a religious household, I can’t imagine living with atheists. I don’t mean this in a mean way. I just can’t imagine not going to church at least once a week, or having to silently pray before dinner.

My mom is Christian and my dad is Jewish. Which technically makes me half and half — except Judaism is given on from the mother’s side in case you didn’t know. Whatever it is, I’m not that much into it. It’s a part of me, sure, and I have never second-guessed it, even though I second-guess literally everything. I have just grown up with it, so it’s probably a part of me. Like my arms are part of me. I don’t even know if I’m making sense.

I let my fingers hover above the keyboard. My battery is low.

About Coming Out, though? No idea. I feel so ready for it as of late. I mean, it’s kind of weird. All the time I know this about myself and I’m afraid and just not ready, and then I am.
I think it’s partly because of you, Simon. I don’t want to give you the whole credit but you’re really inspiring. I’m sure you have a lot of people telling you this, and I don’t mean to sound like a fan now, but you really deserve the world. You do so much for other, even if you don’t notice it. You have done so much for me, especially with these emails, even though there haven’t been this many, but also with your videos. It probably doesn’t occur to you, because of course, they are mostly just fun, but you know, for me, they are sometimes the only fun I have all day.

So thank you. And thank you for being here with me through all of this. You don’t have to.

— Blue

PS: If you have any idea regarding Coming Out Plans, hit me up though.

Over my homework I find myself thinking about Luke. He’s going back to Harvard soon, and I wonder what his life is like there. I wonder if he has a boyfriend. I guess I could just ask him. I think we are friends after all.

Never in my life have I written a worse essay for AP World History. I just can’t find the motivation. Not even to read. I feel kind of lazy and restless at the same time, pacing through my room, having Waterparks blast from my Spotify. I only ever stop in my tracks when a new email comes in with a swooshing sound, dimming the music for a second.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 19 at 11:39 PM
SUBJECT: You mean I’m inSPIERing?

My last name is Spier. That’s why it’s funny. Laugh!

Also, note that I’m trusting you with my last name. This is a lot. Please don’t share it with anyone, even though I know you wouldn’t, and it’s probably already somewhere out there. Anyway.

Thank you so much for everything you just said. This sounds like kind of a standard answer. Ugh. I’m not the best at this, you’re the poetic one.

What I’m trying to say is that I get lost too. I don’t share it on my channel, obviously, because it doesn’t fit my brand, but I feel like I can share it with you. Crazy that is since I don’t even know you in real life. You are pretty inspiring yourself. I feel like you have this special gift, Blue. You can put into words what I’m feeling. I don’t know. I feel like there is something, and I don’t know if you can feel it too.

Coming Out Plans, huh? I mean, is there ever really a plan? I don’t really know anyone who has come out. Don’t you just simply sit your parents down and tell them? Like, there’s nothing to sugar-coat. You’re into dick, that’s it. Just tell them.

— Simon
I laugh at this even though my cheeks feel a little numb. Probably because I have been biting their insides for the past two hours. But something in me seems to loosen up with reading Simon’s email. Like I’m taking off my coat on the first day of spring. I know I will have to put it back on eventually because another cold wave is inevitable, but for now, I’m enjoying the sunshine.

***

Talking to Simon gets me through my days. Even when I’ve had a rather unspectacular day, the emails feel like something, rain, rain when you least expect it but need it the most. Who would have thought gushing about Oreos and Chris Hemsworth would strangely feel like home? But it does. It feels like home and safety.

And before I know it’s Thanksgiving weekend, and I’m sitting with mom and my grandparents around our big living room table. Mom and Ambuya, how I call my grandma, cooked together while Sekuru, grandpa, and I played Uno at the table.

My grandparents are from Zimbabwe in Africa. But they moved to America when they were still young and had my mom here. They live upstate in a small town. And even though it has been years, they are still upset my father isn’t with us anymore. They were always really fond of him, and I know he liked them too. Ambuya always tells me how much I look like him. In fact, the only thing I share with my mom’s side of the family is the dark skin color.

Ambuya pats my shoulders after our prayers and we start eating. Except I don’t eat. Not really. I stare at my mashed potatoes and feel my stomach practically knotting itself closed.

I’ve been sitting with this for so long. And even though Simon and I haven’t talked about coming out any more, it’s still with me. Of course, it is. It’s a part of me.

„Bram, are you okay?“, Sekuru asks from across the table.

I nod absently. The truth is I’m reaching for my phone under the table, opening Simon’s last email.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com

TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com

DATE Nov 28 at 4:24 PM

SUBJECT: Re: ThanksGIVE me food

Blue,

You know when your whole house is smelling like candy and sweet potato? It’s so much, I swear I just gained ten pound just from breathing in. I love it. In case you haven’t noticed, I am a big food advocate. But I mean who isn’t?
You told me you’re having your grandparents over. From your description they seem like nice people. I know we haven’t talked about serious stuff lately, and it’s fine — honestly, everything’s great, I like this — I’m just saying, whatever you decide to do, it’s going to be fine.

I’m not asking you to do anything, Blue. I would never do that. I mean, not to sound selfish but what would it do for me? I’m just saying. I know it’s been sitting with you. And I promise you it will be okay.

„Bram.“ Mom’s voice has this threatening undertone to it. Ambuya just grins at the both of us and pats her daughter on the back.

*And I promise you it will be okay.*

I lock my phone.

*It will be okay.*

My breathing is uneven.

*Okay.*

„Hey, can I just say something?“

Chapter End Notes

So, yep, I don't like this too much. It's kind of all over the place, but so is Bram, I guess.

In other news, though, updates are going to be more frequent from now on, so go me.

:)
I’m staring at my turned off ceiling fan, when my door opens just a crack, and mom peaks her head inside. Her mouth is a strict, thin line, but her eyes shimmer in the last hours of sun falling through my window.

I can’t believe I just told them. It’s out!

„Can I come in?“

Instead of answering, I sit up and lean my back against the wall. Despite the heating being off and the cold wind outside I feel my palms getting sweaty. Why the hell did I do this?

The door makes an aching sound as if it’d already mourn what is about to happen.

Mom’s fingers grab the little cross hanging on a faint silver necklace around her neck as she sits down on the foot of my bed. For a while, all I can hear is her breathing, a constant rhythm I can’t seem to follow.

„Ambuya and Sekuru left. And I talked to your father.“

I turn my head toward her so fast it almost makes the world blur before my eyes. She talked to dad? What does this mean, she talked to dad? They never talk.

„I…“ Her perfectly calm breathing stops for a minute for her to swallow the obvious lump that’s been building up in her throat. „I told him you’d like to visit him in Atlanta.“

I bite my jaws together so hard my teeth threaten to fall out. It hurts but it keeps the tears from rising up. Of course, she doesn’t want me, her outrageous gay son, the sinner, around for Christmas time.

Normally, I spend every Christmas with my mom, and Hanukah with my dad in a hotel in Savannah, where we do all kinds of Jewish traditions and catch up on all the year’s worth of school gossip.

Mom shuffles a tiny stack of papers from the pocket of her jacket and holds them out toward me. Her hand is as calm as her breathing.

I take the plane ticket she’s already printed out from her hands, careful not to touch her skin that looks so much like my own. I feel like the eruption every oh so tiny touch would cause in my body could possibly make me break like a child that lost his favorite toy.

Then my eyes fall on the departure date printed on the very top of the page, right underneath my
name. November 30th.

„Tha…That’s tomorrow.“ My voice is cracked, just like it was during the time when it changed to a deeper tone. She did all this in the span of a couple of hours.

„I know“, she says.

These two words hurt more than the plane ticket itself. It’s clear: She wants me gone. Gone from her house, from her life as if I’m not allowed to be a part of it anymore, away from her. As fast as possible.

„Mom“, I croak.

She scoots to the edge of the bed, placing both her hands on her knees.

„Mom, I’m still me“, I try.

She blinks with a pace that doesn’t match her calm posture. She looks like a storm is raging within her. „I don’t know if I ever knew you at all, Bram.“

Wetness spreads over my cheeks as soon as she says it, and all I can do is sit in silence, watching her leave my room through my blurred vision, wishing she’d have yelled at me, told me all about the sin I was committing, her disappointment, cried about all the biological grandchildren she will never have; everything, everything to give me a reason to be mad at her, angry, furious, something I could argue against. But instead, I’m left with the truth. I lied, even though the only thing I did was keeping my mouth shut. I pretended, even though the only person I ever played was myself.

I rise to my feet. Still half blind from the tears I yank my giant suitcase free from underneath my bed, opening it and dragging everything I might need in Atlanta inside. Clothes are a minority, I focus more on books, the pillow I can’t sleep without, numerous pairs of headphones because I always manage to break them at some point.

Tears drop everywhere along the way but I don’t stop. I force all of my school supplies into my backpack. I can’t imagine attending a school without Garrett and Bryan as much as the douches they are. I will be alone again.

When the backpack leaks pencils and highlighters, and the suitcase won’t close anymore, I let myself fall to the ground in front of my bed. The duvet cover is pushed halfway to the ground and my hands find a way of holding on to it as if it was an anchor to keep me sane. When the first sob escapes my mouth I feel the world collapsing.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 10:57 PM
SUBJECT: help

I just told them.
FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 11:04 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help

Oh my god, I was just thinking about you, Blue! Literally about to text you.
Wow. I am so proud of you. How did it go?

Now, I don’t mean to sound like a douche, but you didn’t do this for me, right?
Because, again, I did not mean to force you out. You said you were ready, and I hope
you were. I hope it was all done in your own pace. Again, I am so proud of you.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 11:07 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help

It didn’t go well.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 11:14 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help

What do you mean?

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 11:25 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help
Blue? I don’t know if you fell asleep but I’m really worried here. Was it really bad? You don’t have to talk about it, just text me something so I know you’re okay.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 11:33 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help
Blue??

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Nov 29 at 11:49 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help
I swear to god I’m freaking out right now. You can’t leave me hanging like this! I’m literally panicking. What do I do? Are you okay? I’m scared, Blue, please say something.

I am going to wait until tomorrow and if you haven’t answered me by then I’m going to…I don’t know?? Call the cops? This is silly, I know, what would I even say to them? But I’m legitimately worried, like, worst case scenarios are playing in my head rn.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Nov 30 at 1:07 PM
SUBJECT: Re: help
Simon,
I’m sorry I ghosted you. I didn’t fell asleep. I was…pretty much just staring at my ceiling for a good amount of time. This makes me sound kind of crazy. I guess I was spiraling and forgot about time.

Please stop worrying, I’m alive. Although I low-key wish I wasn’t. I know this is a lot
to say. I’m probably being mediocre or dramatic or whatever.

So I came out. I told my grandparents and my mom at dinner. It was kind of on a whim and kind of not. I mean, I was ready. So ready. It needed to get out or I would have combusted. And no, you didn’t force me out, or talked me into something. I swear this was my own decision.

And it was a bad one.

I guess deep down I sort of already knew that my mom wouldn’t take it well. There was a reason for me being so scared. My grandparents were silent the entire time. Ambuya was looking at me like I just murdered their dog. Sekuru stared at his plate.

And my mom?

She kicked me out, Simon. She bought plane tickets. Plane tickets for tomorrow. I’m going to my dad whom she told about it without my consent. I know I should be mad. But as strange as it is I kind of understand her. Or at least I want to. I have never seen her like this. It was like she had a mask on. She didn’t bat an eye at anything. I told her and two hours later I’m pretty much gone from her life. It seems…easy for her.

God, Simon, I am at rock bottom.

Please stop worrying now. Thank you so much, though. You’re a real friend.

Chapter End Notes

I swear, I'm breaking my own heart with this
Hope you're all cool with me not writing how exactly Bram told them. I thought it was better this way
Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the amazing comments on the last chapter and sorry for breaking y’alls hearts. I will probably do it again. Not in this chapter, though. :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Atlanta must want to fool me with its crazy sunshine once I get off the plane. The wind is still cold and I can’t wait for dad to turn on the car’s heating, but it already looks more welcoming than Savannah ever has.

Dad and I sit in silence for the entirety of the ride home. His greeting for me was a soft pat on the shoulder and a look that must’ve meant something like She’ll get over it even though we both know she probably won’t. Mom doesn’t get over things, she’s too logical for that. Either she solves the problems they’re causing or she gets rid of them. It hurts to know that I am a problem she has to get rid off.

Dad’s car radio is broken and I can’t help but think about Simon. He’d go through hell in my place right now, facing a heavy situation with no comforting music. It’s crazy to think I’m this close to him.

My father lives just outside Atlanta, in a small town called Creekwood — or Shady Creek. It’s what you would imagine a suburban small town next to Atlanta’d be like: Full of drama, gossip and right-wing politicians. At least my dad isn’t one of them.

We come to a halt right in front of his house. It has a small garden in front of it in which a lemon tree tries to grow through the cold. Behind that the house wall’s are painted the color of the setting sun, with blue windowsills. I’ve never actually been here.

„It’s not much, but it’s home“, he says.

I smile at the Harry Potter reference. „Thanks, dad.“

„You know, your mom…“

„It’s fine“, I say, eyes glued to the car’s dashboard.

„I’m okay with it“, he says, „I hope you know that.“

My teeth hurt again from the pressure I press them against each other with.

„I had no idea, Bram…” He tilts his head back as if he’s fighting tears all of a sudden. „I…I wasn’t around when you needed me. I didn’t realize, I…“

I turn my head toward him, watching the water spill over the rim of his blue eyes. „Dad…Dad, no. Hey. Stop.“

He presses his hands against his temples. „I’m so sorry, son.“
I shake my head slowly, placing my hand on his shoulder and pushing it down a little.

Inside, his house is even more perfect. Whereas mom and I lived in order and tidiness with only little decoration, dad’s house is filled to the brim with all kinds of nonsense. He has this fake tree, that is made out of metal, next to the front door to hold our jackets.

„Your room is downstairs“, he says, gesturing to a door made out of old-fashioned wood panels. It opens with a creak and reveals a spiraling flight of stairs. Dad motions me to go first.

Downstairs is a small bathroom with a toilet and a shower. It’s kind of sparse and the lighting is terrible, but it’s more than enough for me. The bedroom, however, is amazing. I almost start crying right there on the spot.

„I hope it’s okay. I mean, I don’t know for how long you’re going to stay.“

He built a bed out of wooden pallets. Around it hangs a canopy out of dark blue linen, making it look like a fort. It’s stuffed with pillows and blankets, and I can even spot fairy lights dangling from the wall.

There’s a desk as well. It’s an old one I can tell, but big and clean. A chair is missing, though. Instead, there’s a big colorful beanbag in the corner of the room by the half-empty bookshelves.

I hug him. Mostly to hide the tears falling onto my cheeks.

He presses a kiss onto my ear, and his beard tickles uncomfortably, and we both laugh. Dad claps his hands together. „We need to get you a closet and a chair. And maybe a small rug if you want to. And I need to fix the light bulb. But otherwise, I think you’re good to go.“

„Thank you so much, dad“, I say.

„Don’t worry about it.“ He smiles. „I was so happy when you’re mom told me you were coming. I wasn’t happy with her reasoning behind it, obviously, but still. I missed you.“

I nod, a lump in my throat.

„I’m just going to get your suitcases down here. And then we’re going out for dinner!“

***

I spend the first couple of days in Creekwood without a closet (my dad makes a lot of jokes on whether I really need one since I’d spent so much time in it already) and a desk chair. It’s hard to get out of bed for two reasons: a) I just don’t feel like it, b) this bed is a-m-a-z-i-n-g.

Dad is okay with me staying home for Monday and Tuesday but insists that I have my first day at school on Wednesday. I wish I could stay cuddled up in bed forever.

At least I make it my mission to get a chair before I go back to school. So I go on an adventure in Atlanta’s Ikea on Tuesday, and of course, I get lost on the way home because I take the wrong exit off the highway. Dad’s Honda’s tank is dangerously empty when I finally pull into Creekwood’s gas station. Gas prices are ridiculously high at the moment, but what can I do?
I park at a gas pump next to an old Subaru that looks like it hasn’t been to the wash in decades. I fill up the tank and then go inside to pay.

The owner of the Subaru is at the register. He’s leaning down on his elbow onto the counter. „God, I’m so, so sorry, can I just—“

The automatic door makes a ding dong! noise when I enter the room, and the guy’s, as well as the employee’s heads, turn up.

And I’m stuck for a moment.

Because no. That can’t be reality. I’m clearly making things up now, maybe projecting. Because this guy cannot be Simon Spier. Simon from YouTube. From the emails.

But he is. He so clearly is. The glasses made out of silver wire, a beanie only partly covering his blonde hair. A burgundy hoodie, a jeans jacket and dark jeans. It’s him.

Both of them return to their conversation once the door’s closed behind me.

„I swear“, Simon says, „I’m leaving my…my“ He pats the pockets of his jeans. „My phone with you. Okay? I leave it here and go get my wallet from home. I’ll be back in ten minutes max.“

The woman looks skeptical at the iPhone in his hand. „I don’t think—“

„Ugh.“ Simon drives a hand through his hair and pulls the beanie from his head. „Alright. I’m just going to call home and see if I can reach my parents.“

The woman taps onto the keyboard in front of her and then nods at me, saying that I can pay now. I step forward until I’m right next to Simon.

Simon, who I have been emailing with.

I hand her the cash and then throw a glance at the boy next to me. He’s biting down on his bottom lip as he almost aggressively tries to contact someone. „Uhm“, I make, „I can pay for you.“ What?

„What?“ He turns to face me. He’s a little smaller than expected, almost a full head shorter than me. But his eyes are as vibrant as in the videos, sparkling almost.

Okay, don’t make this weird, Bram.

„I can pay for you now and you can pay me back“, I say, trying to sound chill. I am chill, I got this. Except I’m almost imploding.

„Oh“, he makes, messing up his hair again, „No. No, but thank you. I’m just gonna try to—“

I turn back to the register lady. „I’ll pay for him.“

She gives me a warm smile and lets me proceed the transaction from my credit card. I don’t have enough cash on hand. Simon doesn’t argue on, but I can feel he’s uncomfortable. He’s still biting down on his bottom lip, eyeing me up and down.

Now I am uncomfortable.

The lady dismisses the both of us with a little smile, and I nod at Simon. I’m this close to losing it,
honestly. Everything in my body feels electrically charged and in close proximity to water.

Simon and I step outside. It has gotten dark.

„You didn’t have to do that“, he says.

I lean my back against my dad’s car because otherwise, I would just fall over, honestly. He’s perfect in real life. „But I did“, I say.

His eyes fall down to his shoes.

„I mean, I’m assuming you go to CHS as well, right? It’s my first day tomorrow. You can just pay me back then.‘’

„That’s really nice“, Simon says, kneading his beanie in his hands, „Thank you… What was your name again?“

„Bram Greenfeld.“

„Thank you, Bram Gr— Wait. Greenfeld? Is your dad Aaron Greenfeld?“ He forgets about his hat and looks back up.

„Uh, yeah“, I reply.

„He’s my English teacher!“, Simon exclaims.

„Oh“, I make and laugh a little at his expression. „Well.‘’

„I didn’t know he had a son“, he says.

„I moved here only a couple days ago from Savannah“, I explain.

„Huh.‘’ He mimics my position, leaning against his own car right opposite of me. Our feet almost, almost, touch. „That’s cool.‘’

I mean, I’m literally about to die. He’s so cute. And I could just tell him right here and now that I am Blue. I could do that. Except I really don’t want to make things weird. I don’t want to tell him that I know him, watch every single one of his videos.

„Oh.‘’ He claps his hand against his forehead. „Almost forgot. I’m Simon Spier. Sorry. I just never really meet people who don’t…who aren’t from here, I guess.‘’

People who don’t know him.

I nod. „Hi, Simon.‘’

A small smile lights up his face, and simultaneously my whole world. „Hi, Bram.‘’

***

So, I’m on cloud nine. And also poor. Like, I desperately need Simon to pay me back as soon as possible or I won’t have any money left. I might need to find a job.
CHS is exactly the same as my old school in Savannah. Everything looks and even *smells* the same. I see the same groups of people. The same lockers. The same classrooms. And then I see Simon. He materializes right next to my locker, smiling from ear to ear.

„Hey“, he says. He’s in a grey hoodie today which kind of brings out his eyes even more. And the same jeans jacket. He draws out his wallet, looking at me kind of sheepishly. „It’s like you’re my dealer.“

I grin. „Yeah, everyone will believe that. *Have you seen that new black dude? I saw Simon Spier paying him. Bet that dude has some good coke*.“

„Exactly“, Simon laughs, „Because I bet you people here still believe that all black people are either addicted to or dealing drugs.“

„Probably. Good ol’ Georgia.“

Simon hands me the money and I toss it into my backpack. Then he awkwardly steps from one foot to the other. It’s something I would have never imagined him to do. I always thought of him as bold and straightforward. „Hey, uhm, my friends and I are leaving to get lunch at WaHo today. You wanna come with us?“

*Oh my God.*

But instead of falling around his neck, beaming, and screaming YES into his ear, I ask: „Can we leave campus?“

„Yeah“, he nods, „Seniors are allowed to.“

„Okay“, I say.

„Okay.“ He smiles. And a wave of giddiness floods my body.

***

Can you believe I have been living almost eighteen years without a Waffle House? I can’t either. Which is why I’m now *binging* on everything they have on their menu.

„Wow“, Leah says, „Are you, like, eating your feeling or something?“

One thing, though, Simon features Abby and Nick in a lot of his videos, and obviously, Abby is stunning and Nick is cute, but Leah is such a gem. First of all, she’s *too* beautiful. Kind of like a Disney princess. Then she is the same amount of snarky and funny. I gathered all that by knowing her for approximately five minutes.

Simon sits opposite me, the straw of his milkshake between his lips. I catch his gaze. *I can’t.*

„Kind of“, I admit, mouth still half full, „To be fair, I didn’t have breakfast.“

„Oh my god, don’t say that too loud or my mom will hear you and absolutely sue your dad“, Simon says, „Like, she gets *aggressive* when she hears about someone leaving their house without food. She’s obsessed.“
„Hm“, I make, and then I feel sort of brave. „So maybe I should tell her and then come by your’s for breakfast every morning.“

I can feel Abby’s eyes drifting between us like she’s soaking up every little bit of this. And so am I. Soaking it up.

„That, my guy, is not the worst idea.“ Simon points his finger at me in a lecturing way. „Because my sister, Nora, makes the best breakfast and you should absolutely try it.“

„Deal“, I say.

„So we have a date.“ Simon holds his hand out for me to shake across the table. Leah makes a gagging noise next to him, but he just nudges her, a little grin on his face.

I shake his hand and I swear, all of my body is responding to him in a way it never has before. It’s a tingly sort of feeling. Like a rush of adrenaline pumping through my veins, shooting heat up my cheeks. I feel so strangely out of it and in it at the same time.

*Maybe it’s a good thing I’m leaving it all behind. Maybe this is right. Maybe it has been wrong for the past eighteen years and now, right now, I’m about to get it all right.*

Chapter End Notes

So, Simon is the definition of a disaster gay, what's new?
Now it’s Thursday morning and Simon and I are unofficially skipping homeroom class to have an extended breakfast. We’re sitting next to each other in the back of his car, waiting for his dad to leave for work. I wasn’t aware that we were already at the skipping-school-together part of our relationship. Not that I’m complaining.

„He always takes so goddamn long.“ Simon rolls his eyes. „That man is such a diva when it comes to his hair.“

But then, finally, a man, equally as blonde as him steps out of the front door and unlocks the car that’s parked right next to Simon’s with a press on his key. We duck in the backseat and to my surprise, it actually works and he doesn’t see us. A minute later and he’s gone.

Simon’s house is the picture-perfect family home you would expect. Picture frames on the wall next to the staircase. A big open living room that looks like it’s actually being used by multiple people at the same time and not just one sitting by himself at a time.

„Nora’s obviously gone“, Simon says, leading me to the kitchen. He doesn’t even notice my eyes wandering everywhere. „But she always keeps the leftovers in the fridge for later snacks.“ He opens the refrigerator and scans the stories. Then he begins packing Tupperware box after Tupperware box into a stack on the counter next to him. „So this morning’s choices are“

I do a quick drumroll with my fingers on the countertop and he hesitates in his movements for a second to laugh. And I’m so gone for this boy.

He opens the boxes one after another, commenting on each one. „Strawberry parfait with other questionable fresh fruits. Homemade granola. Ah, and chocolate fudge cake.“ Without looking at my reaction he closes all the boxes except the one with the cake back up, putting it back into the fridge.

I mean, he’s right.

Half of the cake is still left, and once put out of the fridge, it’s in perfect gooey condition. Simon gets chocolate sauce and sprinkles to go with it and it seriously looks like porn to me. Foodporn. Probably the best kind of porn.

„Hey, uhm“ Simon puts the bottle of chocolate sauce back into the fridge. „Do you want to go upstairs and eat in my room? My mom sometimes comes home between therapy sessions and that would be quite inconvenient since we’re, you know, skipping school."

„Sure“, I say while completely losing my shit on the inside.

So I have seen this room before. But never in its entirety. I know the space on the ground in front of a wall covered in posters where he films most of his videos. I know his desk because I’ve seen it
in the background. And I know the bed, of course, on which he came out to the whole world.

Actually, his ring light and the camera are still propped up in front of the bed, probably from whatever video he’d been filming last. It must be an exciting one. He doesn’t sit on his bed for a lot of videos.

It’s just when I finally stop looking around and my gaze finally finds Simon’s, when I realize I probably should act a little confused about the camera set-up in front of his bed. For all that I know, apparently, this could indicate that he’s filming amateur porn films.

„I“, he starts, placing his plate on his desk, driving a hand through his hair, which — okay. Oh boy. „This is not as dirty as it looks.“

I grin at him, wiggling my eyebrows a little.

„I’m doing YouTube videos.“

_I know, I’ve been watching you since the beginning_, I think.

„Oh“, I make instead, „That’s cool.“

„Yeah.“ He clears his throat. „Uhm, let me just move this…away."

I end up helping him setting down the light and the camera, putting it back into his closet. Then we sit down on the floor in front of his bed, backs leaning against it. He has one of these really big Boxspring beds from Ikea.

„So, what kind of videos do you make?“, I ask, eating a piece of cake. And, God, Nora, I may not know you personally but you are wonderful! Obviously, I know what Simon will tell me. Like the gist of it. But I kind of want to hear it from him. I want to see his eyes light up behind his glasses.

And they do. They _so bloody do_ once he starts rambling about all the stuff he puts onto his channel. And I listen, although I know all of this. And I could tell him just now. That I am Blue. And whatever would happen, would happen. But I don’t do it. I just watch him eat his cake and talk about his passion.

„And, like, a lot of people want me to start vlogging“, he says, „But honestly? Like, I’m flattered they think my life is interesting, but it’s kind of just…“

„High school melancholy?“

He nods eagerly. „Exactly."

„I guess you have to do what every Youtube does then“, I say and take a dramatic breath in. „Move to LA."

He snorts, spitting cake crumbles onto the rug. And even that is weirdly cute. _I’m_ truly being weird right now. „I don’t think I want to love to LA."

„Hm, then your career is probably doomed“, I shrug.

„Shut up!“, he laughs, „I don’t know. Like, I really want to go to New York, but then who _doesn’t_? Maybe I want to go…somewhere. Just anywhere. To look and to…find someo— something. You know?"

I let it sit for a moment. I have never thought about not going to college.
Simon finishes his cake before I do, so he's the first one to get up from the floor, putting a vinyl on his record player. I recognize it right away. It's Elliott Smith, of course. I can't help but to wonder if this is some kind of test.

„I like that.“ It’s LA from his album Figure 8.

Simon nods his head along to the rhythm of the song as he plops down onto his desk chair, spinning halfway around to face me. „So. You're living with your dad.“

„Yeah“, I say, „I used to live with my mom back in Savannah.“

„So they are divorced.“

„No, they just really enjoy long distance.“

He looks at me, half dumbfounded, half grinning. „Oh, alright, haha, Greenfeld.“ He leans back in his chair, and thank God I'm not standing because this makes me go weak in the knees. „Why did you move here? Like, in the middle of the school year.“

There is a little something unsettling pumping through my veins, leaving me in a state of some kind of awareness. Does he suspect anything?

„I, uhm“

Right now, out of all times, I remember my elementary school teacher, Misses Schreiber, telling me that every time I felt the urge to say uhm I should instead go with moo. Like a freaking cow.

I am not going to moo at Simon Spier.

„Uhm, it was actually planned“, I lie, my eyes glued to my knees, „My mom got this amazing job offer, I guess, which meant she would have to leave town for a few months and she didn’t want to leave me alone.“

I know this doesn’t explain why I moved in the middle of the school year, but I just hope he’ll somehow look around it. And to my astonishment, he does. Instead of asking any further questions, he spins back around and shuffles with his laptop.

„Do you want to watch a movie?“, he asks and turns the record player back off.

„Uh, don’t we have school?“

He grabs his laptop and comes back to me, falling onto his bed. „We have maths. And I’m boycotting that.“

„You know“, I say, crawling onto the bed as well, „there are two types of gays. Those who can’t drive and those who can’t do maths.“

Why did I say that?! I’m not even supposed to know that he’s gay! I don’t watch his videos!

Simon laughs. „I’m definitely the maths gay. I hate maths.“ Then his laugh fades, and he seems to realize, as do I, how close we’re now sitting next to each other. On his bed. His eyes, those moony, wonderful eyes, fall down onto my lips for just a second, and I wonder if this is what the moment before a kiss feels like.
But instead of leaning in, Simon kind of leans back, and again, like the first morning at school, he looks kind of shy. „Which type are you?“

My mouth goes dry. So he’s subliminally asking me about my sexuality. This is happening. „Actually, I can do maths and I’m quite a good driver.“

It’s almost unnoticeable, but he leans back away from me just a bit more. Like he fears he just said something wrong.

„But I’m still gay.“

He is closer immediately. I don’t even know if he realizes that his body language is kind of like reading an open book where the font is about 72pt. He’s obviously relieved. And I don’t know whether that is because he hoped that I would turn out to be gay, or whether he was just scared he said something awkward.

He taps his fingers on the closed laptop. His hands are kind of small, but not really. I guess they’re just really delicate, the fingers and knuckles, but actually quite large in size. I need to stop thinking about his hands right now. „I’m the only one out at school, you know.“

I’m rowing back. „Sorry. I don’t even know why I’ve said that two types stuff. I mean, I didn’t know for sure you were…were gay, I was just…“

„Seeing what you wanted to see?“ His eyes fall to my lips once again. Holy shit. „Yeah, me too.“

This is it. I’m officially done. The air is basically crackling between us, and I’m getting way, way too hot. How is this even happening so fast? It can’t be real. This is not me.

Or maybe it is. And I’ve just been hiding it for too long.

But right as I’m about to close my eyes, give my everything to him, Simon falls back into his pillows, propping his knees up and leaning the laptop against them. „So, I’m thinking Sense 8“, he announces.

„Sounds good.“ I lean back next to him.

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FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Dec 4 at 11:07 PM
SUBJECT: Guess who’s back

Dear Simon,

I’m with my dad now. Sorry for not writing to you sooner, the last days have been kind of hectic. I still need to set up my room and get a hang of school here. I mean, it’s basically the same as back home, but you know. I kind of miss my friends. But also not really. I don’t know. I’m a mess at the moment, I’m sorry.
Anyway.

I have missed you, too. A lot, actually. I have to admit I kind of like that we can pour our hearts out to each other. So, Simon, how is it going? Is it still horrible to be out? For me, I really hope it will be better over here.

Love,
Blue

I’m shoving my laptop away from me.

Oh no.

Why did I do this?

I can’t sign my emails with love now. I can’t. He will get suspicious!

But it’s too late. Normally, I’m proofreading every email before sending it out, because that’s just the person I am, but this was kind of on a whim. I cam home from Simon’s a few hours ago, and I guess it kind of felt like I could just text him now.

Except this is not texting, it’s *emailing*, and I’m not Bram, I’m *Blue*.

Which is a little messed up.

There is clearly something going on between me and Simon. But every time, and bare in mind I’ve only ever spent quality time with him *once*, I feel kind of detached from who I am. Or who I thought I was.

Because maybe you’re supposed to feel this warm and comfortable *all the time*, and I’m just the exception that feels sad and miserable. I wouldn’t know. I have never felt so — *okay* with who I was until I came to Creekwood. I have only been here for half a week and I haven’t cried sad tears *once*. It’s a record if you will.

And when I’m with Simon… God, it’s like a whole level-up. I forget who I was before, and everything that is going on, like the emails, becomes a white noise in the back of my mind that is so easy to ignore. I feel brave, and for the first time ever, it works out.

*Maybe this is how it’s supposed to be.*

Chapter End Notes

I am not a good driver, nor can I do maths...a true pan everybody *flips hair*
Simon’s Point of View

I stare at the word for longer than I really need to grasp its meaning. Love. Love, Blue. It’s almost midnight and this is all I can think about. Blue Blue Blue Blue.

Except whenever I get this feeling in my gut, this swirly little whirlwind, that’s associated with Blue, somehow Bram steps in the picture as well. It’s weird. I have to say that it’s a crazy coincidence that he came into my life just as Blue got kicked out from home.

But is it a coincidence? I have thought about this. The What If Bram Is Blue? But it can’t be. Bram is just — different from Blue, I guess. I imagine Blue as this sad kid, small with dark circles under his eyes, kind of fragile.

And Bram is, well, not that. First of all, he’s tall, and kind of muscular, but not bulky. But first and foremost, he seems happy. Something that I, as sad as it sounds, can’t think of Blue being at the moment.

And also, I guess people move all the time, right? It’s just coincidence that Bram and Blue happened to move places at the same time.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com

TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com

DATE Dec 4 at 11:59 PM

SUBJECT: Re: Guess who’s back

Dear Blue,

I’m so glad to hear from you. I definitely missed you a lot too. And I was thinking about you a lot. Did you know you sneak into my mind every time I’m trying to solve a math problem? It’s almost like you don’t want me to do math, Blue.

Honestly, I’m keeping my fingers crossed for you. It will work out, I promise. And if not where you are now just remember, high school will be done in what? Half a year? And then there’s college, Blue. You will go to college, right? I imagine you to be that person that’s saved for Yale, or Harvard pretty much since birth.

Oh, and then there’s me. Hey. I’m here too. And if there is no one left to accept you for who you are, I will always be there. Me and my bunch of awesome friends. We’re very accepting and open-minded and I think we can make room for one more in the
squad.

I mean, I have a feeling that if we ever meet we will instantly become some kind of double package deal, and they couldn’t do other than take us both.

So, yeah, for me the Gay Thing™ is okay. It’s good even, I guess. There might be a cute boy here. Or maybe I’m just projecting you on the first half-decent person I see.

You’re messing with my head, Blue.

Love,
Simon.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Dec 5 at 1:03 AM
SUBJECT: Re: Guess who’s back

I am messing with your head? No, Simon, uh-uh. You’re the one sneaking into my thoughts all the time. Especially at night. I feel like everything is more at night. Do you know what I mean?

Like, I think about you a lot, always, but at night, it’s just… It’s a good thing you have a YouTube channel so I can see your pretty face whenever I want to. You know, for daydreams and the like.

(Please don’t think I’m a stalker or a pervert, I guess I’m just really bad at flirting.)

Love,
Blue

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Dec 5 at 2:59 AM
SUBJECT: Daydreams…and the like

Elaborate those Daydreams And The Like further please.

Love,
Simon

PS: I can’t sleep because of you, Blue. I will be a zombie tomorrow.
I get exactly zero minutes of sleep that night. My mind is a seesaw that’s bouncing from Blue to Bram, from Bram to Blue.

When my alarm goes off I’m already in jeans and a hoodie, sitting on my desk, planning out a few future videos and doodling a little. I am not an artistic person by any means, but I gotta say those hearts I doodled look pretty cute.

I bring one of Nora’s breakfast muffins to school with me for Bram, who I meet in the parking lot. He leans against the car I already know from the gas station but only now recognize as Mister Greenfeld’s.

„Are you pretending your dad didn’t drive you here?“, I ask, handing him the muffin.

„Pshhh“, he makes, carefully tearing the brown lunch bag open to peek inside. „Aw, it’s a muffin!“

„Yeah, Simon forced me to make a couple extra ones so he can bring you one.“ Nora falls into pace next to us. Of course, she’s there too. She drives with me every morning at least. She looks at Bram and her curls almost slap me in the face. „I’m Nora by the way. His sister.“

Yeah, no shit, really. The Spier family is pretty much entirely copy and paste from our father. He’s the one with the blonde, kind of messy hair and the grey, in my opinion, a little colorless, eyes. The only thing all three of us inherited from mom is the bad eyesight.

Nora and I both were glasses (Alice is the only one going for contacts), round ones, which make us look even more similar. We’re also really close in age and both rather on the short side. Sometimes people ask us whether we are twins.

Inside, Nora disappears to join her friends, the sophomores who all kind of look like they’re going through a renewed scene and emo phase. Could be worse, I guess. Or not.

„I’m surprised you’re here, though.“ Bram stops at his locker, and so do I because apparently, we’re escorting each other to our lockers now. „Since we have algebra.“

„Well.“ I lean my side against the row of lockers so my face disappears behind his open door. „Gotta keep up my grades. Or at least try to.“
Blue — except Bram and I seem to become some sort of double package deal. I don’t mean to sound like an asshole, but my friends would normally never accept someone as part of the Inner Circle as fast as they do with Bram. It almost seems like they are doing it for me.

Which is awkward.

But then Nick and Bram bump fists and fall into a conversation about soccer.

Oh. I see how it is then.

I sit down in my desk next to Leah who’s drawing in her sketchbook. From the title she doodles atop of the page I can see that she’s drawing something for my next video. I’ve actually asked her for this a couple of times before because a little bit of art just makes every simple video a little better.

And my next one is pretty simple. It’s a freaking Q and A. Because I’m basic.

No, but really, I filmed it a couple of days ago, and yes, it was pretty chill and easy to film, obviously, but it made me feel a little lazy too. So I decided to just go for it. Instead of the generic ten minute Q and A video out there — answering questions like What is your favorite color? (It’s blue. I’m basic.) — mine is half an hour long and I talk about a lot — and I mean a lot — of gay stuff. Because I can now, I guess.

„These look amazing“, I say, peeking at Leah’s sketches.

„Wait until I draw them on your iPad.“ She smiles contentedly at the drawing of a little cartoon Bieber. „Is today after school okay?“

„Yeah, sure“, I say, leaning back in my seat. I open Twitter and get lost in my timeline for a moment. It’s the usual mess, but I have learned to read it a long time ago. After that, I switch to the Gmail app.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com

TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com

DATE Dec 5 at 8:49 AM

SUBJECT: Re: Daydreams…and the like

Good morning, Blue.

So I am at school and I’m much less of a zombie than I thought I would be. Although the only sleep I got last night was…oh right, none. And now is maths time — again, and — also again — you’re sneaking your way into my mind.

Can you believe, I don’t even know if you’re interested, but I’m posting a Q&A video. Like I’m that basic white dude now, Blue, and I’m sorry. But don’t worry I haven’t fallen into the abyss too far, I’ll film something more fun for this week also. I think I want to sort my friends into Hogwarts Houses. I obviously know mine and my best friend’s (Leah), but Abby has only now started reading the books, and I’m not even sure whether Nick can read.
I can’t help but turn in my seat and grin at Nick for a second. He obviously has no idea what’s going on.

So that was my introduction, Blue, now Butter bei die Fische! like my mom always says (’Cards on the table‘): What Hogwarts House are you in?

And spoiler: I will judge you based on what you’re going to answer.

Love,
Simon

PS: If you tell me you don’t know I will stop talking to you :-) 

I tap send and then, because again, I can’t help it, I turn around in my seat. Bram and Nick still stand pretty much in the middle of the room, talking, and now other students are passing them by because the first bell just rang, and Bram has his phone in hand.

But it doesn’t light up with a notification, nor does Bram react to anything other than whatever Nick just said.

I guess people really do just move places all the time.

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Leah’s on my bed, drawing away on my iPad, whereas I’m trying to do my homework. I mean, I don’t even know why I’m pretending anymore. It’s not like I plan to go to college anyway.

Which has nothing to do with YouTube. If it wasn’t for that, yes, I would have probably ended up going, but I wouldn’t have been happy with it. I just don’t think college is for me. High school is so much of a shit show I definitely don’t need more of that.

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Dec 5 at 5:03 PM
SUBJECT: Butter bei die Fische???!?

Dear Simon,

You just made me laugh so much with that German saying. Sure enough it translates to cards on the table, but have you ever googled the word for word translation? BUTTER WITH THE FISH?! What the heck are Germans even thinking? Why would
they put butter with their fish? (I mean, I don’t like butter in general but— I’m just confused.)

Please tell me more of the things your mom says, though, I’m having a good laugh over here.

Also, I am excited for a Q&A. I know it’s not quite on brand for you, but you know, I’m a little nosy. And I’m predicting you will put your own little twist on it anyway.

About that other video idea, though? Yes. Talk about Harry Potter all that much on your channel, I will eat it up. And can I predict something else? Like, I obviously don’t know your friends personally, and I don’t think you ever mentioned your house, so I’m guessing.

Leah: That one is so tough. I mean, I’ve never really seen her, but she does a lot of graphic doodling in your videos, right? I’m just going to guess she’s a Ravenclaw. I really don’t know.

Nick: He’s bold, you know. Like, he went for a swim across that pond last December in one of your dare videos, didn’t he? My guess is Gryffindor.

Abby: Oh wow. I mean, I have seen her in your liveshows, Simon, and she’s a cute one. Almost as cute as you. So it would only make sense to put her in the same house as you. But then again… I think she’s also bold and brave — just in another way than Nick is. Maybe she’s a perfect hybrid.

You: Hufflepuff. Don’t even try to convince me otherwise. Face the truth.

Love,

Blue

PS: I’m a Ravenclaw.

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Dec 5 at 9:29 PM
SUBJECT: Re: Butter bei die Fische???!!!

Blue,

What do you mean I’m a Hufflepuff? Me?? No way!

I’m just kidding.

Okay, now I’m a little, teeny tiny bit sad that we are not in the same house. Do you realize we could have cuddled in front of the fireplace all by ourselves in the common room?

But no. You have to be in Ravenclaw.
And I could never sneak into your common room, because those riddles? I’m dumb. Or more like not creative enough to solve them. I know Ravenclaw isn’t all about being smart. Although you are, Blue.

Your guesses about my friends are good, and I agree with some of them. Leah’s a Slytherin, though. Through and through. But I guess you wouldn’t know unless you talked to her.

My friends just came over to film the video actually, and it was a lot of fun. I’m not going to talk about the results though, you have to wait and watch. ;-)

Love,
Simon

PS: The Q&A is uploading right now. Leah’s proof-watched it and she says it’s embarrassing. Guess it fits my brand after all.

PPS: I’m attaching a notes sheet to this email with all the German crap my mom says on a daily basis. I will put the translation next to it, but feel free to google the word for word one too and let me know your favorites.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone comment your Hogwarts house challenge! :D
Nick, Abby, Leah, and I stand outside Simon's door. Leah has a party horn loosely hanging from her mouth. Abby rings the bell. The Spiers family car is missing on the porch, but Nick assured us that Simon is home.

A few seconds after the bell stopped ringing, there is the sound of a dog skittering toward the door, and also Simon's damped voice, calling it back. Then, he opens the door, half bend down, holding on to the dog's collar with one hand.

It's the first time I see the Golden Retriever that goes by the name of Bieber in person, not just in a video. And I might die of cuteness. I almost drop the box I'm holding in my hands because I feel the urge to crouch down and pet him. He tries to wiggle his way out of Simon's grip but fails. Instead of surrendering though, he just falls onto his back, legs in the air. Simon lets go of him, finally.

"What are you guys doing here?", he asks, driving a hand through his hair and messing it up even more. He's in sweatpants and a stripy sweater, *aka* I'm actually weak in the knees.

"You know", Abby says, "Just being the best friends. As per usual." I lift the mint green box in my hands a little higher to emphasize her words.

Simon looks clueless.

Leah, who has been attacked by Bieber for the past minute, gets back up from petting him and grins at Simon. "We saw your tweets, man. Three hundred thousand!"

"Oh." Simon's cheeks blush a little. "Thanks."

"So we got you something", Nick says, nodding toward me, "But maybe let us in first?"
"Oh… yeah." Simon opens the door a little wider and lets us move past him into the kitchen.

I place the box on the counter and look at him. "You open it."

"Guys." Simon eyes the box up and down. "Please don't prank me or something."

"Open the damn box, you coward", Leah laughs, "It's not a prank."

Simon shoots her one more suspicious look, but eventually opens the lid of the box. Inside is the biggest, most delicious looking Oreo cheesecake. It's entirely covered in cookie crumbs and has 300K written on the top layer in white icing.

"Wha— Did you make this?"

"Bram", Abby says.

Simon looks up at me, eyes big as saucers.

"I didn't make it", I say defensively, "But I bought it. There's this cute store just outside Atlanta. I saw it when my dad first picked me up at the airport. And I thought… I don't know. It's okay if you don't like it, I mean—"

"Man, shut the fuck up." Nick pats my shoulder. "It was a great idea. And Simon's obviously speechless. Which literally never happens. So."

"I'm not… I'm…" Simon looks down on the cake once more, then back up to me. "Thank you."

"It's from all of us", I say.

Simon nods. "Right. Okay. Uhm… Do we… eat it?"

"Hell, yeah?", Abby says, already on her way to grab plates.

Simon grins up at me. Then he draws out his phone and snaps a picture of the cake.

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There is only one way to celebrate something, and that one way is Oreo cake. Well, it's this Oreo cake in particular. Because it's homemade from the little cake store. They did three layers of perfectly-gooey chocolate cake on top of each other with icing in-between. Then icing all around it and the entirety covered in Oreo crumbles.

We sit outside on the Spier's veranda, even though it's cold. Bieber's running around the garden, chasing a tennis ball Leah keeps throwing for him.

"He's such a ball junkie." Simon shakes his head, then he looks at Nick. "Don't say it."

But Nick apparently can't hold it back anymore. "So are you."

Abby is the first one to laugh, but Simon is quick to follow. "Alright, man", he says, "You kicked it off with the first gay joke. And you know what? I think I'm ready for that."
Leah nudges his arm with hers once, smiling, "We're glad you're back to normal."

Abby nods. "I mean, the last few weeks have been shit."

And then everyone looks at me. And I remember I'm supposed to be confused. I should look like I don't know why everything has been shit for Simon since he came out. But Simon steps in quickly and tells me the short version of his outing. I notice that he leaves out the part where he was caught kissing another boy. He just says someone outed him without his consent.

"That sucks", I say.

"Stating the obvious", Nick nods, "I swear, every time I see Martin Addison, I'm this close to punching him in the face."

Simon takes another piece of cake. "Chill, Nicky. If someone actually punches him, it's going to be me."

And because of the likelihood of that, everyone laughs.

***

Abby and Nick leave around 4 pm, taking Leah with them to give her a ride home. I decide to stay behind and help Simon to clean up the kind of mess we made with all the plates.

I rinse them and sort them into the dishwasher while he tries to stuff what's left of the cake in the fridge.

"Thanks", he says as I let the dishwasher fall shut, "For helping to clean up."

"No problem", I say. And it's hard to look away from his eyes. Maybe it's because of the gloomy weather outside, or because of his slightly rosy cheeks, but they seem extra sparkly today.

But I manage to tear my eyes away from his before the situation becomes weird. My gaze falls upon a little stack of books on the dining table. Except they aren't books but photo albums.

Simon follows my gaze. "Oh. Oh no. No, Bram."

"Please", I pout, "Come on."

"My mom left them there after her nostalgic outburst yesterday evening because" His mimics his mother's voice, "All my babies are so grown up already!"

I grin. "Cute."

"Uhm, no", he says, "What's in there is not cute. Okay, except for my oldest sister, Alice. She was a cute baby. Nora and I looked like a bad version of the Michelin Man."

"What?"

"Google it. Or don't."
I take a step closer to the albums.

"Okay, fine", he says, "I'll show you."

***

I can't help it, when Simon flips open the first page I burst out laughing. It's a picture of him on what must have been his first day of freshman year. He's standing in front of the house, little Nora is in the background, and he's wearing a shirt with a big wolf print on it and the baggiest pair of jeans I have ever seen.

"What the heck is that outfit?", I finally manage to breathe through my laughter.

Simon looks like he has to hold back a grin as well. "That was me after that guy, Remy, from summer camp told me I looked gay. So naturally, I gathered the most loose fitting pants in the world and refused to wear anything else for six months straight."

"Wait", I say, "You thought you looked straight in that?"

"Listen!", he giggles. That sound will be the death of me. "That was the time I was dreaming about Daniel Radcliffe every night. I was confused."

"No level of confusion could ever excuse that outfit." I nudge his shoulder with my own. And it's like a little electric shock. I'm sure he's feeling it too. I move my fingers to flip the page.

"Stop!" He swats my hand away. "We should do that on camera!"

"What?"

"I haven't looked at these in ages! We should look at them together and record our reactions", he says, already getting up from the chair he's been sitting on.

My ass is practically glued to my seat. "Oh, I… I don't know. Isn't it weird for me to be on your channel?"

"Huh? No, absolutely not. You're my friend, aren't you?"

I swear, my heart skips a beat. "Uhm, yeah. I mean, I think so."

"I think so too." He grins. "So come on!"

***

Not going to lie, filming a video with Simon is a lot of fun. I mean, it didn't even feel like filming at all. We just laughed at his ridiculous middle school hair and outfits. But his hand was brushing against mine a couple of times, and it felt almost like lightning. Like electricity running between us.
Simon shoves the photo albums aside and gets up from the ground. "You know what would ruin all of this right now?", he asks, fumbling with the camera, "If the camera died halfway through. But… Okay, no, we're good."

"Did this happen to you before?", I ask.

"Funnily enough, yes. I did a Girlfriend Tag back in the day." He rolls his eyes, grinning. "I know what you're thinking — let me explain. So I was dating this girl, Anna, and as if things weren't weird enough already, people begged me to do a Girlfriend Tag with her. I mean, she's a sweet girl. Pretty. Whatever. But we had no chemistry whatsoever." He pauses. "Probably because I'm gay."

"Yeah, that could be the reason", I say.

He laughs, "Anyway. I didn't let it show, but filming the whole tag was pure torture. I mean, I liked her, but I had to pretend the whole time I liked liked her. And after we were done filming, I realized the camera died halfway through and we had to record the whole thing again."

"Why did you break up?", I ask, "I mean… you obviously didn't tell her you were gay, did you?"

"God, no." He shakes his head. "It was… It's kinda sad actually. She told me she loved me and I… I just couldn't say it back. And she was hurt. Obviously. And then we just… ended things."

I remember how guilty I felt because of how happy I was when Simon announced the breakup. No one knew he was gay back then, but still. I didn't like seeing him with someone. Not that I was crazy jealous or something. It just irked me.

"The entire relationship was one big awkward mess, to be honest", he says, putting the ring light back in its place next to his bookshelf.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean… Okay, so I have had girlfriends before Anna", he says, "Stop looking at me like that. I was confused."

It's hard to hold back a grin. Not because of what he's talking about, although that's probably so humiliating that I will be laughing about that too, but because his face is as red as a tomato.

"I dated this girl, Maria, when I was… fifteen, I think. She actually liked the baggy jeans." He nods toward one of the photo albums. "Anyway. I had my first kiss with her, and that was awkward, too, but we were fifteen, so obviously, absolutely everything is awkward. But with Anna… You know, I was seventeen. And you know what teenagers wanna do when they're seventeen and alone in a bedroom?"

I bite down on my bottom lip so I don't laugh just yet. Please, go on, Simon, I want to hear every humiliating detail.

"Yeah. Sex." He fumbles with the tripod of his camera now. "And I mean…” He shoots me a quick look. "I wanna have sex. Just not… with a girl. But I couldn't say that to Anna."

"Wait." The grin fades from my face. I remember his email. He said he never had sex. That he wouldn't be able to do it with a girl! "So she wanted… but you… You didn't go along with it, did you?"

"No. Not all the way, at least." He looks down at his hands. "We did some stuff and I guess it was okay… Even though I felt really guilty for imagining Ryan Gosling the whole time, but then… Let
me just tell you: girls' bodies? Weird. Confusing."

Okay, so I knew Simon was more experienced than me. I knew he's already had his first kiss, and I obviously had not. But I kind of thought we were on the same page regarding sex?

He shakes his head. "Sorry. That was TMI."

"No", I say quickly, "It's actually funny. Imagining you— Well, not imagining but—"

The wide grin that spreads on his face shuts me up immediately. *Shit.* And looking at his face, my imagination goes haywire. Anna easily turns into me, and I imagine us doing all the things he's already done once, but with the wrong person.

"What about you, though?" Simon sits down cross-legged on his bed, looking down at me. "Any past-relationships?"

*Listen. I didn't plan to lie to his face. I would never do that.* Except I am doing it right now. "Well, not with girls."

He rolls his eyes. "I see. You're never going to let me see the end of that. I get it. You're just like my friends."

I grin up at him. "I'm sorry."

He shakes his head. "The funniest thing was", he says, "Anna actually came up to me the day after I was… I came out and asked me if I dated her because she looked like a boy."

I can't hold it back any longer, I burst out into laughter.

Simon watches me as I try to get myself back together, hugging a pillow to his chest. "I sometimes laugh about that, too. Still. Now tell me about your exes."

I ignore the little drop my stomach does. I don't even know if I'm a good liar; if I can pull this off. I don't even know why the hell I'm doing it."

"There's only one ex, actually", I say. And the words leave my lips so casually, it almost throws me off track. *What is this? Who am I?* I almost cannot describe it. *I said it before, being here in Creekwood, and especially with Simon, feels like I can define myself in a completely new way. I can tell him I have dated a boy. I can tell him I'm experienced. Maybe… Maybe he'll be interested?*

There's this tiny little voice inside of me, the one that used to be so loud back in Savannah, that's currently telling me what a bad idea all of this is. *You shouldn't lie to him. You don't lie to people you care about. You should tell him you're Blue.*

But I cannot do that. I don't even want to. When I'm with him I feel like I'm twice the size of me. I weirdly feel confident in my own skin for once. And it's only because of him, that's crazy. And I forget about Blue because Blue is me when I'm not with Simon. A small, sad kid that is lowkey confused the entire time and still needs to find his place in the world.

But right now, I feel like I found my place. And said place may not even be a place but a person after all. And I kind of don't care about Blue anymore. Not until I'm back at home, anyway.

"His name is Luke", I say and it scares me that I don't even feel any guilt, "He's a year older than me. Meaning he's at college now. Harvard."
"Wow", Simon says, "But, uh... Why did you break up?"

I shrug. "Because he went to college." Somehow, this doesn't even feel like a lie. Luke and I were friends before he went to Harvard. And we did stop talking once he was gone. We weren't dating but... This is just stretching the truth a little, right? "We weren't dating for a long time anyway. We were childhood friends before that."

"Huh." Simon nods, and then I can see a faint pink color creeping up his cheeks. "So... I really don't want to sound like an inexperienced baby gay but I guess that's my brand now so... Did you?"

"No", I say, "Some things. But not everything."

He nods again. It almost seems like he's a little relieved. *Maybe this is working.* "Do you... Do you wanna come up here?" He pats the spot next to him on the mattress.

*This is definitely working.* But I'm also kind of freaking out right now. I nod anyway and get up from the ground. When I sit down next to him, it's impossible not to have his knee touching mine, since he's still sitting cross-legged.

"The cake thing was really nice." His voice is a little more careful now. "Thank you."

"You did already thank me", I remind him, "And it's not a big deal. Or I mean, it is a big deal. Three hundred thousand subs, that is."

His eyes fall down from my eyes to my lips and —*this is driving me crazy.* "You know", he says, and it's close to a whisper, "I just... I wish I would have experienced all these things with a guy. No offense to Anna."

"You still can."

"I was hoping you'd say that." I can feel his breath against my lips. *This is happening.* How is this happening? I'm panicking. I told him I had done this before when in reality, the closest I have come to a kiss is drooling into my pillow at night. And I know he's done this before. With girls, yes, but also with a guy. What's his deal with that guy, anyway? I can't ask that right now. Bram doesn't know this, Blue does. I'm—"

"SIMON?!", comes a woman's voice echoing up the stairs, "Why is there half a cake in the fridge?"

Chapter End Notes

HELLO ARE YOU STILL HERE? I didn't update for such a long time and I'm super sorry!
But I kind of have this story figured out now. A quick summary: Bram is very confused and probably everyone can tell what a mess this is going to become.
When I come home later that evening, I'm still so full that my tummy kind of hurts. I stayed for an hour or so longer after Simon's mom interrupted whatever was about to happen between him and me.

My stomach does flips whenever I think about his words. "I was hoping you'd say that." And I'm pretty sure we were about to kiss. In hindsight, I'm kind of mad at myself. I should have just gone for it. How hard can kissing be?

But at the moment, I was freaking out. Blue stepped into the picture when I least wanted him to, causing me to get all insecure. I feel like some messed up in real life version of Eddie Brock and Venom.

Dad waits for me in the living room, feet propped up on the coffee table before the couch. "The Prodigal Son returns", he says solemnly when I close the front door behind me.

"Hey." I step into the living room.

"There are leftovers in the fridge", he says, muting the TV.

"I'm good, thanks."

He nods. Then he stares at his feet for a moment. One of his toes is peeking out of a tiny hole in his sock. "Uhm, there's a package for you in your room. It's from your mom."

It's as if some kind of hatch has been opened in my brain and Simon's and Cool Bram's Almost Kiss fell through it into a dark hole and disappeared. Mom sent me a package! Maybe she wants me to come back. Do I want to go back? I don't know, but she sent a package!

"I didn't open it, obviously", Dad says, his voice sounding kind of wary.

I step from one foot to the other. "Okay, uh, I'll let you know what she sent. Okay?"

"Okay", he smiles, but his upright, kind of stiff posture doesn't change one bit.

***

When I come down to the basement, the package is on the floor right before my bed. I kind of
expected something like an Amazon package, not one that is about half my body size.

On top of it is a letter in a green envelope, half covered in stamps. It looks funny, which is why I can say for sure it's not coming from Mom. I toss it on my bed, saving it for later. Then I grab scissors from the desk and slice the package open carefully.

It's filled to the brim. When I open it, the insides almost flow over the edges. It's clothes on the top, all my clothes as I quickly notice. Then books and DVDs. Mom even took the fairy lights off my wall and packed them. All the posters, too, neatly rolled up so they don't crease.

I didn't even realize I was on my knees until I feel myself falling back on my butt, pulling my thighs up against my chest. I know what this is. This is not a peace offering, it's the exact opposite. It's her saying "Here is all your stuff. I never want to see you again. Goodbye."

I can't even cry. I want to, but my body doesn't seem to obligate anymore. It feels kind of numb and cold, while my insides are raging and burning. I want to curl up in bed but can't get myself to stand up. I stare at the shipping label on the box, reading my mom's name over and over again, wondering if someday, this wouldn't pain me anymore.

Dad finds me half an hour later, still on the floor, still not moving. He starts panicking almost immediately once he sees the insides of the package. Which means he understands. Which means there is no doubt in the message Mom wanted to send with the package.

Dad crouches down next to me and wraps his arms around my body, one around my legs, one around my back, and we just sit on the floor like that or a few minutes. He's the one who cries. I still can't. I try to sync my breathing to his, otherwise, I'd just stop.

"I'm so sorry, Bram." His voice is hoarse. "I'm not gonna lie, I was expecting this. I didn't want to let you come down here alone at first, but—"

I shake his arms off gently. If there is anything worse than this package it is my Dad crying about it. I don't even think he is particularly sad. It's probably his way of expressing how mad he is at my mother.

"I'm going to call her", he says as if he just read my mind.

"No", I say. It's the first word I've spoken in an hour. Without looking at him, I get up from the ground and start unpacking the box. I stack the books on my desk to sort them into the shelf later. The clothes go in a pile on the floor in front of the closet for now. The posters land on my bed. "Do you have tape for the posters?", I ask.

"Bram." He gets up as well. "Don't—"

"Thank you, Dad", I say, staring at my bed sheets, "For not being Mom."

"I love you, son." He presses a kiss to my cheek. "But please talk to me."

I bite my jaws together until it hurts. I'm sure if I applied one more bit of pressure, my teeth would crack. But I nod at him. "Just. I just wanna unpack this, Dad. And get the box out of here as fast as possible."

He pats my back. Then he wipes his eyes with his shirt sleeve and leaves the room to get tape.
It takes about an hour to unpack. I don't own that much stuff, after all. And in some really messed up way, I'm kind of glad my mom sent the box. At least now I have all of my things here and the basement is now officially the dopest thing in the entire world. I hung up the posters above my bed, draped the fairy lights all over my bookshelf and sorted the books into it.

The last thing I find at the very bottom of the box is an envelope. I tear it open and pull out about fifty sheets of paper. At the very top is a letter from my mom. Written on the computer and printed out. Signed at the bottom with her signature; not her name, her signature. I hand Dad everything but the letter and flop down on my desk chair, reading.

Abraham,

I hope you're doing well at your father’s. As you probably noticed, I sent you all your belongings you left behind as I don't expect you to come back anytime soon.

I am sorry, I truly am, but I cannot accept your decision, Bram. Your lifestyle now is not God's will. And I won't accept you arguing against that.

I will not try to change you. While I cannot accept it, I will respect it.

Herewith, I send you the documents as well that enable you unrestricted access to the bank account your dad and I created for you when you were born and invested in every month ever since. It was supposed to be for your college funding.

I will send money up until you turn eighteen next month, then my side of child support will stop. It is up to you on how to use all of the money, it's entirely, rightfully yours. If your dad is not on board with this, he can ask the bank to maintain it from you until you're eighteen. That is his choice, I have nothing to do with it anymore.

I hope you respect my decision as much as I respect yours.

Best regards.

I stare at her signature, then I close my eyes for a second before crumbling the paper in my hands and tossing it into the bin. Now a tear is falling to my cheek.

Dad's still staring at the papers. "Well, guess you're a millionaire now, kid."

I wipe my cheek. "What? No way."

"Yeah, just kidding", he says, "Not a millionaire, but it's quite something still." He tilts one of the papers for me to look at and holy shit, that is quite a number there!

I swallow and give the paper a gentle toss back in his direction. "Can you take care of it?", I ask, "Until I'm eighteen, I mean."

He nods.

"And I want to give you rent for this", I say, looking around the room.
His head snaps back at me. "Don't you dare. Are you crazy? You're my son!"

"Yes, but you never… Mom just sent me here without your real consent."

"I was consenting."

"No, you said yes because otherwise, I would have been homeless", I say.

"Bram… D-Do you really believe that?" He folds the papers back up, putting them into the pocket of his sweatpants.

"I mean", I say, "You never planned on having me here. At least not for so long, I—"

"Are you kidding me?" He actually sounds a little angry all of a sudden. "Right. It's not like I fought rag and bone against your mother when we got the divorce. I wanted you to move here with me!"

"I—"

"No offense", he says, "but I knew I was the better way to go. I have more time for a child. God, I even wanted another one! But your mom makes more money than me, so I finally gave in and let you stay with her." A new stream of tears wets his cheeks. "I see what a big mistake that was now."

I wrap my arms around his shoulders. "Dad. No. It's okay, none of this is your fault."

"What I'm saying is", he lifts his head and looks me directly in the eye, "that I will not accept any money from you. I want you here. For as long as possible even. I know you've only been here for a week, son, but it feels so good to have you back, I'm already dreading the day you have to move out for college."

Okay, now I'm crying, too. This is a mess. My life, that is. Like a rollercoaster. Or a Ferris wheel. One moment, when I'm with Simon and his friends these days, I'm on top of the world, I feel like I could do anything and never not succeed; the next I'm at rock bottom, trying to pick up the broken pieces that once were my life, crying over my mom kicking me out just because I am finally being myself.

Chapter End Notes

i stongly dislike (hate) bram's mom in this woops (also...that other letter...HMMMMMMMM who wrote it?? tune in next chapter to find out;))

on a happier note, hi! i'm so glad you're still here, reading this! thanks for all the kudos, comments, and love on the last chapter ❤
A Letter To The Lost

Chapter Notes

Thanks again for all the comments and love for Bram's dad ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's just when I got to bed that I remember the other letter. The one half covered in stamps. I find it halfway hidden under my pillow when I lay down with a book to read before eventually going to sleep.

I toss the book to the side and open the envelope, careful not to rip it for whatever reason. It's an actual letter this time, handwritten and all, and I think I would recognize the handwriting everywhere.

Bram —

Fuck, how do I start this? I haven't written a letter since, like, primary school or whatever. Anyway. Why am I writing a letter, you might ask? The answer is, I don't really know. I don't know if we're on texting terms, or if I can call you.

Which is fucking stupid because we didn't even fight. You just left.

After you disappeared, I first thought you were just sick — you know you get too nauseated to go to school at least once a month. I'm starting to think that might be an anxiety thing, Bram. Wow, look at me go after half a semester of taking a Psychology class at school.

But after three days, I actually went to your house and asked your mom. And she told me what happened. Well, she told me you came out and that you were staying with your dad for a while. But I have been a part of your life for long enough to know what that means. She kicked you out, right?

Fuck, Bram, I'm so fucking sorry. And I'm also mad. It's kind of half-half, really. Like, my first reaction when I got back to my car after your mom told me was "Why the fuck didn't he tell me?"

I thought we were best friends, man. I thought I'd be the first person you'd text when your mom literally kicked you out of the house. But maybe I gave off the wrong impression for all these years? I know we're around Bryan a lot, and he can be kinda annoying and douchey, but I never thought of myself that way?

Please be honest, do I come off as an asshole or something?

Because I don't mean to. Really, Bram, you could have told me. I'd be cool with it. I am cool with it. More than cool. It's great. Or normal. Whatever, honestly.

But maybe I'm interpreting too much into it. I was really sad, and I talked to my sister about it (I didn't tell her it was you exactly. I said 'a friend of mine'.) and she told me that everyone has to come out in their time.
So I guess you just weren't ready yet. And then you were and told your mom first. Which makes sense. You probably meant to come out to me sometime after that, right?

What I'm trying to say here is — Listen. I love you, dude. Honestly. And I miss you and your nerdy comments on literally everything Bryan and I say. Please write to me (not a letter, if you don't mind. We can just text.) or call me. Whenever, really.

Love you, man. Take care.

Garrett

PS: If life is really shitty at your dad's, come live with me!

It's crazy. My mom's letter, the whole package even, left me raging inside, yes, but numb on the outside. This, however, breaks my heart and fixes it at the same time. Tears are streaming down my face, and before I know it, I'm full-on sobbing. Tears smudging the ink on the paper, snot running from my nose, all that.

I didn't know I needed to hear this. I didn't know how much I needed someone from my hometown to tell me it was okay. To accept me.

Suddenly, I feel bad because the truth is, I never saw Garrett as my best friend. Well, I kind of did, but also not really. I was always one to think I didn't have a best friend. Sure, I had a friend I was closest to — Garrett for that matter — but I never actually felt close to him.

I always thought being best friends with someone means having some sort of deep connection with them, when in reality, sometimes it just means you both like to kick a ball around in your free time.

The feeling that Garrett saw, sees, me as his best friend, leaves me absolutely motionless for a second. Then I grab my phone and unplug it from its charger. I don't even care that it's eleven at night. Whenever, he said.

Garrett picks up on the second ring. "Bram?"

"I just read your letter." It doesn’t matter that my voice sounds thin and cracky.

He's silent for a solid minute, then I can hear him sniffing. "Man, I just—"

"I'm sorry", I say, "I'm really, really sorry I didn't tell you."

"No, Bram, I—" There's shuffling against the microphone. I'm guessing he sat up in bed. "I mean, yeah. But I think my sister is right. You had to do it in your own time."

"I should have known you were a safe place to come out", I say, hugging my legs to my chest.

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry", I swallow.

"So do it now", Garrett says.
"Huh?"

"Technically, you didn't come out to me. Your mom told me. I never heard it from you." He pauses for me to answer. When I don't, he adds, "So. Abraham Louis Greenfeld. Is there something you want to tell me?"

I cringe at my own name, while another tear falls on my cheek. "Garrett?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm gay." And I don't know why it feels like fucking Mount Everest has been lifted off my chest, but it does. In the back of my mind I know, this is how it was supposed to feel when I first told Mom. But I can't look back right now — for once, I can't, I'm in the moment. And this feels very fucking amazing.

"Cool, man", Garrett says casually, "Thanks for telling me."

I grin almost unconsciously. "It's really good to hear your voice."

"How is life with your dad?"

"Pretty good", I admit, "He's really bad at cooking. Which means I get to order Pizza at least three times a week."

"Dude", he laughs, "When can I come visit?"

I grin. "And guess who I met?"

"Nicole Scherzinger."

"Wha— No."

"Okay, I don't know. Who?", Garrett asks.

"Simon."

Garrett doesn't say anything.

"Like, from YouTube", I clarify, "SimonSays?"

"No fucking way. Where? How?"

"At a gas station, of all places", I say, "I know, right? He lives here. My dad is his English teacher."


"I mean, kinda", I let my voice trail off.

"Dude. If he gives you a shoutout on Instagram, you could easily gain like 100K of followers!"

"I don't really want that", I say, and then it kind of hits me. The fact that Simon could find my Instagram easily now. He knows my name, he has my number, it's easy to find me now.

I put Garrett on speaker, roll on my stomach and open Instagram. Up until now, Simon hasn't found
me. What am I thinking? That he typed my name into the search bar? Wishful thinking, that is. Anyway. My account is on private. But still. I scroll through all my twenty-five posts, only half listening to Garrett rambling, making sure no picture or caption could link me to Blue.

"Dude, you still there?"

"Yeah", I say.

"I mean, I was kinda joking when I asked when I can come over but I also kinda wasn't", he says, "So?"

"Uhhh", I make, holding my phone against my ear again, "Sure. What about Christmas break?"

"Awesome, man. I'm game."

***

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Dec 7 at 0:43 AM
SUBJECT: Re: Butter bei die Fische???!!!

Dear Simon,

I just watched your Q&A. Now I know every gay fantasy you've ever had and I feel very powerful. Muhahaha! But I guess three hundred thousand other people know them now, too. Hm, not sure if I like that. I'd much rather be the only one knowing what goes on in your head when you're alone and it's dark outside.

Congrats on 300'000 subs by the way!

Clearly, I'm in a good mood. Which is partly because of the video, partly because I just talked to my best friend on the phone. And I had the chance to come out to him (I didn't have the opportunity since, you know… my mom kicked me out).

I think I'm genuinely doing better, Simon. And I want to thank you. I know you probably think you haven't done anything, but you have. You've stuck with me through this. And just… your videos help a lot, too. Maybe this sounds a little creepy. Hm.

And I have to say, cuddling with you in front of the fireplace in a Hogwarts common room — of whatever house, I don't care — sounds like a plan. I'd like that. Not necessary at Hogwarts, though. I like the idea of cuddling with you in general.

Is life okay at yours at the moment? I hope so.

Love,
Blue
PS: I'm crying at the word for word translations of the German sayings. I love them all, especially everything involving sausages and pigs (What is it with Germans and pigs?). I think my favorite is "Ich glaube mein Schwein pfeift" because it literally translates to "I think my pig whistles".

I'll laugh myself to sleep now.

Chapter End Notes

Garrett got the redemption arc he deserves! I love him!
Friends With Benefits

Chapter Notes

if you checked the added tags recently you would know what’s about to happen... (pls read the note at the end before you fight me)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I am that one person in the entire world that actually wakes up before his alarm goes off. Every single day. I could easily sleep ten more minutes, except once my eyes snap open for the first time on a new day, it’s like some sort of green light for my thoughts.

I roll to my side — I usually sleep on my back with the blanket pulled up all the way up to my nose and wrapped around my body like a burrito — and grab my phone from the nightstand. Monday, December 8th. I sigh.

The first thing I do is turn the alarm off. Then I tap my way back to the home screen, reply to a message Garrett sent me during the night — he often pulls all-nighters playing video games — and finally open Instagram.

And then I die. Like, literally. Because the first thing I see is a picture of Simon Spier naked.

For some reason, I turn the brightness of my phone further up, then I proceed to stare at the picture. Simon isn’t exactly naked, I exaggerated that one — wishful thinking!

On the picture, he is standing in front of the mirror in his bedroom, shirtless and in pajama pants. The pants hang a little lower on his body so the hem of his boxers is showing. The thing, though, is the light that’s falling through the window next to him, breaking in the glass, and casting a rainbow diagonally over his body.

living my best gay life, is the caption.

This is not something I should see in the morning, already half hard from whatever my subconscious is pulling at night. I roll on my stomach, pressing my face into my pillow for a second. But I cannot not look at the picture. It’s almost mesmerizing.

Simon isn’t exactly muscular. Even though he’s short — he doesn’t seem short in his videos and pictures, though — he’s kind of lanky. But he got this faint outline of abs that kind of makes me lose my shit.

"Shit", I mumble into my pillow. I really need to stop looking!

It takes all my willpower to give the post a double tap and leave it at that. It would be creepy to jerk off to that picture, right? Yes. Now mind out of the gutter!

I’m actually one of the first people to like the picture — probably because it’s barely seven in the morning. I lock my phone and try to cool down. But I can’t concentrate for long because the screen lights up with a notification almost immediately.

@SimonSays requested to follow you
I swipe the notification to the right and pinch in my code. My finger hovers over the accept button for a few seconds. I mean, I literally just double checked my profile yesterday, and it's all safe and sound. I press down. And it feels weird because absolutely nothing changes, but at the same time, everything does, because Simon can now have a look at what my life was like one, three, six months ago. And this time without me lying to his face.

***

The fact that I lied to Simon doesn't sit well with me at all. I'm glad my dad isn't big on breakfasts because I'm way too nauseated to eat. *I have to talk to him. I have to tell him that I'm Blue. That I never had a boyfriend.*

I enter school with the intention of telling him — and leave it eight hours later next to him, while he rambles about something that went on during rehearsal. He mentions a girl called Taylor Metternich about five hundred times and I can't make up my mind whether he likes her or not.

"Bram?" Simon nudges my arm with his.

"Huh?", I make.

We're already at his car. He's leaning against it sideways and — seriously, I need to stop losing my shit over everything he does. But he just looks so cute and — especially with this morning's Instagram post in the back of my mind — hot in the setting sun.

"I asked", he says, and suddenly his eyes drop halfway to the ground as if it takes a lot of courage to repeat his question, "Uh… if you need a ride. We could hang at yours for a bit. Or… Or at mine, I don't care. Or… not."

"Yeah", I say. Somehow, his hysteric rambling calms me. "My dad has a meeting until six anyway. I would have just taken the bus."

Simon nods, more to himself to be honest as if to give himself the courage he needs for whatever. I'm a little scared to go home now. Scared and… excited. *I know I meant to tell him my secret today but… I can't miss this opportunity, right?*

***

Compared to Simon's room, mine is embarrassingly tidy. Maybe it's because I just moved in and things haven't had the chance to get messy yet; maybe it's just the kind of person I am.

Instead of heading for the desk chair, Simon flops down on my bed, bouncing up and down as if to test the mattress. "This room is dope. And the bed!"

"My dad built it", I say, a little proud undertone swinging with my voice.

"And you own so many books." He nods toward the shelf. And it's true. Now that Mom sent me all my stuff, which *is* mostly books, there's not a single inch of space left on the shelves. "Have you
"read all of them?"

"Most", I say. "Everything except for those on the bottom shelf. Those are tbr."

"Tb what?"

"Tbr. To be read", I say.

"Dude, wow." For a second he looks as if he wants to get up from the bed, but then he shoots me a look and stays exactly where he is. "You should make YouTube videos about books."

"No", I say. "I mean, I do watch them, but I don't think I'd be good in front of a camera."

"Actually", he says, "Our video turned out pretty good." He looks startled all of a sudden. "I mean… not our video. That sounds like some sort of porn. Not that I'm thinking about po— Okay, you know what I mean."

I bite down on my bottom lip, partly to suppress the upcoming laughter, partly because he's just so cute.

He messes his hair up with both hands. "Sorry, I'm just. You… You make me nervous."

"What?" And I'm kind of feeling brave right now or empowered, or whatever, so I sit down next to him. On my bed. "Why?"

"I don't know", he says. "Because you come here, and I meet you at that gas station and it's almost like… like I know you. Or like I should know you. It's weird. Almost like you're a missing puzzle piece."

I tilt my head a little to the side.

"And… I just feel like there is something. Between us." He gestures his index finger back and forth between our two bodies. "But. I… I just haven't made the best experiences with guys… yet. Almost no experiences. And I really like you as a friend too, but I also really want to kiss you, and not gonna lie, I was late to school this morning because I looked at every single one of your Instagram pictures, and now that I've said that out loud it sounds like I'm a stalker. Which I'm no —"

I just lean in and press my mouth against his. He's startled for a moment, and I mean, I am, too. I've never done this before! What am I thinking?! But luckily, it doesn't take long for Simon to get what is happening. And I'm really fucking relieved when he returns the kiss, takes the lead even.

His hands graze the nape of my neck – and shit. This is really happening. I'm kissing a boy. I'm kissing my crush! And then Simon pulls me even closer, and his hands travel down my sides until they eventually reach the hem of my shirt. Which is when I remember: He thinks I've had a boyfriend before!

Luckily though, his hands rest loosely on my hips, and I pray to God he doesn't notice the half-boner I'm popping right now.

A few, too short, seconds later, he pulls back. But not too far, just to rest his forehead against mine. Both our breathing is uneven, and I don't know if that's the normality after making out or if we're both just really, really worked up.

"I mean", his voice is almost a whisper, "was that picture of you shirtless and in soccer shorts from
June 12th of this year really necessary?"

I fall back into my pillows, laughing, hands half on my stomach, half in my lap. "You're one to talk! What was that post this morning, huh?"

"Pleasing the audience, that's what it was", he says, lifting his nose with faked vanity.

I push him gently.

He grins at me, but then his eyes catch mine and it fades. "What I was trying to say… First of all, now I know for sure you're an amazing kisser." He blushes. "Not that I was imagining before. But… I really like you as a friend, Bram. It's weird, you know. Normally I don't click with people that fast. The last time I clicked with someone was with Abby. But then you came. And, like, all of my friends, including me clicked with you."

I can't look away from his lips. They're slightly redder and a bit swollen.

"And I wanna keep it that way." He looks down at his lap for a second, and I can make out the outline of his phone in his pocket. "But I also kind of wanna keep kissing you. And not only kissing to be honest."

This is because of Blue. I'm pretty sure he wouldn't keep me at any distance if it wasn't for Blue. So just tell him! But I can't. Because it seems like what he's offering me here isn't that bad after all. I'd like to be friends with him, friends with the benefit of kissing and potentially more.

All of this could turn into a relationship right now if you just tell him you are Blue!

But I can't give Blue up just yet. I know that deep down. It may not feel like it right this second, but my life is still messy, and I still feel kind of broken whenever I'm alone with my thoughts. If I told Simon that I am Blue, I'd have to relive everything I have already told him. I'd give up the luxury of telling him everything in complete anonymity. Because the truth is, everything is said easier if you don't have to put your name on it.

"Sounds good to me", I say, still half buried in my pillows.

"I mean… I just can't have a relationship now."

Because of Blue.

"But in a few months — maybe. But I like you now. And I'm pretty sure I will still like you in a few months, but… until then — I just don't wanna miss out."

I nod. And then before I know it, he's the one lying back against the pillows, and we're kissing again. Somehow, we're horizontal, and I'm pretty sure he's trying to pull me on top of him right now. I give in and steady myself on my forearms, not trusting him with all my weight.

"Shit", Simon breathes against my neck, "How long did you say your dad was out?"

"Six." I'm not able to form sentences right now.

Simon makes a sound that is somewhere between a moan and a growl, then he proceeds to kiss down my neck, hands traveling down my back, all the way down to my hips, and — okay his hands are in the back pockets of my jeans. And I like this. I more than just like this. And I think he does too. I can feel it.
listen. LISTEN. I don't know if any of you know what a pantser is – let me enlighten you. It basically means you're a writer that doesn't plan or plot a story. Aka me. Hi.
So. Technically, none of this is my fault... xD
Sorry if this is not what you were expecting going into this story – let me just tell you: me neither. But I kinda sorta really like the direction this is taking soooo... *throws up peace sign*
Lyfe Sux A Lil Less

Chapter Notes

I'm so glad y'all didn't murder me for the Friends with Benefits twist :D I still really like the idea of it and I hope I can do it justice! Thanks for all the comments <3

Simon's Point Of View

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Dec 8 at 9:09 PM
SUBJECT: Update: lyfe sux a lil less

Dear Blue,

it makes me ridiculously happy to hear that you're happy. Or happier. I guess coming out in a safe place feels good in general — but after such a bad experience like yours, it must feel incredible. I never asked how your dad was reacting to the whole thing!

I'm actually in a place where my friends and I can joke about the entire thing now. That's what we do, you know. Just laughing things off. I'm starting to get really comfortable with the whole thing and let me tell you, that just feels fucking amazing.

Anyway. I'm really, really tired, but I also can't get myself to sleep, so I'll probably be a complete zombie tomorrow at school. At this point, Zombie Simon is more my personality than actual Simon Spier. I just wish school would be over already. Not gonna lie, it's not the worst thing in the entire world — I mean, there's war, gun violence, police brutality, Trump… — but it comes close.

I wish I could text you at school. Like any other person. With emails, I always feel like I have to write a long ass monologue, and I'm not really good at that, I think. My English teacher keeps telling me I have a thing with sentence fragments. I don't even. What's that supposed to mean? Hmmmmm.

Love,
Simon

PS: I highly doubt you know all my sexual fantasies just from watching the Q&A video. :-)

PPS: I kind of feel the need to change the title to Q & Gay. Just for the hell of it.
So, I guess I have a friend with benefits now. I'm not exactly sure how that happened since I literally had *nothing* planned. I kind of just… let my feelings take over, I guess. And what I feel is this: There's something between me and Bram, clearly, but I can't get Blue out of my head, and how we both started signing our emails with love.

It's a little confusing because I don't know what I would do if I ever met Blue in real life. Drop Bram like a hot baking tray? I guess that depends on how my feelings will change about all this.

Right now, my mind is always at Blue, Blue, Blue, even when I don't particularly think about him. My feelings for him are kind of like a heartbeat, soft and persistent, underlying everything. But my body wants Bram. And my mind, too, but just the platonic part of our relationship. My body, however, isn't exactly able to differentiate between platonic and romantic — at least that's how it seems.

Which is why I'm googling how to give a blowjob. Because apparently, that is my life right now. Crazy to think about, though — a month ago, I was kissing Cal Price and now I'm here, discovering that every direction to a blowjob is one and the same and not helpful at all.

So I settle for Drarry fanfiction. Believe it or not, but you can learn a lot through fanfiction.net. Leah introduced me to the world of fanfiction years ago. I must have been around thirteen. That was back when I first actively realized I might have a thing for boys. Draco and Harry were there for me during that time. Harry maybe a little too much, since he literally haunted me in my dreams.

A familiar chime interrupts my reading experience just as Draco is leaving a slow trail of wet kisses down Harry's torso. It's an email from Blue!

---

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
DATE Dec 9 at 5:53 AM
SUBJECT: I like Zombie Simon

Good morning Simon,

I think I like every version of Simon. Regular Simon, Awkward Simon, Q & Gay Simon (please change the name to that, please), Zombie Simon. As long as it's you.

I'm happy you're back to joking around with your friends. Honestly, your friends sound so amazing. You're really lucky to have them.

You might be wondering, Blue, why the hell are you writing to me this early? Well, let me explain: I am weird. And yeah, I guess you figured that out already — if not, you have to add Oblivious Simon to the list — but I actually wake up before my alarm
goes off in the mornings. There's no reason for that at all, I don't know why it happens.

All that I do know is that my thoughts are kind of like a perpetual spiral. At night, they won't let me fall asleep and then they wake me up at fucking 5:30 in the morning.

But life is better. At least when I stop thinking. My dad is amazing. My mom sent me a letter the other day. Well, not even a real letter since she typed the whole thing and added her signature, but still. I thought it was a peace offering of some sort. Which it wasn't. She just told me formal stuff and basically made clear that she wishes for me to stay away. I quote: "I will not try to change you. While I cannot accept it, I will respect it."

It's strange form of respect to kick your son out, if you ask me.

Sorry for bothering you with that in the morning, it's just… I kind of really like writing long monologues. I don't even expect you to answer to every little thing. But I like the idea of you knowing about my thoughts. Kind of like you're my diary. Which is why — Simon, I just don't know about the texting thing. I'm not scared of you hearing my voice or anything. You just have to believe me when I say that I'm better over text, and that phone calls kind of freak me out. I'm just not ready for that. You don't have to accept that, but maybe respect it? (Please don't kick me out.)

(Haha, I get the joking thing now. It really does help.)

Love,
Blue

FROM: hourtohour.notetonote@gmail.com
TO: bluegreen118@gmail.com
DATE Dec 9 at 6:06 AM
SUBJECT: I'm glad you like Zombie Simon

Dear Blue,

herewith I consent to you abusing me as your diary.

Seriously though, I'm really growing to hate your mom. I wish there was a way for me to help you other than just being virtually there for you. I'd like to be physically there for you. I guess what I mean is just that if your dad somehow stops being amazing, don't hesitate to give me a sign. Oblivious Simon (yes, he exists. You're not weird.) will always be here to welcome you home.

Oof, the Harry Potter reference. I can't help it. I haven't slept at all last night. Can't really tell you, but something is just keeping me awake (don't worry, it's nothing bad). So, naturally, what do you do when you can't sleep?

Ding ding ding!
You read Drarry fanfiction.

Or you don't just read the fanfiction, you completely abuse the Drarry tag on various social media platforms and just suck it up.

Love,
Simon

FROM: bluegreen118@gmail.com
TO: hourtohour.notetone@gmail.com
DATE: Dec 9 at 7:08 AM
SUBJECT: I'm glad you're glad I like Zombie Simon

Imagining you sucking something up isn't really helping in the early morning.

Have a good day, Simon.

Love,
Blue

I have one leg already in my jeans when I read that email, and I seriously consider taking them off again and settle back in bed with some better imagination than even Drarry could give me.

But I don't, because Nora is banging her fists against my door, yelling at me to get ready.

I look at my Silver Play Button on the wall just as Nora calls me an asswipe — a word she must have adapted from Leah — and wonder if Blue imagines my life to be like that. There's this thing about his emails that makes me believe he kind of sees through the screen. It's not that I'm a different person in my videos than I am in real life — but the power of editing exists and I am a master.

"Will you shut the fuck up?", I shout back at Nora, throw a hoodie on over my shirt and open the door. Her fist is right about to hit my forehead, but I take a small step back into my room. "We have plenty of time left until school starts, what do you want?"

"You know Mom is a breakfast witch. And I made bagels", Nora says, "So, come on."

***

I don't even have time to think about either Blue, or Bram, or Drarry at school. Apparently, I have an English quiz this morning, and I swear, Bram's dad is giving me the Mind Your Sentence Fragments Look that he developed entirely just for me. Then I have to spend lunch break in the school's library to do research for an essay that's due in two days. And now I'm in rehearsal and
supposed to be off book — which I'm not. But no one is. Well, except for Taylor.

But the misery that is Tuesday, December 9th is turned on its head as soon as the giant gull-winged doors of the auditorium swing open halfway through practice and half the soccer team comes in. Up front: Nick and Bram.

I'm startled for a moment and completely forget my next line — as far as you can forget something you never memorized in the first place — as all the thoughts about the whole Friends With Benefits thing come rushing back all at once. I didn't know Bram joined the soccer team, but I that was prone to happen just from the way he and Nick talk about sports — but because all the guys are wet. Soaked to the bone.

Bram is wearing one of those long-sleeved spandex shirts, white, and he's stripping of the dripping jersey he wore over it, and... It's a nice view.

"—mon. Simon!" Abby nudges my shoulder.

I tear my eyes away from Bram and his lean stomach. "Huh?"

"It's your turn", Abby says, looking mildly annoyed, "Has been for about five minutes."

"Oh", I clear my throat, "Yeah. Sorry. Uh. Where are we again?"

Abby groans, Taylor flops down on a plushy seat, and Miss Albright seriously starts banging her head against the clipboard she's been holding.

***

I'm out of it for all of rehearsal. For the best reason, though, I mean I could do worse than think about Bram, and Bram's body, and Bram's lips for an hour straight, but all the other Drama people are mad at me nonetheless. I mean, I have the lead role after all. And apparently, not remembering your lines, or where to stand, or what the play is even about is not ideal.

So the auditorium clears out of people pretty much as soon as the bell dismisses us. Miss Albright is the first to leave, looking pissed.

I volunteer to stay behind and take care of the props. It's the least I can do, and I really need to cool down. Like, desperately. I mean, yes, Bram and I kissed, and we're kinda having a non-dating-relationship thing going on, and all I can think about is when I'll see him next and what will happen then, but I just need to... not have a boner for a minute.

Also, with all the thoughts about him, I also realized we might have to establish some rules. I have a feeling if we don't, this whole thing might go to hell.

Well, that plan's out of the window, because there he is. Leaning against the wall with the double helixes all the way back down the hall, arms crossed in front of his chest. Still in soccer clothes. Still a little damped.

"Hey", I say, my voice hallowing in the now empty room.
"Hey."

"Are you not going to…" My voice actually cracks. *Great.* "I don't know. Change?"

"Yeah. Eventually", he says, slowly coming down the aisle between the rows of seats, "Thought you might need help with" He nods toward a muddle of colorful wigs on the ground next to my feet. "whatever that is."

I don't say anything. I just stand there, on the edge of the stage, watching him come closer. My mind trails off. I mean, of course it does, but this time, I don't even bother to stop it. Maybe I want it to. Oh, I definitely want it.

Bram comes up the stage and we sit down next to each other, feet dangling down in the orchestra pit. We sit about a feet apart, which is ridiculous, regarding the fact that I can basically feel him thinking about the same thing as I do. But I guess this is not the place to burst out into a heated make-out session.

"Good practice", Bram says.

I turn my head toward him. "That's a lie."

"Yeah." He throws me a short look, grin on his face.

"You distracted me", I say, spreading my legs a little more so our knees almost touch. It's like the air is slowly becoming thicker.

If I didn't know better, I could swear Bram is blushing. "Did I?"

I nod. "What did you think? Coming here, literally soaked", I say, "In that shirt."

I mean, you can still see his nipples through the white material.

He's definitely blushing now. And he's staring at his knees, too, when he says, "I… About yesterday…"

The elephant has officially entered the room. Not that he wasn't violently knocking on the door beforehand (kind of like Nora this morning).

"Yeah", I swallow, "About that." Even though I know for sure the auditorium is empty, I let my Ganze wander through the hall nonetheless.

"If you don't — I mean, we don't have to —"

"What? No!" I snap my head back at Bram. "No, that's not what I meant to say, I just. I think we need a few rules to make it work."

He tears his eyes away from his knees that are so close to mine, eyes wide, "Rules?"

"You make that word sound really serious", I chuckle, "I mean more like… To keep things grounded, I guess."

"And we can talk about this here?"

"I think my acting was so bad today it pissed off the entire cast. Everyone was out of here at the speed of lightning."

"It was pretty bad."

"It was pretty bad."
"Make your nipples responsible for that."

Bram grins.

"I was kind of thinking about this", I say, "Well, not really at the same time. You know this is the first time for me… doing something like that."

"Yeah, for me too", Bram says.

"But you have had a boyfriend before", I remind him, "So you have at least some kind of experience with guys. All I have is a half decent hand job a girl gave me under my Star Wars sheets."

His grin fades for the briefest fraction of a second, but then he actually giggles. "Alright. But overall I think you are more experienced."

"Whatever." I scoot another inch closer to him. "What I was thinking about: Ground rules. Boundaries."

"I'm listening."

"Maybe we should write this down", I say, reaching for my backpack behind me. All I can find are my notes from history. I turn the sheet of paper and start writing on the back.

"Wow, your handwriting sucks", Bram comments.

I stop halfway through the word Contract and hand him paper and pen. "You write then."

He huffs a laugh and — okay, yes his handwriting is way prettier. I mean, you can make out actual words!

"Rule number one", I say, and before anyone can ask: Yes, I have totally adapted this from a fanfiction I read somewhere between three and four am this night, "We can't fall in love while we're doing this."

I can see Bram hesitating for a moment, but then he scribbles it down.

"Rule number two", I clear my throat, "We can't tell anyone about this. Leah will think it's stupid, Nick will make innuendos nonstop, and Abby loses her shit over anything mildly romantic."

"Noted."

"Okay. Uhm, those are the most important things, I guess." I tap my fingers lightly against my thigh, "Anything to add?"

"Maybe that we also have to stay friends?", Bram asks, some kind of indescribable flicker in his eyes, "I mean, we can do all the, uhm, physical stuff, but we can also just meet for, let's say video games."

"I don't give a fuck about video games, but yeah, I agree", I say.

He writes it down.

"Any boundaries?", I ask, "Fetishes? Kinks I should know about?"

He looks mortified for a second before he bursts out laughing, "Simon, I'm a virgin."
I shrug, "Still."

"Not that I know of", he says, "But I'll let you know." He closes the pen and hesitates, but then his eyes meet mine. "My, uhm, only request is to… take it slow, I guess? As much as I want to, I don't think it would be smart to have full-on, uhm…"

"Sex in the next broom closet?", I suggest.

"Yeah. That." He bites down on his bottom lip. "As much as I want to."
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

a long one to make up for basically leaving y'all on read

Chapter Notes

HELLUR! you thought this story died, didn't you? well, i wouldn't blame you lmao

but no, here i am, thriving in life *smiles through the pain* and updating - fucking finally

i have a few things to say before i let you off the rail, so here goes:

1. I've been sitting on this freaking chapter for fucking ever and I'm still not happy with it (my virgo ass needs perfection)

2. If the punctuation is off, I'm sorry, I'm trying to get the hang of the English style of it. I'll figure it out, eventually, pinky promise.

3. Do I need to up the rating?? I feel like this chapter is still relatively innocent, but it might get a little more... steamy in the future (nothing actually explicit because I suck at writing that), so... sned help i guess i don't know how to rate this ugh

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bram's Point Of View

"You can close the door," Simon says, kicking his shoes off his feet, "My parents won't be home until seven."

One hour. I close the door of his room behind me, admiring the giant Radiohead poster that's taped on it for a moment.

"Hey." I turn back around only to find Simon eagerly tapping down on his phone. "You wanna stay for dinner?"

Look, I can't really place what we're doing right now. Maybe that's the first orange flag of this whole thing. I don't know if we're just being Friends this afternoon or Friends With Benefits. How am I supposed to know? Should I ask?

"Uh, sure," I say quietly.
"Okay-dokes." Without hesitation, Simon locks his phone and throws it onto his bed.

And then I know.

It is as if something shifts. During our car ride home, Simon and I chatted about all kinds of things — the weirdness that is our Instagram explore pages; that Thor is the superior superhero; the fact that, for whatever reason, mini marshmallows taste better than the original-sized ones — but now... Maybe it's the presence of his bed. Maybe it's the perpetual mess of his hair. Something heats up the air between us.

"Uh," Simon clears his throat, "So. Do you, uhm, want to watch a movie?"

I tap my fingers against my thigh a couple of times before shoving my hands fully into my pockets. "Sure."

*I don't think any of us really wants to watch a movie right now.*

"Well. I don't."

*Told you.*

I can't help but grin a little, "Then let's not." And I guess I'm feeling kind of brave again, because the next thing I know, I'm sitting on his bed, looking up at him. It feels like a weird but strangely right thing to do.

I can't tell how long it takes Simon, if he even hesitates, but now he's standing in-between my knees. It's almost like we're both in some kind of trance. "Can I kiss you?"

I swallow, "You don't have to ask."

Apparently, that's all he needed to hear. We're in the zone. And we're kissing. And we're horizontal within seconds.

Right. I think I still need to process this. This new sensation that is kissing. Even though Simon thinks I have done this before, I clearly know I haven't. Which is why it is so strange that it comes without thinking. *Nothing* in my life comes without thinking! But this — It's almost like it's second nature. I'm not thinking about gently biting his bottom lip; I'm not thinking about brushing my fingers along the nape of his neck, pulling him even closer; I'm not thinking about whether I'm doing all of this right in the first place.

It's just happening, and it all comes together in one blissful feeling.

And then Simon moans into my mouth. Well, it's more of a suffocated whimper between kisses, and he's definitely trying to suppress it, but still. I heard it and I wanna hear it again.

Half of his body is on top of me, steadied by one hand while I feel the other wander up and down my sides. And then he seems to find the courage: his hand slips under the hem of my shirt. "That okay?," he mumbles against my lips.

I take that second apart to breathe, "More than okay."

He leans in and presses his lips against mine again, slowly, hand fully laying on my chest now, completely pushing up my shirt. He backs away again. "Uh... can you... Can you. Take this off?"

It's strange. Things got really real all of a sudden. I'm pulled back to reality without any warning. I
feel Simon's grey eyes piercing into me, pupils wide, waiting.

This isn't going too fast, is it? Are we supposed to stick to just kissing for now? But then again, how long does the kissing stage last? When can we use our hands for more than just innocent roaming? When can we use our mouths for more than just hungry kisses?

That much to not thinking, I guess.

I can feel Simon backing away slowly.

Don't make this awkward, Bram! Just stop overthinking this! "Only if you take yours off as well."

Simon's mouth forms an actual O before he starts grinning shamelessly. He doesn't hesitate. Of course not. With one swift motion, he reaches behind his back and pulls his hoodie up over his head. Our clothes fall to the ground next to the bed.

Look, I think I have seen more romance movies in my life than I can count, but things aren't that easy in real life. I try to shuffle us around so that I can be on top — don't ask me where I find the courage to even think about that — but Simon turns out to have other plans. Because he is on top of me now. Not straddling me, just kind of laying, chests brushing against each other. I can hear him cursing under his breath.

And I get it. I don't think I have ever been this aroused.

Suddenly, something angrily vibrates against my thigh. I flinch back — or rather up, accidentally grinding our hips together.

"Oh, shit." Simon leans back, away from me, fumbling with the sheets until he frees his phone from where it's been trapped between my leg and the mattress. "It's my mom. Hold on. Fuck."

I just kind of stare at him. I mean, how did all of this even happen? How did I end up coming here, to Creekwood, and out of all places in America, Simon lives right here? How did we end up talking in the first place? How did we end up here, in his bed?

"Hey, ma." Simon coughs a little to cover up the fact that he is ever so slightly out of breath. "Uh, nothing. We're just studying for that, you know, that math thing. — Yeah. — Curry? Sure. Wait, let me ask, alright?" He tilts his phone away from his face and looks down at me. "Mom and Dad are bringing curry home for dinner, is that alright?"

I nod.

Simon's gaze lingers on my lips for a couple seconds longer before he eventually returns to his phone call. "Ma? — Yup. — Regular, I guess. — Half an hour? Okay. — Yes. — Okay. — Yes. — Oka-hay. — Bye." With a sigh, he hangs up and places his phone on the nightstand next to the bed. Then we just kind of look at each other.

"Your mom's timing is great", I say.

The corners of his mouth twitch twice before he just bursts out laughing, collapsing back onto me since he's been holding himself up in a rather awkward position this whole time. His face is buried somewhere between my shoulder and my neck, and it's slightly terrifying how perfect he fits in there.

It takes a few moments of us just laying on top of each other, limbs sort of tangled, but then I feel his lips on my skin. On the skin of my neck, to be exact.
I feel my breath instantly caught in my throat while shivers run down my spine.

And Simon doesn't stop there. He's placing a little trail of kisses down to my chest, even sucking on the skin a bit. I don't bruise easily, but I can tell I'm going to have a hickey for days there. And I'm not complaining — at all.

I'm so caught up with Simon gently biting my neck that I don't even notice him opening the button of my jeans at first. But then I do. And you would think that would be another something to snap me back to reality — but it does the exact opposite. I completely blank out as soon as he touches me, even through the fabric of my boxers.

"I'm… uhm." Simon lifts his head up a little, his eyes flickering back and forth between my face and his hand that's… kind of a little off trail, you could say. "Just. I haven't done this before, right?" I can see a blush creeping up his cheeks. He seems to notice too, he almost trembles over his next words. "But I want to. But if I suck at — wow, suck wasn't really the right word to use here. Or it was. I don't… I just. Anyway. If I'm, like, crap at this then I—"

I reach up, bury one hand in his perfectly messy hair, and pull him down for our lips to meet again. "Just tell me if you want me to stop," he mumbles against my skin, voice a little hoarse.

I can't imagine a world in which I would want him to stop.

***

I might be a bit biased on the whole thing, but I honestly don't think Simon could be crap at this even if he tried. It's not like I have anyone to compare him to anyway, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

We're both wearing sweatpants now — we kind of had to change if you get what I'm saying. I'm wearing a pair of his since I didn't feel like changing back into my sweaty soccer shorts. Simon's leaning against the headboard of his bed, legs triangled, laptop leaning against his knees while I'm sitting cross-legged next to him.

"Hey, the video," he says, swishing his fingers over the trackpad, "I have it scheduled for later this evening but I kind of wanted to show you first. I think it turned out great, but I wanna make sure…"

I lean back to look at the screen. There's me and him, sitting next to each other, glancing down at the photo album. It's wild to think this was only a few days ago. Before anything happened between us — before this happened.

"Ew, I look weird," I comment.


I can tell he's all in Just Friends mode now. There's nothing but genuine happiness in his eyes when watching the video. For just a few minutes ago he was aching to be as close to me as possible, he's now bearing a safe distance between our bodies.

We're halfway through the video — Simon is right: it turned out pretty amazing and hilarious, with
him actually starting to cry of laughter at one point — when the doorbell rings. Simon stops the video at a very flattering frame of my face.

"Oh, is that your family?"

He nods, "Yeah, but they're letting themselves in. The doorbell is just for Nora and me to know they have arrived."

"Oh, uh, I— Nora was home the whole time?" I feel heat rising up to my cheeks.

Simon seems to understand, "Yeah, but… She lives in her headphones, you know. It's a Spier thing. We're kind of an oblivious household with everyone just living side by side constantly wearing headphones. Every one of us except my mom."

"Wow, she must be going insane."

Simon shuts his laptop and shoves it away from him. "Yeah, sure," he huffs, "No. She's worse. She's listening to audiobooks at, like, five in the morning. On speaker. In freaking German."

An actual giggle escapes my mouth just when the doorbell rings again.

"Come on, we should get going."

***

Who knew a mother's stare could cause all the embarrassment to rise up to your cheeks in form of beautiful, crimson color in the matter of nanoseconds?

I mean, I'm trying very hard not to look like I've just received, well, a handjob from her very son, but Mrs. Spier gives us this Look as soon as we enter the kitchen, both in pairs of shorts that clearly belong to Simon, and I — of course, I immediately give in and drop my gaze to the ground.

"So, you're Bram!," she says into the awkward silence. Her eyes focus on my face for a good second too long before she eventually extends her hand for me to shake, "I'm Emily."

I shift a little in Simon's sweatpants — maybe, if she asked about them, I could just state these are actually mine? But no, there's no way she'd believe that. She probably knows her son's clothes. Plus, the shorts are just a tiny bit small enough on me that it's clear they don't actually belong to me.

***

I cannot for the life of me concentrate on dinner. I’m sure what I’m eating is supposed to be a delicious curry, but it tastes like gray mush to me. My head is swimming with the most recent events.

Simon’s lips on mine, our bodies against each other, his hands…
Having his long, sort of spindly fingers in front of me right now doesn’t exactly help to keep me at ease. Seriously, I’m probably not the best choice for a Friend With Benefits as of right now, I feel like screaming it from the rooftops.

Simon gently kicks my shin under the table, and when our eyes meet, grins mischievously.

***

"Oh, I can help with that!", I say immediately if only to escape Emily's eyes that are flickering back and forth between her son and me, and the smirk that’s been sitting on her face for the last half hour. Despite Simon's and her protest, I grab the stack of used plates and stand up.

I can't help the grin that stretches on my face when I hear Emily whisper "Oh, he's a gentleman, Si" to her son when I follow Mister Spier into the kitchen. I mean, I know Simon and I are supposed to be Just Friends. With a few benefits every now and again, but I would be lying if I said I wasn't in this for the long run, wasn't hoping for it to grow into something more.

Simon's father — I still don't know his name — takes the plate out of my hand and starts sorting them into the dishwasher. "So, you just moved here from…"

"Savannah," I say — and I actually consider adding the word 'sir'. Without the rest of the Spier family, without the casualty of a takeaway dinner, I suddenly feel nervous, exposed, as if I had the recent events written out in detail on my forehead for everyone to read.

I can basically hear the question that must be dancing around Mister Spier's brain throbbing out of him, "Why the hell are you wearing Simon's clothes?"

I mean, what would I even reply? It's not that weird, is it? Two dudes can share clothes, that's perfectly normal.

"And what…" He shuts the dishwasher, straightening his back. And at that moment, I swear, he looks just like his son. Not that he actually looks exactly like him, obviously, he's older, taller, and has a beard, but his gestures and body language are exactly the same. He has the same perpetually lost look to him just like his son — not helpless, it's sort of endearing.

On Simon, it's the cutest thing ever, I think, feeling my brain short-circuiting, paired with the messy hair, the round glasses, and the way he scrunches his nose when he grins.

"… what exactly are your intentions with my son?"

I instantly feel my heart dropping into my stomach, then shooting up until it's somewhere in my throat, paralyzing my vocal cords. Great, not getting a word out right now is not at all suspicious!

Mister Spier leans his back against the kitchen counter and suddenly, I can tell he's just as uncomfortable as I am. I know by the way he fiddles with his fingers that this to him feels like a classic father role he has to fulfill, rather than some weird form of masculinity, showing me he's the boss. He's just generally… concerned, I guess.

"We're just friends," I blurt out. I mean, technically it's true.

Mister Spier's brows shoot up, and it looks like he's losing the grip of his role for a second,
genuinely surprised, "Are you?"

I hold my breath, nodding.

He's shifting from one foot to the other. The fact that we're both on the same level of discomfort should probably calm my nerves but ultimately does the opposite. That's the thing about my mind — it's literally always on edge, always ready to go into full-on panic mode, whatever the given situation.

"Okay, good. I mean — I just," he lets out a long breath of air, "I'm not trying to… presume anything, don't get me wrong. I'm just… being a dad, I guess."

Now, despite my mind literally walking the line between fright and plain panic at being interrogated by Simon's dad, I have to hold back a laugh. This kind of ramble… like father like son, I guess.

"So, you're friends — that's great! Friends are great. Everybody needs friends. Just. In case there is more—"

"Oh my god, Dad! Stop!" Simon, like a very small bulldozer, comes waltzing into the kitchen, "You're… ugh!" He slams another plate down on the counter, certainly almost breaking it, "Just stop."

Mister Spier's rather questionable hard facade softens immediately, "Si—"

"No! Geez, every time! Come on, Bram." His hand twitches and I can almost already feel it wrapping around the small of my back, dragging me out of the kitchen — this innocent thought sends my mind off track yet again. Probably another orange flag. But Simon stops himself before anyone but me can notice, I don't think he himself has a clue to his reflexes.

***

Simon kicks the door shut, "I'm so sorry."

I'm standing in the middle of the room. It's past eight in the evening, I should probably grab my things and go home. "It's actually kind of sweet," I say — it's true. As terrifying as it may have been for me for a second, nothing escalated, and the fact that Simon's family is just so caring makes my chest ache a little bit.

Simon shakes his head, "No, absolutely not. I swear to god, every time. He did the same thing to each of Alice's boyfriends. And to Anna when we started dating." His eyes fall down to his feet after the last word.

"But we're not dating", I remind him.

I hate to see his eyes lighting up at that statement, "Exactly. That's what's making it, like, awkward times ten." He drives both of his hands through his hair. "I mean, seriously, imagine we were not… doing anything. No, wait. I do you one better: Imagine you were straight—"

_I don't think I can even think straight in Simon's presence._
"— and he would just… just assume things."

"Si, calm down." I actually laugh a little bit, "He's just looking out for you. Just worried I might spoil his innocent son."

He snorts, "Innocent. Yeah, right."

I can’t hold my laugh back any longer, either.

***

I come home to my dad sitting on the couch, frowning. I can’t remember if I ever received anything more than a semi-stern look when he was still living with Mom and me, so this is new.

"Hi." I kick my shoes off my feet. Simon drove me here and I didn’t bother to tie the laces just for the short way from the house to the car and vice versa.

"It’s nine. At night."

"I— uh, oh yeah." I duck my head in-between my shoulders a little bit. "Sorry."

"Bram, you can’t just—," he sighs, "Listen. I’m fine with you going out, obviously. I’m glad you seem to have found some friends! But… I know things… life is still tough."

I bury my hands deep inside my jeans’s pockets.

"So when I come home in the evening and you’re not here, and I can’t find a message, I’m really worried."

"I’m sorry, Dad," I say — and I actually am. Not exactly just for leaving him in the dark about my whereabouts today but for spending rather little time with him as of late. We see each other in the mornings, briefly at school, and then for dinner, sometimes. Regarding that he is the last bit of family I have left, I should start treating him less like a host and more like a father again. "I completely forgot… I—" I catch his gaze. "I spent my day with Simon."

He seems to catch up on my tone of voice as his head peaks up a little bit, "Spier?"

I nod. Look, I’m not going to tell him about the Arrangement Simon and I have going on, obviously. But Dad has been so accepting, so caring ever since I moved in, he deserves to have a little insight on my life. Even if that means tearing down my walls a little bit for someone I actually know — and that’s slightly terrifying.

I’m not going to lay my feelings open for him like some sort of interactive biography — the English teacher he is, he’d probably love that, though — but I’m also not going to lie. He doesn’t have to know about the Blue thing and about the emails. He doesn’t have to know about the Friends With Benefits thing and the weird double life I have going on at the moment. But I can tell him that Simon makes me happier. That he gets me out of my head for extended periods at a time.

It wouldn’t be a lie.
I go to bed feeling light and floaty. I can’t believe we came up with the rules this afternoon. It already feels lightyears away.

I fumble the crumpled sheet of paper out of the back pocket of my jeans, together with my phone, and flop down on my bed, unfolding it.

1. Don't fall in love.
2. Don't tell anyone.
4. One can still see other people, but as soon as feelings are involved, this has to end.

I stare at the last rule for a solid minute. It’s scribbled down in Simon’s handwriting, letters smudged together messily in some words. He wrote it down just as we were getting ready to leave. And I know why. I can tell he was thinking about Blue in the moment that rule came to his mind.

My phone buzzes angrily, yanking me out of my thoughts. I look at the lightened screen.

@SimonSaysYT when you get invited somewhere and get a plus one but have *four* best friends :/

Chapter End Notes

oof simon being so relatable with his four best friends am i right *rolls eyes* this guy i swear
anyway, oooooooOoOOOoooo what's going to happy we love a good mystery

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