I love you, and now you cannot pretend

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I love you, and now you cannot pretend

by whatagoodboy

Summary

Matt's latest trick to get into the Rivoli-- faking a relationship.

The whiteboard marker squealed like a dying animal and Matt loved it.

He stood back, marker cap between his teeth, and studied the diagram he'd been building for the last three hours. It was beautiful. It was a masterpiece. It was, he was almost certain, the most important piece of visual communication in history. At least, it would be after he and Jay played the Rivoli!

He dug in the pocket of his worn jeans, producing a flyer he'd swiped from just outside the venue. The "ideal" couple, a guy and a girl smiling, their cheeks pressed against each other. Toronto's next set of indie darlings.The Lovelies. They'd plastered the city with these things, grinning out from every lamppost and telephone pole like they owned the place. Worst part? They had booked the fucking Rivoli.

Matt's stomach tightened. He pressed the flyer flat against the whiteboard, right in the center of his diagram, and traced around it with the marker. Red. Red was the color of warning. Red was the color of war. Angry squeaky uneven streaks surrounded it. He treasured the pack of coloured markers Jay had picked up for his birthday, and used them rarely but always with a lot of emotion.

"Jay," he said, not turning around. "Jay, come look at this."

The keyboard stopped. Four bars, same four bars, the ones Jay had been running for—what, an hour? Two? Matt had lost track. Time was a suggestion when the whiteboard was talking.

"Biiiiiiird!" Matt singsonged, though it came out more as a whine. The keyboard stopped. Jay let out a long, weary sigh that Matt could feel in his own chest.

"Matt, no—" Jay started, but Matt interrupted.

"This is important!"

"Okay, fine, what is it?" Jay appeared at Matt's shoulder, and Matt stepped aside with a flourish, arms wide. A magician revealing his grandest trick. He watched triumphantly as Jay scanned the spiderweb of arrows and circles and furious red underlines, all converging in the center where The Lovelies smiled their darling, perfect smiles. Jay's face did the thing. The slow, reluctant scan. The slight parting of the lips. The way his eyes tracked one arrow to the next, following the logic, and Matt could see the exact moment Jay stopped seeing a mess and started seeing the diagram.

"Okay.. what is this?" Jay said carefully, which was the best possible thing Jay could say.

Matt lunged forward. "Okay! Okay, so!" He grabbed the marker, uncapped it, and pointed to the outer ring. "Toronto's indie scene right now, right? What's the dominant aesthetic? What's the thing? Couples." He drew a circle so hard the tip squealed in protest. The lines became streaked and uneven. "It's couples, Jay. It's always been couples. The Lovelies have cracked the code and I am not mad at them for it, I'm just mad that—"

"You're definitely mad at them for it."

“—that Nirvanna the Band isn’t playing the Rivoli, which they are, which is—” He jabbed at the flyer. “—which is *criminal*, Jay, it’s criminal, because we’re better than them and we’re *right here* and nobody— nobody is even—” He was pacing now, marker waving like a conductor’s baton, and Jay had that look, the one where his eyebrows did that thing, and Matt knew Jay was about to say something reasonable and ruin everything. “Wait, wait, wait, before you say anything, just—look at the center.”

Jay looked at the center. The Lovelies kept smiling. Matt could feel the flyer’s glossy paper under his thumb, the way it curled at the edges from being stuffed in his pocket.

“The center is the problem,” Matt said, lowering his voice. “The center is what we fix. The center is—” He tapped the flyer twice. “—the *aesthetic*. And the aesthetic is couples. And we—”

“What? We get girlfriends?” Jay’s head tilts.

“No! We get boyfriends! Each other! We become our own musical.. Partnership.. Couple.. You know!” Matt watches Jay’s face cycle through emotions… surprise, confusion, then something unreadable. The silence stretches between them, filled only by the hum of the keyboard’s power supply.

“Wait,” Jay says slowly. “You want us to... pretend to be a couple?”

“Not pretend!” Matt waves the marker almost dangerously. “We *are* a couple. In the sense that we’re together all the time. We live together. We make music together. We’re already—” He gestures wildly between them. “—this!”

Jay’s eyes narrow. “So we tell people we’re dating.”

“Exactly!” Matt circles the flyer again, this time in blue.

“I mean, think about it, Bird! People already assume we’re gay all the time, we do everything together! We live together, Jay! We’re already more authentic than they are!”

Jay’s eyebrows climb toward his hairline. “Authentic?”

“Well, yeah! They’re probably all for marketing, do any celebrity couples actually like each other?” Matt was practically vibrating with energy, rocking from his heels and forward to the balls of his feet.

“Okay, wait.” Jay’s hand goes to the back of his neck, rubbing there like he’s trying to massage out a thought. “So let me get this straight—”

“We’re not straight, that’s the whole—”

“Matt.”

“Sorry, continue.”

Jay’s mouth opens, then closes, and again it opens. A hand goes to his chin, and Matt can practically see him lining up his words, picking the right ones. Matt has to physically bite the inside of his cheek as to not fill the silence.“So you want us to pretend to be boyfriends,” Jay says slowly, dark eyes narrowed. “For the aesthetic.”

Matt nods so fast his hair falls into his eyes. “Exactly! The aesthetic, the visual, the—” Matt has set the marker down, filled with restless energy he paces the room and speaks with his hands. “The *vibe*, Jay. People eat that shit up. The Lovelies aren’t better musicians than us —”

“We didn’t get the gig, Matt, they did.”

“—but they have the *brand*. The couple brand. And we could have that too, except better because we’re not faking it.”

Jay’s eyes narrow further. “But we would be faking it.”

Matt waves this away. “Semantics. We’re already doing all the couple things. We live together! We do EVERYTHING together! We’ve spent more time together than most married couples.”

“That’s not—” Jay rubs the back of his neck harder. “That’s not the same as being in a relationship, Matt.”

“Sure it is!”

“No, it’s really not.” Jay crosses his arms, his jaw set in that stubborn way that means he’s digging in. “Being roommates and bandmates isn’t the same as being boyfriends.”

Matt grabs the marker again, tapping it against his palm. “Okay, but think about it—we already act like a couple! We argue about what to watch, we share food, you know when I’m sick before I do!” Matt’s voice pitches higher, the way it does when he’s losing ground in an argument but refuses to admit it. The old idea that the louder he was, the easier it was to get his way. Not much different from a petulant kid. “The point is, we’re already doing everything a couple does except—”

“Except the actual relationship part,” Jay finishes.

“Yeah, well, that’s not hard to fake! We just have to hold hands— this isn’t far off from the kiss plan!”

“That didn’t even work— you puked!” Jay sighs heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose like Matt is already giving him a migraine.

“Semantics!” Matt waves his hand dismissively. “The point is, we’ve already established physical intimacy parameters. We hug all the time!”

“Matt- we’ve never kissed,” Jay interrupts, his voice suddenly quiet. Something shifts in the air between them, a tension Matt can’t quite name but recognizes in the way Jay’s shoulders tense, the way his gaze drops to the floor.

“We don’t have to kiss, Bird! Just- hold hands! Call each other boyfriend, throw an arm around each other and have a cute photo shoot!”

“You know what. Fine, fine. Just no kissing me.”

Matt jumps up, and throws his arms around Jay’s neck. The first of many bone-crushing hugs as “boyfriends”.

“We’re playing the Rivoli!!”

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