

"Not too bad," I started, and then paused. My rump was starting to feel sore, as it would remain probably until bedtime; my boyfriend had just come over apparently to hump me and then leave, which left me with an odd mixture of half-satisfaction and sweet, pleasurable exhaustion; and I still felt bad about pushing to learn more about this coyote this morning... "How about you? Doing ok?"

His next message came in just as I'd started to pull my pants back up my legs. I could feel the slickness of William's load underneath my tail.

Yeah, yeah. Could be worse, could be better.

If I waited any longer, I'd lose the nerve to say what I wanted to say: *"Hey, sorry about this morning. I shouldn't have pushed you that far."*

What? Oh, no, that's no problem! Not your fault, man. :) Don't worry about it. I mean, I just figured, I should get everything out on the proverbial table before you get too involved with me as your friend. Besides, I thought you just oughtta know that story about me, take it as a vote of confidence in you

And then, in a separate message – maybe because he'd hit the character limit or something:

because I like you.

Well. And to think my heartbeat had *just* slowed to normal after my little thing with William. My legs were slightly shaky as I made my way down the hall, but it wasn't too bad: sometimes when we have the weekend to ourselves because Mom is out of town doing something for work or whatever, we'll stay awake all night cuddling and kissing and grinding against each other, making the bed squeak and probably accidentally thump our heads against the wall a few times... and then, once, he had me ride him while I was playing a new game that had just come out. Thing was, I was in a voice call with my cousin at the time, too.

My phone screen had gone black. When I clicked it back on again, the time flashed across the screen – still a few hours before Mom would get home – and then it unlocked to show my messages again.

"Get too involved?" ...Erase. "I like you too." Erase. "I like you too, Harley." Erase. I turned to the right and started down the hallway that led to the kitchen, but halfway along the way, leaned against the wall. The only sound that reached my ears came from the air conditioner above, quietly churring and thrumming around in the ceiling and walls. Back when I was just a little pup, I used to be scared of it, as it suddenly sputtered to life in the middle of the night and would wake me up, as a badly-placed air filter in front of one of the vents made a dreadful rattle like someone drumming their claws on my closed bedroom door.

To tell the truth, sometimes I still found myself struck with a bit of unreasonable fear of the dark, like way back then.

“Well, I appreciate it. I know it’s only been, like, what... two days? But I still feel like we can be really good friends.”

Then, a quick response:

So I’m not the only one?

Again I felt like I could just *hear* his voice as he said that. Even in the short time I’d spent around him, I’d noticed that, when talking about something he enjoyed or to someone he liked – being me, apparently – there was always a hint, a ghost of a smile pulling up at the corners of his mouth, always some part of his white fangs in view. And, God, there were his eyes...

My claws tapped against the tile floor of the kitchen as I typed out my next message. Instead of bothering to find something to eat, which I’d come down here to do, I just lounged back in one of the chairs by the table. *“Hey, I was thinking – since you told me a story about yourself, how about I tell you a story about me? That way we’ll be even.”*

Lol. You say it like learning more about each other is an unpleasant experience. But, of course I’d like to get to know you better. what’ve you got on your mind?

He had told *me* a story about a past relationship of his – so why didn’t I do the same? I hadn’t exactly had many before William, partially because we’ve been together for so long, but...

“Can I call you?”

While waiting for a response, I stood up and started peering around in the pantry and fridge. It looked like William had snatched a couple packs of fruit snacks on his way out the door. But, then – my phone started buzzing in my paw, and when I looked down at it- *Harley calling*.

I pressed it to my ear. Honestly, talking on the phone always made me a little nervous. “Hey.”

“Howdy.” From that one word, he sounded a little subdued, but content. As if – as if he had just woken up from a nap or something.

“Okay, so... well, let’s see... my first boyfriend...” I swallowed. “My first boyfriend was actually – well, actually an online relationship, so I’m a little... ah... *hesitant*, I guess, to really call it a real relationship. Nobody really knows about it except for me, and him, and the friends I spoke to at the time. I was young, y’know? Young, and curious, and excited by the prospect of anything new-”

“Oh, we’ve all been there.”

“Yeah. I don’t even remember how we met – some... chat service for gaming or something, I don’t know. But we hit it off instantly, started texting – I remember Mom mentioning to me how the number of texts I sent and received per month suddenly hopped up from, like, fifty, to a couple thousand. He was a wolf too – said he was, and then sent some pictures to prove it.”

“Damn. What *kind* of pictures?” Harley’s voice briefly cut out to the sound of a yawn. “Wait, how old were you?”

“You know *exactly* what kind. And, I was young. Too young, I thought once I’d grown up a bit, but then I learned what my *other* friends had been up to at that same age. But, hell, I wasn’t complaining, of course. I thought they were the *hottest* thing ever – you know, pictures of someone that I imagined I actually *knew*, instead of just things you could find anywhere else on the internet. It’s always better if you have a connection with the person, right?”

“*Oh yeah. That’s why I’m not one of those guys who’s like, oh, hey, they’re hot – hey, wanna come back to my place?* Nah. That doesn’t do it for me.”

I couldn’t keep down a smile at hearing him say this. If you ask me, Harley probably *could* act like that, and would get more hits than any other guy. I mean... “Yeah. Yeah, I actually, uh...” I reached up and scratched behind my ear. “...sent a picture back at one point... he didn’t react too well to it, probably ‘cause I was so young, but whatever. I don’t even remember how long we lasted, but, God, he was a lot of my firsts, except for the in-person stuff. Which I guess is more important. First nude sent, first nude received, first sext...”

“First fantasy?”

Oh Jesus. “Yeah. First, and second, and third...”

“*Mhmm.*” The amusement could be clearly heard in Harley’s words. “And fourth?”

“And fifth.” My mind flicked back to what had happened in the bathroom today, and my voice briefly caught in my throat. “...Well. Anyway. Being young, of course I thought, *oh I’m in love, this is the love of my life, we’ll be together forever, blah blah blah.*”

“Didn’t work out, huh?”

My first thought was to say *well, if it had, I wouldn’t be here talking to you now*. But I couldn’t really explain *why* that had come up. Instead, I scoffed. “Course not. He was actually the one to break it off, saying something like – *this is borderline illegal, it was a mistake*, stuff like that. I got really upset and pissy about him calling our relationship a *mistake*, but after a few years had passed, I could see the logic to that. But, yeah, he apologized – I was sending message after

message, *well fine, if that's what you think is best*, whatever, anything to avoid conflict – and then told me to delete his pictures and to not talk to him again.”

“Well, did you?”

“Of course not. Well, I mean, I kept the pictures for a while – lemme tell you, if you’d *seen* them-”

“Still got them?”

Another irresistible smile. “Hah. No. I kept the pictures for, like, a year before finding another boy to mack on, and repeatedly tried to contact this guy again, but I guess he’d blocked me or something. So that made it feel like it was my fault, too. Lots of...” I swallowed. “Lots of things about that relationship made me feel like it was my fault.”

Harley didn’t say anything.

“You still there?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m here.”

“I mean, sure, it was fun while it lasted, but... when you call a relationship a *mistake*, when you refuse to talk to the other person ever again, when – when the other person ends up getting grounded for three months ‘cause their mother found out about the relationship afterwards...” She had taken my phone from me and locked up my internet for a full year after. I only ever got through the restrictions because she’d forgotten that she ever put them in place, so didn’t think to check after I found a way to disable them. “It... well, when it comes to whose ‘fault’ the whole thing was...”

More silence, aside from a little exhalation of breath.

“But, at the end of it – was he just a creep, trying to get at me ‘cause I was so young and dumb?” I shrugged. “Maybe. Probably. Maybe. No way to tell now, and it’s not like it really matters. I’d sent him a few pictures of *my* face, but I’d never gotten to see *his*. But, yeah. I didn’t really *tell* anyone when we broke up, so a few months later if my friends asked if I was still with that guy – well, I couldn’t think of anything more to say than a simple *no*, and move on from there. I think they could tell that I wasn’t feeling too good about it.

“And then my *second* relationship wasn’t too good, either. *That* one had all of my physical firsts: first kiss, first... handjob, first blowjob, first fuck. My first time bottoming? God, it was *fantastic*. Second and third weren’t so good, though, so I thought it was a fluke.”

“It ain’t for everyone.”

“You sound like you’re speaking from experience.”

This time, it was Harley who scoffed, but said nothing more.

“Anyway. *That* one wasn’t too good because, by the end of it, I’d really started to feel that he was only with me for the sex. *That* was fun at first, too, but once I came to recognize it... well. I stopped answering the door when he knocked, I stopped responding to his messages. Eventually he broke up with me, and that was kind of a relief for me.”

“Didn’t want to do it yourself?”

“No. Besides, it’s a lot easier for me if I just follow what the world wants to do, y’know? Go with the flow. But, we didn’t talk for a while, but started seeing each other at school, so... eventually we became friends again.”

“Just friends?”

Again, I scratched my ear. “Well.”

“Hey, man, no judging here.”

“But, I mean, after two pretty bad relationships, where I felt like a lot of the blame and... inferiority was shoveled onto *me*, you can probably understand that I was a little reluctant to get involved again. Like, *jeez, what if I fuck up again? What if I do something, or what if I don’t do something, and the next person gets angry at me, and breaks up with me?* I mean – William took me by surprise. I wasn’t *expecting* to fall for *him*. It just sort of... happened.”

“That’s how love goes, man. Someone asks why you love them? The best answer is ‘I don’t know’. ‘Cause if you *do* give a concrete answer, well, you’re just making something up, pulling at thin air.”

“Yeah.”

“Hey, does – William, is that your current boyfriend?”

“Yeah.”

“Does William make you feel like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like...” Harley swallowed. “Like you’re gonna mess up. Like you have, um... something to worry about, I guess. From what I’m understanding, you don’t really like conflict, do you?”

“That’s true. God, it really is. You know that saying, where, like – if your friend is being wronged, the best thing you can do is stand up and help them? Yeah. I’d like to say that’s me, but if we’re being totally honest here, I wouldn’t stand up unless someone made me.”

“I understand. But, I wanna ask if you’re worried about your relationship with William. I’ve been in a few good relationships and a few bad ones, and I know enough to say that one you’re *worried* about is leaning towards the latter. So?”

“So?”

“What are your thoughts?”

I flicked my tongue out over my lips, and looked over at the clock on the oven. Maybe I’d make muffins tonight. “It’s okay.”

“You hesitated.”

Silence. Harley was the one to speak again, and when he did, his voice had lost its characteristic charismatic note.

“Do you feel like it’s your fault? Any of the problems with your relationship with him?”

Problems. Sometimes I feel like William and I were still together simply because it felt wrong to be apart. Sometimes I feel like he’s immature and expects too much out of this relationship; sometimes I feel like I don’t treat him right, and he doesn’t treat me right, and neither of us are really willing to pay attention to figure out *how* to treat the other right; sometimes he just – *pisses* me off, and I’d like nothing better than to break things off, and then I realize that he probably feels the same way about *me* sometimes... but then there are times at night when I get lonely, and I feel scared and anxious and worried about everything and nothing in particular, and I send him a text, and he tells me that he loves me and everything will be alright-

“So. There.” Harley’s voice startled me out of my thoughts. “*Now* we’re even. You felt like you overstepped your bounds this morning, and now *I’ve* felt like I’ve overstepped mine. See? That wasn’t so bad. You, um – don’t have to answer that last question. It’s none of my business.”

“Harley...”

“Yeah?”

Does he prefer chocolate or blueberry muffins? Or, maybe – strawberry? “Do you – uh, think we could hang out sometime? After school, or something?”

“Oh, jeez, yeah! That’d be great! When did you have in mind?”

My tail thumped against the cabinet behind me. Worried that he’d be able to hear it, I walked further into the kitchen. “Well... when would work for you? And, um – do you have, like, a laptop or something? I was thinking we could just, like... play video games, maybe?”

“Oh, well, I should be good any afternoon, except for Tuesdays. What day’s today?”

“Tuesday.”

“Oh! Really? Well, that all works out, then. And, yeah – it’s my main thing for playing games. I could probably let you know.”

Oh, man, I bet Mom will like Harley. My tail started wagging again. “Yeah, that’d be cool. Well, uh – I should probably get to doing homework...”

“Oh, sure. Uh – Daniel?”

“Yeah?”

This time, *he* hesitated. “...Ah, nothing, never mind. Talk to you later. Oh, and – I appreciate you telling me what you did.”

“Yeah. Talk to you later, Harley.”

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Some time later, I leaned back in my chair at my desk upstairs, having just finished the math homework that I hadn’t the previous night. A little while ago, I’d heard the sound of the garage door opening and closing, followed by Mom’s shouted *Hello!* across the house, which I’d returned. Even though our conversation had finished hours ago, I still couldn’t quite get Harley out of my head – some of the things he’d said, how he’d responded...

I clicked my phone on to check the time, but then saw – *1 unread message from Harley*. The timestamp showed that it was sent not even... five minutes after we’d hung up.

**hugs* No matter what anyone else might make you think of yourself, danny, I think you’re pretty great.*