

Dudes Who Want To Be Her Boyfriend

by Kathryn Sanders

Act One

She walks into his apartment. She looks around and it is all there, always the same, the dirty clothes on the floor in the kitchen, records and CDs everywhere stacked alphabetically and by genre, the smell of the Italian restaurant downstairs. He looks up at her as he is bending over to pick something up. "I found this old mix tape," he says, holding the cassette above his head triumphantly. She is momentarily caught off-guard because he is smiling, a rare thing for him. He is wearing cutoffs and an undershirt that was, at one time, white.

He walks toward her without another word and tries to kiss her, but she stops him with a wave of her palm and a sharp turn of her head. The first thing she says is that there are other people who like her. Other guys. She feels she has to advertise this because he has never told her she's pretty. The nicest thing he has ever said to her is that he now thinks about her when he masturbates. This is the sentiment she keeps in her mind when she thinks of him now. He likes to fuck her but he has never told her she looks good to him. Even after four months of fooling around steadily, still, he does not tell her that. He has farted in front of her several times; this, she takes for intimacy. This is all she has.

"And I'm kind of seeing this one guy, kind of seriously," she tells him in a voice both sheepish and proud. He turns and walks across the room to the window ledge and sits and rolls a joint. He starts to smoke it without offering her any. She is still standing in the kitchen, by the door. His moods are like a light switch. His bitchiness

permeates every part of the apartment, but she does not leave, even as her stomach is sinking. She walks to him and holds out her hand. She smokes his pot and gets stoned, and starts to cough. He seems mad, but she was never able to read him, and besides, she doesn't know if he's mad because she smoked most of his pot or because she told him she is seeing someone else. "But we're not having sex," she says of this other guy.

"I guess ours is a very casual relationship," he tells her. She smiles a little because he called it a relationship, and also because she finds it funny—the boy she is seriously seeing, she doesn't have sex with, and the boy she is casually seeing, she does. He tells her he doesn't want to be a distraction to her life. "If you want to date that other dude, you should date him." But I don't, is what she wants to say, but doesn't know if she says it out loud or imagines it.

Act Two

She comes to his apartment again. She says she is mad because he didn't respond to her text four days earlier apologizing for a tiff they had. He says he didn't know he had to respond. She says he is not a real person. He says he doesn't understand. And that she should be with the dudes who want to be her boyfriend. She doesn't say anything because she still holds out the hope that he wants her, that he is only saying this because he is angry or jealous. She continues to believe that he is simply trying to beat her to the punch, that his disaffectedness is affected. It must be that he is hiding his feelings. It must. She tells him that yes, these guys like her, but she still likes him the most. He shakes his head slowly, asks her if she needs a hug. She declines of course, as is her custom, heavy armor and all, but he gets up from his chair and hugs her anyway. She touches him like a third cousin once removed. "I feel like your math teacher," he says, and she doesn't comment. In this moment, she feels the closest thing to warmth she has ever felt from him in four years of friendship, a glimpse that he is capable of empathy, that his heart might give a little bit sometimes. She asks him if they can smoke

some pot, which annoys him. But she is sure her feelings are going to attack her when she leaves, and the drug is her machete.

Act Three

She is back in his apartment a few days later; they are reenacting Act Two. She had been to dinner earlier with the dude who wants to be her boyfriend, the boy who courts her, texts her, asks her every night if she got home all right. He gave her his gloves to wear so her hands would stay warm on the way home, and instead of going to her own apartment, she redirected the cab and wore them to this apartment. This boy has never asked her if she got home safely. She is telling him again that there are guys interested in her, and why doesn't he like her as much as she likes him? He is vague in his answer and says that he does, he does like her. But he is still seeing other people, his ex-girlfriend, etc. "I never made you any promises," he says as if confused that she has misinterpreted his intentions. He has said this to her before, but in a different context. She puts on her coat and picks up her bag. "You always try to leave when we are trying to communicate," he says. She tells him he already told her what she needed to hear. She came for closure. He tells her once again that she should be with the dudes who want to be her boyfriend. She walks to the door. She starts to unlock it, drawing out her movements, fumbling with the lock on purpose. He stands against the wall, across the room. "Now I'm bummed," he says. "Are you ok? We've been friends for so long. I mean, are we ok?"

"We're fine," she says. She looks at the old pipes running up the wall next to the door and smiles, hoping her voice has the same rusty edge to it. She is already planning to erase his number from her phone on the way home.

"Why did you come here?" he says.

"I don't know why I came." But she knows why—she came to hear that he liked her, or that he didn't. She came to hear. And she flicks

her hair because she feels she is on stage suddenly, that maybe she has an audience, that her words are more loaded with meaning than she anticipated, and she walks out the door with actual purpose. She pauses on the second floor landing, she hears a scuffle at his door and her heart jumps a bit, but it is not him dramatically coming after her; it is just the locks clicking into place.

