



Gym Class Heroes

"New Friend Request"

*As Cruel as School Children*

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# Myspace Memories to the Tune of "New Friend Request"

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I grew up at just the right time for online communication to integrate into my life naturally while still managing to completely confuse me. A child of 1990, I had prime seats for all the major social switches of the early aughts: Xanga to MySpace to Facebook. I was in (and out) of college by the time I joined Twitter and Instagram—already too old to really "get it," even though I love both platforms. Plus, by then, I'd already met my husband—IRL—so I didn't even use these newer forms of interaction for what my generation supposedly perfected: hooking up.

*"It's a sad situation when we have to resort to keyboards as a means of making relations."* But as a lonely sophomore in high school, one who'd been recently dumped by both her boyfriend and her best friend, the online world was the only place I could turn for connection. So, like an idiot, it's where I fell in love. The heartbreaker in question is named Matt, though I called him Matty at the time.

Because I'm both a romantic and a choir kid, I frequently associate people, places, and things with music. For Matt, and the time he came into my life, Gym Class Heroes loom large, and "New Friend Request," the third track off *As Cruel as School Children*, hits too close to home.

Even back then, I feel like I had a fair bit of self-awareness about my situation when I listened to this song and thought about my unfortunate love life. Chronicling lead singer Travis McCoy's attempts to connect with a girl on Myspace who never reciprocated, the song resonated in a "You might want to take a look at yourself" way. As much as I wanted to be the unattainable girl, imagining that Matt (a spoken-word rapper whose early style reminded me a little of Travis) was aching to get in touch with me, I knew better.

I was Travis—sad, desperate, and in need of a life.

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The first four years of my friendship with Matt were...unhealthy in a lot of ways. After meeting in a random MySpace group, our earliest communications were simple enough. Then he started asking to see my boobs—I'm sorry: "boobz." I'd log into AIM, seek him out, and mere minutes of small talk would pass before such a request popped up on my screen.

To my credit, I never sent *actual* naked shots. I wasn't that stupid. But, because my sad little heart needed someone to be in my life, and it decided Matt was that someone, I did what I thought was enough to keep him around and interested. (When I introduced him to a friend of mine because she and I were going to start a music zine and I wanted to interview him, I was equal parts embarrassed and jealous when she told me that he'd asked her for some sexy selfies as well. Was I really not that special?!) I shudder to think of what might've happened if I'd had access to a webcam in those years...

In the deep recesses of my mind—which I can easily access, thanks to low self-esteem, horrible depression, and crippling anxiety—I wondered whether he knew how

desperately I craved his approval and affection. And, if he knew, was he withholding it just to see what would happen? As the song goes, "*It's kinda obvious that you're either occupied or playin' a game.*"

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Complicating things further: We lived in different time zones, ensuring that, as broke, car-less teenagers, we could never meet. So, after about a year of "knowing" each other, I started dating someone else—Jay. He already had a point in his favor by being in the same state as me. On top of that, we were good friends, and while he'd probably made a joke or two about my boobs, he never asked to see them (not seriously, anyway). Good enough for me!

But despite getting coupled up, I kept returning to Matt, like an irritated gum that you can't stop poking with the tip of your tongue. Consulting my newfound habit for self-analysis, I can say it's probably because I knew Jay and I weren't built to last. (And yet, I dated him for two years.) I couldn't stop wondering: "How different would life be if Matt could be a viable romantic option?"

As a result, I frequently used my relationship to try and push Matt's buttons. What does Travis rap? "*It's hard for me to not hate when I'm on MySpace / I never see my face in your Top 8.*" Yeah, I was overly motivated by that sentiment. As the person who typically expressed her emotions widely and with abandon in relationships, I was frustrated by the fact that I couldn't just say "Hey, I wish we could date," so I got mad at Matt for not saying it either. The only way to retaliate was to flaunt my relative happiness in my real relationship and hope to illicit some sort of response.

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I do think this led to the few times when Matt became more of the protagonist in the Travis-MySpace Girl story. (Because, spoiler alert, he did actually have a crush on me, buried underneath the nudity pleas and silence.) When I inevitably began to lament the cracks as they formed in my relationship, Matt was quick to take a jackhammer to them—"*I'll be here when your man ain't fully down as he used to be.*" He thought it was hilarious that Jay hated him (because Jay knew about my "old crush" on Matt and was, understandably, not his biggest fan) and frequently joked about how I should break up with Jay.

And I just laughed it all off. Because this was what I wanted. I thought I might have loved Matt, if things had lined up the right way, and his reaction to my prodding felt like it was proving my point. "*Show me some kind of sign, and let me know it's time to make my move.*"

So, when I went to college and things really began to deteriorate with Jay, I stepped it up. I crossed as much of the impropriety line that a girl can cross while keeping her clothes on. I practically ran to my computer screen for validation that there was someone out there who wanted me in a way that wasn't weighed down by the emotional baggage Jay and I had managed to rack up. But of course, what would you call what I had with Matt? The guy with whom I actively initiated conversations about the likelihood of our having sex just because I was bored—and, let's face it, horny.

I didn't care. I couldn't—wouldn't—stop myself.

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After the break-up, I spiraled most spectacularly. I'd been growing into a subtle case of agoraphobia rather nicely in the weeks prior, so other than class and quick, anxious trips to the McDonald's behind my dorm, I stopped leaving my room. I dropped off the social calendar for the friends I'd brought with me from high school, and barely interacted with the new friends I made.

What I did instead was think about Matt, trying to figure out if I could force a future there. After all, I'd put nearly as much time and energy into that relationship as the one that had just imploded, so why couldn't I make it work? "*It was plain to see we were meant to lock lips.*" In what was probably an episode of low-level mania, I convinced myself that I'd travel all by my lonesome to his hometown and... That's as far as I got.

Even in my wildest fantasy, I couldn't imagine truly being with Matt. I could call up some of the raunchier conversations we'd had, but I knew in my heart, I wouldn't be able to follow through on anything we'd said or anything I thought I wanted. Besides, my life wasn't a movie. I couldn't just show up on Matt's doorstep, declare my love for him, and then spend an undefined amount of time in romantic bliss before returning to my regular life with a promise that we'd "make it work."

(Plus, what if he was secretly a murderer this entire time?!)

So, I had to put an end to it. Not our friendship, necessarily. But I couldn't sustain a life where I felt like my heart was, to no avail, beating against the walls of another's for permission to enter. I needed to let go. "*It's time to sign out; my vision's getting blurry / This is madness.*"

I wish I could say that life was an instant triumph once I made that decision, but of course it wasn't. I developed other, unsustainable crushes and retreated further into my depression. I was actively battling a particularly dark period of feeling worthless the night I met my husband. Because THAT is how love happens in my life—it claws its way from under a disgusting pile of misery and smacks me in the face.

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I don't miss what I had with Matt. We've managed to piece together a more legitimate friendship these days, and while it's not where I thought we'd be after 12 years, it's better. Though I often struggle to determine what's appropriate for friends with our history to talk about, because I just naturally talk about inappropriate things with most of the people I hang with, I'm happy. And at least now Matt occasionally initiates our chats.

Still...

I can't help but feel like this whole experience must've meant something. After all, Matt "*caught me at my most pivotal moments,*" so it has to add up to more than just extra nostalgia when I listen to Gym Class Heroes...

Or maybe we were just two kids who wanted to explore the boundaries of platonic and romantic relationships from the safety of the internet's semi-anonymity, and then moved on once we grew out of it.

From the other side of things, and for the sake of my sanity, I'm going to say, yeah, that's it.