



Justin Beiber

"Boyfriend"

Believe

06/2012

Schoolboy · RBMG ·
Island

I, Belieber

Kyler Fey

"If I Was Your Boyfriend"

It's Christmas Day 2012, and I'm sitting with my partner Danny in his mom's little apartment complex living room, a claustrophobic and tiny chamber filled with a crush of heavily-pillowed couches too big for the space, too cold because she doesn't turn the heat up high enough, and too smoke-filled because we are all chain-smoking. The moment I dread, because it's always so tedious and unaccountably embarrassing to me, is when we will open a few dumb gifts that we've bought for each other. Danny and I would have ended this custom years ago, but his mom cherishes it, so we adhere.

Actually this year I had bought all of these gifts, but I let Danny pick some stuff out for us without me peeking at the Amazon order confirmations. He likes to surprise people with gifts though he hates any sort of surprise for himself. But I already know, despite his sneakiness, what one thing is: he'd bought a frame and I knew he'd used it to finish, for display on a wall, the original of a piece of artwork that he'd drawn for one of my book covers, and it's so beautiful mounted like this, and I laugh a lot to stop myself from crying because the physical fact of it is even sweeter and more touching than the expectation of it.

But then there are these two other packages, labeled for me in Danny's silver Sharpie-scrrawl, and I avoid them until he and his mom are done opening their things. I *hate* opening gifts. But I can't stall any longer, and Danny is prodding me forward—*your turn!*—so I tear open their snowflake-glossed blue paper. Number one is a copy of Justin Bieber's hardcover book *Just Getting Started*. When you crack it open—even now, six years later—it smells like an old high school year book because it's made of thick pages covered mostly in glossy pics. The other item is a little 8x8 2013 Justin Bieber calendar, the first page of which contains the fall of 2012 so that you can start using it right away if you get it for Christmas. The book and the calendar are both composed largely of pictures of Justin, of course. The text of the book is utterly banal, and I can't quite read any more of it to this day. One of the full-page pics in it shows Justin, beautiful and wet, maybe sweat-soaked, triumphant and awed on stage, and looming behind him in giant blocky fractured squares of light: *PRAY*. It reddens my face and heats my ears even now to relate that detail even though I had nothing to do with its saccharine earnestness, its utter pop cheesiness. And Danny's mom says this thing: "Do you really *like* Justin Bieber!?" with a big toothy grin, a laughing interrobang behind that question. Though it was not at all his intent, Danny has embarrassed me a bit—a *lot*—by letting someone else see this *thing* about me. I was a thirty-seven-year-old man that Christmas.

September is my favorite picture in the calendar. He wears sharp sunglasses a lot like my own prescription Ray-Bans, and his face and hair are delicate as confections that might dissolve under a single lick. Danny assumes that I like Justin just because I think he's hot. I do think he's pretty to look at, but the sicker and deeper truth of it is that I actually like his songs, too. This part of it is even weirder to Danny—and he resists believing it—because he assumes that I have only a few musical moods, roughly outlined by The Cure and Marilyn Manson, a big Venn diagram that includes a lot of 70s and 80s punk and alt-rock, a lot of 90s industrial and metal, and a lot of later emo/screamo. But there's somehow a little bit of room in my space-dark heart for some pop sung by a pretty young man with a perfect angel-voice. This is, to my life partner of two decades, a thing to laugh

at, even today. Danny might say, even now: "You're kidding. Have you *seen* this?" and he somehow knows where the PRAY page is in the fucking book. I overlook now the fact that Justin often cosplays as a hipster religious fanatic, his douchebag megachurch minister shadowing him like a creepy Jesus chicken hawk. But then, right after Christmas 2012, I hang the little calendar on the wall next to my desk in my home office and, month-by-month through 2013, I flip the page. I often wear earphones while I write, and sometimes I don't get much at all done because I keep hitting replay and having another drink and another smoke, and another and another one, and zoning the fuck out to "Boyfriend" and "Beauty and a Beat."

"If You Still Love Me"

In 2014, I find a strange short story posted online, a piece of Bieber fan fiction unlike any I had ever read before—and I've read a lot. Indeed, when I'd found this story, I wasn't expecting it to be JB fic at all. I started reading it because I thought it was going to be a horror story, and that's the mood I was in. Its title is "The Exorcist Play-Set," and it's a short and loose reworking of Blatty's *The Exorcist* (with a little of its sequel *Legion* mixed in), but the possessed kid this time is a teenage boy whose apparent encounter with the supernatural is aided by an elaborate play-set, laid out like a miniature bedroom, into which one can insert animatronic dolls ("Celebrity Add-Ins") to play the part of a possessed child, ministered over by animatronic priest dolls, the whole contraption run by a phone app and maybe some kind of nanotechnology. This boy is a Justin Bieber fan and he has inserted into his play-set a little and freakily realistic JB doll that displays signs of demonic possession while the kid who plays this game gets weirder. It's wholly creepy, so fucked up in its premise and its promise, and I could not get enough of it. As it turned out, its author is a local (aging) JB fan like me, and an occasional publisher of speculative fiction. He is now the publisher of some of my stories, and he even wrote another JB fan piece inspired by my 2012 Christmas recollection, which I'd shared with him during a drunken conversation.

"Love Yourself"

It's the start of 2017, and I decide to start a Tumblr blog because the first book in my gay science-fantasy serial is about to release and my publisher worries that I have basically no social media presence appropriate for this project. I also abandon a long-dormant Twitter account and start a new one. My new Twitter does okay for me, helping me sell a few books and giving me a sense of having some peers online, but my Tumblr was—and remains—a total bust. Almost no one follows me to this day, and those few who do don't seem to like me very much. I get maybe six likes or re-blogs per month. This is probably due in part because of the way that it became immediately a stream of gay erotica with three main components: excerpts from my books, journal posts about my actual sex life, and lots and lots of pics of Justin Bieber (because I followed like 100 gay Belieber fan blogs immediately, and their posts fill most of my feed). Some rare pics that I will reblog when I see them are of Justin on-stage, his arms raised and wearing his Marilyn Manson shirt, wide armholes showing his pits. I set aside the fact that Manson—whose work I also love—can't stand Bieber and that he was pissed off about that appropriation of his image, and that he was deeply insulted by JB's quip that he'd made Manson "relevant" again. It's a family fight in my head-canon brain where I just want them to get along, and set in a universe where perhaps Manson could induce Bieber to forsake his religion. My Tumblr blog is garbage and wholly humiliating, but it amuses me anyway.

Not long ago, I wondered if it is too embarrassing to share on my blog YouTube videos of other dudes covering JB songs. I like the punk and metal and screamo covers. It is too embarrassing, but I can't figure out *why* exactly I feel this way, because no one is likely

ever even going to see that I did it because I have no followers. This absurd tension between wanting to show off what I like and the fear of being pilloried for it is, to be honest, the whole “Kyler Fey Story.” But it’s not *quite* true that no one sees my posts: I have one “friend” who actually direct-messages me once in a while when I share a Bieber pic. We say the dirtiest fucking things to each other. Our JB-based association is entirely unwholesome, composed completely of short filthy statements punctuated with pornographic images in support of whatever lurid turn the conversation has taken.

But anyway, despite my social media inadequacies, my series of novellas starts to roll out into the world over 2017, and episode #4 could even be construed as a piece of Justin Bieber fan fiction in the sense that its “guest star” character is a very thinly-veiled JB (I changed his name a little bit and moved him a thousand years into the future and made him queer and horny as hell). The whole time that I was working on the final edits of this book, I blasted songs like “Love Yourself” and covers of it into my ears. I even made up my own song for the book’s Bieber-avatar to sing, but I had the good taste to not actually publish its lyrics (which are stupid), and the dignity to not attempt to sing it myself (I can’t sing). The 2013 calendar now sits on a book shelf by my desk, lying across the top of a row of Samuel Delany novels and a copy of one my own books. I see it any time I look to my right. Sometimes I even open it up to September.

“Despacito”

Sometime in 2017, the radio plays in the commercial kitchen that I run (my “day job”). Some of my staff occasionally bring in their little speakers and stream stuff from their phones, but on this day that I remember, the lady who has been on my staff for many years—and who is well into her seventies—turns on the radio that sits on her prep table, and that’s what we all hear as we work. She keeps it tuned to a local top-ten pop channel—that I usually cannot stand because I find the constant bleating ads for car dealers and personal injury lawyers to be maddening. But on this day that I now recall, we hear once every single hour Justin Bieber’s remix of Luis Fonsi’s reggaeton-flavored song “Despacito.” Both Fonsi’s version (featuring Daddy Yankee) and Bieber’s—featuring my pretty sexy boy singing in Spanish—were burning up the charts. Our radio lady half-dances and half-sings along a little bit each time it comes on. During the third or fourth time this song plays, as I pour custard into a bunch of tiny goat cheese tartlets, I venture aloud to some my staff this declaration: “This song is, right now, the most-streamed-ever song, which means that Justin Bieber has had the *top two ever* most-streamed songs to date.” A couple of my staff members react with some surprise and mirth: the first reaction because they weren’t even aware that they’d been listening to a Bieber song again and again, and the second over what was, to them, my surprising knowledge of Bieber’s work and popularity (I don’t have the “look” for it, and I seldom remark upon music at work). But this time, self-outed now at work as a JB fan, I am not in the least bit embarrassed: I like the cool thing for once—the most-streamed-ever song—and that means that I’m really *not* alone, at least in this one stupid little way.