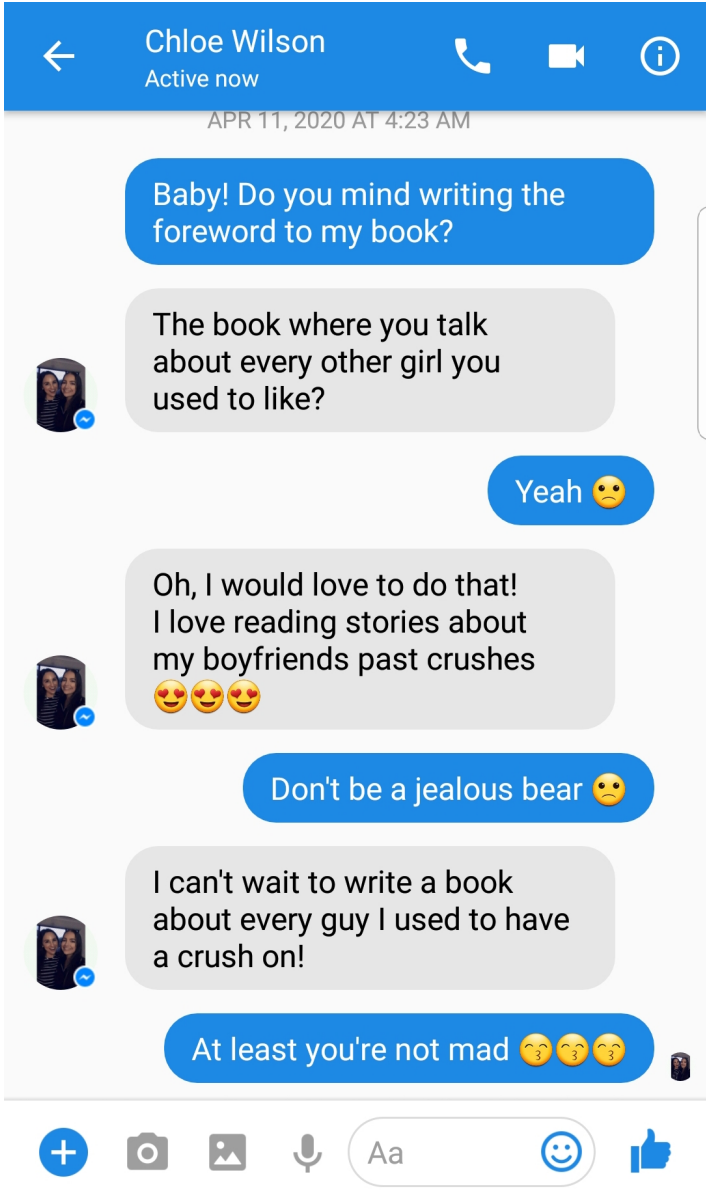


No.

Carlos Contreras

Foreword



The Beginning

The year is 2008, I am currently ten years old and attending the sixth grade at Intermediate School 96 in Brooklyn. My freshman year has just begun, and I realize that I do not know anybody in this school. I walk down the gray and narrow hallways and keep to myself to not disturb anyone. That was the case until that fateful day in science class when I met her.

I am sitting at my desk in my best white short-sleeved polo shirt with horizontal green stripes, a pair of baggy denim blue jeans, and all-white Nike Air Force 1s looking like a dollar store Eminem. That is when she walks over to me and asks if she can borrow a pencil. I freeze in complete admiration and do not know what to respond with, but "Here, take this one" as I give her my bright yellow Ticonderoga. I do not take any notes that day, but it did not matter because I was not paying any attention to anything except her.

An array of questions is going through my mind like "What is her name?", "How will I get to speak to her again?" and "Why did she pick me out of everyone in this class?" I conclude that she must like me and now I need to strike while the iron is hot.

I get up, walk over to her and ask for my pencil back and she returns it with a smile and a quick thanks. I hold on to it and realize that it's now or never! I cannot let the love of my life get away that easily, and I do what anyone else in my shoes would've done. I asked for her name.

I stand there looking paler than the white on my sneakers and embarrassed enough that I just wanted to hide in my baggy jeans. My face is beginning to turn red, but that is when she says it, she says "Joanna Herrera" and I mentally explode. Not only did I make my first friend, but she's my girlfriend as well. What could go wrong?



Just Kidding

It's been about two weeks since I met Joanna, and things are getting serious between the two of us. Our relationship is blossoming like a rose in Cupid's garden. We're beginning to say more than four words to one another, and she even accepted my friend request on Myspace. I click on her profile and see that she doesn't have me on her top 8 friends, but that is okay because I am #1 in her heart.

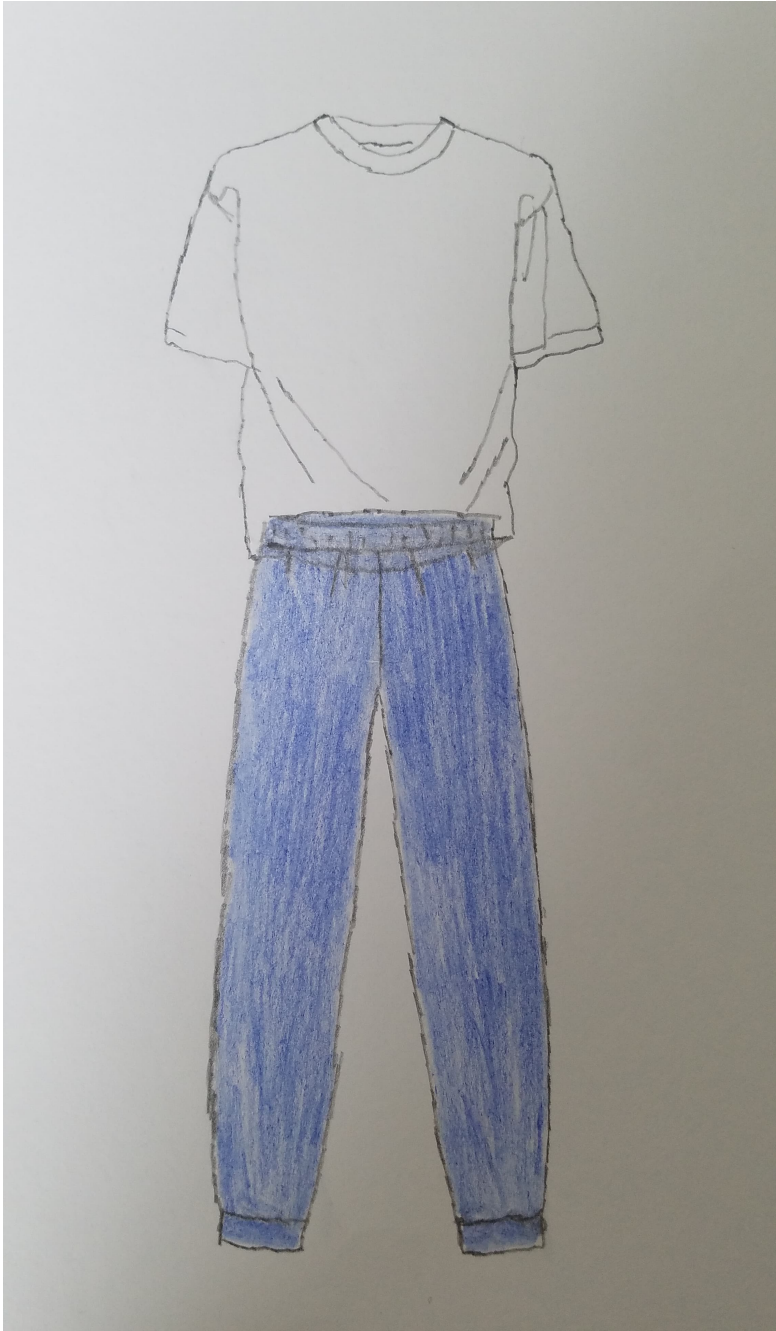
I've been keeping this relationship a secret from my family and do not know how to break it to them. I go to my cousin Francia for advice, and the news of me having a girlfriend shocks her. She interrogates me and wants to know all about Joanna, but I tell her that I do not know much about her. Francia is left puzzled and asks me how I asked Joanna to be my girlfriend. It was at that moment when it all hit me like a ton of bricks, and when I realized that I never asked Joanna out.

I know that I am only ten years old, but it's my destiny to end up dating this girl. I take action right away and hop onto my computer. I sit on my computer chair wearing my pajamas, which only consists of a plain white cotton t-shirt and long midnight blue cotton pajama bottoms. I log onto my Myspace account and start composing a declaration of love for Joanna, with the bravery of a Trump supporter at an Antifa rally I hit send.

I glare intensely at my computer screen for an eternity (probably about three to four minutes) and see that Joanna opened my love letter. She begins to type, but I am already wedding planning and picking out the venue. Right before I submit the payment for the Hammerstein Ballroom, she responds with two letters, one word, one meaning. No.

I begin to go numb and start developing a cold sweat, but my cotton t-shirt is absorbing it. I am at a loss for words and feel like the blue on my pajamas, my mind is blank, but I pull myself together just enough to respond with "I am just kidding! My cousin wrote that when I was in the bathroom and she almost got you :')." "

I never spoke to Joanna again.



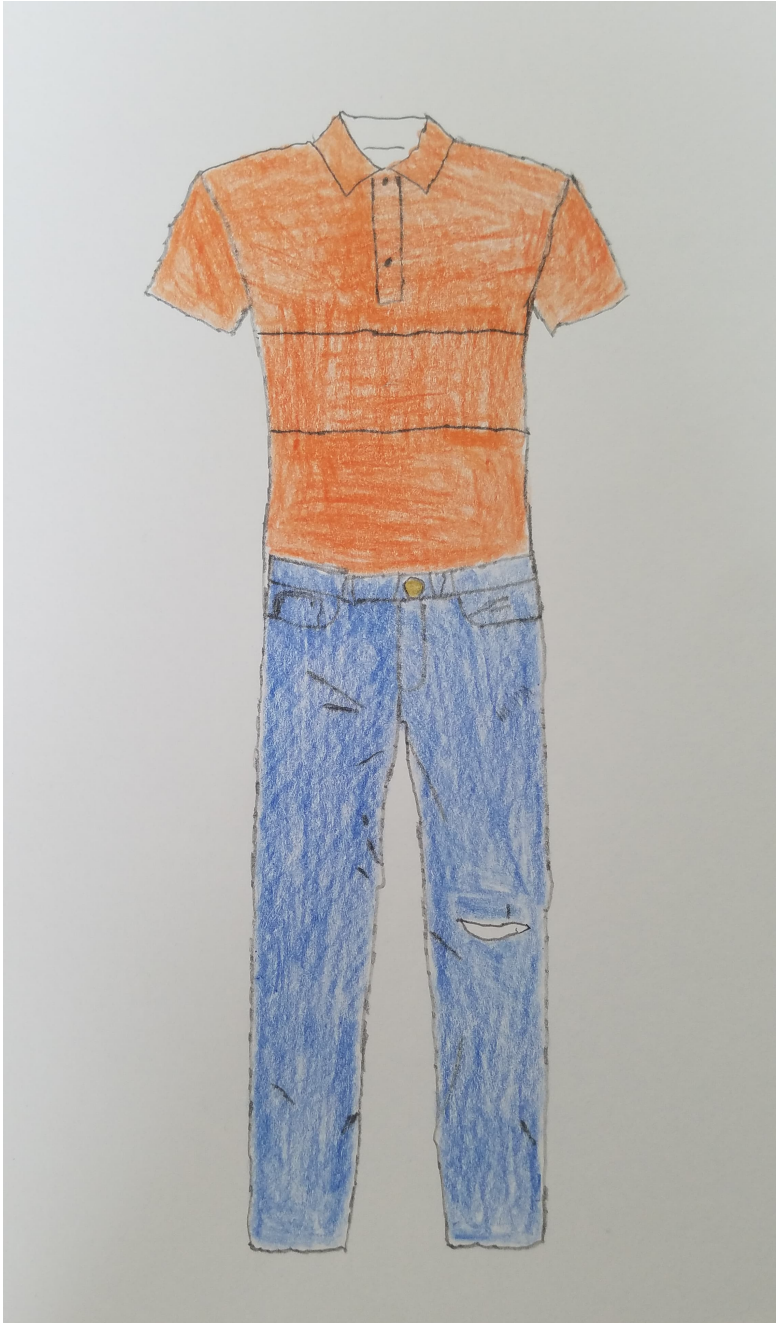
Polar Bears

Summer break goes by faster than a hot knife through butter, and the next thing I know is that I am sitting with my guidance counselor picking out my classes for the seventh grade. Mr. Vecchione asks me if I prefer to take an art class or a chorus class because I am missing an elective. I do not know what to choose because I sound like a seal getting strangled by Ted Bundy when I sing and cannot draw proper stick figures to save my life. I weigh my options and decide to go with the chorus class because it's the lesser of two evils. I finish enrolling and head on down to my impending doom right away.

I walk in late and sit in the only chair available next to a kid whose name is Benjamin Lin. We begin to chitchat after we realize that we're both wearing a bright orange polo shirt with two horizontal gray lines, a pair of denim blue jeans with a rip on the left knee, and all-black Nike Air Force 1s. We think we look good, but who honestly dressed us? Helen Keller?

All the talking I am doing with Benjamin starts to annoy the teacher, so he decides to separate us. He moves Benjamin to the other side of the room and sits a girl next to me. I take a look at her and almost faint because of how good she looks. I begin to shake harder than the Great Chilean Earthquake of 1960 and try to come up with a plan on how to speak to her. I ask her if she knows how much a polar bear weighs, and I immediately hit her with the classic "enough to break the ice." She laughs, but I am not going to make the same mistake again and jump to conclusions so quickly. I calmly ask what her name is, and she replies with "Sophia Peraza."

A solid four minutes have gone by since I found out her name, and I am beginning to hear wedding bells in the distance. Sophia tells me that I look like a traffic cone, and that is when I knew she's the one for me. My "ex-girlfriend" Joanna did not treat me this kind before, and Sophia already has a nickname for me. I am her little traffic cone because my heart needs "a little roadwork" or something like that, probably.



Gone Like the Wind

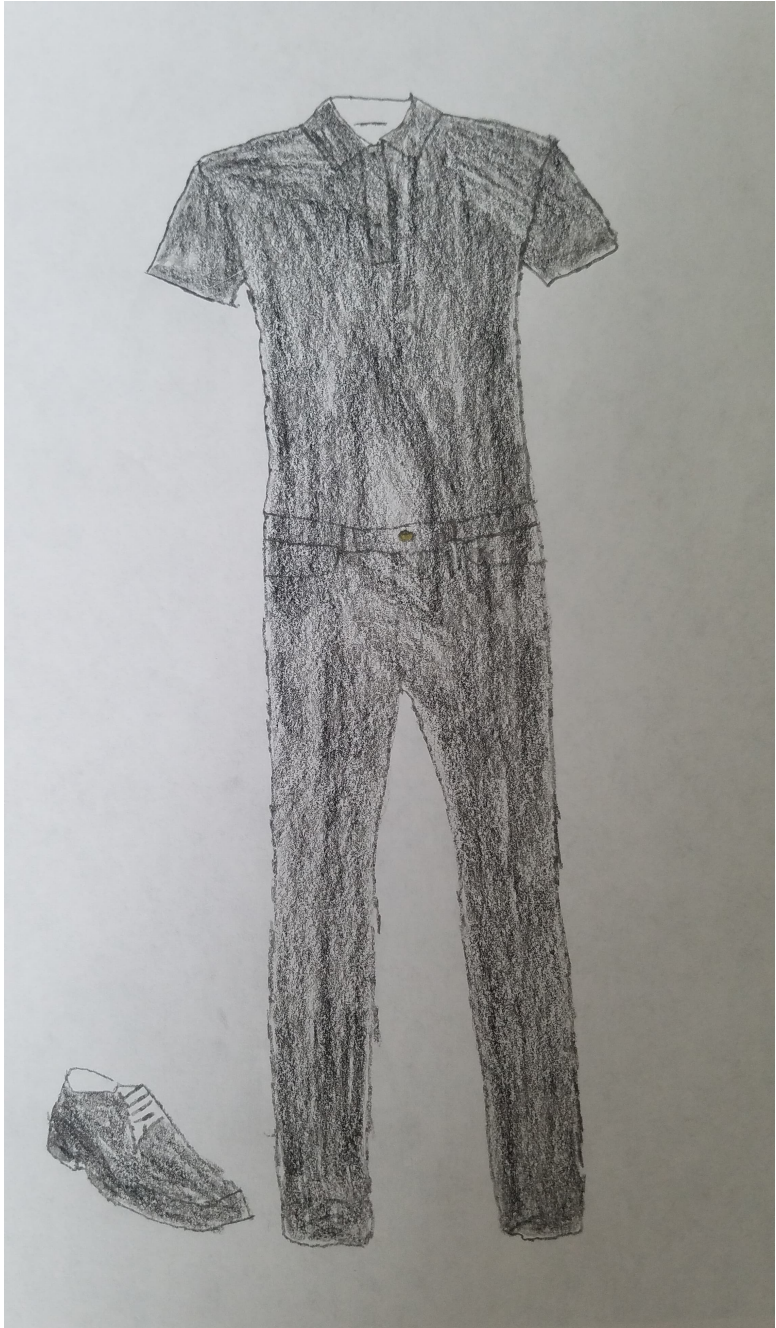
Time flies when you're in love, and the past 48 hours have been a countdown to seeing the love of my life again. I am a little nervous, and I never thought I would be so excited for a chorus class before. I have to look my best today because first impressions matter, but second impressions decide if I get put in the friend zone.

I have so many colors and styles to choose from and cannot decide what kind of vibe I want to make Sophia feel. Should I wear red and let her know I am courageous? Maybe yellow will make her notice me? I decide to wear black so she can see how sophisticated I happen to be. I grab my best all-black polo shirt, the tightest pair of all-black denim jeans without any rips, and my only pair of black dress shoes. I put everything on and tell myself that I look like I am worth a million dollars, that is until I realize that I am wearing square-toe dress shoes. The shoes are so square that you can find the square root of them in an algebra class. I do not have another pair, so I roll the dice and hope that Sophia doesn't look down at any point throughout the day.

I head on out to school very nervous and excited just at the thought of seeing Sophia. I walk down Avenue O until I reach West 12th and get a lot of looks along the way, but I assume they're admiring how good I look from the ankles up. I arrive at Seth Low, walk up the stairs to the third floor, and enter my classroom.

The late bell rings and Sophia isn't here yet, but that is okay because things happen, and she might be running a little late. Then 10 minutes go by, she's still not here, and I am beginning to deflate. Maybe she's going to be absent today, so I tell myself to keep it together. I figure that Sophia is sick and couldn't make it today, so I ask her close friend if there's anything wrong. She looks at me in confusion and realizes that I am not filled in on what happened to Sophia. I tell her to rip it off like a band-aid, and she tells me that Sophia moved to Long Island. I stand there in bewilderment and know this isn't an April Fool's joke because it's September.

I never spoke to Sophia again.



Kiss and Do Not Tell

My last two relationships haven't gone my way, and I've officially lost all hope in finding the right girl for me. I am fed up with this world and everybody betraying me, I'll no longer chase what is not for me. You're born into this world alone, and you leave this world alone.

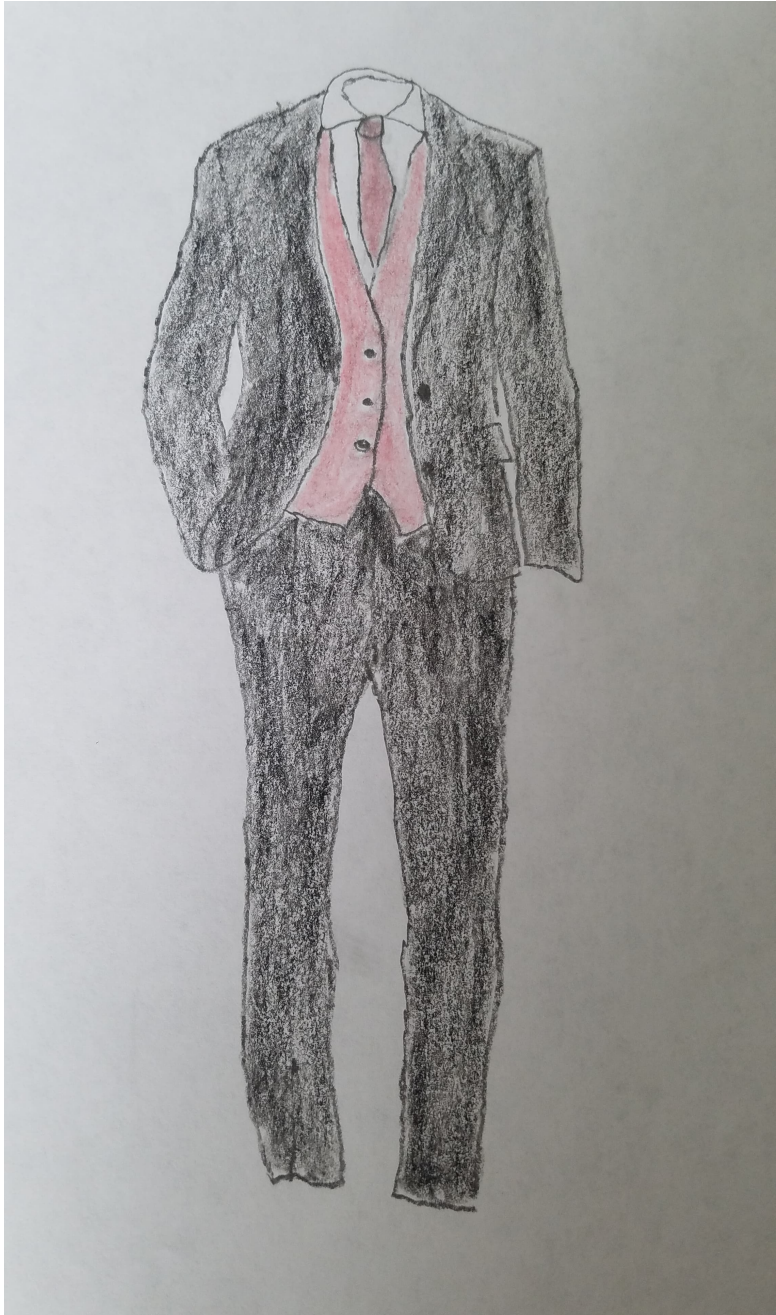
It's my final year of middle school, and all of this pain and suffering will be over in just a bit. No more rejections and no more surprise moves, this will be the end of heartache. All that is left for me to go through is the word all timid and shy middle schoolers hate more than any other in the English language. Prom.

I contemplate not going, but my mother has already paid for my admission and set up an appointment with a tailor. I do not understand why I have to look so good if I am going alone and reluctantly drag myself to the tailor. I arrive at the tailor on Avenue U & Flatbush Avenue and start looking at all the different colors of suits. They have white suits, green suits, red suits, and blue suits, but my eye catches this specific black suit. The pants are your ordinary black dress pants alongside the suit jacket and the white dress shirt, but the suit vest and tie are what the eyes see. It's a pink so bright that Bret Hart can look at it and go "now that is a nice pink." My mother doesn't like the color combination because "it's going to make me look like a highlighter," but I could care less.

I purchase the suit, wear it to prom, and it turns out to be a big hit amongst everyone. I have a ton of girls asking for my name, handing me their cameras, and asking me to take a picture of them and their dates. I become everyone's photographer that night and make it a memorable time for anyone in attendance.

The night comes to an end, and everyone begins to head home when one last girl walks up to me and asks me for my name. I tell her to give me the camera, point out who her date is, and pose. Right as I finish my sentence, she leans forward and plants a kiss on my cheek. In the words of AC/DC, "I am thunderstruck" and do not know what to do or say. She walks out of the venue before I can get her name.

I never saw her again.



I'll Be Right Back

The suffering I went through in middle school is in the past now, I have to look forward to my high school years at the High School for Health Professions and Human Services.

The first day of school comes, I need to look approachable or else it's going to be another lonely four years. I look into my wardrobe and pick out the baggiest pair of all-black denim jeans, and a black polo shirt with horizontal white and red stripes. I put it on and think I look good, but in reality, I look like a wacky waving inflatable arm-flailing tube man. My mother insists on buying me clothes that are two sizes bigger because I'll grow into them. A slight breeze and I could get blown away as if it's a category five hurricane.

I make it to school somehow without getting carried away and walk into my new Spanish class. I sit down and begin to see the class start filling up, but nobody takes the seat next to me. The teacher says to introduce ourselves to one another, but that is hard to do when you're the only one without a partner. I sit there alone, realizing that making friends is going to be harder than I thought, and that is when she walks up to me and asks if I want to pair up. I look up in disbelief when I see a girl standing on the other side of the desk, but I accept her proposal, and we get to chit chatting.

I ask her for her name, and she says it's Sofia Lizcano. I think nothing of it and notice that she's wearing a lot of sports affiliated clothing, so I ask if she's into sports, and she tells me that soccer is her biggest passion. I freeze, and something comes over me because the next thing I do is ask her out on a date. She has a look of confusion on her face because we just met, and I am already swinging for a base hit. I stand there in amazement because my balls just dropped, and I am officially a man. She walks away from me and asks the teacher if she can go somewhere and leaves. I wait for her to come back because maybe she just needed a minute to think about it, but she never returns. The next day I walk by another Spanish class and she's sitting there.

I never spoke to Sofia again.



All Righty Then!

Two days into high school, and I already scared a girl right out of my Spanish class. Maybe I came on too strong? She probably wasn't ready for such a long-term commitment and did not know how to tell me. I pick myself up and move on to the next victim, I mean, girl.

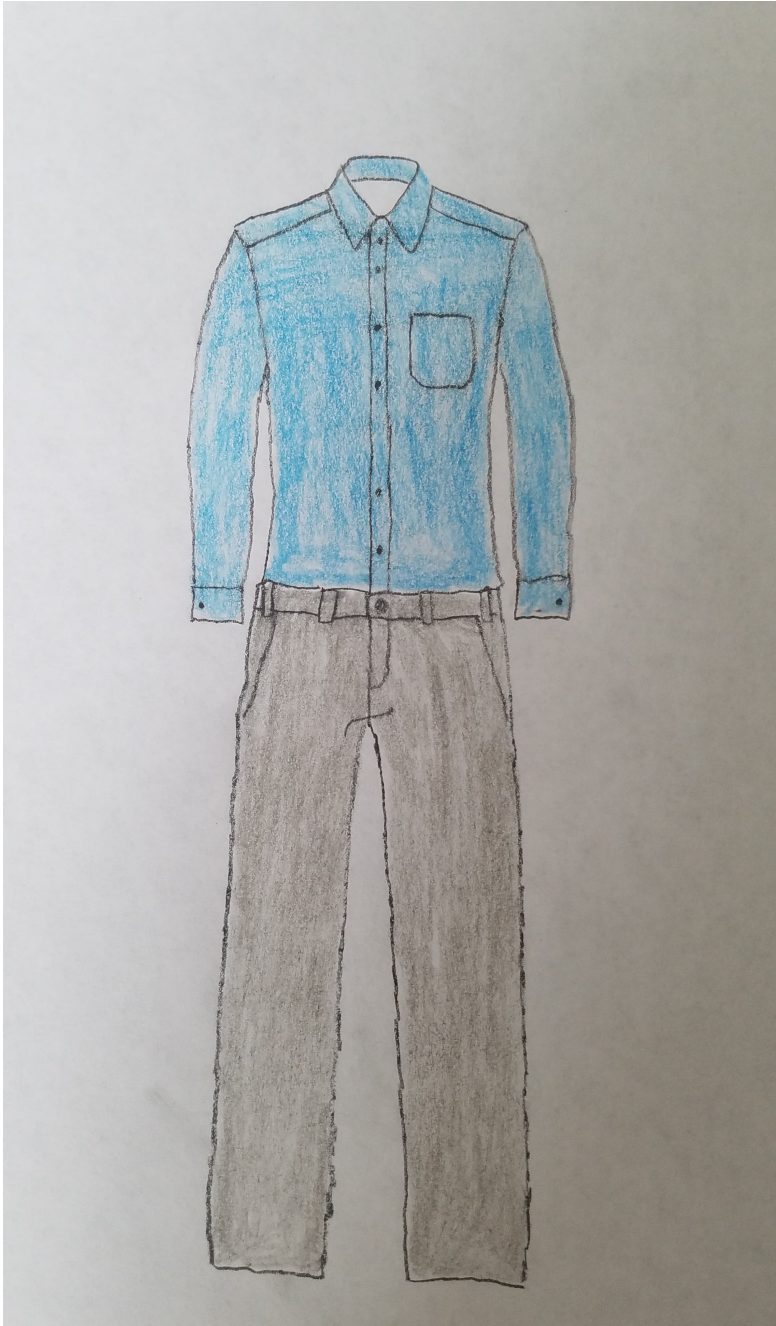
I have to let six months pass before I get interested in anyone else because I do not want word spreading of me making girls transfer out, so I focus on my classes and maintain a near-perfect GPA. That was the case until I met Janet Shumshomova. I met her in my microeconomics class and introduced myself by performing a magic trick, surprisingly she was still there and did not disappear after I finished. She came to class the day after I introduced myself, so I took that as a good sign. We talked and talked, and I began to realize that we have more chemistry than a periodic table, so I figured now was the time.

The day is April 15, 2012 (Janet's birthday,) and I just finished adding the final touches to my plan. I am going to throw her a surprise birthday party at school and ask her out in front of everyone in attendance. I put on my tightest pair of gray chinos and a premium oxford cotton shirt with a button-down collar because that is how I like them and get ready for showtime. I head out of my house and make a quick pit stop at my local 99¢ to buy a couple of party hats, streamers, balloons, and a little bit of the bubbly. I get to school and start giving orders on where people need to hide, so it doesn't ruin the surprise.

Everyone is waiting, we're all excited, and we see Janet approaching her locker. She begins to put her combination in, and that is when I pop open a bottle of apple cider. I start pouring out drinks to the tens in attendance, put a birthday hat on her, and call for a toast. I take out a speech I had written down the day before and declare my admiration towards her. I finish it off by getting down on one knee and popping the question.

The attention shifts to Janet as I wait for an answer on the floor, and that is when she says no. I get up, reach for the apple cider and drink my sorrows away while everyone begins to disperse. Janet is the last to go and tells me not to talk to her anymore.

I never spoke to Janet again.



Transferring into My Life

The word begins to go around the school about what happened between Janet and me. I am a little embarrassed, but at least I have the girls feeling bad for me and telling me it'll get better soon.

It's hard to be taken seriously after that catastrophe and hard to erase from everyone's mind. Every girl is aware of what happened and doesn't want to associate themselves with that clown. I stop searching for love and get back to studying, so all of my focus is on my grades again. I get into some AP courses and hope they'll help me forget about everything.

The first day of my junior year arrives, and I am feeling pretty numb about it. I walk into my AP English class and notice something out of the ordinary. There's a girl with curly brown hair, glasses, a yellow coat, and a pair of denim blue jeans sitting by herself. I have never seen this girl before and want to approach her but after the public castration I suffered the year before. I decide that I have nothing left to lose and sit next to her. I get a bit of courage and start up a conversation with her. I ask what her name is and what school she's from because I have never seen her before. She tells me that her name is Emily Peguero and that she's a transfer student from Aviation High School. I try to be funny and ask her if she wanted to make planes or be a pilot for a living, but she thought I was serious and went off about how more women need to be involved in those fields. I tell her to keep preaching while calling her Susan B. Anthony, and that gets a good laugh out of her.

The class comes to an end, and I ask Emily if she wants to get something to eat after school, and to my dismay, she says yes. I tell her that I'll wait for her at the front exit, and I am ready to be stood up. My jaw drops when she shows up and tells me to get moving because she's hungry.

Have I finally found the one?



Bloody Hell

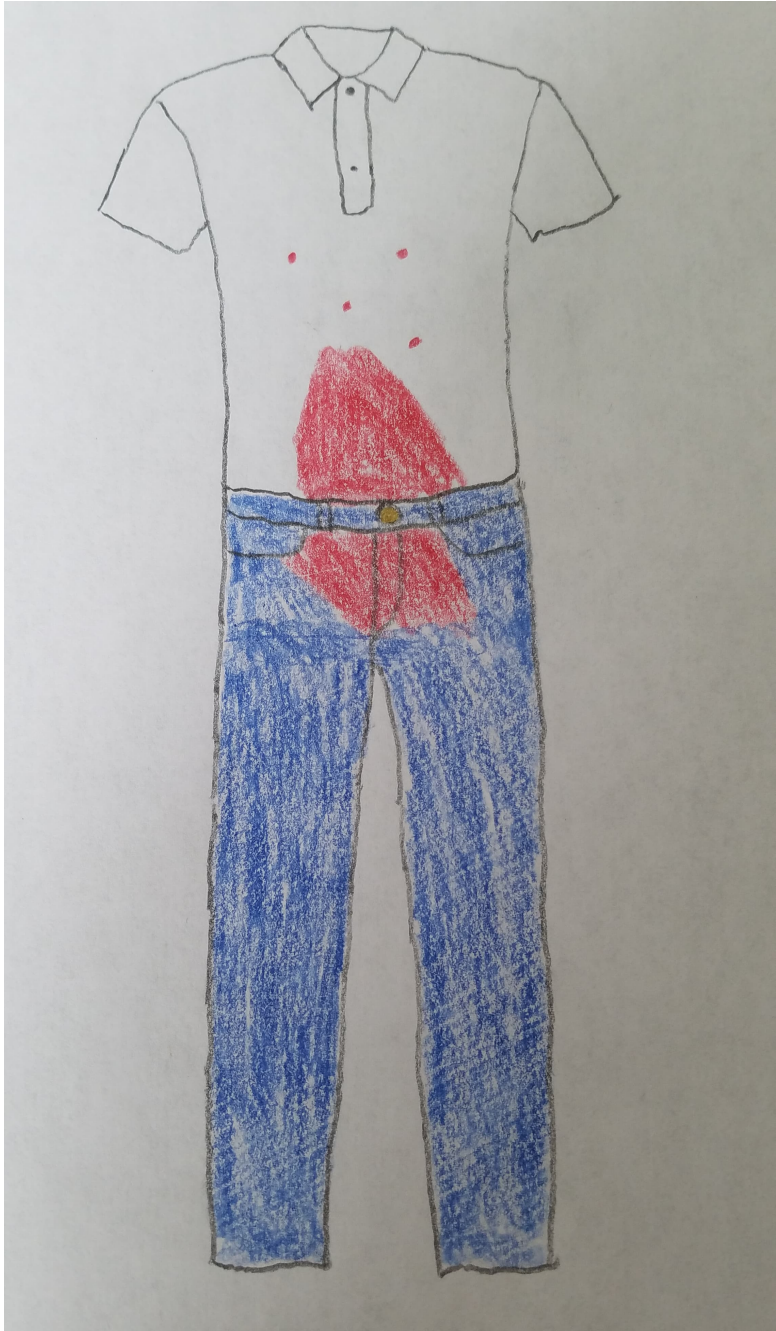
There are a lot of restaurants in the city, but I am 17 years old, without a job, and only have about \$40 in my pockets. I am finally on a date and want to impress, but I do not want to wash dishes to take care of a meal I cannot afford.

I ask Emily what she's in the mood for and she surprisingly picks Subway. I love Subway, and it's rare to meet a fellow Subway lover like myself. We get in line at the Subway on Union Square, and I order for the two of us because chivalry isn't dead. I get the Italian BMT with lettuce, tomatoes, pickles, black olives, and jalapeños; Emily gets the chicken teriyaki with everything because she likes to give everything a chance. We walk over to an empty table and begin to discuss life and everything in between. I tell her about my love for soccer, rock music, and how Seinfeld is the greatest TV show ever created. She tells me that she loves going on long walks, loves rock music as well, but that The Office is funnier than Seinfeld. Those are fighting words on my block, and we start playfully arguing with one another.

That is when it happens. I get a runny nose, but I wipe it clean with my right hand and think to myself that is the end of that. I try to continue the conversation with Emily, but my nose won't stop leaking so I take out a tissue and press it against my nose to stop it. I remove the tissue and place it on the edge of the table, then I take a quick glance at it and notice something strange. The tissue is of the color crimson, and my right hand has blood all over it; I begin to panic and look down at my denim blue jeans, but they're no longer blue. I am letting more blood out than a plague victim and do not know what to do. My white short-sleeved polo shirt is now red, and my face is turning red as well from embarrassment. Emily looks at me and tells me that there's blood pouring out of my nose. I thank her for letting me know, tilt my head back, and ask her to get me some napkins. A Subway employee hands her some, but it's too late; our table looks like a scene out of Friday the 13th, and I look like I just went 12 rounds with Mike Tyson.

Emily begins to gather her things and excuses herself from the restaurant. I ask where she's going, but she doesn't bother to look back at me. The embarrassment was too much; she got out of there faster than a fat kid chasing an ice cream truck. The bleeding stops, but what is the point? It might as well keep going; maybe I'll get lucky and drown when I tilt my head back.

I never spoke to Emily again.



No Goal

Who did I upset? What voodoo priest did I forget to thank after they held the door open for me? Somebody put a hex on me because I am cursed. I have been alive for 17 years and never had a bloody nose in public, but I decide to leak like a broken faucet when there's a pretty girl right across from me.

I contemplate swearing girls off my life for good because of this whole dating thing, but I have plans on procreating. Asexual reproduction is still not possible, so I have to keep looking for my next victim. I mean, "possible love interest." Emily doesn't have a lot of friends, so nobody knows about what happened between her and me. I get my head out of the gutters and decide to lower my standards because I am playing hard to get when I am honestly hard to want. Branching out and meeting new people is not easy, but I took a shot in my AP Spanish class senior year and met Alejandra Tabares.

A fellow soccer aficionado like myself is hard to come across, and I almost asked for her hand in marriage when she began naming teams that were not in the mainstream. We spent periods together discussing who would win this week's game, and that is when it dawned on me. I should take her out to a game and ask her to be my girlfriend at the end of it.

I purchased two tickets to see Honduras Vs. Ecuador at RedBull Arena and asked her to be my guest of honor. She had no prior commitments and happily agreed to attend the game with me. I couldn't believe it; another pretty girl had agreed to be seen in public with me? I have to step my game up; this could be my last chance at finding true love and didn't want to blow it again. I went out to purchase the newest Honduran jersey on the market. It's a gorgeous looking thing; a short sleeve crew neck, made out of 100% polyester, three (blue) thick vertical lines going down the front, gold trimming all around, with a big H over the heart. I am ready for anything, whether it's finally having a girlfriend or jumping onto the field in case the team needs an extra player.

I decided to push my luck and came up with a bet, I told her that she has to kiss me if Honduras wins and that I have to kiss her if Ecuador wins. She agrees and we end up watching the most boring 90 minutes of our lives, the game finishes 0-0 and I am speechless. I forgot the cardinal rule of soccer: majority of them in a draw.

She laughs and tells me that she's glad nobody won because her boyfriend would have been mad. I do not look at her, acknowledge her, or say anything back, I just drop her off home.

I never spoke to Alejandra again.



Do Not Talk to Strangers?

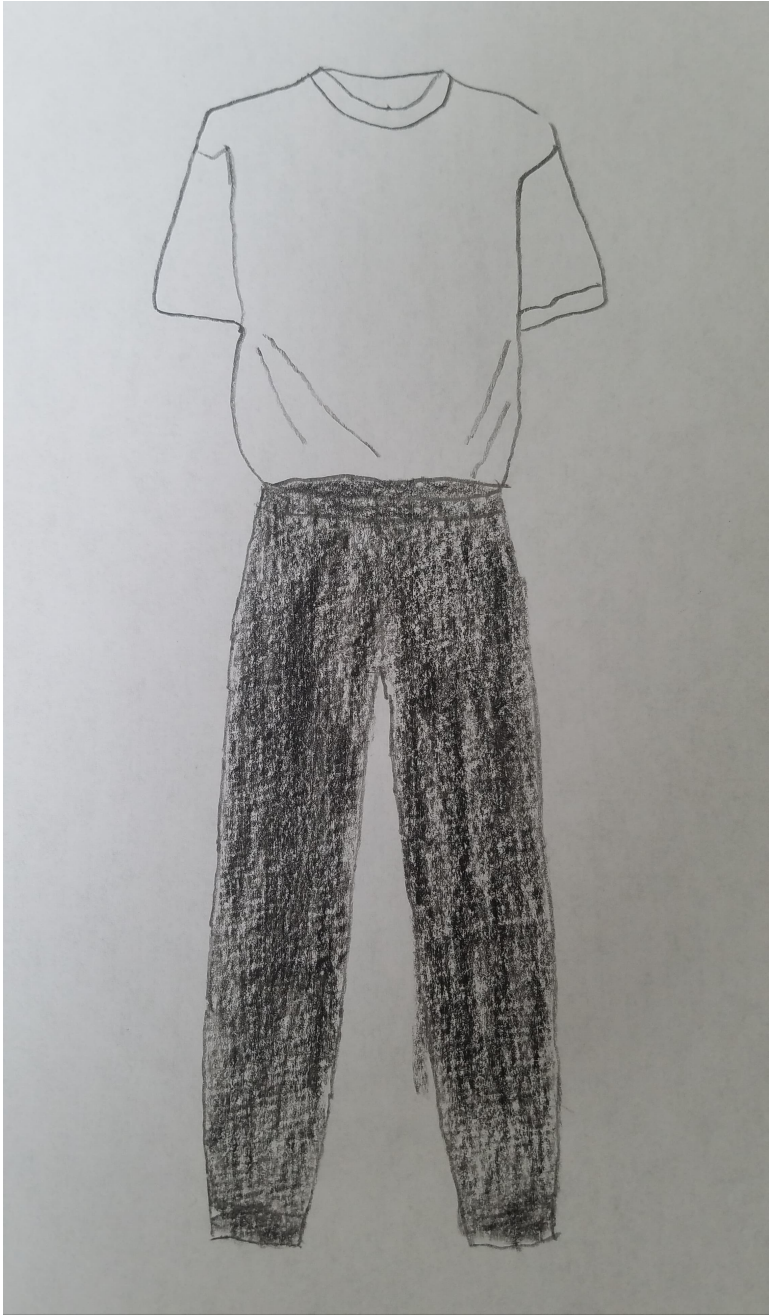
I give up. The world is conspiring against me, there is no other way to explain what has been happening to me since sixth grade. My first year of university is just around the corner and I am not here to make friends. I want time to hurry up so I can die already, there is no purpose for me on this earth.

Parties are a thing of the past and social interaction is meaningless. I go to school and come straight home to just do it again and again until I get my degree. I cut everyone off, I am finally alone, but sometimes I feel a little too lonely. I have no one to talk to, but it is my fault, it has always been my fault. Having no friends is rough, but odds are I am going to fall in love with them and get my heart broken again. I decide to try having temporary friends by using a website I had recently discovered. Omegle is a website that lets you talk to strangers anonymously until you get bored or the conversation escalates into something bad. Most conversations start off with a guy asking you if you're horny and those are the ones you should disconnect from immediately. Most conversations do not materialize into anything special and the couple of sane people that you come across are irrelevant. That was the case until December 28th, 2017.

It is four in the morning; I am lying in bed wearing my plain white cotton t-shirt and long black cotton pajama bottoms and decide to log on to Omegle for a quick chat. I hope I do not get any creeps, but that is usually the case anyway, so I am not getting my hopes up. I connect with a stranger who tells me that her name is Chloe Wilson and that raises a lot of red flags. Omegle consists of about 94% males who are there for a good time. The other 6% are usually males pretending to be females (not that there's anything wrong with that) because they are into that. I have my suspicions, but I get to know this "girl" and "she" sounds really cool. You should never exchange contact information with a stranger you meet online, but I gave "Chloe" my number so we can keep in touch.

We continue to text and begin to learn a lot about each other; I tell her that I reside in NYC and she tells me that she is from Queensland. We instantly click and are like two peas in a pod, but I am still not convinced she is who she says she is so I tell her to video call me. My phone rings and I answer the call, on the other side of the screen is the most beautiful girl I have ever laid eyes on. It is love at first sight and I'll make her walk by again until she feels the same way.

Will she hang up the call after finding out what I look like?



The End

I show Chloe my face and expect the worst; she will probably block my number, block my Facebook, block my Instagram, and pretend I was never a part of her life. We say hello in unison and our smiles are so cheesy that Wisconsin is jealous.

The video call lasts about five hours and it honestly felt like a couple of minutes. We continue to text every day and call whenever we can, but we wanted more after six months of constantly doing the same two things. The only thing going through our heads now is meeting in real life, but how could we do that? I am undocumented and not allowed to leave the USA or I'll get deported back to Honduras. Chloe is an 18-year-old girl who has never traveled outside of Australia by herself. We talk things out and decide it has to be done, Chloe has to get on a plane for 32 hours and come see me. Convincing her parents won't be easy because I could be the next Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, or Jack the Ripper.

Chloe assembles her family and I meet them through video, they notice I am a down to earth guy and do not look like a threat to anybody. They allow her to come see me, so we book her flight for November 15th, 2018. Time couldn't go by any slower and I just want to have her in my arms already, I mark the days off my calendar until the 14th of November hits. She has to leave on the 15th of November in Australia, fly for about 24 hours, and get here on the 15th of November in New York. She's technically a time traveler so I begin to ask her why didn't she warn us about 9/11?

The 15th of November finally hits, I suit up and get ready for something that has been in the making for about 11 months. I put on a plum suit, black dress shirt, and black dress shoes because Chloe loves it when men wear black. I hype myself up and get ready for a day that will change my life. A friend offers to give me a ride to JFK, so we head on out and wait at terminal four until her plane lands. I get a call from Chloe who tells me that she's at arrivals, my muscles begin to tense up and butterflies' whirl all around my stomach. I begin to approach the door and that is when I see her waiting for me. It was no longer through a video camera; she was in front of me. With a tear in my eye, I give her a hug with the same amount of energy as Chernobyl and we kiss.

This is how I met my wife.

