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The Romantic Tragedies of a Drama King

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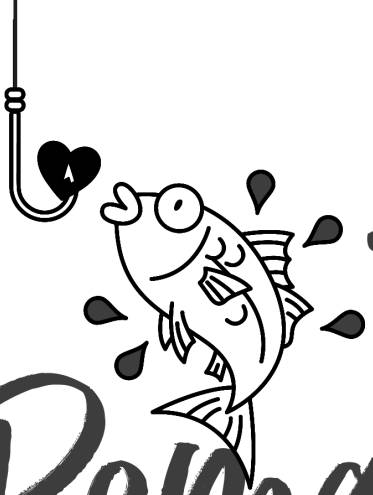

The Romantic Tragedies of a Drama King

HARRY TREVALDWYN

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To all the romances that couldn't happen,
and all the ones that still can.

Dear Jean-Pierre,

I regret to inform you that this will be the last letter you ever receive from me. You see, this year I have decided to get a boyfriend and unfortunately (for you) I simply don't have the time to both continue my pen-pal responsibilities and give this new task the focus it requires.

I don't want to lie to you and say that getting a boyfriend is the only reason I'm stopping my letters. I think, Jean-Pierre, you are partly to blame. We have been writing letters to each other for nearly two years now and there hasn't been the slightest hint that you'll invite me to France despite me having invited you to my house several times. Invitations which you have, rather rudely, ignored. There was also the issue last year when you addressed your letter to someone called 'Felix' and in the process made it abundantly clear that ours was not an exclusive writing relationship. Have you invited Felix to Normandy, Jean Pierre?? Don't even bother responding to that because I shan't reply. Lastly, and I don't quite know when this happened, but I've noticed that we now write all of our letters in English and because of this, my French has not improved <u>at all</u>. I wish you well and I hope that life is kind to you and despite all of this I genuinely hope that you get into the tennis team this year. I know how important that is to you.

But like I said, this is the last you will ever hear from me,

Kind regards, à bientôt,

Patrick Simmons (Patch)

PS In your first-ever letter, you attached a Milka chocolate bar (which was quite the incentive for keeping up our pen-pal relationship, and I wrongly assumed they would be a regular addition to your letters). I think it would be a really classy and symbolic move to send me one more as a final 'adieu' to our writing relationship. Also, they are really quite hard to find here. OK, now <u>that</u> is the last you'll ever hear from me, properly this time.

Au Revoir!

Patrick Simmons (Patch)

xxx

Chapter 1

I cross out the kisses at the end of my letter because I think it undermines the gravity of what I'm saying. My chair creaks as I lean back and hold the letter up for inspection. Faultless penmanship, as always.

I do feel a bit guilty for ending my pen-pal relationship with Jean-Pierre but 'in order to make room for new relationships in my life I have to de-weed the ones that aren't bearing fruit'. I learned that phrase from one of my mum's self-help books, which I've taken to borrowing on a semi-short-term basis. If you look past the tacky covers there are some real pearls of wisdom there. It's fascinating how much is applicable to both a divorcee in her mid-forties and a queer sixteen-year-old; especially as we're both desperately seeking a man. While, *of course*, seeming to be happy on our own in order to lure them in. Ah, Jean-Pierre, au revoir!

It's worth noting that I have been in love twice before. The first time was with Fred; very charming with neat blond hair and a penchant for accessories. The problem was that he was an animated character on *Scooby-Doo*. I appreciate that he was romantically linked with Daphne but I always

felt their chemistry to be somewhat lacking. Fred took charge which I found very appealing (but now find a bit problematic) and he, alongside Velma, was a large factor of why the gang had such a high success rate when I don't think any of them were formally trained in detective work. The second time was with Josh, who was definitely a real person, but things turned sour when I discovered he was a paid babysitter rather than a seventeen-year-old genuinely interested in my origami and who weirdly enjoyed enforcing bedtimes.

You have to be *organized* in order to fall in love so I've given myself a 'boyfriend deadline'. The end of the school year feels much too far away; I'm ready to take the leap *now* and I'll get complacent if the deadline's too far in the future. Also I'm terrible at being patient. So, I've marked in my diary (with a big red heart) the perfect deadline: Prom. Our school doesn't do *actual* Prom, but my Drama Club puts on a party after the first big show which everyone calls 'Prom'. Apart from Ms Jenkins, who runs it, because she thinks that '*Americanisms* are melting our mind', which is ridiculous because America is responsible for such incredible things! Off the top of my head: Kelly Clarkson, the Hollywood sign and cereals so sweet they make your teeth shake. I even tried suggesting a big family holiday to America under the guise of 'political intrigue' but Mum quickly sniffed out it was for the cereals, so we went to Devon instead. Regardless, Prom

is the *perfect* time to have a boyfriend:

Why Prom is the PERFECT time to have a boyfriend:

- Proms are romantic (ask any film).
- There's a photo element (it is so important to professionally document love).
- I won't have to spend an awkward amount of time pretending to browse the crisp selection when the slow songs come on.
- It's in December, so I'll probably receive a thoughtful and romantic Christmas present from him (jewellery seems a bit obvious, but also I want it).

Last year, our 'Prom' was tasteless and uninspired; the theme was 'party'. It was my mission to convince Ms Jenkins (partly through pretending to cry) that this year it was integral to have a legitimate planning committee. Luckily, as I'm the only person who volunteered to be on the committee, I can essentially organize my own perfect night!

'Patrick! We are leaving at 7.45 *on the dot*!'

I'm snapped out of my daydream of slow-dancing with a new boyfriend to the sound of my mum yelling at me from downstairs. Bugger. I spent too long trying to impress Jean-Pierre with my handwriting and now I have ruined my life.

I stand up from the little wooden desk in my room and go to the mirror on the wall, which is in the shape of a

crescent moon, making it very difficult to see anything in. Today's the first day of school, so obviously I have to wear something that perfectly encapsulates the vibe of my upcoming year. Like a sociopath, I've left it until the morning to decide what that new look will be.

Looking at the moon mirror reminds me that I also need to redecorate my room to match my new vibe. I can't have my future boyfriend coming upstairs, obviously expecting to see the bedroom of a sophisticated adult with warm neutrals, wicker storage baskets and low lighting and instead entering the bedroom of a *child* – or more specifically a *child obsessed with space* because alongside the moon mirror are star curtains, an astronaut figurine, a giant poster of the moon landing and a hanging rotating model of the solar system. I don't even like space any more! I just so happened to be obsessed with it when I was last allowed to redesign my room. Luckily, over the last week I've managed to steal little touches that make my room seem more mature: a gingerbread-scented candle that my mum got for Christmas, one of the pillows from the sofa downstairs and a lamp I found in the shed which, unfortunately, gives me little electric shocks every time I turn it on, but it's worth it.

'Did you hear me, Patrick?!' Mum yells again.

Ugh. I lean my head out into the landing. 'It's *PATCH*!' I shout. Another part of my rebrand is shifting from Patrick to Patch to feel more characterful and mysterious. As if I

just don't have *time* to say Patrick. 'Patrick' is the type of person to give his hand a hickey from practising kissing too hard (true story, unfortunately), while 'Patch' is the type of person to give other people tips on how to kiss while also smelling divine and having the perfect amount of rip on his ripped jeans.

'Also!' I continue over the sound of the coffee machine. 'You're stressing me out, and this is a really important day! You should be savouring this! Your child is going into lower sixth, a once-in-a-lifetime occasion!'

There is a pause while she waits for the coffee machine to stop whirring. 'Apart from when Kath did it last year. Forty-five minutes, *Patrick*!'

My older sister, Kath, is old for her year (a cruel, cold-hearted winter baby) and I'm young for my year (a joyful, warm-hearted summer baby) and because of that we're only one school year apart which Mum misguidedly hoped would make us close. She's also misguided in giving me forty-five minutes to get ready. You can't do anything momentous in forty-five minutes! I contort my body in an attempt to see as much of myself in the moon mirror as possible so I can figure out what will be the quickest route of personalization. All I see is slightly ginger hair – I've branded it as 'sunset blonde' – and arms that are too long. As always, I decide to FaceTime Jean.

'We can do this, we just need to streamline,' says Jean

calmly on loudspeaker while I sift through a box of slogan badges.

Jean is my best friend in the world. It's unfortunate that her name is Jean but it's not something I hold against her. She's *sensational* but also a bit of a nightmare. Recently, she's taken to wearing a different decorative hair clip every day and learning everything there is to know about queerness. At first this was largely to support me, but now it's gone too far and she just tells me off when I'm not being progressive enough. This is theoretically good but realistically very annoying because, sorry, *I am the queer one.*

'OK, so our main options are hair, shoes or accessories,' I remind her, as I empty out a box of loose crystals onto my bed. I'm not positive what I can do fashion-wise with loose crystals but I'm willing to get creative.

'This would be so much easier if we didn't have a school uniform,' she moans over the phone as she forces a cherry, her clip of the day, into her unruly hair.

'Ugh, I know.'

I'm lying. I would never admit this but I find it very helpful having a uniform because otherwise I would be overwhelmed with choice and nobody would understand my more abstract outfit aesthetics such as 'a chance encounter' or 'memories of bohemia'. Also, the green polo-shirt goes with my colouring.

'What shoes do you have?' asks Jean, but she's left the

screen so her voice sounds slightly echoey.

'Oooh, I don't think that's a route we want to go down because my shoes at the moment, while not super fashionable, have excellent arch—'

'—Arch support yes. You've actually mentioned that several times,' she says as she reappears onscreen with her school bag which, knowing Jean, has been packed ready for three days. 'Hair it is!'

I stick my fingers into the 'texture-enhancing putty wax' that I have received every Christmas for the past six years from my godmother Pamela. Her and my mum aren't even friends any more but she inexplicably still sends me hair wax every year with a flamingo-themed card. I'm following a hair tutorial called 'messy beach look' but after about ten minutes of twisting my ends in order 'to create effortless definition' the result is less 'beach look' and more 'recently died by electrocution'. I run my head under the tap to reset and borrow my sister's hairdryer. After another ten minutes, during which time Jean and I have two fights about whether it would be useful to invest in a hair diffuser (it definitely would) I inspect myself in the mirror and definitely have *volume*. I'm forced to lean quite far back in order to show Jean the full effect but we both decide that volume is something to celebrate so I hang up and proudly go downstairs to showcase my new look.

'Nice hair,' says Mum while grabbing her bag for what I

imagine is the eleventh time to look for her keys.

'Why do you never support my creative endeavours?' I snap, carefully tapping the top of my hair to make sure it hasn't lost any precious volume.

'By creative endeavours do you mean using a hairdryer?' she replies absentmindedly, barely looking up from her bag. 'Where are my flipping keys?'

'Caroline.' I address her by her first name so she knows I'm serious, and take in a slightly performative shaky breath. 'If you continue to stunt my personal growth by saying patronizing things like "nice hair" . . . then I'm not sure I can carry on living under this increasingly oppressive roof.'

Mum looks like she's about to snap something back but then furrows her brow in confusion. 'What?'

My mum used to be proud of my rapidly expanding vocabulary, but it appears she's no longer thrilled that her son is a word prodigy. In theory, I'm very impressed by my mother because she's a single mum raising two children (one of whom is an angel and one of whom is Kath) but in practice I find her to be increasingly annoying especially when she refuses to give me her unyielding support in my every endeavour, which surely is the whole point of being a parent?

'Alright, Patrick,' she continues, using the tone of voice I have learned to recognize as '*can this conversation be over?*'. 'Your hair is the best thing I've ever seen. It's close

to godliness . . . and not just because of its height,' and proceeds to laugh at her own joke. 'Now where the eff are my effing keys!' she hisses into the butter dish.

I actually know where her keys are but in order to give myself time for Weetabix, and to punish her for both calling me Patrick and the hair joke, I withhold that piece of information. My trick with Weetabix is eating one at a time so you aren't left with the dreaded soggy mush. I crave texture both in life and in breakfast cereal.

As I move onto my second Weetabix, Kath trudges into the kitchen dragging her school bag behind her, not dissimilarly to how she sometimes drags me behind her. My sister has recently discovered eyeliner in an aggressive way, but won't let me show her how to do a 'flick' so instead just looks like she's making sure astronauts in space know exactly where her eyes are. Just before she crams whatever cured meat she can find in the fridge into her mouth she looks me up and down with unveiled contempt. 'What is going on with your hair?' she asks.

'What?' I self-consciously tap it. It's a bit crunchy.

'Looks weird,' she replies.

'"Weird" is just another word for unique. So *thank you*, Kath, for saying I look unique.'

'Whatever,' she says and fists a handful of salami in her mouth. There's been somewhat of a cold war between Kath and me over the last year or so because she refuses to admit

that she broke my karaoke machine when the evidence is all there (aka, me just *knowing* it was her!). She mistakenly thinks I'll get over it eventually but she underestimates my skill in holding a grudge. It's actually one of my top five skills.

My Top Five Skills:

1. Acting.
2. Knowing what any TV advert is promoting within two seconds.
3. Being able to roll my r's.
4. Holding a grudge.
5. Triple jump (I'm weirdly good at triple jump but unfortunately it doesn't hold much weight nowadays).

'Alright, let's gooooo! We really are running late,' I say, swiping the keys off their spot and handing them to my puzzled mother who always thinks the key hook is 'too obvious' a place to look.

Just as Mum is about to lock the door, I stop her. It's funny how time-pressured situations always provide moments of clarity. I turn and sprint upstairs to grab the *one thing* that has the power to tie my entire look together and set the tone for the whole year.

Chapter 2

There are three schools in my humble town of Hiverhampton, and if awards were being given out, Hiverhampton High wouldn't win for 'most academic', 'most creative' or even 'most clean', but we would *definitely* win for 'most deceitful'. I'm almost deceived myself as Mum pulls up to a beautiful red-brick building with tall windows, genuine turrets and Latin writing carved above the door. The type of school you would see in a film where Colin Firth plays an inspiring but no-nonsense English teacher! But the building, though technically my school, is only the front of *one* of the buildings. That's where the deceit comes in. The rest of the school, which you can't see until it's too late and you're stuck inside, is what can only be described as three very beige rectangles that join together to make a square. If I were a school tour guide (a position I'm gunning for now that I'm in lower sixth), I would say: 'The school boasts a verdant communal outdoor space, state-of-the-art dining facilities and high-tech computer equipment.' But what I would *mean* is: 'There's a concrete outdoor space with two

chained-down benches and one spindly tree, a cafeteria with an industrial-sized ketchup pump and a computer room with, at most, four computers that can confidently connect to the internet.'

It's only as Mum pulls away and I enter my deceitful school that I look down at my last-minute bolt of fashion inspiration and realize what a colossal mistake I've made. I'm wearing a giant wooden surfboard necklace. What was I thinking?! And my hair is a huge fluffy mess. This is the worst day of my life. The tone I've set for the upcoming year is 'utterly disastrous'.

'It's a statement piece,' says Jean, who can tell I'm spiralling. She inspects the bulky wooden necklace I bought in a gift shop in Devon years ago. 'And statement pieces are worn by bold people ready to take charge of their lives.'

Even though I know that it is a direct quote from one of my mum's self-help books that I leant her (*Owning Your Brand: How to Become a She-E-O*), it does soften the blow. Slightly. But when I look around the classroom it *feels* like everyone in our French class is staring at it. One person even comes up to me and asks if I like surfing?! Obviously I have no idea if I like surfing! Why must everyone take the necklace so *literally*; it's not about what necklace you're wearing, it's about being a necklace-wearer!

And just when things feel like they can't get any worse,

Jean elbows me and whispers, 'Incoming,' and in walks Tessa James; aka, my nemesis and sworn enemy (Jean and I swore it).

A bit of background on the 'Tessa Situation': Tessa joined our school two years ago and nobody would talk to her when she arrived because she wore vegan clogs. Jean and I, ever the humanitarians, spotted something fashion-forward in her Scandinavian and ecological approach to footwear, and took her under our wing. We thought it was very cool that she used to live near London but moved here because her mum was going through something personal (a divorce because she cheated on her husband). Tessa and I quickly bonded over both being children of divorce and also when I found out that she wants to be an actor like me. Jean isn't positive if she wants to be an actor herself, but I've repeatedly reassured her that she wouldn't be left out – she would be my publicist when the time comes.

For that first year, the three of us were inseparable. But then everything changed. Over the summer, Tessa had her hair highlighted and got tanned and all of a sudden the popular kids started asking her to hang out with *them* and by default she wanted nothing to do with us. By the end of the next term she was a firm member of the 'Lodge Crew' (that's what the cool group call themselves because they sometimes vape outside the Holiday Lodge in town). Since hanging around with that sort of clientele, Tessa has

become a certified cow. Sometimes during lunch, I still catch her glaring at us from the cool table while Jean and I eat together or make mosaics out of the salt and pepper sachets.

Tessa struts in with her new cohort, including Callum Taylor, who immediately swipes the books off someone's desk as he passes. Callum Taylor is conventionally attractive, I suppose, but he is even more conventionally evil. It's as if he googled what a bully is supposed to do and perfectly executes it at every opportunity. While Callum guffaws, Tessa walks up to us, swishing her hair which is, predictably, perfectly highlighted and shiny and which matches Callum's pristinely white trainers which he replaces every month. It's too late to tuck my necklace into my shirt. She's spotted it like a shark smelling blood from miles away. Thank goodness I ran my disastrous hair under the tap as soon as I got into school so she doesn't have more ammo.

'Is that a necklace?' she drawls in her heavily contrived London accent, prompting a chorus of laughter from her drones.

'So it would seem,' I reply, trying to stop my face from turning red, even though I can feel my ears are ahead of the game and already crimson. I turn to Jean and roll my eyes. *If someone is trying something new you just have to compliment them, even if you hate it.*

'I think it looks amazing, very chic,' Jean says supportively, God bless her.

'You're into surfing now, Simmons?' says Callum, placing his hands on our desk and leaning in to take a closer look. I can't help but notice that he's somehow become more muscular over summer and is trying to make that obvious with a shirt that's far too small for him.

I shoot Tessa an annoyed look and I can see her dead eyes glinting, ready to go in for the kill.

'Well if you must know, it's my cousin's necklace . . .' The lie comes out before I can stop it. I lean in and take a shaky breath (my second of the day). 'My cousin who is *incredibly ill* so I'm wearing it to support him?' I don't feel great about the harrowing lie, especially as Tessa knows my family, but it does its job to shut Tessa up. I can see her about to mouth a retort but she knows she can't battle with an ill family member so swishes her hair again and goes to her desk.

Patch: 1, Tessa: 0.

Annoyingly, I now have to wear the necklace for ever. Or at least until I kill off my fictional cousin.

'OK.' I turn to Jean and whisper urgently, 'You must never let me forget that I've said I have an ill cousin.'

'I won't. So, how are you getting on with your list?'

I pull out my notebook from my bag and go to the page titled 'Boyfriend Checklist'. This was Jean's brilliant

idea and crucial in reminding me that I can have an *ideal* boyfriend rather than just any boyfriend which is what I was semi-willing to settle for.

Jean analyses the list, red pen in hand, like she's marking my actual homework. So far the list is as follows:

Boyfriend Checklist:

- Very, very hot (will make sure to tell people this doesn't matter, though).
- Has a healthy disregard for rules (but not belligerent of authority).
- Ambitious.
- Sporty (not in a regimented way; in a 'looks good in shorts' way).
- Good with adults and dogs.
- Famous relative (note – *relative*, not 'friend-of-a-friend').
- Willing to call me by my last name in a flirty sort of way (like in TV shows, not like Callum Taylor does).
- Speaks another language / open to learning another one / has Duolingo downloaded.
- Funny, but in a way where he appreciates *I'm* funny rather than funny himself.
- Kind, etc.

'OK, super doable. Although we might want to rethink "hot" being at the top and "kind" scribbled at the bottom . . . one

thing I learned about being in a healthy, albeit heterosexual, relationship is that . . .'

I tune out because I know that Jean is about to go off on one of her '*this is what it's like to be in a relationship*' monologues.

Jean had a boyfriend over summer but they've since broken up. At first I was furious that she was the first one out of us to be in a long-term relationship (over a month) but now I'm happy for her (sort of) because she has become worldly about the mysterious and complicated world of dating. Her boyfriend was called Joe and things were pretty serious. Jean met him by the poolside after she decided to take swimming lessons. She had started having very vivid dreams about drowning in the *Titanic*, which I had made her watch a few times (eight). Jean, Joe and I hung out as a three a lot because she didn't want to put her romantic relationship over our friendship (which I think I will).

Even so, all I could figure out about him was that he wore a lot of khaki, had one filling and supported Tottenham Hotspur. Jean insisted that he was actually very poetic and deep and wrote beautiful lyrics, but I just can't believe a genuine creative would have a Billabong bag. Regardless, Jean said having a boyfriend was amazing and is completely on board with my goal for this year – perhaps a little *too* on board – while she takes the time to 're-learn how to be by herself'.

'. . . and I think that's integral for you to have in a relationship, Patch!'

I snap back into focus at the mention of my name.

'Completely,' I blindly agree. I'll work out what's integral for me in a relationship later.

'So . . .' says Jean, raising her eyebrow like she's the bawdy host of a dating show, 'anyone caught your eye today?'

Luckily, my answer is avoided with the late arrival of Madame Pattern, who immediately illustrates on the whiteboard how another car nearly hit her on the way to work and it was definitely *not* her fault.

While Madame Pattern erratically draws arrows, I think about Jean's question. I don't really know how to answer her. It's not that boys don't catch my eye. They very much do, almost constantly. The problem is I don't catch theirs.

The annoying thing is I had already *planned* in the back of my mind who my first boyfriend was going to be. It wasn't too hard a decision as there are only two other 'out' boys in my year: James and Ethan. Truth be told, I don't know or like either of them especially well, but I don't think that's reason enough to rule them out as a romantic partner. I couldn't work out whether to go for James or Ethan and flipping a coin felt insensitive. Luckily I found out last week that James's cousin was once an extra in *Doctor Who* so I decided to go for him as I can immediately

tick 'famous relative' off my list. I was all ready to lay the groundwork with James through some flirtatious laughter and a gentle touch of the arm, but as soon as I got to school Jean told me that James and Ethan were now dating *each other*. This slightly scuppered my plans. I could wait for them to break up, but that feels unlikely considering after assembly I saw them writing each other's names on their arms in biro. Fortunately, a good boyfriend-finder always has a Plan B.

Mine is Drama Club . . .

About the Author



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Harry Trevaldwyn is an actor, comedian and writer born in Oxford.

His acting credits include *Ten Percent*, *The Outlaws* and *How To Train Your Dragon*, and he has multiple writing projects in development with leading production companies.

He is also the author of *The Romantic Tragedies of a Drama King*, which is surprising when you find out how long it took him to spell his last name.