

You Give Love a Bad Name
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By Amber Drea

Bon Jovi brought us together and Bon Jovi tore us apart.

My obsession with Patrick Botello began when I was in second grade and he was in third. I would see him on the playground at recess, wearing his gray acid-washed denim jacket and tight jeans rolled up on the bottom. He had thick wavy light brown hair that he kept combed and molded perfectly into shape, without the need for any type of product. His eyes were large and dark brown, and the first time we locked gazes, I felt like my stomach and my heart had traded places.

Patrick played basketball every recess and he was really good. His team was the Renegades, and my friends and I were the cheerleaders. We had an original cheer written just for them: “Renegades don’t take no—huh—jive! / Renegades said we—are—alive!” We choreographed dance moves to go along with it, including arm thrusts, squats and something that resembled The Snake.

Patrick didn’t really know who I was, though word that I liked him eventually got out. After summer break, we returned back to school, and Patrick was in my class! It turned out he’d failed third grade and needed to take it again. I couldn’t believe my luck! I even sat in the same group of four desks, so we were actually forced to interact on a daily basis.

At first I was nervous to talk to him. After all, I had been obsessed with him for at least half a school year (the previous four months were consumed by a boy named Tony). Soon Patrick and I became what I perceived to be buddies. Not only was Patrick unbearably cute and athletic, but he was funny, too. He was always making jokes and being goofy, like a young Kirk Cameron. We began sharing private gags and giggling behind the teacher’s back.

One morning he came into class singing a catchy tune: “Shot through the heart and you’re to blame / You give love a bad name!”

“What’s that song?” I asked.

“It’s Bon Jovi,” he said. “They’re my favorite band. Is it still cool to like them?”

I’d never even heard of them. “Yeah, I think so,” I said, hoping I was right.

After school I asked my friend Samantha if she knew who Bon Jovi was.

“Totally!” she said. “I have their tape.” She shuffled through the pile of cassettes on the floor in her living room and pulled one out, sans case. It was a cream/tannish

color, like coffee ice cream, and had “Bon Jovi/Slippery When Wet” printed on both sides in black letters. We listened to the whole thing from beginning to end. I recognized the song Patrick was singing, and I liked the rest of it too. I felt a little uncomfortable during that song in which a woman is making sexy noises. At that moment, I decided to call Patrick and tell him that Bon Jovi was my favorite band.

“Do you have Patrick’s phone number?” I asked Samantha.

“I think so.” She looked through her notebook and found it written in the back. We called him and he answered the phone, but I didn’t know what to say, so I just put the receiver up to the boom box and pushed play. It was that part with the lady moaning. I immediately hung up the phone.

The next day Patrick came into school singing a different Bon Jovi song from the same record, and I began singing along.

“You like Bon Jovi, too?” he asked, incredulously.

I nodded. “I love them.”

“I don’t know any girls who like Bon Jovi,” he said.

“I actually want to sing in a rock band just like that when I grow up,” I said, which was half true—the singing part, not necessarily the rock band part.

“I want to be a guitar player,” Patrick said, then started shredding on the air guitar.

I remembered that my dad made guitars sometimes and figured they couldn’t be that difficult or expensive. I called him that night and asked him to make a guitar for me for Christmas. “I want to give it to my friend Patrick,” I said.

“Well, Amber,” he said nicely. “I would make a guitar for you, but it’s too much work for me to do for your friend.”

“Oh,” I said, disappointed. Then I had an idea. “Actually, I want one, too, so you can make it for me.” I didn’t really want to play the guitar, but my dad lived on the other side of the country—how would he know if I gave it to Patrick?

Unfortunately, my dad didn’t get me a guitar for Christmas, and it made me really sad. I was so sure I was going to give Patrick a guitar and then he would totally fall in love with me.

When I returned to school after Christmas break, Patrick was absent. Then my teacher made an announcement: “I have some sad news, everyone.”

My heart started pounding in my chest and my face turned hot. He was dead.

“Patrick is out sick with appendicitis. Who knows what appendicitis is?”

Whew! That was a relief. But how long would he be out? I’d already gone two weeks without seeing him—I didn’t know if I could stand much longer.

“So today we are going to write letters for Patrick to read while he’s in the hospital,” my teacher said.

That perked me up. Finally, I’d have a reason to tell him exactly how I feel. We got out our paper and colored pencils and glitter and stickers, and I got to work.

Dear Patrick,

How are you? I guess you’re probably not feeling too good right now. Did you have a good Christmas? I got some clothes, some board games and a new bike! I wish I could have gotten a guitar, but my dad couldn’t make one for me this year. Maybe next year! I’m sorry that you’re in the hospital, but just remember one thing: You give love a bad name.

Your friend,
Amber

I thought I was being fun and clever. I folded up the letter and put it in an envelope, which I decorated with glitter and stickers and doodles, and handed it into the teacher. At recess, she asked me to stay inside so she could talk to me.

“I’m not going to give Patrick your letter, Amber,” she said. “These notes are supposed to make him feel better, not insult him.”

I was immediately embarrassed, but also mad because how dare she read my private, personal note to Patrick. She didn’t get it. *It was a joke!* I wanted to scream. But I just said, “OK. Can I go outside now?”

When Patrick finally came back to school a few weeks later, things had changed between us. It was like he didn’t even remember that we had become friends. I tried to bring up Bon Jovi, but he said, “I don’t listen to them anymore. They’re old news. Europe is my new favorite band.”

Oh well, it was fun while it lasted.

Amber Drea lives in Brooklyn and writes about booze. Her fiction has been published by ACM, The2ndhand.com and the Chicago Reader. Her first guitar was a cherry red electric Kramer, circa 1988.