

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

— Anais Bin

Butch. Queer. Dominant. Just reading that phrase at the beginning of this dating profile made Anabel’s center clench. She had been noticing her body more and more in moments like this. Moments that shouldn’t affect the body. She shifted her position slightly as she sat curled up on her sofa staring at her iPhone screen. She had never used a dating app before, and she certainly didn’t expect to feel this way when stumbling upon a profile.

Just three English words on a screen should not create thoughts, feelings, and sensations in a body, Anabel thought to herself, and then her thoughts went to the person who had written them- Syd Sinclair, age 36, They/Them.

Anabel had never really settled into her body in a comfortable way. She mostly lived in her head with her body just storage for her thoughts. Her therapist would repeatedly ask her what she felt in her body, and she had many times said, “I don’t know.” She learned from this therapist that her body had likely been reacting the whole time, but Anabel had to notice.

And with Butch. Queer. Dominant. Anabel noticed.

She let her mind wander to what a sexual experience with Syd Sinclair might be like. Her actual experience felt so limited. But that didn’t mean that she didn’t have an idea of what she wanted. She knew. She had just never experienced outside of her imagination before. Still, the thought of relinquishing control had an appeal that took her over to the point of painful need.

“Mommy?”

The voice interrupted her brief fantasy, and when she looked up to see her six-year-old son, Anabel turned off her phone and felt just the tiniest panic rise up in her chest. She intellectually knew that he didn’t know what she was doing, what she was looking at on her phone, but kids were smart, and from the puzzled look on his face, she guessed this maybe wasn’t the first time he had called out to her.

“Yes, Jackson, what do you need? Why aren’t you in bed?”

“Mommy, can I play my video game for a little bit? I can’t sleep.”

“No. It’s 9 o’clock and you should be asleep. Screen time will have to wait until tomorrow. You

need to go back to bed now.”

Anabel walked her son back to his small bedroom in the two-bedroom house she'd bought after her divorce and tucked him in. She looked around the small room and flipped on the planetarium night light to see small pinprick stars scatter across her son's ceiling.

“Mommy, can I play two games tomorrow?”

“Maybe. We will have to wait and see what tomorrow brings. Good night, sweetheart. I love you.”

“Good night, Mommy. Love you.”

While Anabel knew this was the right response, Jackson inspired her. He was never afraid to ask for what he wanted. He accepted no as an answer most of the time, but he wasn't scared of his desire to ask for screen time after bedtime. This wasn't a new thing for him.

Anabel padded back to the living room, her bare feet sinking into the new carpet she had splurged on for Christmas last year. It was her first year in her own home without a spouse, and she wanted plush carpet. Something that her ex-husband never cared for and never allowed them to have. She had agonized over the decision to buy, but now she loved it so much. Every time she walked across her floor, she savored the feeling of her feet sinking in just slightly. Anabel tightened the belt of her plush floral robe and rubbed her hands up and down her arms feeling fuzzy softness against her palms while her mind wandered again to the dating app.

Butch. Queer. Dominant. She glanced around her living room as if someone might have heard her thoughts. This is silly. Suburban moms don't date wildly attractive Butch. Queer. Dominants. They are out of my league by one million miles, but looking is free, right?

Anabel picked her phone again and found Syd Sinclair's profile. She opened the message feature.

*What do I even say?*

She lived in the same loop. Look at profiles and close the app. Look at profiles and close the app. She got messages sometimes too, but she didn't respond.

*How do people do this?*

She closed the dating app and opened Facebook on her phone. There in her news feed were

several updates including, “Raymond Jackson Green is in a relationship with Stephanie Rebecca James.”

Anabel’s body’s reaction was instant again. Her heart beat fast, and her eyes welled with tears. Reading the simple statement took her breath away for a brief second.

*Why am I feeling this way?*

She didn’t understand the reaction. She didn’t want him back, and if she did, she was relatively sure she could have him. She had ended their marriage when she could no longer deny that he couldn’t give her what she wanted and what she needed from a partner. But the elephant in the room was that while she was brave enough to end her marriage to Ray, she hadn’t taken any further steps to ask for what she wanted other than stare at dating profiles.

She reopened the dating app. *Could I message a Butch. Queer. Dominant first? Were there Rules?*

Hello Mx. Sinclair,

My name is Anabel. femme. queer. submissive. I like your profile and would love to learn more about you.

Cheers,

Anabel

She hit send.