

Half-Decent at Love

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Half-Decent at Love

by [scink](#)

Summary

Jack's dead, Hyperion's gone, and somehow, newly-single ex-paramour Rhys has to pick up the pieces on his own. He rubs shoulders (and a bit more than just shoulders) on his way down to rock-bottom, but it's about the journey- not the destination. Sometimes, you fall in love. Sometimes, you get run over (twice) by a bandit in a bowler hat. Sometimes you leave your emotional baggage at the check-in counter and find your way back home. // Short songfic inspired by "Bad at Love" (Halsey).

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

*Got a boy back home in Michigan
And it tastes like Jack when I'm kissing him
So I told him that I never really liked his friends
Now he's gone and he's calling me a bitch again*

In the beginning, Timothy's an absolute sweetheart – stuttering all over the place to find the words that'd explain just how much he could love. Too often though, Rhys would rather Tim didn't speak at all. It spoiled the moments where he could almost feel like he was holding the same but not-same broad chest, salt-pepper streaks, and worn dress shirts.

Rhys gave himself credit for keeping appearances up for that long. Relationships built upon the burial grounds of dead exes aren't exactly known for being stable after all. Either he had his head jammed too far up his own ass in denial, or Tim trusted enough to think that Rhys wanted him for anything more than his lookalike.

When things fall apart, they fall silently. If nothing else, Tim still shares Jack's knack for petty vengeance.

He finds the photos Rhys could never bear to throw out.

He finds the shirts that still smelled like his ex-boss's cologne.

He even finds the posters from before *everything*.

Most importantly, Tim doesn't find a single thing that told him he amounted to remotely as much shit on the sole of his lover's shoe.

Rhys comes home to a trashed apartment, and every single proof of his duplicity splayed across the bedroom floor where he and Tim had only just fucked the night before. They'd tripped over their own legs trying to make it to the furniture, but weren't quite fast enough... And then Tim- Tim is long gone. Rhys packs the items carefully and throws out the note Tim left behind before he could find a reason to regret what he'd done.

It's only until a month later that he finds the ring in the sock drawer. He tosses that too.

*It's a guy that lives in a garden state
And he told me we don't make it 'til we graduate
So I told him the music would be worth the wait
But he wants me in the kitchen with a dinner plate*

Vasquez was a rebound. Rhys would admit it even if you caught him stone-cold sober for once. Tim's sudden disappearance from his life left him lonelier than he would have expected, even if it was for all the wrong reasons.

Vasquez was cocky as hell with the money to back up each of his outlandish claims. It reminded Rhys of Jack again, and the fake niceties Vasquez spared him just barely made up for the void where Tim would've been, mere weeks ago.

Where Tim was a sweet summer breeze against his recurring pangs of loneliness, Vasquez was a fistful of coal – all bitter ashes and spitting cinders.

He convinces Rhys to quit his planet-side job once he ran out of sick days to drink with. Then, he convinces him to do the drinking from the comfort of Vasquez's own bed. In this case, comfort meant excessive amounts of upholstery, the ever-present reek of hair product, and a handcuff to the post with enough give for Rhys to make it to the toilet and back.

It was cute for about a week, and Rhys plays along if only for the burn of expensive drink and possessive sex. The self-satisfied look on Vasquez's greasy mug as he storms in to find Rhys still waiting was wrong in all the worst ways, but Rhys could understand something as simple as greed. Jack had a bigger ego and a bigger dick, and Rhys stroked them both back in the day.

By the second week, he wants nothing but to clock his "benefactor" over the head with his old Hyperion issue SMG. Instead of doing that, he tears the handcuff clean off the post with his cybernetic arm, overrides his way out of the house (read: Pandoran bunker), and walks away without looking back. If he pockets some spare change on the way, that's no one's business but his.

A month later, Tim contacts him for the first time since he left, to tell him about the minor bounty that Vasquez had posted for his head. Rhys has a good laugh, scrubs mercenary blood out of his metal knuckles, and leaves Tim on read.

*Got a girl with California eyes
And I thought that she could really be the one this time
But I never got the chance to make her mine
Because she fell in love with little thin white lines*

Sasha's beautiful. And strong. And fiery as all hell.

She takes one of Rhys' bounties from right under his nose, and in return, he takes her out to dinner. He steals a glance and she steals his heart. It's an awkward waltz around rivalry and lust, until the two feelings blend into something that looks a lot more like fondness.

They start to go on two-person jobs, which send a nostalgic pang through Rhys he chooses to ignore. A cacophony of bullets is the soundtrack to their partnership. Their mouths taste like roast skag under badlands stars. Her skin is softer than any of his past partners', and he sinks into her like a drowning man giving in to the waves.

Rhys starts to forget Jack, seeing as he had something else to ground him now. This new normal was addicting and heady. They spent their days fighting bandits, and when they ran out of bandits to fight, they were an even match for each other.

They're halfway to saving up for a new ride when Rhys wakes up to sand in his mouth and Sasha nowhere to be found. His head is fuzzy and he immediately curses his own idiocy. He didn't deserve good. He deserved bad and suffering and apparently a full-course backstabbing. Why did he ever think he'd get anything otherwise?

Driving a hijacked scrap vehicle, he storms his way back to the shithole bar where they celebrated their first team job, and there she is, doing a line off the barkeep's wrist. So filled with rage, he doesn't remember how to speak words yet but then she's telling August to cut her another, and all he sees is red.

Outnumbered and distracted, Rhys loses badly to the muscle at the door. He wakes up the next day half-crammed into a dumpster out back, wishing he could summon an ounce of Jack's signature bravado. He thinks that otherwise, he might just convince himself to put an elemental bullet through his own chin.

*London girl with an attitude
We never told no one but we look so cute
Both got way better things to do
But I always think about it when I'm riding through*

Jack's been dead a while by now, and Rhys wonders if he had spiritually followed in his footsteps. He hasn't heard his own name spoken by any person, bot, or beast since the last time Sasha giggled it into his ear like a secret only they shared.

Tim sends some e-postcards now that their relationship has long since gone cold. Rhys never opens those, since he's scared he'd crawl back for the easy way out from this person he's become. With Jack, at least he could claim to be the saint. He was the lesser of two evils by a wide margin.

Fiona runs him over in the middle of an overnight job. More accurately, he falls off a ledge in a sandstorm, and she mistakes him for an adult skag. She hops off to take a look, but when she notices his cybernetic arm and eye, she gets back on her bike and reverses for a redo before speeding away. It's not every day that you run into someone you recognize in the badlands, so her sister and she agree that it was a lucky find. Sasha's only complaint is that she didn't run him over a third time.

With just the hit-and-run in mind, Rhys is well justified when he storms back into town and hunts down "some bitch with a bike and a bowler hat". When he finds Fiona, she's ditched the bike but not the attitude, so his lights get punched out in ten seconds flat.

There is a distinct feeling of watching his life play out before his eyes when he comes to, handcuffed to a bed, Sasha asleep in a chair by the door, and a giant poster of vault hunters with Jack/Tim dead center. He can't really tell the difference with the way the face is faded. The lack of bullet marks suggests in favour of Tim.

The overlapping visions are shattered in an instant. The bed is too threadbare. Sasha's in clean clothes for once, and has her hair held back from her usual mane. The poster is just a poster.

"Rhys," Sasha begins. It's a sound so foreign he doesn't quite recognize it at first.

"Why the hell are you here?" He snarls in response, giving the cuffs a harsh tug. The bed-frame creaks ominously, and both people in the room know he could break out of it easily, robot arm or not.

The woman stands up and circles over to sit at his bedside, gaze fixed firmly at the wall. He somehow refrains from decking her in the jaw as revenge for the bruise pounding its way across his temple, among other things.

"You never mentioned you knew Tim," she remarks suddenly, as if that's the elephant in the room. It's not worth responding to (what could he say?), so she tosses him another line, still refusing to look him in the eyes.

"Why weren't you the one to tell me about Jack?" The question stirs something inside him, deep within the roiling pitch of confusion and resentment of his past. "More specifically, *Handsome Jack*."

"You don't get to fucking say his na-" Rhys starts, all bared teeth and spit.

Sasha cuts him off. "My father *died* because some narcissist in space decided it'd be fun to just bomb the shit out of our planet. I'll say *Jack*'s name whenever I damn well please,"

Sasha continues, grating her teeth harshly on the last syllable. She's whipped around to directly glare into Rhys's face, and if he were a more honest man, he'd have flinched.

In the moment, it comes out as a useless grunt.

"Maybe part of me wanted to get back at him in the grave somehow, with you and all, but... Anyhow, now that we're clear, I better go make sure August hasn't set his face on fire again," and with that, Sasha sashays her way out the room and back out of his life.

Rhys waits until he hears an engine start outside before snapping off the handcuffs. Another set of footsteps comes down the hall at the noise, and now it's Bowler Hat in the doorway.

"I'm Fiona, Sasha's sister. Sorry-not-sorry I ran you over. Want to grab lunch?"

Fiona doesn't bother removing the part of the cuff still stuck on his wrist. Rhys is too busy stuffing his face with what looks like a crude imitation of scythid steak. He hasn't eaten since he entered town yesterday, and his stomach has been clenching painfully ever since he woke up.

"Sasha got a call from Tim a week before you got dumped, you know? That's how we all found out who you were," Fiona has her head propped up against one hand, other hand lazily picking through a pile of rakk jerky.

Rhys swallows down his current bite. "She implied something like that," And shoves another cube of meat into his mouth.

"Would you really do anything to get him back?" Fiona shoots him a pitying glance, though it's tinged with disgust. As if she's an adult trying too hard to be patient for a misbehaving child.

“Of course,” he answers, without missing a beat, “But I guess I’m not supposed to say that in these parts.”

“At least you’re aware.” And that’s all she has left to say on the matter, shifting her focus back to the contents of her plate. Rhys follows suit.

At the end of their meal, Fiona pays for everything, but half the coin in her purse must’ve been looted off Rhys when she knocked him out cold so it’s more than fair.

Fiona sits him back in the room for the time being, this time with a loader-bot guard rather than cuffs. Rhys doesn’t have anywhere else to be, so he stays put and plays a few rounds of “name-the-stains-on-the-drywall”.

The loader-bot doesn’t make for much conversation, seeing as it’s somehow gained a conscience- whatever that was- despite being branded in dulled Hyperion yellow. Still, Rhys kills time trying to hack it. He stops on a whim two hours in, but not without coercing its systems to take in a Trojan that changed its red headlight to a bright pink. He gets lifted and thrown off the bed for that one.

Looking back on his life achievements, he’s done a fair share more than the average stray orphan-turned-office-junky could ever hope for. There was a time when he’d wanted nothing more than a warm bed and food to fill his stomach, long before the penthouse suites and all-night catering and twenty foot statues and a front-seat to the stars for light years in every direction.

Even without Jack, he has that now. He’s still lost in the grand scheme of things, but basic survival is something he’s become very, *very* good at.

So Rhys goes back to staring at stains on the wall. He knows a third of them are blood, another third are paint thinner, and the last third might keep him occupied until Fiona gets

back at least. He suspects some are semen, but them being near the ceiling is giving him doubts. Probably old icing or caulking then.

A new notification pops up on his eye display, and he almost chuckles, realizing that Tim's gone and created another new ECHOnet account to get past his spam filters. Figuring he's already at rock-bottom, he humours the little blinking blue flag, and pops it open to an animated postcard of Sasha riding a crude mechanical bucking-bulldog, smile plastered across her face at full brightness.

Rhys catches himself staring, a warm sensation bubbling inside his chest. It's not quite love (hasn't been for a long time), but isn't exactly contentment either. No matter what it is, he thinks he'll start opening more postcards, both new and old.

At the very least, it beats inspecting wall stains. Rhys scrolls back to two weeks ago, to a message titled "Sunset from The Salt Flats", and hits download.

He has a lot of catching up to do.

END

End Notes

I was meaning to finish this years ago when TFTBL was still fresh and relevant. Nonetheless, Rhys's new barbershop quartet mustache in the Borderlands 3 trailer is enough motivation to finally get this bad (maybe literally) boy published. I'm super rusty and drowning in finals, so I really appreciate you checking this out!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!