

YANSEY BOWLS HIS HAIR

VINCENT DIMSON

Yansey ran up the stairs to Arcade 8, holding two identical cups of orange slushies, each with sunken boba beads. He fanned away the cigarette smoke coming from the four guys outside the entrance with his forearm as he entered the arcade. Arcade 8 was a small arcade, dimly lit by the neon screens of currently popular fighting video games like Street Fighter IV and King of Fighters XIII. A thick, sweaty humidity permeated the atmosphere, emanating from the armpits and foreheads of the patrons crowding the cabinets. Yansey was glad he did not wear his favorite yellow-gold turtleneck sweater.

He squirmed his way through a group surrounding a BlazBlue cabinet and passed the Initial D driving games to get to the change counter. Behind the register sat Tokens-girl, perched on her stool, her clasped headphones wired to her laptop, nodding to a musical rhythm. Yansey approached Tokens-girl's counter with timidity in his footsteps. He placed one of the slushies on the counter and shyly pushed the cup towards her. Her head was still swaying to the music, so he pushed it closer. Tokens-girl's head stopped bobbing. She glanced at the drink and Yansey, smiled at him, and took off her headphones. Tokens-girl politely refused, telling him he did not have to buy her a drink from the café downstairs.

“And so what am I to do with the second beverage I got for free, eh Tokens-girl?” Yansey said in jest.

Tokens-girl still refused but smiled. She was a petite young woman with a cute round face framed on both sides by long bangs.

The top back of her black hair was done up like a tiny fanned out peacock's tail.

Yansey's long, lank auburn hair fell onto his shoulders and his bangs drooped over his circular eyeglasses, which were in need of a new prescription. He was glad the arcade was always dim. He knew the dimness shadowed the specs of acne freckling his cheeks. Khaki slacks

were his fashion trademark.

As Yansey was enjoying both boba drinks, he asked Tokens-girl what she was watching on her laptop. She spun her laptop for Yansey's viewing and clasped her headphones on him. She had been watching a YouTube video of Weezer performing "Undone (the Sweater Song)" on the Jon Stewart Show from 1994; sixteen years ago. Tokens-girl clicked replay. The song started with drums followed by an eerie strumming of guitar and bass. The bass player and guitarist also sang backup. The lead singer played guitar as well. The bass player and drummer had shaved, short hair and the rhythm guitarist wore a beanie. The lead singer wore black hipster glasses and had a thick brown bowl-cut.

Tokens-girl commented that the leader singer was a "guitar hero" and "Undone (the Sweater Song)" was her all-time favorite Weezer song.

Yansey liked Weezer, but he preferred Make Believe, an album released eleven years after the band's "Blue" album. His favorite track on Make Believe was "Perfect Situation." Yansey thought about the lead singer's appearance back then. Yes, hipster glasses were in fashion, but bowl-cuts had been out of style for at least two decades.

Tokens-girl told Yansey she needed to resume her work before the arcade closed for the night. She tied on an apron, got a spray bottle and rag, and excused herself to clean the screens of the games not in use.

Yansey joined the small group huddled around the large King of Fighters XIII cabinet, not as big as the mob surrounding Street Fighter IV. He placed a token on the cabinet's counter among the tokens of others, sat on a tall stool, and waited his turn. He surveyed the patrons of the arcade and their bored girlfriends. They were either texting or jerking their heads upward, blinking their eyes rapidly when they began to doze off. Yansey looked behind him and saw Tokens-girl spraying and wiping screens. A tall, handsome man holding two slushies approached her. She put aside her spray bottle and rag and smiled at him. It was now Yansey's turn. He took a seat at the cabinet next to his opponent. Yansey "beasted" his opponent, defeating all three characters of his opponent's team using only one of his. He turned around to see if Tokens-girl had noticed his victory. She pointed at the beanie on the handsome man's head, and he took it off so she could have a closer look. Yansey saw Tokens-girl giggle and slip the beanie back on, standing on her tiptoes as she adjusted it to look nice. She

accepted the second drink the tall, handsome man had offered her.

Yansey shared a house with three friends from his college video game club. Yansey had been desperate to move out of his parents' house. So they let him move in since he works at a video game store and can borrow games for free. He had left Arcade 8 at one in the morning, feeling crestfallen that Tokens-girl did not say anything regarding his streak of twenty-two wins in King of Fighters XIII.

When he entered his house, he saw his three friends lounging in the living room, watching Scooby-Doo DVDs. They were pouring one another shots of whiskey from a large Jack Daniel's bottle.

"Gentlemen, what act of bacchanal debauchery are you indulging yourselves in?" Yansey asked.

"Yansey," Tyler, one of the friends, called out. He waved him over, saying, "Join us, dude. We're playing this one game where whenever Velma says 'Jinkies!' or 'My glasses! I can't see without my glasses!' we take a shot."

Yansey declined the offer of whiskey, but joined his friends, sitting in between Jay and Eddie. Jay said to Yansey, the stench of alcohol in Jay's breath burning Yansey's eyes, "Man, you got to get a freaking haircut, man. You're starting to look like a girl."

"Everyone, shut up," Eddie said. "The TV!"

Yansey and his friends saw Velma slip and trip, and her black eyeglasses fell off. She crawled, patting the ground and saying, "My glasses! I can't see without my glasses!" Tyler, Jay, and Eddie raised their glasses, toasted, and downed their whiskey.

"That freckled nerd Velma looks like a boy," Eddie said. "That brown skirt and orange sweatshirt don't compensate for those geek glasses and having helmet hair."

Tyler and Jay nodded.

"So, Yansey, did you hook up with Tokens-girl, yet?" asked Eddie. "You just want to hook up with her so you could get free tokens, huh?"

"Again, no, gentlemen," Yansey said, shaking his head. "In the stuffy arcade, sweat seeped out my pores along with my confidence. And I was beasting everybody at KOF XIII."

Tyler said, "KOF sucks. Why do you even play King of Fighters?"

"Unlike you, gentlemen, while you were playing Street Fighter in the arcades as children, it was King of Fighters that robbed my pockets of quarters. Everyone plays Street Fighter. We KOF gamers are an elite

group, the only ones possessing the skills of playing a truly complex fighting game. All you do in Street Fighter is play footsies and spam fireballs. And, well, Tokens-girl plays KOF. Never have I seen such an angel as her tap buttons with the fluidity of a concert pianist. A woman who plays Street Fighter is rare. But only one woman plays KOF, and that woman is Tokens-girl, the rarest of them all.”

“Well, if she’s one in a million,” Jay said, “then you better say something to her before someone else does. You’re the only one in this house who doesn’t have a girlfriend.”

“And, Yansey, for the love of Christ, like we’ve been saying, cut that ugly-ass girlie hair,” said Eddie.

Yansey visited the optical department at JCPenney’s in the mall. After a short examination with the optometrist, he browsed the frames, looking for one with that hipster look. Yansey remembered that Tokens-girl liked the lead singer from Weezer who wore hipster eyewear. He found hipster frames and looked at the price tag. The frames were \$159.99, making Yansey wonder why looking geeky was so expensive. But he still thought the frames looked good on him. He glanced at his checkbook. With the eye exam, lenses, and frames, he barely had enough money.

Yansey returned to JCPenney’s two weeks later to pick up his glasses. He drove to Arcade 8 afterwards to show Tokens-girl his new eyeglasses. When he approached her counter where she was watching her laptop, she paused the same YouTube video showing the same Weezer’s performance on the Jon Stewart Show, looked at Yansey, faintly smiled, gave him a thumbs up on the new eyewear, and resumed watching the YouTube video.

The same tall, handsome man arrived at Tokens-girl’s counter. He had a clean, clear, smooth complexion and wore a Call of Duty: Black Ops beanie. Tokens-girl looked at the beanie and clapped her hands giddily. He took it off and handed it to her, and she inspected it excitedly. A skull wearing a gray beret was stitched on the front. She asked him where he got it.

“I got it at an event release party in Downtown Los Angeles, Tokens-girl,” the tall, handsome man said.

She slipped it back on his head, tugging at the sides to make the beanie fit snugly. She said it looked good on him. She loved Call of Duty. Tokens-girl hugged the man, and as he left, Yansey saw

dreaminess in her eyes. Yansey had wanted to ask out Tokens-girl on a date using the new eyeglasses as an ice-breaker. She asked him if he needed any tokens.

“No, it’s okay, Tokens-girl. I already have some. I’ll just go play KOF.” Yansey slid his hands into the pockets of his khaki slacks and walked away.

Yansey arrived home from Arcade 8, feeling bad again. When he entered the house, the living room smelled like ashes of burnt palm tree leaves. Tyler, Jay, and Eddie were watching Scooby-Doo DVDs again, smoking marijuana.

“Yo, Yansey, come join us,” Tyler said.

“I have asthma,” Yansey said.

Yansey heard the crunch of potato chip bags underneath his footsteps and saw many peeled Slim Jim wrappers littering the carpet. He tiptoed over stacked trays of Oreo cookies and strawberry wafers and sat in the middle of the three lounging in a triangle, taking drags on their marijuana cigarettes. Yansey helped himself to a bag of Funyons next to him. Again, Yansey shook his head when Tyler extended a hand towards him holding a marijuana cigarette.

“Did you ask out that chick yet, dude?” Eddie said.

“No. She is more animated in the presence of good-looking gentlemen taller than her and me.”

“Yansey, you’re a wussy,” Jay said with a voice deeper than the far left key of a piano as marijuana smoke fumed out his mouth. “You’re never going to get a girlfriend like us if you don’t say anything.”

“Do you know what Tokens-girl’s into—” Tyler was saying when he and his stoned buddies laughed uncontrollably, their faces cringing from the intoxication of cannabis, at Velma on her hands and knees again, trying to find her glasses. Tyler regained his composure. “Anyway, Yansey, do you know what she’s into? Her interests other than KOF?”

“She is always watching the same YouTube video of Weezer performing ‘Undone’ on the Jon Stewart Show from 1994. It’s her favorite song. Obviously, she likes ‘Blue,’ though I like Weezer’s later stuff.”

Eddie paused the DVD right after Velma had said “Jinkies” and asked Yansey to show him and the others the video. Eddie retrieved his laptop lying beside the television. Yansey YouTubed the video for them. Yansey’s friends, too, were fans of Weezer. Yansey informed them that

Tokens-girl worshipped the lead singer as a “guitar hero.”

Tyler said, his breath reeking of burnt herb and processed beef from too many Slim Jims, “That’s it, Yansey!” He pointed at the hair of the lead singer. “Get a bowl-cut.”

“Yeah, dude,” Eddie said. “Bowl your hair. You need to get a haircut anyway. Might as well be a bowl-cut.” He covered his hand as he coughed.

Jay looked at the video peculiarly. “I think I’m way too high, dude, but there’s something not right about the lead singer.” He rubbed his eyes cracked with bloodshot veins. “Weezer’s still cool, though.”

“Screw you, gentlemen,” Yansey said. “I am not bowling my hair. I’d look ridiculous with a bowl-cut.”

Yansey visited Arcade 8 the following week on a Thursday night. He did not find Tokens-girl sitting behind the counter. Instead, she was sitting at the King of Fighters XIII cabinet by herself. She was not wearing her apron. It was her night off.

“May I play with you, Tokens-girl?”

She said sure.

Yansey sat next to her and inserted a token. Although Yansey had fought valiantly, Tokens-girl beasted him.

“You know,” Yansey said, “I’m really happy you convinced your management to acquire a KOF XIII machine. I know KOF isn’t as much of a moneymaker as Street Fighter, but gosh-darn-it, I grew up playing KOF, as well as other SNK games. Of course, my parents didn’t buy me a Neo Geo because it was astronomically expensive.”

He let out a light laugh, thinking Tokens-girl would laugh, too. She was still facing the screen, but he saw the right corner of her mouth curve upwards.

“And you’re really good,” Yansey continued. “I’m second to you.” He laughed again. “It’s because of you that there’s a large enough group of KOF enthusiasts to call a community.”

Tokens-girl stopped playing and turned her head towards Yansey. She thanked him, that it was really no big deal, and that Yansey seemed to be exaggerating her role at Arcade 8. After all, she was just the tokens-girl.

He scooted an inch closer to Tokens-girl so his voice would be more audible in the noisy arcade.

“If you’re not busy next week on your night off, would you like to have dinner with me at the Thai restaurant across the street?”

Tokens-girl said okay.

“I got a date with Tokens-girl!” Yansey shouted in the living room with his friends present. Tyler, Jay, and Eddie had been playing Street Fighter IV on Xbox 360 using their arcade sticks. They were glad to hear what had happen tonight.

“Good, Yansey,” said Tyler. “Now you got to change the way you look if you want to make a good first impression on Tokens-girl.”

“No. I don’t need advice from you, gentlemen.”

“Hey,” Tyler said. “Who has girlfriends?”

Yansey was silenced. “Okay, then. How do you mean?”

“Well, for starters,” Eddie said, “buy yourself a pair of jeans. Do you see people our age at school or the arcade wearing khakis? You’re a member of the Arcade 8 community. Not a yacht club.”

“As for a top,” Jay said, “a nice long-sleeve plaid shirt.”

“No,” Yansey said. “I’ll wear my yellow-gold turtleneck sweater. After all, her favorite Weezer song is ‘Undone (the Sweater Song).’ ”

“Even though that’s an ugly-ass sweater, good point in regards to the song,” Tyler said. “But there’s just one more thing.” He looked at Jay and Eddie. All three looked as if they had exchanged information telepathically.

All three shouted: “And get a haircut!”

Two days before his dinner with Tokens-girl on Thursday night, Yansey visited JCPenney’s again. He wandered around the men’s department, looking for a pair of jeans. He had a waistline under thirty. Not even the slim jeans fitted. He found a pair of skinny jeans that fitted just right. Although the jeans were burgundy, they would match his yellow-gold turtleneck sweater.

After he purchased his jeans, he rode the escalator upstairs to the salon. He arrived at the salon, told the receptionist he wanted a haircut, took a seat, and waited.

Yansey’s name was called. The stylist invited him to sit on her spinning stool in front of her mirror then tied a black tarp over the front of his body.

“So, what are we doing with your hair today?” the stylist asked with a smile.

Yansey hadn’t decided on a hairstyle yet. He thought of his roommates’ advice about getting a bowl-cut. Yes, they had been under the influence of marijuana when they advised him, but they

had girlfriends. Besides, Tokens-girl always watched the same Weezer video with the lead singer sporting a bowl-cut. And, well, it might not look so bad.

Yansey tossed his long, lank hair one last time.

“Bowl it. I want you to give me a bowl-cut.”

He saw the smile of the stylist droop in the mirror. He looked to the left, a stylist who had been coloring a girl’s hair purple stopped. Three middle-aged women sitting under headlamps looked up from their magazines, tensing their brows.

“Is there something wrong?” he asked. “What I mean is I want my hair shortened into a bowl but long in the back and long enough to cover my ears. And neat. Not shaggy.”

The stylist walked Yansey to a sink and asked him to lean back on a reclining seat. She soaked his hair as his head was tilted back. Back on the stool, the stylist severed the excess dull hair that had fallen onto his shoulders and over his eyes. Yansey glanced down and saw strands of his wet matted auburn hair covering the floor like twigs. After she blow-dried his hair, he looked at himself in the mirror and felt dissatisfied. The bowl’s shape was okay, but it didn’t have the amount of volume as Weezer’s singer’s. The stylist informed Yansey that his hair was fine, not thick. When he paid for his haircut, the stylist was able to up-sell him shampoo and conditioner that would give his hair extra poof.

“Holy crap!” Tyler said when Yansey entered the house. Yansey’s new haircut had interrupted Tyler, Jay, and Eddie’s video game of Street Fighter IV. “My God! A bowl-cut! I can’t believe you got a bowl-cut.”

“I think it looks okay,” Yansey said. “The lead singer of Weezer had a bowl-cut.”

“Yeah, Yansey,” Eddie said, “when he was younger. Besides, he had short hair on the ‘Blue’ album’s cover. Why’d you bowl your hair?”

“You told me to!”

“Yeah...but we were high,” Eddie said.

Jay walked over to Yansey and stood face-to-face with him, looking at Yansey with the same confused countenance he had when he had watched the YouTube video. “There’s something about you, Yansey. With those glasses and new haircut. There’s something odd.”

Thursday night was now. Yansey showered using the shampoo and conditioner the stylist had recommended. He dried his hair thoroughly and his hair achieved the voluminous thickness of a

baseball helmet. He slipped into his burgundy jeans and put on his yellow-gold turtleneck sweater and black hipster eyeglasses.

He went into the living room, ready for his dinner with Tokens-girl. Tyler, Eddie, and Jay were playing video games. Jay looked away from the television screen to look at Yansey, he pointed at him and shouted, "That's what I was thinking! Velma! You look like Velma!"

"Jinkies!" Tyler and Eddie said.

"You look just like her," Jay said. "You're wearing an orange turtleneck sweater—"

"It's yellow-gold, not orange."

"Your jeans are burgundy like her skirt—"

"But I'm not wearing a skirt, am I?"

"Your black nerdy glasses—"

"Hipster glasses are hip."

"Your cheek acne looks like freckles. And of course, that bowl-cut!"

"I don't look like Velma!" Yansey yelled.

Eddie went over to Yansey and yanked off his glasses, playing keep-away with Tyler and Jay.

"My glasses!" Yansey said. "I can't see without my glasses!"

"He said it!" Eddie said. "Where's the bottle of Jack?" He returned the eyeglasses to Yansey.

"You look like a girl, dude," Tyler said.

"I don't understand," Yansey said. "You said I looked like a girl with longer hair, and now you're telling me I still look like a girl with shorter hair?"

Basically, yeah, all three said.

"Never mind you then. So if you'll excuse me, I have a date with the beautiful Tokens-girl."

Yansey had arrived early at the Thai restaurant to reserve a table.

Earlier, he had overheard a child wearing a Scooby-Doo shirt whisper, "Mommy-mommy-mommy. Look. Velma."

When Tokens-girl arrived at the table, Yansey got up from his seat like a gentleman. "Hello, Tokens-girl. How are you tonight?" He went over to her side and pulled out her seat.

She didn't sit immediately. Yansey saw her eye him from the bottom up, her gaze appearing to linger on his bowl-cut.

Their server arrived with menus. Yansey and Tokens-girl looked through them.

“Which would you prefer as an appetizer?” asked Yansey. “Beef or chicken satay?”

Tokens-girl shrugged her shoulders and let Yansey decide. After their appetizer arrived, Yansey invited Tokens-girl to help herself to a stick of beef satay first. She nibbled at her skewered meat. Yansey noticed Tokens-girl still tilting her eyes upwards.

Yansey’s hands began to tremble as he grabbed his drink. His hands never trembled, when besting opponents in King of Fighters.

“So, I hear that the console version of KOF XIII will come with a four-disc soundtrack.” Yansey said.

Tokens-girl informed him that she knew that already.

“Do you just play KOF?” he asked her.

She shook her head, saying tersely that she also liked Call of Duty.

Their main courses finally arrived. The silence between them remained as they ate their barbecued pork spareribs and rice. Yansey paused from eating. He looked at Tokens-girl. She appeared uneasy. She spooned her rice with her shoulders hunched, glancing around the restaurant with a look of worry.

Yansey was worried, too. “Tokens-girl, is there something wrong?”

Tokens-girl said, yes, there was something wrong. Yansey’s new haircut was creeping her out.

“Why? What’s wrong with my hair?”

She said Yansey looked like a girl.

He laid his palms flat on the table and shook his head. “I don’t understand. You always watch the same YouTube video of Weezer performing ‘Undone,’ and you said that the lead singer was a guitar hero. And that guy had a bowl-cut.”

She did call him a “guitar hero.” But she never said anything about his hair. In the video, the lead singer looked like Velma, a girl, from Scooby-Doo, a cartoon for kids and potheads. She liked Weezer for their music, not their hair. Besides, his hair was short on the “Blue” album’s cover.

The feeling of discomfort had now shifted from Tokens-girl to Yansey. “This really sucks, Tokens-girl. I spent so much money to look presentable. I paid over \$250 for my glasses and over \$25 for a haircut. And that’s not including product!” He crossed his arms and sulked. “How do my roommates do it? They’re jerks, but they have girlfriends. I just don’t get it.”

Tokens-girl had already known that Yansey was befriending her in an attempt to establish a romantic relationship. It was obvious. Tokens-girl told Yansey that he seemed more confident when he played King of Fighters and advised him to incorporate that confidence of beasting into his social life.

However, Tokens-girl admitted she had accepted Yansey's invitation to dinner only as a friend. She disclosed to him that she had a crush on the tall, handsome man with the Call of Duty beanie. She patted his hand and apologized.

"Besides," Tokens-girl said, "you looked better with long hair."

Yansey uncrossed his arms and tried to smile.

"So I guess I won't be getting any free tokens."