

A Happy New Year's Resolution

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feat. Larissa and Gabriel

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Happy New Year!
Here's to a... happy new year.

Two days before the end of the year, while Larissa was chilling inside her spacious yet warm apartment, occasionally gazing at the cold, dark outdoors, Gabriel was in a studio on the outskirts of Frankfurt.

“OK, move a little to the left,” an elderly man said, swinging his left arm around.

He was taking pictures for a promotion of the elderly man’s line of clothing and has been accompanied by a female model who wore some of them. Gabriel himself wore a dark blue hoodie with the hood off his head, jeans and a pair of beige boots. It was dark outside and the temperature was close to zero, possibly slightly sub-zero.

The model made a pose and Gabriel adjusted his angle before pressing the trigger on his camera. A blinding white light flashed briefly before their eyes. The man walked to him and peeked at Gabriel’s camera screen.

“Oh, I like this picture,” he said, nodding. “I think one more should do.”

The model left the stage for some time and returned wearing a colourful set of clothing, including pastel shoes, a light blue skirt, a light pink blouse with long sleeves and a beret of the same colour. She struck another pose, one hand around her waist and the other in the air, holding a peace sign.

Gabriel looked at his camera and moved around her to figure out what the best position to take a picture from would be. Then, he gently pressed the trigger, but not all the way.

“I’m gonna take a picture now...”

He pressed the button further and the room flashed once more. After the man looked at the taken picture, the two, plus the model, walked to a table in the room so that Gabriel could unload his picture album onto a running computer on top of the table. Once the pictures were extracted,

the man sat at the computer and reviewed them all one by one.

“Ah, these are quite nicely taken. Really do scream ‘be bold’, if you ask me.”

He dragged a couple of pictures he liked into the folder of a USB flash drive which he then safely removed.

“Okay, I’m going to take these to my graphic designers to finish the job. Wait here, you two.”

The man stood up and walked away. The two were quiet the whole time before the man came back holding an envelope filled with cash. He took out five twenty-Euro banknotes which he gave to the model, then reached for another twenty Euros which were given to Gabriel.

“You did well. I’ll make sure to call again if I need your assistance,” the man said, shaking the model’s hand, followed by Gabriel’s.

The girl went to change her clothes into whatever she was originally wearing while Gabriel only picked up a small bag to fit his camera in. Both left the premises and went separate ways. Gabriel put his hands in his pockets, one which had the twenty-Euro note in it. He sighed, exhaling a small cloud of mist into the air.

“Just twenty, huh... Well, money is money, I guess.”

The wind strongly blew. He did not walk for long before he arrived at a small stop where he waited for an S-Bahn to pick him up. He reached his destination, another small stop in a settlement far from the city, ten minutes later. He walked down some steps and past the entrance to his former apartment, continuing towards the other apartment complex. He placed a chip attached with his key next to the reader and the door immediately unlocked for him to go inside. He climbed another few steps until he was at the fourth floor of the building. Once he walked through the door after he unlocked it, he whispered:

“I’m home...”

The lights were off and Larissa appeared to have fallen asleep, wearing nothing but underwear and some regular old socks, slumped onto the couch. Gabriel quietly closed the door and went to the hanger to place his jacket which he just took off. He also placed the camera bag next to it.

“Boo.”

“AIEEEE!” Gabriel raised both his arms in the air and froze for a brief second.

The lights were on again. He saw Larissa right in front of him.

“Ah, it’s you... Jee, don’t just sneak up on me like that!”

“Sorry, sorry,” Larissa said, in her usual deadpan voice. “It was too easy, man.”

“You weren’t sleeping?”

“No, just lying in the dark. The weather makes me want to just sleep, though.”

“You’re not alone in this,” he said, barely smiling.

“How was the shoot? Did you take any pictures?”

“Yeah, it was okay, I think I did good.”

“No, I’m sure you were great. C’mon, let me see those pics.”

Larissa sat back down on the couch while Gabriel took out his camera from the bag. He sat next to her and gave her the camera so she could scroll through images.

“Oh, I like this fit,” she said, pointing to the pastel combo. “I think you’d look nice wearing it.”

“Maybe if it isn’t cold... Brr!”

“You could still wear it inside, since it’s a bit hot in here.”

“That’s true...”

Larissa set the camera on the low table in front of them.

“Say, how much did he pay you, anyway?”

“Hm, let me just make sure he didn’t miscalculate...”

Gabriel put his hand in his right pocket and pulled out the only bill from earlier.

“Wait, that’s it?” Larissa looked at him sharply.

He looked at her and frowned.

“Well... Yes.”

“No, that can’t be right. What a cheapskate,” she said.

“Not much I can do, sadly,” he looked upwards. “Plus, it happens so much that I’m used to it by now. Ahh, I’m so sorry for having such an unstable source of income.”

Larissa shook her head.

“I told you, there’s nothing wrong with you. I love you for who you are, not for how much you earn.”

She lay back down and yawned, then tapped on the couch.

“Come, let us snuggle. I know you want to.”

He joined her in the same position and was gently embraced.

“I’m tired,” she said, “and I haven’t even done anything today. Thankfully it’s dark outside, so...”

She yawned one more time.

“Ah, hold onto me, Gabi, I got you.”

“O-okay... Thanks for being there for me...”

“Now, now, we’re dating, aren’t we? Of course we need to stick together.”

She cupped his left cheek with her left hand.

“There, there. Are you tired, also?”

“A little, yes...” He yawned.

“Close your eyes, then. Hope you don’t have anything tomorrow.”

“I should be fine... I think.”

“Okay, shh, now. Don’t think too much.”

Larissa carefully reached for a blanket and put it over them.

“Mm... It’s a little hot,” Gabriel mumbled.

“Perhaps you could take off your clothes.”

“Yeah, let me do that...”

Gabriel took off both his hoodie and trousers, leaving only his underwear and socks intact. Larissa looked underneath the covers and smirked.

“Oh my,” she said, “I fancy those panties of yours. My wardrobe must be quite rich.”

“Um... Y-yeah!” Gabriel shuffled in bed.

“Relax, my wardrobe is your wardrobe. Vice versa, too. Very bold move, I gotta say, wearing my panties during a photo-shoot. We gotta dress up again together.”

“Mhm...”

In five minutes, both were sound asleep, holding each other tenderly. They opened their eyes the next day, the sun shining through the window.

Larissa got up first to wash her face and returned to wake Gabriel up. As she gently shook him, he struggled a bit to get up.

“Morning, Gabi,” she said, “I take it you wanted to laze some more?”

“...Maybe,” he replied.

“I’ll fetch us some water,” Larissa said, already up and on her way to the kitchen.

She took out two clean glasses from the cabinet and poured some water in them, then carried them to the table. She sat back down and put her right arm around Gabriel.

“Today’s the last day of the year, huh. It went by fast, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, it feels like it’s been only a few months...”

“Right? Man, we should really travel somewhere next year.”

“Agreed! The city is nice but I crave a different location...”

“We could plan a trip next month, even. Sometime when you aren’t doing your shoots would be nice.”

“I’m not too busy in January, I think.”

“That’s good,” she said, rubbing his back. “Now, let’s go make breakfast together. I have something on mind that I’d like to do today.”

The two got up and walked into the kitchen. Gabriel opened the refrigerator to check what foods were available. Gabriel and Larissa agreed to start the day with some cereal and yoghurt. He took out a yoghurt bottle from the fridge and tried to reach the top cabinet to take some cereal. Larissa smiled and reached for some rainbow cereal which Gabriel mixed with some yoghurt in two large plates. Once he put a spoon in each plate, they sat at the mini bar on the edge of the kitchen and dug into the food. Having eaten well, Gabriel offered to wash the dishes that were left from some days ago while Larissa left for the couch again to watch something on their television. Coincidentally, the channel that popped up first happened to air some sort of cooking show. She quickly took out some paper and a pencil to write whatever was being spoken. She ended up writing a recipe for lemon cake which could only take about a little over an hour to prepare, bake and serve.

After Gabriel finished, he joined Larissa on the couch to watch TV

with her.

“Oh, thanks for taking care of the dishes,” she said. “You needn’t have done that, but I appreciate it a lot.”

“It’s alright, I did ask if I could do them,” he smirked.

“Fair. Thanks again.”

Larissa ran her fingers through his soft red hair. The two lazed around for a couple of hours, surfing through channels and possibly finding some anime to watch. Sometime around three in the afternoon, she decided to hit the shops before they closed down in order to purchase some groceries and other items she needed. She told Gabriel to stay where he is until she came back, and he obliged. While she was gone, he was still holding the remote control and scrolling through channels.

She returned an hour and a half later, holding a bunch of shopping bags. After laying them all on the floor, she called Gabriel out by his nickname. He approached her and was about to pick up the bags from her when she stopped him.

“Put on some proper clothing and head on out. I want to prepare a surprise for you. Speaking of which...”

She took out her wallet and pulled out two hundred-Euro bills from it and gave it to him.

“E-eh? What is this for?” He asked.

“This is for you to spend on whatever you want.”

“B-but this is a lot of money! Are you sure I can spend this much?”

“Spend as much as you can, the rest you can keep for yourself.”

“Um... I... Can I really have it...?”

“Did I stutter? Please, don’t make your girl upset now.”

Gabriel looked at the money, then back at Larissa.

“O-okay, thank you!”

“Don’t mention it. I’ll give you a call when I’m done. You take your time at your favourite shops, okay?”

She gently caressed his cheeks.

“See you later, then!”

“Bye, Gabi.”

As soon as he left her vicinity, Larissa closed and locked the door

and proceeded to unpack all her paper bags. She took out some ingredients that were missing for the cake, some decorations, some dried meat, cheese, toothpicks, a can of alcoholic drink for each of them, some regular carbonated and non-carbonated drinks, some candy, and the list goes on. All unpacked, she put away the bags to store them for the foreseeable future and began by first making the lemon cake. While the cake was being baked, she opened the window to let some fresh air inside, put up some of the decorations around the place, sliced the meat and cheese to place on a large plate with some toothpicks, hung some clothing on the hanger in place of Gabriel's jacket which he was wearing at the moment; she took out another two glasses and placed them on the low table, alongside the two alcoholic beverages, brought the other drinks next to the table, dusted off all furniture found in the apartment, swiftly moved across all rooms with a Hoover, and still had enough time to take a shower and to dress up in the outfit she would not usually buy for herself. Rather, the outfit was skimpy and was composed of a regular Santa hat, red top that only barely covered her breasts, a red skirt that almost reached to her knees and red socks.

"I definitely wouldn't wear this in public... But hey, it ain't half bad."

When she took the cake out of the oven, she iced it and placed it on the desktop so it can cool down before placing it in the refrigerator. After doing that, she sat on the couch and picked up her phone. The time showed almost six o'clock. It had already been dark. She dialed Gabriel's phone number and he picked up as soon as possible.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Gabi. You still out and about?"

"Just came out of a shop, right before it closed down!"

"Ah, good. You can come home now. I'm waiting for you."

"Alright, now I'm a bit excited, I won't lie!"

"You should be. See you soon."

Ten or so minutes after she hung up, she heard the door being unlocked. She stood up to welcome Gabriel inside. When he opened the door, he blushed.

“O-oh,” he stuttered, “I wasn’t expecting... such an arousing fit!”

“You like it?”

“Yes, I do! I... what a surprise!”

“I figured you’d dig it. Now come in, there’s more where that came from.”

Larissa led him towards the hanger where he saw an outfit of his own: a light blue skirt, a light pink blouse with long sleeves and a light pink beret, an outfit similar to the one the female model was promoting the previous day. In addition, the outfit also consisted of a pair of knee socks in various soft colours.

“Oh, there is a difference,” Larissa said, “it isn’t that cheapskate’s brand of clothing. I just got it from... uh... Aldi. I didn’t have much time to play around other shops.”

“Aww, it looks so cute!” He beamed. “Can I put it on?”

“Of course, it’s for you. I’ll unpack your bags while you change.”

He ran off with the clothes into the bathroom. Meanwhile, Larissa emptied the bags on the table at the couch and put the bags where all the other bags were. Gabriel walked out all dressed up and posed in front of her.

“Just how I imagined it,” Larissa said, “it fits you so well.”

“You think?”

“No, I’m sure. You could wear the fit outside, even. As long as it isn’t too cold... Oh, by the way, what did you buy?”

“Ah, let me unpack something for you!”

He opened up a pack which contained a crystal necklace and put it around Larissa’s neck.

“It’s for... um, good luck!” He chuckled.

“Aww, how thoughtful of you.”

She kissed him on the cheek.

“But, did you get anything for yourself?”

“I got the same necklace for myself, too! And a charger for my phone because the one I had broke. Oh, I also got us similar shirts from ChikiDesign!”

“Oooh, well thought. I’ve been planning to visit that shop ever since

it opened.”

Gabriel took out a light blue shirt which had “Damage dealen” written on it, and a small ChikiDesign logo right underneath that text. He gave it to her.

“Classic.”

“I know! I got myself a light red one with the same text.”

“Sounds good. We should wear these whenever we go out together.”

Larissa set aside both of their shirts and switched on some music which came from a small player they had at their place, as well as some festive lights she had bought. Gabriel sat on the couch while Larissa walked to the small library of animated (and live-action) films. Ever since Gabriel moved out of his own apartment some three months ago, after she found out that not only was he the only person paying rent, but the landlord would increase his rent bit by bit behind closed doors. It was when Larissa herself noticed it that she put her foot down and, with the help of her landlady, took him inside her apartment. That is how her place was even more full of Gabriel’s belongings; it was now his apartment, too.

She chose a DVD case at random, plopped the CD out of the case and stuck it into the disc tray of her DVD player. She navigated to the “play” button with the other remote, then sat back down and opened her can of hard seltzer. The film started playing after some production house names popped up on the screen.

While the plot was slowly unfolding, Gabriel and Larissa sat hugging each other from the side, all while Christmas-themed music was playing from the player in the corner of the room and the lights were gently flickering. Gabriel cracked open a can of his drink and took one sip. Sometime later, as the two were watching the main character hanging out with his friends, he lightly tapped her on the shoulder.

“What’s wrong, Gabi?” She asked.

“How are your friends doing?” He asked back.

She blinked and rolled her eyes around.

“Oh, you caught me off-guard with that one... I haven’t actually heard of them in a while. I hope they’re okay.”

Gabriel nodded. “I see, good...”

“Hm? Is there a reason you asked me that?”

“Well... I wish I had some, just like you.”

“Really? Didn’t you use to hang out with some guys from uni days?”

“I did... But right now, I only have you. And I’m happy with you, of course! But...”

“I got you. You just want some friends. Oh, I could invite my friends and introduce you to them, if you want.”

“You would do that?” Gabriel clutched his hands.

“I *will*, silly. There’s a key difference. Hold on, I’ll call one of them now.”

Larissa took out her phone, typed the number in and put it next to her ear.

“Yes?” A female voice was heard from the small speakers.

“Hey Sofia. Larissa here.”

“Oh, *sup girlie! Are you having a slumber party or somethin’?*”

“Where I live, it’s *always* a slumber party. But I’m loving it. Where are you at?”

“*Just relaxing at home. Yous?*”

“Me too. I was wondering if you’d like to come over. I want to introduce you to my boyfriend, he said he’d like some friends too.”

“*Aww, I’m sure he could use a friend! When can I come?*”

“Anytime you want, but preferably before the year ends.”

“*Haha, alright! I’ll bring Maja with me, too!*”

“I was about to call her after you... But now that you mentioned it, let her know that she’s invited.”

“*Cool! ‘K, bye!*”

Larissa hung up first and set her phone aside.

“I’ll just tell you, though, Sofia likes to talk. A LOT. So be prepared.”

“No problem! I’m just worried I won’t have a lot to talk about...”

“Well, don’t worry, I’ll be with you. On the bright side, Maja is more like you.”

A little over ten minutes passed since the phone call when they heard a ring. Larissa told Gabriel to stay put and reached for the phone.

“Hello?”

“*Hey, it’s me, Sofia!*”

“Okay, I’ll open the door for you,” she said as she pressed a button next to the phone stand which made a buzzing sound.

She took out the disc from the DVD player, placed it back in the case and returned it to its original place. Gabriel switched to a different output on the television. Soon, the girl, Sofia, appeared at the door and gave Larissa a good hug before being welcomed inside. She waved at Gabriel and sat at a chair across him and Larissa.

“By the way, this is my... ahem, cutie, Gabriel, or Gabi, if he doesn’t mind being called that way.”

“Ah, it’s fine!” He said, gently rubbing his knuckles.

“And, Gabi, this is Sofia, my former uni colleague.”

“Hi,” he said, offering his hand.

“Nice to meet you, Gabi!” Sofia said, taking his hand.

Larissa offered to pour some drinks for everyone and Sofia complimented Gabriel’s clothes. The ring was heard again after around twenty minutes; Maja had also arrived, so Larissa greeted her and led her into the apartment. The four were sitting and chatting, mainly Sofia.

“You didn’t lie when you said she talks so much,” Gabriel whispered to Larissa who nodded in response.

The group touched upon the past when they were still in university and the year that was about to come to a close; how Gabriel and Larissa started going out, the Cosplex that took place then and the drama that unfolded, the other two girls got their jobs, Gabriel moving out of his apartment, perhaps even what the future holds for everyone. Maybe next year Gabriel and Larissa could be tying the knot; maybe the other two girls could find their other half, get a promotion at work, travel abroad during their vacation; anything was possible in the following year. In addition, it was agreed that health was the most important aspect of a new year, as well as every other after it.

Later, Larissa brought the lemon cake and cut everyone one piece. The three praised its not-too-sugary taste and even asked for one more slice. Two was enough for them.

Gabriel was a little quiet while the conversation was unfolding, but Larissa teased him a little to speak about himself. Maja had also given a compliment to him wearing a skirt. Sofia was still talking about the time she accidentally knocked over a large bowl of chips during her lunch break, going over how every individual who saw it reacted.

“I had to tell this to Gabi, too,” Sofia said, “it’s too funny not to talk about it again!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Larissa said, shaking her head.

A bit later, he was told to put on his Chiki uniform which he wore during that year’s Coplex and to also perform some kind of role-play. He posed around wearing the outfit, but did not feel like speaking. After being encouraged by the three, however, he said the line in Chiki’s slightly pitched-up voice:

“Heeey everyone! It’s your classiest magical girl to ever grace this world, Chiki! And I’m here to deal a lot of damage!”

He hid his face immediately after saying it, but the girls let out an “aww” and showered him with even more compliments. Then, the four played a bunch of games; namely several rounds of one card and one board game. Larissa had the most luck and the second place was reserved for Maja, followed by Gabriel and Sofia respectively.

Larissa had one look at the wall clock above the television.

“Wait, is this clock adjusted well?” She asked.

“Why do you ask?” Gabriel said as he also looked at the clock. “Looks like it’s past twelve already... Past twelve?!”

He took out his phone and checked the time: it was indeed past twelve, January 1st. The television underneath switched off before it even got to the nation-wide countdown. Shortly after, fireworks were heard outside. Larissa stood up and opened the window, letting some fresh air get inside and so that they could see the firework show.

“They’re a little weak this night,” Sofia said.

“What would you like, then?” Larissa joked. “Fireworks that make your heart also go boom?”

“I don’t like those,” Gabriel said.

“Me neither. Dunno what’s so impressive about them.”

The firework show lasted for a good five minutes after which Larissa closed the window again.

“Ah, that’s our cue to leave,” Maja said.

“Eh? Already?” Larissa replied.

“Well, we don’t celebrate new years all that much. We just kinda stay up late and that’s all. Sleepy time, they say.”

“Fair. Thanks for making our night. Gabi, did you have fun?”

“Y-yeah!” He said. “I’d like to talk to you both sometime soon!”

Sofia gave him a thumbs-up.

“No problemo! We exchanged numbers earlier, so call whenever you want some company! And you, Lari, feel free to invite him to one of our outings, too!”

“Will do. Thanks for everything. Happy New Year, girls.”

“Happy New Year to you two as well,” Maja said as she and Sofia were escorted through the door by Larissa.

After sharing another hug, the two girls waved goodbye and travelled down the short hallway before turning left and down the long staircase. Before she locked the door, Gabriel tapped her on the shoulder again.

“Hey,” he said, “could we... go outside for a moment?”

“Hm... not like this. Let’s get dressed, first.”

Nodding, he ran to the wardrobe next to the window to put some warmer clothes on instead of Chiki’s uniform. Larissa did the same and within five minutes, both had finished, so they headed for the outdoors.

Gabriel led them atop the empty train stop. The environment was quiet, as if they were in space. He turned towards her and smiled.

“Larissa...”

“*Hai, Larissa desu!*”

He smiled away from her eyes, then looked back at her again.

“I’m very thankful for everything you’ve done for me. We laughed, we cried... sometimes... and we’ve done plenty of things together. As both best friends and later a cute couple.”

“Going out with you was definitely the best decision I’ve made this year,” she replied.

“Don’t you mean ‘last year’?”

1 Lit. “Yes, this is Larissa.”

The two laughed.

“Yeah, I suppose. But you get what I mean, silly.”

“True, true.”

He approached her, almost hugging her or gently grinding his body against hers.

“I hope that we will continue to hang out and...”

Larissa, noticing he had gone quiet for a little bit, wrapped her arms around him.

“And? I’m still listening.”

“Well... Whatever cute couples such as us do.”

“Let me show you one of such things.”

Smiling, she captured his lips and tenderly caressed them with hers for a hot minute. Moving away from the kiss, Larissa looked down to his lower track suit, noticing that Gabriel enjoyed the kiss a little too much and saying it through a smirk.

“Not that it’s a bad thing. We should take some time and make love, too. C’mon, let me carry you back to the apartment. It’s kind of cold here.”

She picked him up and held him like a bride.

“Eh? Are you fine with this?” He asked.

“You are sleepy, right?” She said.

“Yes...”

“I got you, I got you. Happy New Year, I almost forgot. I hope you continue to be yourself.”

“Ah, thank you! Y-you too! Um, but more smiles in the future, please!”

“Since you said ‘please’, I’ll make sure to deliver. Cutie.”

They left the train stop before any trains arrived.

END

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