

EXCERPTS FROM A BREAKUP

A SHORT STORY

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## ABSTRACT

Upon reading this story, the reader may believe it to have come from a very personal and intimate place in my heart. It would be easy to believe that this story is based on true events; that I had my heart broken. That I was in love and vulnerable one day, and upset and vengeful the next. It would be easy to believe that, from the rubble of my relationship, I crafted a short story in order to cope and understand emotions I had never faced before. I would like to say the story was a product of personal experience, but it simply wasn't.

The truth is, I wrote this short story after listening to Taylor Swift's re-recorded album *Red*. I've never been broken up with. I've never been in love. In fact, I've never even seriously dated someone. But, as a life-long Taylor Swift fan, I cleared my schedule one fall evening to listen to the re-recorded album that I'd already loved for years. I lit candles, made tea, and sat down in the dark with earbuds. I listened to this album that I had grown up listening to with a new, adult perspective, and suddenly I saw a story unfold in my head. I knew I had to write a thesis for Texas State, so I began writing, despite my brain telling me they certainly didn't want a romance. I thought, *so what? I want a sad romance.*

I wrote and wrote about things I had never experienced, only heard of. I drew inspiration from TV shows—*Sex and the City*, *Fleabag*, and *Modern Love*—and movies I loved—*While You Were Sleeping*, *Runaway Bride*, and *Sabrina*. I read books about women's experiences with love (*Writers and Lovers* by Lily King and *Everything I Know About Love* by Dolly Alderton) and I tried my best to listen to their feelings and their

voices. I talked to friends about their relationships and asked them what *exactly* they hated about their boyfriends. And lastly, I listened to Taylor Swift.

I wanted to write something almost every woman could relate to. I wanted girls to read this and see parts of themselves woven in. I wanted someone to remember their own heartbreak while reading, to remember their most human moments. I hoped to provoke thoughts and questions of modern relationships, like, *do we really need them? Can women be better off on their own? How much of yourself do you give away in relationships? How do you move on? Is the person you really love the person you should end up with?*

Overall, I wanted to encapsulate the experience of being a girl in love and being a girl heartbroken. I hope at least one person reading can relate to that.

## *The Breakup*

You ended things.

It was my favorite restaurant and I wore my favorite dress. We walked there, hand in hand, from my apartment. You put your coat on my shoulders. It was my favorite coat of yours: the navy one. We talked about your day, and the long drive, and how pretty the trees were at this time of year. I asked if we would go to your parents' for your mom's birthday. You said you weren't sure.

The restaurant lights were dimmed. You ordered me wine. I tried to hold your hand, but you pulled away. I felt my heart sink as the appetizers came. Were we not good? Did you not love me? Was all lost? I shook away the feeling, filling the void in my chest with excuses. Maybe you were worn out from work and from your flight. Maybe you were stressed about going home for the holidays. Maybe you were worried about me. Dinner came and left, and so did the conversation. You were absent. I could feel it.

The waitress asked us about dessert. You turned to me, with tears brimming in your eyes.

You said you were tired of pretending we were good. You said the distance was killing you. You said you loved me, but you couldn't do it anymore.

"You're the right person, but it's just the wrong time."

"I'll wait, then." I said, my breath leaving my body. "I'll wait. We can wait."

You shook your head.

And I don't remember how I got home.

I just remember catching my tears so you wouldn't see me cry.

*Two Days After*

Did I love you?

Because I feel fine. I feel nothing at all, really. Time is just passing. I've been spending my days cleaning and going for walks. I can't sit still and I don't know why.

The end of us felt like a bandaid caught in the hair of your arm; it feels like it should hurt more than it does. I keep asking myself, over and over again, *Did I love you?* Why don't I miss you? Why am I not crying? Is there something wrong? Were we not what I thought we were?

I can't watch tv.

I can't sit down and read.

I can't go to sleep unless I'm exhausted.

Maybe I thought we were more than we were. Maybe I should have ended it. Everyone's worried. My mom said it was a shame. My dad said he never liked you, but I know he's lying. My sister said she thought we'd get married. None of their words hurt me. Nothing they said made me feel anything. I haven't cried since you ended things. I've just been breathing. Constantly.

I tell them I'm fine. They don't believe me. Then I repeat myself two more times before they let it go. It's a vicious cycle I'm sure I'll never break. You'd probably think it's funny, but you're not here anymore.

I'm okay. I promise.

You didn't break me.

I barely notice you're gone.



I barely notice the last water glass you used, sitting on the bedside table. I barely notice the watch you left in my bathroom. I've completely forgotten about all the books you have stacked against my wall—I just mindlessly pass them as I clean.

It's a weird sensation, being without you.

I'm not happy. I'm not sad.

I feel close to empty.

Do you feel the same?

*And It's Denial and Anger*

What gave you the right to end things?

Didn't you once say I was the best thing that had ever happened to you?

Do you think you're entitled to someone better? Someone that's more than I am?

How dare you? After all I've done, and all I'll ever do? I loved you more than I've ever loved anything. I moved cities. I moved apartments. I sold furniture. I shared my spaces. I told you my secrets. I gave up dreams and hobbies. I changed jobs. I read books you read. I liked the things you liked. I believed your opinions as if they were fact. I changed parts of me. I wasted so much time.

And now, all I have to show for us is your stupid watch you left and the half-drunk glass of water by my bed.

Was I not everything you wanted?

Was I not kind? Was I not funny? Did you not laugh?

Am I not intelligent? Did I not read enough?

I'm sorry you're so much more cultured than I am. I'm sorry you listen to indie bands and own a record player. I'm sorry I play guitar and not violin. I'm sorry your friends read self-help books and frown upon fantasy novels. I'm sorry you hate fun. I'm sorry you went to an ivy league. I'm sorry you're afraid of what people think. I'm sorry I ever fell in love with someone who never understood me.

And how dare you swear you loved me? How dare you look into my eyes and lie. How dare you say half the things you said, knowing you'd end it in the end.

You said, "It's you. It'll always be you."

You said, "Marry me. Say you'll marry me one day."

You said, "I love you. I'll always love you."

And then you said, "You're the right person, but it's just the wrong time."

What's wrong with this time? Is the world ending? Has the sky turned red?

How could you?

I wasn't asking to move in. I wasn't asking to marry you. I wasn't even asking for forever. I was just asking for you. I was asking for a few of your days and most of your nights. Was it too much? Was I too much?

I'm sorry I was overwhelming. I'm sorry I thought I deserved you. I'm sorry I left things in your apartment. I'm sorry I had a drawer. I'm sorry I was too much for you.

Maybe the next person you fall for won't take up as much space.

## *Meeting You*

It was my sister's twenty-first birthday and I was panicking about her gift. I had already bought her a bottle of booze, but it didn't feel like enough. Aimlessly roaming through Barnes and Noble (all the while feeling guilty about it because Ana said I should always shop local), I was looking for anything my sister would possibly like. I was too embarrassed to head straight for the romance section, so I took a stroll through the classics.

I stayed close to the shelves as I had always been self-conscious about unknowingly being in someone's way. A new edition of *Wuthering Heights* had been released, so I thumbed through its pages looking for my favorite quote.

That's where I ran into you.

You were holding a copy of *Hamlet* and wearing a deep navy coat. I somehow managed to catch your gaze and I smiled. You smiled back. A blush rose to my cheeks the moment I looked away and almost immediately I tried to gather the courage to glance at you once more. I remember praying that it'd be my lucky day and you'd say something, *anything*, to me.

And then you did.

"Do you like *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* better?" You asked, turning to look at the same shelf as me.

I shut the copy of *Wuthering Heights* I held in my hands, trying to hide my excitement that the cute stranger was speaking to me. "I'm more of a *Hamlet* person, myself, but *Macbeth* has its qualities."

“I’m a *Hamlet* person, too.”

I laughed, turning to face you. “Really? Or are you just saying that because I did?”

You looked into my eyes, a grin evident on your lips. “Do you want the truth?”

I nodded.

“The honest truth?”

I bit my lip in an attempt to hide my growing smile as I nodded once more.

“I’m more of a *Macbeth* person.” You admitted with mock-shame as you held your head low. “I just wanted to impress you.”

“*Macbeth*?” I gasped. “I guess we’d just never work out in the long run. I could never be with someone like that.”

“Well, of course. I understand. I mean, I could never be with someone who loves *Hamlet*. That’s pure insanity.”

“Then we agree. We’re doomed.”

You paused, your eyes following the curve of my neck and trailing down to the book in my hand. Letting out a deep breath, you said, “God, I hope not.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I looked away from you. In that moment I felt like speaking to you was something to remember, something to memorize. I tried to internalize your words. I tried to keep quiet—I didn’t want to ruin this small little moment with a stranger in a bookstore

Instead, you spoke again. “*Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights*?”

“Well, that’s a hard one.”

You grinned. “It is? I don’t think it is.”

“Really?” I cocked my head, suddenly very curious. “Which would you pick?”

“*Jane Eyre*. No contest.”

“I mean, I completely understand. I love Jane, I really do.”

“Then what’s holding you back from embracing a quiet governess and a man with his wife in an attic? Who doesn’t love that plot line?”

I laughed, shaking my head. Maybe mine was contagious, because then you laughed too. “I guess I’m just fond of the tragedy of *Wuthering Heights*.”

“Tragedy? Who wants more tragedy than what’s already present in *Jane Eyre*? Who wants tragedy over happy endings?” You asked, taking a step closer to me so someone could move past you in the aisle.

“I do.” I said, unable to contain my smile. “Happy endings can be so boring. Tragedy is just so...tragic.”

You laughed, nodding your head. “Spoken like a true poet.”

We spent forty minutes talking in the classics aisle. I left with an inconceivable smile and the newest edition of *Wuthering Heights* that you insisted on buying for me. You left with my phone number.

I was late to my sister’s birthday party.

## *Everything Wrong*

You never let me listen to Phoebe Bridgers. You hated when there was even a singular dirty dish in the sink. When something small went wrong, you completely shut down. You always wore mismatching socks. You loved to sleep under sheets. You loved horror movies. You hated *Wuthering Heights* when you read it.

You were horrible at giving gifts. You'd always call and you'd never text. You snored. You stole covers from my side of the bed. You organized your book shelves with your own, personally invented, coding system. You only ever watched TV documentaries. You stole my conditioner in the shower. Your favorite color was red.

You didn't like my laundry detergent. You always interrupted my reading. You reorganized my kitchen without asking. You could never sleep past eight in the morning. You drank black coffee everyday, the moment you woke up. You tried not to eat bread, ever. You yelled at me on your birthday. You hated long car rides and long layovers. You made fun of me for only drinking tea. You liked pinots and not malbecs. Your taste in decor was subpar, and you had never set foot in a HomeGoods before you met me.

There are so many things I'll never miss.

There are so many things I hated about you.

Things I couldn't stand.

I haven't been dwelling on your good things. They really never cross my mind.

My heart's angry and fixated on all the things that were wrong.

### *Small Beginnings*

I remember that first week. I remember the smile I couldn't contain and how loud and excitedly I spoke to Ana at work.

"I've never seen you like this." She had said.

I remember walking on air, feeling foolish, and stupid, and lightheaded. I remember waiting anxiously for your calls and feeling my heart pound vigorously when the phone actually rang. I remember talking to my sister and not-so-casually dropping your name, fifty times or so. I remember her wide cautious eyes and her devious smile as she teased, "Who are you and what have you done with my older sister?"

I remember lying restless in bed in the middle of the night. I recounted phone conversations and facts you shared and the in-the-making second date plans. I remember my cheeks feeling hot and my lungs working overtime as I laid awake, unmoving. I remember thinking about us—something I had rarely let myself do before. I remember planning, and hoping, that maybe you were one of those "good ones" everyone said I'd find.

I remember holding my breath and watching my steps. I remember nervously wringing my hands as I worked, recounting in my mind things I had let slip about myself too early. I remember wanting to see you often, a feeling I had never had before.

I remember the beginning of us so clearly—especially now, at the end.



## *The Breakdown*

It took a week without you before I realized it.

It was late at night. I was driving home from dinner with Ana. Our whole dinner we talked about her new relationship while I fought desperately to avoid the conversation leading to you. I told myself I was indifferent. I told myself I wanted to move on and forget it had happened.

But, three drinks in, she asked, “What happened?”

I didn’t know what to say.

*What did happen?* What happened to us? Why did we end?

“He was tired of the distance. I think.”

She shrugged it off. She told me you were not even half of what I deserved. She told me she never thought we’d ever end up together. I pretended I believed her. We spent the rest of the evening laughing at pointless things and talking about our muddled futures. Ana had been offered a job in California. I said I would miss her at work. She had also decided that her relationship with Stewart was worth staying in. She didn’t want to enter the dating scene again. She said she liked him alot. I said I was happy for her.

We walked to our cars. I pulled your navy blue coat tighter around me. She asked me where I had gotten it; I didn’t have the heart to tell her it was yours.

I told her I loved her, and I’d text her when I got home. She got into her car and drove away. I locked my doors and turned on the heat. And then I cried. I cried for the first time since that night. I cried because you were gone. I cried because I missed you. I cried because you hurt me.

I couldn't see through my tears. A slow Taylor Swift song came on and I cried even harder. It hit me then, in the P.F. Chang's parking lot on a Wednesday in November, that I was devastated. You left me and time felt as if it had stood still. Everyone else was moving forward and growing up, and I was here, devastated that you left and still in complete denial. I was telling people I was fine. I was making jokes and saying I didn't miss you, but I did.

I missed you.

I miss you.

I cried for thirty minutes in my car that night, listening to the same song on repeat. And when my tears reached a lull, and I could finally see enough to drive, I made my way back to my apartment. I realized you were actually gone. You had actually ended things.

We were over.

## *Knowing*

I remember our third week of ‘officially dating’. You had spent almost every night at my apartment because you claimed my bed was nicer and made your back hurt less. It took no convincing to make me believe you. We laughed constantly. You cooked breakfast every morning after your run. You’d take showers as I read, and you’d steal my conditioner.

You would smell like strawberries for the rest of the day.

You helped me clean the apartment and you volunteered to vacuum. I remember the urge to fall head over heels for you when you rolled up the rug to get forgotten dust. I wore your shirt as I made the bed. You watched me do laundry, and you told me about your family, and you helped me cook.

That Sunday, you drove me out to a farmer’s market. The leaves were starting to turn vibrant shades of yellow, orange, and red. I had to hold back tears at the sight as you sped down the country road—we didn’t have a proper fall where I grew up. The air was crisp and clean, and I wore a scarf.

You linked our arms as we walked. You knew I hated holding hands. We exchanged mumbled jokes and knowing glances, holding back laughter as we passed people by. I bought you a coffee and you got me a tea.

I remember watching you talk to a woman selling french bread. You told her some joke and made her laugh. Then you asked about her day, and I knew.

All my life, people had told me that when you meet the person, you just know. I never believed them. It seemed crazy to me. How could there be *one* person for everyone?

But that day, with you at a Sunday farmer's market, I just knew.

I knew, and I still know.

## *Melancholy*

I haven't left my bed in two days. All I do is stare at the ceiling, tears streaming down my cheeks.

I miss you.

I miss your smile and your laugh. I miss how clean you were. I miss your mismatching socks. I miss your snoring, and your constant calls, and you stealing covers from my side of the bed.

And I hate myself. I hate myself for missing the things I said I could do without. I hate myself for wishing you were here. I hate myself for not being mad at you. I hate myself for putting your watch in a drawer and not getting rid of it. I hate myself for keeping your glass of water on my nightstand.

It sits there, half-empty, in the exact spot you last left it, waiting for you to return. Waiting for you to pick it up and press it to your lips one last time. Waiting for you to carry it away and finish it off, like you should have done the first time. I stare at it, as if that would make you appear. Around four o'clock, the light hits the glass just right and I can just barely make out your fingerprints.

I can't get rid of it. I can't carry it to the kitchen and set it in the sink. It's all I have left of you.

I'm not ready to let you go.

## *Marriage*

I never understood the concept of marriage in times like ours. Why did people get married? Were there specific reasons? Better reasons than “*we love each other*”? Did they *have* to get married? Who made them?

You can do so many things now without having to get married.

You can live together.

You can have children.

You can open joint checking accounts.

I never saw the need to be married, not unless I wanted to publicly claim someone. To say, to the entire world, “I belong to this person, and they belong to me”. To wear a ring to show I’m taken. To refer to my spouse in every other sentence. To have a legitimate excuse in my corner (“I’m sorry—my partner is sick, so I can’t make it”). To publicly love someone. To be a part of a pair.

I never understood marriage.

But you.

I would’ve married you in secret.

I would have married you for no benefit, no reason, no ring. I would’ve married you in the middle of nowhere, not a soul around. I would’ve married you and told no one—not even my sister. I would’ve married you and let it remain a sweet, sappy secret we kept between ourselves.

I don’t think I believe in marriage, but I would have married you just to marry you.

*Picking Up Pieces*

What do I do with myself?

How do I become me again?

I've finally gotten out of bed, but I still can't really breathe. I've developed an addiction to coffee I didn't used to have. There are always bags under my eyes. I feel like I don't look the same.

Would you love me, how I am? Sad and different and alone?

I replay our conversations in my head, over and over and over. I avoid the most mundane things, like sweeping the floors and using specific blankets. They always make me break down and cry. I only watch *The Mummy*—the one made in 1999. I can't bring myself to watch anything else. Every night, I watch it twice. And every night, I cry when Rick gives Evie the tool kit, because you used to care about me like that. You used to look at me like he looks at her.

I'm a shell of myself and I don't know what to do. I feel empty and cracked in places that used to be whole. I feel like a fraud. I used to be so good at being alone. I used to swear that I'd never let a man make me feel this way, that I'd never rely on someone so much that I couldn't be okay if they left. I spent years without anyone before I met you. I spent years by myself. I *loved* those years by myself.

What happened?

I'm not okay. I relied on you. I trusted you. I loved you. I thought you were *it*. I thought I was done looking. *I thought I knew*.

I don't know where I went—the me before you.

Who was I? Who was the girl who was confident, and kind, and didn't wonder  
what you thought about her? Who was the girl who didn't feel sad and broken?

She's a completely different person. She was happy. She knew her worth. She was  
shiny and bright and innocent. She was strong and funny. People always looked her way  
when she walked into a room.

What did you do to me?

Why do I feel like I'm half the person I was?



*The 'I Love You'*

We had been dating for two months. It had felt like years.

It was raining that day. You gave me your favorite coat—the navy one. I’ve kept it in my closet ever since. We ran through the streets, you dragging me by the hand. I ducked my head to keep water from smearing my mascara. You laughed as we ran, holding your hand above your eyes to see through the thick sheets of rain.

“We’re almost there!” You called over the loud sounds of the city and rain mixing. I nodded as my teeth chattered. You pushed open the door to the coffee shop, the bell dinging as we stumbled in. Your clothes were soaking. Raindrops were dripping from your curls.

“Was coffee worth this?” I asked, attempting to hide my smile, but failing miserably. I couldn’t hide anything around you.

“*This* coffee is worth everything.” You winked.

I made a face.

“Oh, of course. I forgot. You don’t like coffee.”

“I don’t.”

You rolled your eyes as you stepped into line. “Then why do you always take sips of mine?”

I fought a smile, grabbing your arm as I followed you further into the warm shop. “You make coffee taste better.”

You rocked back and forth on your heels, with your hands in your pockets. My arm was laced through yours. I could barely feel your warmth through all my layers.

You read the menu on the board, lips slightly parted, and I found myself staring. You glanced over at me.

“What are you getting?” You asked, a grin rising onto your features.

A deep blush found its way to my cheeks. “Nothing. I’m just going to drink some of yours.”

You rolled your eyes again, shaking your head as you leaned over to kiss my cheek. I remember your lips felt wet and cold from the rain, but they seemed to send a spark through my skin anyway. “I’ll buy you tea.”

“I don’t want to waste it.” I said.

“Don’t worry—I’ll have some. I’m sure you make it taste better.”

I looked at you then. I really looked at you. You were soaked through, your lips trembling and blue. You kept your hands on my arms, moving them up and down to try and generate heat. You squinted your eyes to try and see the menu board better.

“Will you get peach green tea?” I asked.

You glanced down at me, a slanted smile on your lips. Shaking your head once more, you said, “I’ll get you anything.”

“Anything?”

Your eyes searched my face, and suddenly it was just us, and you were serious as can be. You took a deep, shaky breath, and then let it go with a grin.

“I love you. I’m in love with you, I mean.” You said.

I smiled. And then I laughed. “I love you.”

And when we ran back to your apartment with our drinks in hand, through  
the downpour, I felt truly warm. In the elevator, you took a sip of my tea.

I remember it being the best tea I'd ever tasted.

*Miserable*

My head hurts.

I keep thinking of you.

I want to forget you. Forget us. Forget the trips we took and the plans we made.

I just can't seem to let go yet.

I haven't left my bed in days, but I'm so tired. Some days I can barely keep my eyes open. It feels like I'm in slow motion, but everyone else is fine.

Why were you good to me? Why were you so kind? Why were you the person I wanted to spend the rest of my life with?

I think if you were terrible, it would be much easier to hate you and want you out of my life.

But, you weren't terrible. You were nothing short of lovely.

I miss you, still.

I love you, still.

I wish you didn't leave.

I wish you were here.

### *The Family Dinner*

My hands were shaking as I waited at the table with my sister. It was my parents' wedding anniversary and we were meeting them for dinner.

You were meeting them for the first time.

"Why are we eating in an Italian restaurant? Dad hates Italian." My sister said as she perused the menu. She wore a blue dress with her hair tucked behind her ears.

"He's late." I mumbled under my breath, checking my watch and phone once more. "He's running late."

"So are mom and dad."

I frantically bounced my knee beneath the table, trying to pass the time. "I'm nervous." I admitted.

I *was* nervous. My sister had done it before—introduced someone to our family. In fact, she'd done it three times before. I never had. I was always the one meeting other people's boyfriends and girlfriends; I was never the one doing the introducing. And anything before you had never lasted. I had never liked anyone enough. No one ever felt right enough. They wouldn't share my father's sense of humor, or be cute enough to please my mother, or have a good knowledge of music to appease my sister.

And sitting in the restaurant, I rethought every feeling I had ever had for you, but came up feeling the exact same; I was a goner. I really, truly, was in love with you.

My sister looked up from her menu. She stared at me for a moment, as if she hadn't seen me in years. "It'll be alright. If you're dating him, then he must be close to perfect."

It was then that you rushed through the front door, the hostess pointing you in our direction. You shook rain from your hair as you walked towards me with a smile. My fears that they would hate you melted away slowly. How could they possibly hate you? And even if they did, would it matter?

“I’m sorry. I’m late, I’m late.” You said, leaning down and kissing my cheek. “Work kept me and then traffic was horrible and I’m so sorry.”

I squeezed your hand as you sat beside me. “It’s okay. You made it before them. No worries.”

You rested your hand on my knee under the table. I stopped shaking. You introduced yourself to my sister and told her a joke. Then together the both of you began to compare notes on my sleeping habits.

“How do you deal with her endless kicking?” She asked you.

“The secret is,” You leaned in close, across the table. “I tuck the duvet under her. It contains her legs.”

My sister cackled, tossing her head back. “You’re a genius. I must remember that on our next family vacation when I’m stuck sharing a bed with her.”

“Thanks.” I said, rolling my eyes and sticking my tongue out at her.

She looked at me while you read the menu. Her hand grabbed mine on top of the table and she squeezed it. “He’s great. He’s amazing.” She mouthed with a smile. It felt as if a car had been lifted off of my chest.

My parents arrived shortly after, my father annoyed by the rain and the price to park and my mother ready and filled to the brim with questions for you. They sat

hurriedly, after hugging and kissing my sister and I. My father shook your hand. My mother kissed your cheeks.

“Where is your family from?” My mom asked, a wine glass in her hand.

“Michigan.” You replied easily with a smile.

“Don’t you think parking’s expensive in this city?” My father asked, cheeks red from his beverage.

“The prices are crazy! And don’t get me started on gas.” You hummed, seemingly knowing exactly what it was they wanted to hear.

After dinner, as I stood by the front door putting on my sweater, my father hugged me goodbye.

“He’s very nice.” He said in my ear. “Maybe he’ll help me mow the yard one day.”

I suppressed a breathy laugh. “Maybe dad. Thanks for being nice to him.”

As my dad went to say goodbye to you and my sister, my mom pulled me aside.

“He’s very handsome and very smart. I can see why you like him.”

“Thanks.” I laughed nervously, unfamiliar with discussing my feelings with my mom.

“Bring him around for Christmas! We’d love to have him. You can share a room. We’re cool parents, you know. It’s not like it’s the 1800s.”

“Thanks mom.” I nodded, hugging her goodbye. “Happy Anniversary.”

She grinned brightly. “He’s very, very cute.”

Later that evening, you stood at the sink in my bathroom, brushing your teeth.

“Do you think they liked me? Did I do okay?” You asked.

I looked up from my book. “They loved you.”

“Honest?”

“Yes! Honest!” I smiled big, yawning as I did so. “They really, *really* loved you.”

You let out a breathy laugh. “Thank god. Do you know how nervous I was?”

I giggled to myself, sinking further under the covers. I watched you clean your face, steal some of my moisturizer, and take out your contacts. Then you slipped off your favorite watch and left it on the counter. You leaned down and kissed me goodnight, making a production of tucking the duvet under me. We turned out the lights, and then I listened to your breathing even out as you fell asleep.



### *The First Snow*

It was New Year's Eve and we had stayed in.

It was snowing. It was the first time we had ever been together while it snowed. I put on your coat and gloves, and you layered on all your sweaters. Snowballs were thrown, snow angels were made, and mothers were called. We stayed out for hours. We ran through the park until my cheeks were bright red. I told you I never wanted to leave, and you didn't make me.

I laid beside you in the snow, the cold slowly creeping through my layers and layers of pants. My breaths were shallow and stung. "It never snows back home." I said.

"It doesn't?" You asked.

I turned to look at you. You had a green hat pulled over your hair and ears. Snowflakes had gotten caught in your eyelashes. Your cheeks were a bright pink and your eyes a deep blue.

"Never," I said. "I've always wanted snow like this."

"It gets old."

"It does?"

You turned your head and smiled. "No, it doesn't."

I laughed.

You shook your head, and raised yourself up on your elbow, above the snow. You looked at me. You *really* looked at me, and said, "I love your laugh."

"I love the snow."

"*Just* the snow?"

“You too. I love you, too.”

Three hours later, we were back in your apartment. We were in your bed, talking about our future. I remember it so clearly; you said you wanted three kids so the house always felt full, and you hoped our kids had my smile and my eyes. I suggested we live in Maine. You said you could see us, walking the shore of a beach in the mornings, bundled up and holding hands. I remember laughing, and shaking it off, but deep down, I really wished it would be true.

And then a silence fell between us. You were watching the snowfall outside your window. I was watching you. I leaned over, and I kissed your hand, and then your wrists, because I loved your wrists.

You smiled and shook your head.

And then you said, “I could never live without you.”

## *Lying*

Were you lying when you said you loved me? I used to know that it was you, and that you felt the same. But, if you felt the same way I do, you would've called by now. If you felt the same, you never would've ended things. If you loved me, your world would have stopped before you ever thought about leaving.

Were you lying when you talked about Maine? How we wanted to move there and live in a renovated colonial house? How we wanted to walk with our kids on the beach? Were you lying when you said you wanted to spend every winter with me? When you said you wanted to grow old with me?

There were so many times when we were together that I'd lie awake and think about Maine. I'd picture us painting walls white, or planting a garden, or putting up a clothesline. You would hang up those paintings of the sea that I loved so much in the hallway. Our bed frame would be pushed against large windows and all our books would be sitting in rainbow order on the shelves. Backpacks would lie on the kitchen table and shoes would be left haphazardly on the ground in the foyer. You'd buy me a real Christmas tree in December because I never had one growing up. I pictured us, laughing in dim candle light, hanging ornaments on a tree.

Were you lying when you talked about our future? I remember when we talked about kids. You suggested names. You wanted to start saving money; you were sure our daughter would go to Yale.

Was it ever *our* future in your mind or was it just yours? Was I interchangeable?  
Filling a spot in your fantasy until you found the woman you'd marry? Was I that  
meaningless to you?

How could you say all of that? How could you make promises and plans that you  
never intended to keep? How did you wake up that morning and decide to end us?

I wish I was lying.

I wish I was lying when I laughed at your jokes and believed every word you said.  
I wish I was lying when I told you I knew you were my forever. I wish I was lying when I  
said I'd been waiting for you all my life.

I wish I was lying.

I wish I didn't love you.

I wish I could say I didn't still think about Maine.

*A Random Saturday Morning*

“I think you’re the one for me.” You said as you took a sip of water from my glass.

“Is that so?”

“It is most certainly so. You’re *it*. You’re my one.”

I laughed as you set down the glass on my bedside table. I remember feeling the same; unbelievably happy. Like I’d finally found you.

*Better*

I got up this morning and nothing ached. My heart was okay. My head was okay. My back and shoulders were okay. I got up this morning and went for a walk, like I always used to do before I met you. I went for a walk and looked up at the sky and smiled at strangers. I felt like myself for a moment. Then it was gone.

I made breakfast. I made eggs the way you hated them. They were the best eggs I had ever had. I drank tea and I cleaned the apartment. I didn't put on *The Mummy* for the first time in weeks.

I carried your water glass from my bedside table and put it in the sink.

*That Morning*

That morning you woke up and decided to end things between us.

I woke up and worried about what to get your mother for her birthday.

Then I called you.

## *Moving On*

My mother called to remind me that it had been six months since you ended things. She said that I'd been sad for long enough and it was time I moved on.

Now I'm angry at you all over again.

When we met, I thought I was done looking. I thought you were it. Never in my life had I felt the way I felt about you. My mind had been made up. I had been picturing Maine. I was a goner. I was head over heels in love.

And then you ended things.

You ended things and now I have to go out to bars and meet people. I have to smile, flirt, and give out my number. I have to go on first dates. I have to introduce myself when I don't even know who I am anymore. I have to see someone else, and kiss someone else, and forget about you.

I've been trying my hardest to forget about you. I promise.

It's just so hard.

I feel like you took up every part of me and found your way into every corner of my life. I gave you everything. I let you have it all. You touched every part of me. You slept in my bed and held my hands. You tainted every thought I had and every plan I made. And it's no one's fault but my own—I let you do it.

I don't want to meet someone else and give them everything.

I don't want to fall in love again and have it not be enough.



*Myself*

I gave the watch you left away. I feel better now that it's gone.

I've been reading. I read *Jane Eyre* again and I finally felt like myself. Feelings flooded me and I didn't feel empty anymore. I felt alive and young and warm. I felt like the me before you came along.

I've been cleaning, and going on walks, and cooking more than the frozen dumplings we used to live off of. I've been listening to Phoebe Bridgers on repeat. I've been calling my friends and talking to my sister every other day. I've been watching old black and white movies again. I've been hosting dinner parties. I've shopped at the farmer's market every Sunday. I've been wearing my favorite clothes.

I'm my old self again. I found her.

*A Blind Date*

He pulled out my chair for me. He laughed at my jokes.

We went to my favorite restaurant. I wore your coat. He said he liked the color of it. I said I liked it too. We talked about his family and their summer vacation. I talked about work and what I like to cook. I brought up the fact that my sister was dating someone new. We talked about that for a while.

He was cute, funny and nice. I couldn't stop thinking of you.

We had red wine. We split appetizers. He doesn't like cherries or cheese cake. I told him about how much I hate mushrooms. I wasn't sure what to say. It was so different from being with you. I struggled to make conversation and to find things in common.

With you, it was easy. It was always so easy. I think I loved you from the start.

We walked around the block. We looked at the store fronts. He said he liked me. He seemed sincere. I think he might have meant it. I smiled and I told him I liked him too. Was it like this when I first met you? Did I not know what to say?

All I can seem to remember is how safe you made me feel. How I felt like I could say anything—*anything*—and you'd understand me. I never worried about if you'd think I was strange, or if my words would make you walk away.

But here, on this blind date, I'm worried. What if I say something that I could've only said to you? What if I scare someone else away? If you didn't want me, why would they?

He walked me home. The whole way I tried not to think about you. Why does it feel like I'm cheating? I'm not yours anymore.

We stopped on my doorstep. My body went rigid as I filled with anticipation. For the past two and a half years I was convinced I'd only ever kiss you for the rest of my life, but tonight has proven me wrong.

He kissed me. It was soft and quick, and nothing like how you used to kiss me. When I stepped back, I smiled. I thanked him for dinner. He said he'd call and then kissed me once more. I walked up the stairs and shuffled into my apartment alone. I thought about the kiss until I fell asleep.

For the first time in a long time, it was night and I wasn't thinking of you.

## *The Gifts*

I remember that first Christmas. I had spent weeks dreading your gift. I was terrified of going too big, of making us out to be a bigger deal than we actually were. I panicked on the phone with my sister, begging her for ideas. Fed up, she called me one afternoon.

She had found a deal on tickets to *Macbeth*.

I wrapped the tickets in an envelope with a deep green paper and met you at your parents' house.

While you poured wine for your mom and sister, I peaked under the tree. Your gift was a small rectangular box decorated in a plaid red paper and some red ribbon. I worried your gift was better than mine. I worried you spent more. I worried it was a diamond bracelet, or a set of dangling earrings. But, I also worried that my gift was better than yours. I worried you'd gotten me a nail file, or a pack of gum, or—god forbid—a deck of cards. You had said I needed some in my apartment two weeks back.

“Are you okay?”

I jumped, completely unaware of your proximity to me. You steadied me with a hand on my elbow, your touch light. “God, I’m sorry. You scared me.”

You laughed. “I can see that. What’s going on?”

“I’m nervous.”

“Nervous?”

I nodded. “Terrified.”

You raised an eyebrow, trying to get me to continue. “Of...?”

“Our gifts.” I finished, shaking my head as I chewed on the nail of my thumb.

“What if you hate it? What if I hate yours?”

“If you hate mine I’ll just get you a new gift.” You stated simply, pulling me closer to you.

“I wouldn’t tell you if I hated your gift. That’s mean.”

“I’ll be able to tell.”

“No you won’t.” I laughed, pushing you away. “I told you I liked the new laundry detergent you picked out and you believed me.”

“You don’t like that? It’s lily scented!” You exclaimed, mock-disbelief covering your features.

“I hate it. I like the lavender better.”

“Well,” You laughed to yourself, bending down to pick our gifts out from under the tree. “Let’s be glad I didn’t get you laundry detergent, then.”

You reached out, offering me the small rectangular box. I took it in my hands. It wasn’t heavy. In fact, it weighed almost nothing.

“We’re opening them? Now?”

You nodded. “Let’s go on a walk. We can open them out in the snow.”

It took us five minutes to get on our coats and gloves, but eventually we made it outside. You made a snide remark, sighing, as I struggled to get on my hat and scarf. I shuffled my feet slowly down the sidewalk, my boots making a trail in the fresh powder. It was dark out, but the entire block seemed to glow from the reflection of Christmas lights off snow.

“You first.” You said, tucking my gift to you in the pocket of your navy coat.

I took a deep breath, made painful by the cold air, and began to untie the ribbon. You watched, catching the ribbon in your glove as I let go of it. I was left holding a navy box which I opened to reveal two white slips of narrow paper.

*Hamlet* tickets.

You had gotten me *Hamlet* tickets.

“Oh my god.” I said, a smile growing large on my face. “Did you really?”

You looked concerned as you watched me. “Do you like them? I figured with all this talk of Shakespeare we should go see the play, you know? And I know it’s in London, but—”

“It’s in London?!” I exclaimed, frantically bringing the tickets closer to my eyes. My hands were practically shaking from excitement.

“Well, yeah. I figured we were ready to take a trip. That’s your second present, actually. Tickets to London.”

“Really?”

“Can I open mine now?” You asked, lifting the envelope from your pocket.

“Are we really going to London?”

You ignored me, grinning slyly. “I’m opening mine now.”

I watched you fiddle with the wrapping paper, your cheeks red from the cold. You looked at me. “Cash? A card?”

“Why are you making guesses?” I groaned, shoving you lightly.

“I like guessing.” You murmured, opening your gift to reveal two more narrow, white slips of paper. Your face broke out into a bright smile as you read, a laugh escaping from your lips.

“Do you like them?” I asked, biting my lower lip in concern. “I know it’s not in London...”

You look at me, a large grin present on your face. “I love you. I absolutely love you.”

I smiled back. My ears were freezing, but I didn’t seem to care. “Really?”

“You got me *Macbeth* tickets. You’re the love of my life.”

“You got me *Hamlet* tickets. *In London.*” I countered, pulling on the lapels of your coat to bring you closer.

“Yeah, but your tickets have better seats.”

“Yours come with a flight.”

“Yours are in my favorite theater.”

“Oh, shut up and kiss me already.” I said.

“I can’t believe I’m going to see *Macbeth*.” You responded quickly before crashing your lips into mine. I laughed into the kiss, feeling a snowflake fall onto my cheek as I did.

*Fourth Date*

It's going well. He makes me laugh.

It's different. He texts and rarely calls. He doesn't do my dishes or reorganize my kitchen unless I ask. He smiles at me as we watch movies. He never pays attention to the news, so I never know what's going on in the world anymore. You always told me the important things.

We've gone for dinner, a picnic, and to the zoo. I met his brother. He said I was the best girl he'd brought around, and I actually believe him. We have inside jokes. I know the names of their family pets. I know his favorite color. I've started to memorize all of his small little facts.

I don't think of you much anymore.

I really do think I'm better.

Maybe you ending things was for the best.

It's going well. Better than I thought it'd go.

He makes me laugh.



*A Year*

We stood in the classic aisle of Barnes and Noble on our one year anniversary, whispering back and forth over books. You played with the rings on my fingers as I read a book synopsis aloud. Once we reached the section with Shakespeare, you interrupted me.

“I re-read *Hamlet*. In preparation for London.”

“You did? I never saw you reading it.”

“I read it when I was in D.C. for work.” You said, spinning the ring on my thumb around and around.

“And? How was the second reading?” I pressed, my smile growing. I set down one book and picked up another. You followed as I moved slowly up the aisle.

“Good.”

“Better than *Macbeth*?”

You nodded remorsefully. “As much as I love *Macbeth*...yes.”

I gasped. “*Hamlet* has dethroned *Macbeth*?”

“Yeah. I was shocked too.”

“What changed?”

You paused, considering the question. Then you shrugged. “I met you.”

A laugh escaped me as I said, “Wow. I guess we weren’t doomed after all.”

*Parts of You*

I still keep parts of you.

I still wear my favorite coat of yours. The navy one with a hole in its pocket. You never asked for it back. I still watch your favorite movies and play your favorite albums. I still read *Hamlet* every couple of months. I keep my kitchen organized the way you did. I still sleep on the left side of my bed, as if you'll walk in one night and take the right.

I kept your books. I kept your pens. I kept your gloves and your scarf—I only just found them the other day.

I keep parts of you because I don't think I'll ever completely let you go.

But, he makes me happy.

He sleeps on the right side of my bed, and helps me put my dishes away. He lets me watch the same movies and play the same music with no complaints. He never asks me about you. I know he wonders, but he never asks.

He makes me happy.

I've moved on. *Really*.

But, you were the one.

I can't just forget you, not like you were nothing.

*Macbeth*

We practically lived together by the time we saw *Macbeth*.

All my time away from work seemed to be spent with you. We went to the grocery store and I'd watch you cook dinner. We went for long walks and we'd clean the apartment. You fell asleep in my bed before I even managed to get out of the shower. Your shirts hung in my closet and your socks could be found in my drawers. You began to stack books you'd finished reading against the wall. You slowly found yourself at home in my life and I slowly adjusted to having you around. The night of the play you sat on the edge of the bathtub, watching me as I finished doing my hair.

"How was your day?" I asked, twisting my hair up as I looked back at you in the mirror.

"It was okay." You said. "I'm getting restless for London. I seem to need a break from work. I don't want to go in anymore."

I laughed. "I'm excited for London, too. I'm excited for *Hamlet*. I think it'll be good."

"You want to know what I think?" You asked, standing to make your way over to me.

"What do you think?"

You rested your hands on my shoulders as I put my earrings on, then looked into the mirror and met my gaze. "I think *Macbeth* will be better. *And*, I think you look great."

"What happened to you changing your ways and thinking *Hamlet* was better than *Macbeth*?"

You shrugged, grabbing your navy coat from the nearby chair and draping it over my shoulders. “You can’t just erase years and years of adoration overnight, you know.”

“Of course. How could I be so silly.” I murmured in response.

The play was consuming. I learned more from watching that play once than I ever had from reading it multiple times. I was absolutely encapsulated, hanging on the actors’ every word. Their tones and their gestures, and their real, human glances painted a Macbeth I had never considered. I laughed aloud at the jokes made, turning to glance at you each time. You were already looking at me, as if you were watching me more than the play. I held your gaze after one of the jokes during the final act, softly smiling at you.

I couldn’t remember a time in my life where I was happier than I was then.

Outside, in the cool air, I laced my arm with yours as we began to walk. We took our slow steps in sync, my head resting on your shoulder. You suggested we stroll home to ‘enjoy the evening’. I laughed, enthusiastically agreeing, despite my shoes digging into the sides of my feet. I guess I was too clouded with joy to care.

“It was amazing. I mean it! It was amazing.” I exclaimed, my smile wide. “I’m so glad we went.”

“I’m glad too.” You said contentedly. “Macbeth was a great actor, but I could not get over how impressive Lady Macbeth was.”

“She was great, wasn’t she? I loved her.”

“She made me appreciate her character more. Or, maybe it was seeing the play in person. I guess I appreciate it all so much more.” You laughed, as if your thought was foolish. I didn’t think it was. In fact, I thought your thought was perfect. I thought *you* were perfect.

“Are you glad we got to go?” I asked, lifting my head to scan your face.

You turned to me with a bright smile. “It’s the best Christmas gift you’ll ever get me.”

“You don’t think I can do better?”

“No, I *know* you can. But I just really loved this one.” You leaned down as you continued to walk, quickly kissing the top of my head. “Now, let’s go home.”

*Home.* You had called my apartment *home*.

Deliriously happy, I tiredly stumbled my way home with you.

*Five Months In*

It's been a year since you ended us.

It's been five months since I started dating him.

You still cross my mind. It happens at the oddest times. I'll be pouring a cup of tea, watering the house plants, or writing the grocery list, and suddenly I'll remember us vividly. I'll remember the deep color of your eyes and the crinkle in your nose when you smiled. I'll remember your hands and your wrists. I'll remember your jokes and your family. I'll remember everything.

And then you're gone again.

You're like a mild case of amnesia I can't seem to shake.

He distracts me from you. He buys me flowers every week and holds my hand as we walk the streets to dinner. He texts me updates about his day.

He could be here for a while.

I know I'd miss him if he were gone.

*I Love you's*

He told me he loved me.

He looked me in the eyes and smiled and meant it.

And in that moment, I remembered you. I remembered the coffee shop and the rain in your hair. I remembered the tea and the coffee. I remembered the look on your face. I remembered the air leaving my body as you mumbled the words to me.

This time, no air left my body. There was no rain. There was no coffee shop. It was me and him, sitting on my living room couch. We had been playing chess. I was about to win for the second time when he looked up and told me he loved me.

And it wasn't like you. It wasn't like us. It was different.

I said, "I love you, too."

And I shook my head to get rid of you.

## *Gone*

I don't want to remember you anymore.

I want to forget. I want to scrape you off of me. I want you gone. Maybe it's too much to ask, because I don't think of you all the time. Not anymore. I only think of you once a week, but I wish I could just forget. I want to forget your name. I want to stop remembering your smile. I want to stop picturing your hands. I want to forget us entirely.

I want to forget Maine.

I want to forget London.

I want to be done. I want you gone.

I want to be happy with him. I want to imagine a life with someone new. I want to forget the frail plans we made. I want to forget how happy we were.



## *Six Months*

I ran into your sister today. She was as beautiful as ever. Her hair was longer, a little past her waist. Her smile looked just like yours. She was engaged.

We talked about her work and how she never stops going. We talked about my new apartment—did I tell you I moved? We talked about houseplants, Pinterest recipes, and romance novels. I danced around the subject of you as if my life depended on it. She didn't seem to mind.

"Are you seeing anyone?" She asked me.

"Yes. We've been together for about a year now."

She smiled and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "That's amazing! I'm so, so happy for you!"

"And you? You're engaged! Is he perfect?"

"He feels pretty perfect."

I laughed. "I'm glad. I'm glad you found what you were looking for."

She went silent for a moment, looking down at her coffee cup. But then she looked up again. It was as if she had never left the conversation. "You're missed, you know."

"You don't have to..." I shook my head. "You really don't have to do that."

"It's true." She said firmly.

I took her hand in the middle of the table. "I miss you guys."

She sighed, shaking her head sadly. "I really don't get it. We all thought...we all thought you two were it. We were convinced. I can't believe..."

“It’s okay. I’m fine now.” I smiled, shaking my head.

“We just, we really thought you guys were forever.”

Her words hung in the air, and for the first time in six months, I thought of you again. It hurt, knowing I wasn’t the only one who thought we were good together. It hurt knowing other people didn’t understand the end of us either. It hurt seeing your sister again and realizing she’d never be my family.

After six months of you never crossing my mind, here you were again.

I sighed, and smiled softly at her. “I thought we were forever, too.”

## *Hamlet*

The plane ride to London was long, made even longer by the fact that you had been hiding something from me. The entire week leading up to the trip you were more quiet, more reserved. At first I thought you needed space. I thought you had grown tired of me. I thought you were distancing yourself because we were ending.

I was devastated. I was packing for London and I was devastated.

After a year and a half, after everything you'd said, after all the promises we'd made, you were pulling away. I hated myself for jumping to the conclusion that we were over, but I wasn't sure what else it would be. I refused to tell my sister, or Ana, or my mother. I was embarrassed. I had said you were wonderful. I had been so happy. I had talked about you so much. What would I say then? That we were over after two years? That everything I had put into our relationship was meaningless in the end?

The plane ride was long. Anxiety burrowed deep within me and stayed there. I just kept waiting for the other shoe to drop, for you to turn to me and say the inevitable. But you never did. You were quiet. You were stuck in your head. You barely looked at me. We made small talk the first two days in London. I commented on buildings and gardens and you'd simply agree.

On the night of the play, I'd bitten my nails to the quick. I wore a black dress and I looked nice, but I felt doomed. I followed closely behind you as we walked quickly down the streets, as if we were running late. After a few minutes, once the theater was in sight, I stopped walking.

I felt anger bubble up in my blood. I had been waiting most of my life to see a live production of *Hamlet*, and yet here I was, about to walk in and ignore the performance as I worried over you. I shook my head, mostly to myself, refusing to do it. If you were going to end things, you'd do it right there.

You turned around a few feet in front of me. You looked annoyed, holding your hands up in the air. "What's wrong?"

"What's wrong?" I repeated, a certain degree of disdain in my voice. "What's wrong with you?"

"What do you mean?"

I shook my head, suddenly peeved at the very sight of you. "Are you kidding me?"

You shook your head as people passed us. All of them were dressed nice too, probably headed to the theater. I stood angry on the sidewalk ready to yell at you. We had never fought before. Not truly. We had small arguments and even smaller disagreements, but we had never fought.

But there, in London, thirty minutes before *Hamlet* started, we started screaming.

"What do you mean, what's wrong with me?"

"I mean that you've been ignoring me. You've been hiding something."

"That's ridiculous—"

"What do you mean? It's not ridiculous! You've been virtually silent for weeks—"

"I have not—"

“Just come out and say it!” I shout over your protests, “Just end things if you're going to end things. I'm sick of worrying about it!”

You went quiet for a brief moment, taking a physical step back. You looked at the sidewalk before you, running your fingers through your hair. “What do you mean, break up with you? What are you talking about? Why do you think we're breaking up?”

I shook my head, defeated. What else could explain it? I went over every interaction in my head, lowering my voice as I said, “If you aren't ending things, then what are you hiding?”

“Work.” You let out a sigh, then rubbing at the nape of your neck. “I may have to move here.”

My eyes went wide. I looked around us, my eyes catching on the gardens and the cobblestone streets, and the red telephone booths. “Here? As in, London? England?”

“Yeah, here. London.”

My first feeling was hurt. I felt it deep in the pit of my stomach, rising up like bile in my throat. But then I forced my hurt into anger. I wanted something to fuel me, something to fire back at you. “So when were you going to tell me? Am I even a factor you're actively thinking about while considering this?”

“Of course you're a factor—”

“Then why did it take you almost two weeks to say anything?”

You stared at me, your face blank. “I don't know.”

“You don't know?”

“I guess I just...” You shook your head sadly, looking down at your feet like a little kid. “I just didn't want to ruin anything. I don't know.”

“I don’t understand why we couldn’t talk about this like adults. I mean, you could’ve just said something.” I spit out as I took a few steps closer to you. “It’s so easy. Every day I ask you how your day was and all you had to do was say *something*.”

You looked around us at the people passing by. “Can we not do this right now?”

I laughed bitterly. “Why do you care! You’ll never see these people again—oh, wait, I forgot—you’re moving to London! Don’t want to be foolish in front of potential new girlfriends, do we?”

“Oh my god, I wasn’t ending things!” You raised your voice, finally meeting mine.

“It certainly felt like you were! You didn’t tell me anything about a huge change in your life! In *our* life!”

“I wasn’t sure it was actually happening!”

I rolled my eyes. “I want to be told if there’s even a *possibility* of you moving! Is that too much to ask?”

“I’m sorry.” You took a step forward, rubbing your temples in frustration. You shouted again, “I’m sorry that I’m in love with you! I’m sorry that I didn’t want to talk about it yet! I’m sorry that I was struggling with choosing you or a job! I wasn’t sure what to do, okay? I *knew* I was going to choose you, so what was even the point of bringing it up?”

I stood, suddenly silent.

You lowered your voice, heaving a sigh. “I’m choosing you. I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to fight.”

“It’s too late for that.” I said, looking at my shoes. I felt relieved. We weren’t ending. The best thing to ever happen to me was still going. You were picking me.

And then I felt guilty. You were turning down a job offer for me, and I yelled at you.

“I’m sorry.” You repeated. “I’m sorry I didn’t say anything. I just...didn’t know what to say.”

I continued to stare at my shoes, thinking it over. My heart was still beating fast, my skin was hot, and I hated myself for yelling, but I also wasn’t ready to apologize. You had said nothing. You made a big decision without saying a word to me, and I never did that to you. I pulled my sweater tighter around me, shuffling my feet forward. “We’re going to be late.”

You followed behind me, your hands in your pockets. You kicked pebbles as we walked. I snapped at you to stop.

The play was long. The entire time I was intensely aware of every movement you made and every breath you took beside me. I couldn’t concentrate. All I could think about was you and London. We were silent throughout the entire play, and the intermission. Even on the walk to the hotel we barely said a word. I still laced my arm through yours and rested my head on your shoulder, but I said nothing.

In the hotel room, I showered. When I climbed into bed, I stayed all the way to the edge. I reached over and turned out the light, not looking your way. Then I whispered into the darkness of the room, “Are you really turning it down?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

You moved closer to me, wrapping your arms around my body. “Because of you. I don’t want to give this up. I’m finally happy.”

“If we’re both truly happy, I don’t see why we can’t make it work.”

“What do you mean?”

I turned over to my other side to face you. I could barely make out your features in the darkness. “Do you want this job? Be honest.”

You sighed, a small chuckle escaping you. “I do. I’ve wanted it for a while.”

“Then do it. So we’ll do long distance. I’ll fly here. You’ll fly there. And one day we’ll be in the same place again.”

“Maine?” You suggested.

I smiled softly. “Yes. One day we’ll be in Maine.”

You were quiet for a while. I could feel your breath on my neck as you thought it over. I closed my eyes, trying to memorize the feeling of you beside me. “Are you sure about this?”

“Yes.” I said.

“You really want to do this? Make it hard for us? Just for me to have a job I want?”

“Yes. Would you not do it for me? If it were the other way around?”

You laughed a breathy laugh, shaking your head. “Of course I would.”

“Then yes. I really want to try this.”

You kissed me, hugging me tighter. “I love you.”

Three weeks later, you moved to London.



*Fractured*

I suppose I was drunk. I had too much red wine. I put on the romantic comedy I always thought you'd like. I was lonely. I started to think of you.

I never let myself do it, but tonight I did. It had been a month since I ran into your sister. I fought myself so much. I fought myself on remembering us, remembering you. But tonight, I thought of your eyes. I remember how they could look like a stormy sea. That's why I told you I wanted paintings of the sea in our house in Maine; the paintings always reminded me of your eyes.

I remember the feeling of loving you...maybe because the feeling has never left me. Every day I rise with the sun and stare at the darkness of my eyelids, trying desperately to forget you. But then, the moment night falls, I get back into bed and try to remember every little thing. I suppose it helps me fall asleep.

But tonight, I wasn't trying to fall asleep. I'm not sure what I was trying, really. I just know I was lonely. I finally said, outloud to no one in particular, "I miss you." I finally said it. I finally admitted it to myself, to the never ending void, to my plants.

I said, "I miss you. I miss loving you. I miss needing you. I miss waking up and seeing you there."

I was lonely.

I thought about your hands. I'm always thinking of your hands. It's as if your hands belonged to some middle aged celebrity—I obsess over them. I can't forget them. My mind wanders to them while I'm in meetings. The blue of your veins, the pink of your wrists. I remember kissing your wrists. I remember you saying my lips were soft. I

remember the snow falling outside your window, and your bed sheets twisted around my bare legs. I remember the light from the streetlamp glowing softly through your curtains. I kissed your wrists because I loved them. Because I loved you. I remembered you smiled at me, and you tossed your head back on your pillow, and you stared at the ceiling, and after a long silence, you said, "I could never live without you."

And now you're gone. You're living without me.

I'm living without you, and I feel fractured and lonely.

I know I'm not broken. Nothing could ever break me.

But you almost did. You almost broke me, only you fractured me instead.

Why am I not okay yet? It's been over a year and a half.

How do I heal? How do I move on from you? How do I stop being haunted by your wrists, and your eyes, and your words? How do I stop missing you?

They all tell me to move on, to find someone new.

I *did* move on. I found someone. I found an amazing someone. I moved on, but I still love you. Anyone else could never fill my gaps the way you did. No one else could cure me and my sad, depressing blue. No one else could touch me, and hold me down, and take me in. How can I move on when I'm fractured and constantly thinking of you?

I was lonely.

I thought of your laugh. I thought of the warmth it brought to my chest. I know I haven't been that warm since you left. I know I'll never be that warm again. It's crazy, but I could see colors better when you laughed. And it hurts to know that I would give up everything I own, every piece of me, every word I've ever said, to hear you laugh one more time.

I thought of how sometimes I'd lie awake at night and watch you breathe. How I sometimes couldn't manage to comprehend that I was there, with you, and we were both living and breathing and happy. You'd breathe slowly, lying flat on your stomach. Your face was always half buried in your pillow and your right hand was always limp by my shoulder. I'd watch you sleep and admire you, free of judgment. You never knew. I would spend hours memorizing your face. I don't know why I did it. It's not like I knew we had limited time.

I thought of your ears and your lips. I thought of the freckles on your cheeks and how they looked like stars. I thought of your elbows and how you always asked me to put lotion on them. I thought of your nose and how you'd pull me in and smell my skin after a long day. I thought of your fingers and how you trailed them up and down my legs mindlessly as you read. I thought of your eyelashes and how they just barely brushed your cheeks as you slept.

I'm fractured. I miss you.

### *A Christmas Party*

I stood in the back, a glass of wine in my hand. I watched as he made his way around the garden, talking with people. He always made everyone smile, even when he wasn't the host of the party. I loved it about him. I was wearing a new coat. I had just bought it in time for the holidays. It was a deep navy blue. There were no holes in its pockets.

We were attending a friend of a friend's Christmas party. They held it in their garden, in the freezing cold. In the car, on the way to the party, we joked that we would freeze to death. I still felt that it could happen. My fingers ached from my lack of gloves. I glanced around, looking for anyone who could distract me from the feeling of impending frostbite. I caught sight of him talking to an older couple. The husband was tossing his head back, laughing. Just as I was about to move towards them, and huddle under his arm for extra warmth, I saw you.

I saw you and froze in place.

You were staring at me from across the room. You smiled. Standing beside you was a tall, gorgeous brunette with wine colored lips. She was wearing an emerald green dress and no coat, as if the cold didn't affect her. You whispered something in her ear and she nodded. Before I could process it, before I could get my feet to move and run, before I could beg you not to, you were standing before me. You looked the exact same, as if no time had passed and we were just two strangers meeting again for the first time.

"Hi." You said. You sounded breathless. I wasn't sure why.

I closed my eyes as I took a breath. I was hoping when I opened my eyes, you'd vanish, as if you were some hallucination or ghost haunting me. But you were there. You were standing in front of me. You were speaking to me as if we were old friends. "Hi."

"It's been...It's been—"

"Three years." I finished for you.

You nodded, realization hitting your beautiful face. Your eyes went dark, like the clouds in a painting of a stormy sea. I felt a sudden rush of admiration for the color. "It's been forever."

"It has." I said.

"You haven't aged a day."

"Neither have you."

"You look..."

I smiled then at your loss for words. "I look...?"

"Stunning. So stunning it hurts." You laugh, looking down at the ground to your feet. "Are you here with someone? Friends?"

My mouth fell open slightly. I went silent for a moment, studying you. So no one had told you. I knew your sister knew, and your mother knew. I just assumed you had heard. "I'm here with my fiancé, actually."

"Fiancé?" Your face fell for the briefest moment, but then you recovered, as if it never happened. I almost wasn't sure it even did. "Wow, that's, that's something. Congratulations."

I laughed because it *was* something. It was a miracle I had ever gotten over you. "Thank you. And you? Who's the pretty girl?"

“Marie.” You grinned as you scratched the back of your neck.

“Marie.” I repeated.

“We met at some concert thing I had to go to.”

“How romantic. In London?”

Your mouth dropped open slightly as you shook your head. “No. Not London. I moved back about a year ago.”

“You moved back?”

“They transferred me again. But, this time, I think it’s permanent. I was promoted.”

“Congratulations.” I said, forcing a smile to my face but hating the fact that I hadn’t known. “That’s great that you’re back. I hadn’t heard.”

“Like I hadn’t heard of your engagement. Where did you meet him?” You asked. If I knew you half as well as I once did, then I’d think you almost didn’t want to hear. There was something about your smile. It didn’t feel sincere.

“We met on a blind date. Ana set us up.”

“Ah, Ana. How is she?”

“She’s good. Great, actually. She moved to California and got a new job that she loves. And a new dog.”

“She still with Stewart?” You asked.

“Yes. He moved with her. And between you and me,” I lowered my voice and took a step closer to you, “he asked me to help him pick out a ring.”

You let out a breathy laugh and took one step closer. A part of me felt like it was wrong, standing this close to you, but I didn't move. "Look at you, suddenly pro-marriage. And what about your ring?"

I held up my left hand. There sat a diamond on a gold band. You stared at it for a moment, silent. "Well, what do you think?"

"I thought you liked silver, not gold." You said.

I could feel my eyes widen slightly. "I do. But, I like this ring. It was his grandmother's."

You smiled. "My grandmother's ring is silver."

I bit my lip to hide my laugh, then took a step away from you. I shouldn't have stood there. Not after all this time. Not after all that getting over you. We both went quiet for a few minutes. I started to fiddle with my ring. I didn't want to leave your presence yet, as pathetic as it sounded.

I made my feet move anyway.

But you stopped me, your voice quieter than before. "Why are you marrying him?"

"What?" I asked, my eyes wide. I didn't expect this. I didn't expect questions that only a close friend would ever ask. We weren't close friends. We hadn't spoken in years. We hadn't *known* each other in years.

You sighed. "Well, I guess I'm asking why you're getting married. I always thought I'd have to fight you tooth and nail to even wear a ring."

I frowned. In all of my reminiscing of you over the last three years, I never thought I had been that explicitly against marriage. At least not in regards to a marriage involving you. “What do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” You chuckled at my words, as if they were funny. “You always denounced marriage when we were together. You didn’t believe in it and—”

“But, I still would’ve married you.” I blurted out. We stood there, in complete and utter silence, staring at each other. I wanted to take back my words. I wanted to erase them from your brain and pretend I never uttered them. I was doing so good. I was so close to being completely over you. “I mean, I just...”

You nodded, staring at me blankly.

“I just mean that I didn’t believe in marriage. And I’m not sure I do, even now. But with you and I... I would have married you.”

“You would have?”

I ignored you, more words leaving my mouth before I could stop them. “And I’m marrying him because he’s sweet. He’s really nice and he’s wonderful and he wants to be married.”

“Well that’s...” You paused, looking down at your feet. I could feel my shoulders tense the longer I stood before you.

“I should go check on him.” I said as I took a step forward, away from you. I needed to escape. I was so close to moving forward and moving on. When you didn’t say anything, I took two more steps.



But then you reached out. Your fingers lightly brushed over the skin of my wrist. It almost felt like electricity briefly shooting through my skin. Then you lowered your voice and said, “I still think about Maine.”

I stopped dead in my tracks.

I stood there, with my back to you, for what felt like an eternity. I wasn’t even sure I had heard you right. And if I did, I wasn’t even sure I wanted to hear right. I fiddled with the ring on my left hand, but he was so far gone from my mind. I took a shaky breath and closed my eyes. I felt like I remembered everything at once; I remembered fighting in London. I remembered all of my lonely nights when you were away. I remembered the water glass and the watch. I remembered the snow. I remembered that first Christmas. I remembered the promise of a future with you. A future I’d probably never have.

Then I turned around.

There were your eyes again, a bright and deep blue. Looking in your eyes, I knew I had heard you right. I didn’t say anything. I wasn’t sure what to say. I didn’t feel cold anymore. My hands didn’t hurt. I felt a violent heat in my cheeks as I blushed at your words. After three years, you were saying you missed me. My feet moved before I even realized. I walked back to you, and stopped before you. I looked up and met your eyes. You shook your head and ran a hand through your hair.

“I think about Maine.” You repeated, letting out another shaky breath. You lowered your voice to a whisper, like you were speaking forbidden words. “I think about Maine every night. I think about the house we won’t buy, and the kids we won’t have, and the walks on the beach we’ll never take.”

My lower lip trembled, and I shook my head. I tried to smile, as if we were just friends still catching up. “Don’t do this.”

“I love you still.”

“I can’t—”

“And I miss you all the time.”

“I’m getting married.” I said.

“I still think about Maine.” You repeated, lowering your head in defeat and running your hands through your hair once more.

Nobody at the party paid us any attention. I could hear the soft murmurs of conversation. They felt like they were a world away. I stared at you. I stared at you for the first time in three years. You still had light freckles on the tip of your nose. Your eyelashes were still as long as ever. And your eyes. God, your eyes could swallow me whole.

I looked up at the darkened sky and took a deep breath. Then I looked at you as I let it go.

“I do too.” I said. “I think about Maine.”