

## There's Really No Way to Reach Me

Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

The clock kept ticking, and the bell would ring any second now. As usual, Iris was staring at the clock. But today, it was louder than it normally was, as if it was yelling at her, desperately trying to get her attention. And it did.

He said he just “wanted to talk.” That could mean anything right? It didn’t necessarily mean that it was something she didn’t want to hear.

But who was she kidding? For months now, they had been a mess. They, who were the ones that were supposed to get it right. They, who all their friends envied. They, who were not supposed to “talk” in a few minutes.

Last night was the first time she’d heard from him in a while. He had stopped replying to her messages and ignored her calls. He claimed he never got them, but Iris was a smart girl – she could sense a lie when she heard one. But her heart got in the way this time, and she truly did believe that everything was OK between them. But now that she thought about it rationally, they truly were hopeless.

The bell rang. 2:40PM, on the dot. On a regular day, Iris would have packed her things five minutes before class ended, eager to get out the door and into the arms of her boyfriend Carl. But today was no regular day. She sat in the classroom and watched as everyone else left. She continued to sit after her professor had left the room. She sat there quietly, all alone. She heard Carl outside the door, but it didn’t make her jump with excitement like it used to. She sat there,

hoping desperately that if she sat there long enough, maybe, just maybe he would change his mind.

He must have grown impatient, because two minutes later the lecture hall room door swung open and he spotted her at the back of the room. He climbed the steps two at a time towards her, and by the way he approached her, Iris knew, there was no changing his mind now.

“Hey.” He said quietly. Carl wasn’t stupid either. He knew she knew.

“Hi.” Iris whispered.

They were silent for a long time. She looked up into his eyes. They were dull and dark. They had been this way for weeks now, and Iris had known something was off, even then. She just couldn’t bring herself to believe it.

“Listen,”

She was going to stop him. She was going to tell him that he didn’t have to say a word, because she knew it all. But her voice caught in her throat and her eyes started to water so she remained seated looking down at her palms, fidgeting with her fingers. She waited for him to speak. She felt something bending deep down inside of her, and it kept stretching...

“I know I’ve been ignoring you, and I’m sorry. I feel terrible...”

Bending, squirming...

“It’s not fair to you, and I know that, and I am so incredibly sorry...”

Paining, tingling...

“...But I don’t think this is working out. And I think we’d be better off alone.”

Snap.

It was the sound of her heart breaking. It was a clean sound, almost like a pencil snapping.

“I really do want to be friends. You’re my best friend Ire, and I don’t want to lose you. I am so sorry.”

Iris finally managed to look up at him, and his eyes met hers. She hoped to see at least a little disappointment, but she could see in his eyes, that finally, he was free. “It’s ok.” She managed to whisper with a small smile. He smiled sadly, but it didn’t mask the light that was dancing in the depth of his deep green eyes. Iris, however, felt like someone had just punched her in the gut.

Who would have thought that the one person who she believed could set her free would only be free himself without her? She sighed inaudibly. She was exhausted. Their relationship was work and she was tired of dealing with it. She was tired of trying, and getting knocked down every single time she did. Most of all, she was tired of being let down.

They stared at each other for a while. Finally, he opened his arms and she unwillingly fell into them, the attraction like a magnet. Because, even though they didn’t work together, it didn’t mean she didn’t love him. And it didn’t mean that, as dysfunctional as they were, that they hadn’t loved each other at some point, even if for a little while.

As he held her, she thought in her head, “This will be the last time he will hold me.” She pulled away, eyes watering again. “Well I have to go.” She didn’t bother waiting to let him know that she was going to be OK, because at that moment, she really didn’t know if she was going to be OK.

A million thoughts ran through her head as she stepped outside the building, the cold, brisk air knocking the breath out of her. He'd forgotten everything. And he didn't even want to try anymore. No, he didn't love someone else, and he hadn't cheated on her. Something in his heart had just...stopped. He had ceased to love her. Like a switch, it just turned off. What hurt the most though, was realizing that she had been holding him back, and now, he was finally free. Without her.

It took 332 days to get over Carl. Of course, he had no idea. The next day and the 331 days after that, Iris put on a brave face and was exactly what she was before the hurt—his best friend, with no hint of anything more or anything less. And to Carl's knowledge, they were fine. But it took 332 days. For 57 days, she was angry. For 48 days, she felt relieved. For 43, she was upset. She spent the following 183 days feeling exhausted and empty. And then one day, the last day, she remembered thinking in her head, "This will be the last day I will cry over him." And it was.

A few months later, she had a dream she remembered in frightening detail. It was fairly normal, except she dreamt that Carl loved her again, and it was magical. It also felt so incredibly real. So when she woke up realizing it was just a dream, naturally she was devastated. So it happened again. 332 days.

A year later, there was a second dream, very much like the first. Ever since the first dream, Iris felt like being friends with Carl was much like walking on a tightrope. There was only so many times that she could fall before she gave up. So this time, when she woke up, she picked up the phone and dialled his number.

"You're my best friend and I love you, but I can't be friends with you anymore."

It was a long conversation. Carl had no clue why Iris was acting this way, but he of all people understood why she just couldn't do it anymore.

When she hung up the phone, she smiled, realizing that she had finally grown up. She had been pushing for three years for their friendship to work, because she cared about Carl more than anything and was willing to take the hit for him. But now, it was time for her to do something for herself. She realized that love doesn't change – people do. Carl had, and now so had she. She also realized that Carl didn't even make her happy anymore. He was just a constant reminder of what she would never have and who she would never be. And she was tired of feeling sad and wishing she were someone else. She needed to be free from this burden and being around Carl wasn't the solution.

She had been pushing for three years for their friendship to work, but finally she decided she needed something more. She discovered she was not happy, and so desperately wanted to be. She realized that sometimes you have to stop waiting for life to give you what you want, and go and chase after it yourself.

But most importantly, she realized that sometimes, though you lose the people you love in the process, circumstances change. She realized that though she would never forget or stop loving Carl, that it's better to let go, and be happy, than to hold on and wait for something that will never happen.

So she got on a train, taking her far, far away, and never looked back. Carl stared after her, hoping she would, but she never did. She never looked back. As the train chugged off into the twilight, the last few words Iris said to Carl echoed in his head.

“There's really no way to reach me.”