

Forever and Always

To my dearest friend,

I hope this letter finds you in good spirits, and that it helps to explain why it's been so long since we last spoke. I've been reminiscing, thinking, and have finally decided to tell you what I should have so long ago. I have since recovered, but the constricting nature of untruth has tormented me constantly since we last spoke. This is my way to end that. But first, I suppose, the beginning.

I

The first time I saw you was at a café, our café. I'd come for the first time, having just moved, and the warm tones of wood and bitter scent of coffee transported me to a state of tranquillity unlike any I had felt since before my move. I saw someone sitting in the back on a pretty little green table, engrossed by their laptop and surrounded by empty mugs and filled papers. I was, and am, curious by nature and found my way to the back, sneaking a peek over your shoulder.

You were writing. What, I have no idea, but you wrote with the expression of someone challenging the stars and creating an infinite universe of worlds. It was inspiring.

I visited the café more and more frequently, as you know. Officially, I loved the muffins, the coffee, the aesthetic, and the atmosphere. While this is all true, another reason I visited was to see you, creating worlds and changing tides. I always found a reason to look over your shoulder to read what you were writing, and what little I saw matched the inspiration I'd found on your face.

To this day, I still cringe at how obvious I was. What did I expect? That you wouldn't notice me peering over your shoulder every time we were in the café at the same time? I suppose I always was obvious and you, oblivious.

II

The first time we spoke – what, 3 weeks after that? – I was so scared I felt everything from my toes to fingertips to head sweating. You were in your usual spot, writing, but when I came to have a look as I always did, you turned to me and asked what “the hell” I was doing.

I hadn't really noticed your eye colour before this moment – your words had always held my attention – but your shade of blue invaded my dreams for months afterwards. Your eyes are really beautiful.

I stuttered, I messed up my words, I can only imagine I seemed creepy and scattered as I stood there, trying to formulate a reasonable excuse to have been watching your computer.

But that didn't matter. You laughed. We spoke. We kept talking. We became friends. We became an us.

III

I'm not sure you'd remember the first time I helped you, it was so long ago and there have been a million and one other instances since then. But I remember. He was the first, with blond hair and blue eyes. They were duller than yours though. Everything about him was dull compared to you.

Nevertheless, you really liked him. Something about him being brave and kind and smart (he really wasn't) and when we realised I shared a class with him, you begged me to help you two get together.

I could never say no to you.

I talked to him, I spoke of you, I stepped back, I watched you fall in love with him. I watched him break your heart. I helped you pick up the pieces. I watched you repeat the process with a new guy.

It hurt, but you were happy.

IV

I doubt you remember the first time I held you either, even if you wanted to. You called me up, it must have been a bit past eleven, with slurred speech and a terrible case of hiccoughs. Now I know it was about your latest guy, who meant more to you than I could ever have realised. Through the phone, I could hear the tears, feel the dryness in the back of my throat, a phantom born of empathy. When you asked me to come over, I couldn't refuse. Not to you, not when I was scared you'd somehow hurt yourself in a state of tears and intoxication. You're so clumsy.

I came over. You'd drunk far too much. You're so small, why would you ever think that's a good idea? But you had done it, you were puffy and looked like you were about to throw up.

I took you to the bathroom, I stroked your hair, I held it back as the entirety of your stomach filled the toilet basin. I could feel my own eyes begin to well up at the sorry state your heart was in.

Why did you think it was a good idea?

Then you explained. I listened. You cried. I hugged you. You fell asleep. I put you to bed. You snuggled into your pillows. I kissed your forehead. You mumbled something in your sleep. I crashed on the couch. I'd wanted to be there for you, and I was so glad that you

trusted me enough to do so. The next morning, when you woke me up you looked better. A mess, but better.

V

You weren't there the last time I cried over us. The us that never truly was.

Well, I suppose you were there, in a way. But not in the way I wanted you to be. In the way you never knew I wanted.

It was your wedding. You were getting married, and he was wonderful. As kind and as brave and as smart as you deserved. I tried so hard to be happy for you, and in a way, I was. I was happy that you were happy, I was glad you'd found your soulmate.

I was devastated it wasn't me.

When you stood there, smiling at the groom, glowing with a happiness I'd never seen before, I couldn't help but smile. Smile, even as my heart began to break and tears fell down my cheeks. The last tears, I promised myself, the last tears I would shed for something that would never be. Would never be because in the interest of your happiness, I had given up any hope to create it. Instead, choosing to remain only your friend for as long as you needed me.

In the interest of your happiness.

The thing I wanted to tell you, I think you may understand it now. I hope I've explained enough for that to be the case. It was hard, it was painful, but that's the price you pay for a friendship as amazing as ours. And it is amazing. I am so lucky to have known you, and I hope that now I've discussed this with you, our friendship may continue unburdened by any secrets.

I will be your friend, forever and always.

Yours truly,