

Dear Friend,

I tried to stop myself, I really did, I pushed it away. Labeled it simply an infatuation. I tried. I think I am just addicted to that feeling; when you let your guard down, when you take your feet off the ground. You feel like you are flying. Or at least for a little while.

I was told to be careful when trying to mend a broken person. You are only going to cut yourself on their broken pieces. But you can't fix people, no matter how hard you try. I, of all people should have gotten that through my thick head. I understood that I couldn't fix someone that I could only love them. There is a risk in that. Sometimes, that, is just not going to be enough.

This is my story. I don't know how this will end at the moment; I think that is the most beautiful and absolutely frightening thing. There is always an infinite number of possible endings. I guess we will both have to wait and see.

Dear Friend,

Fair warnings

So I guess it all started there...At the deli

It was my second day into working at my new job. I really loved it. I was actually making fast friends, which is pretty new for a quiet girl like me. I was really enjoying my seven hour shifts at Rein's New York Jewish Style Deli, where the Taste of Quality is Long Remembered and the stain of Russian dressing is sadly permanent. Two days in. I was bombarded with warnings from nearly everyone.

"Have you met Ricky yet?"

"Stay away from him."

"He's a drug addict."

"He plays every girl."

I didn't even know the kid, so I really didn't pay attention. The thing with me is people can say what they please, about anyone, true or not; I really won't place my judgment until you personally give me a reason to.

Dear Friend,

The day after my Fair Warning

The hands on the clock chased each other around and around. Those seven hours of genuine laughter were much needed.

"Wait, What's your name?"

"Ricky."

I've never felt so comfortable to let my inner weird ass out right off the bat. The days at the Deli continued on like that for the following days. In about two weeks I was starting training as a hostess. I

was petrified, everyone dreads hosting. I was letting Ricky off, "So, you need more napkins, placemats, crayons, Oh and my phone number." Clever kid

Dear Friend,

After a long day of setting up pickles and wiping tables

I looked at the folded piece of paper. (860) 992-2288. Easy enough to remember. We started our conversation in the middle of the night. Around midnight he texted me, "I think I'm going to call you," In disbelief I told him, "Go for it." And that he did.

And I swear there wasn't a moment where at least one of us was laughing.

"Hey! Guess what!? There's a meteor shower tonight, will you stay up and watch it with me?"

"Well, the best time to watch it is at five in the morning."

"I have time."

And so I laid on my back, on the picnic table in my back yard, Pandora had the perfect play list for that warm, July night. Would you believe we stayed up until five talking? Would you believe we talked right through the meteor shower? And thus ensued night after night, day after day phone calls, all which lasted hours on end.

Dear Friend,

The shitty idea. But such a good one.

I will admit it now. Yes. I am a teenager. I put in a valid effort to act on my teenage tendencies. Sometimes. Yes. I am pathetic. Please, now that this has been duly noted, let's not point it out. I hadn't slept over my best friend, Kaite's house in forever. It was mid-July, the summer before our senior year. So what do we do? Well, to say the least, we may or may not have dipped in to her dad's cooler. And we try. Repeat try, to down the Bud-Light Lime-a-Rita. Legitimately. The grossest beverage I have ever consumed. And of course I was texting Ricky about my pale attempt of rebellious behavior. "Wanna come finish this for me?" There was no way I was even going to try to drink it. I didn't really mean that I thought he should drive all the way to one of my friends houses in the middle of the night to finish my already watered down can of nasty. Not at all. I think he thought otherwise. My phone lit up. His name flashed on the screen as my Iphone's default ring tone broke the quiet of the night.

"Heyyyy!"

"Where'my going?"

"16 Cathy Drive."

"I'm on my way meet me out front."

Soon enough a little blue two-door pulled up in front of my friend's house. He really strut out of that car, his mere presence made me just smile one of those goofy smiles that doesn't go away. I broke his strut by grabbing his arm and pulling him to the side of the house. As I was fairly certain that the Johnson's wouldn't necessarily appreciate a nineteen-year-old boy rolling up to their house at 1:25 in the morning. (Come to find out, I was spot on.) We sat around the sad excuse for a fire Katie and I attempted to make earlier in the night.

"Ricky, You're a man, can you embrace your manliness and make this fire roar?" I joked,

"Let me be a manly sort of man for you," playing along,

"Look at you making a fire! What other manly man things can you do?!"

"I can chop wood!"

"Go on! Go on!"

He burst into laughter

"Lions, tigers, and bears"

"Bears?"

"Bears."

"Oh my!"

We both burst into laughter; Taylor just smiled trying to understand where that conversation took such an odd turn. Soon his brother, Austin showed up to entertain Katie, who felt like a third wheel. We all met Austin up at his truck in the front yard. Derek gave me a piggyback ride back up to the fire. We laughed at the fact Katie and Austin didn't follow. "Well they didn't waste anytime" I joked. I sat on his lap even though there were plenty of other open chairs. Plenty. He reached down in his pocket to pull out a Marlboro and a red lighter. He lit his cigarette and blew the smoke up, I blew the remains out of my face.

"You should get the ones that smell good, those smell terrible!"

"Oh yeah? Where can I get that?"

"Emh Walgreen's?

"Are we just going to stroll over to Walgreen's?"

"Yeah! It's only up the street" (About five miles)

I pulled him up off the plastic white chair and led him down the street.

"Where are we going?!"

"On a walk!"

I have always believed more than anything that people have the best talks when they are walking, I'm not sure why, but that is how it always works out. Walks make things better. They just do. We walked down my endlessly long street; hands intermingled and intertwined the entire time.

"What time is it?"

I reached into the pocket of my purple hoodie.

"Well. I can't tell you. I don't have my phone."

He went to reach for his, but before he even tried we both remembered his phone was sitting not-so-conveniently plugged in to the outlet in Katie's basement. "Should we go back?" We came to the mutual decision to just continue our stroll. We walked until time couldn't keep up anymore. But really now, who said nights were for sleeping? Every time headlights were remotely visible he would take my hand that he was holding and moved me to the side of him furthest from the oncoming car, even though we were on the sidewalk. We took a turn toward downtown Rockville.

To be very honest with you, I can't tell you everything we talked about, I don't remember all of the things we said. I remember the feeling he gave me. I remember understanding what Charlie from the Perks of Being a Wallflower, meant when In that moment he felt infinite. It was one of those infinite moments. I remember how he pulled me closer when we laughed. I remember his laugh. It was real, never forced, his eyes always smiled when he did. I remember. I wouldn't trade that night for the world.

At some point we made a turn back towards Cathy Drive. I really didn't want that night to end. We made it up halfway up Ridgewood , almost past my own house, but not quite. It was 5:30 in the morning when an engine roared up and slammed the breaks right behind us. I wasn't as scared as I should have been. I really wasn't. The driver in the pristine black truck promptly rolled down the window and urged Ricky and I into the car. It took me a bit to realize it was only Austin. I told him I couldn't get in the car with other people. That's pretty much my mother's one rule for me. He grew angry as I calmly protested, he interrupted me in mid-sentence. "Get. In. The. Car. Katie's parents are up. Your mom is up. The police were alerted. Get in the car now." Stunned, Ricky and I looked in each other's eyes with utter shock and jumped in Austin's truck as he alerted the police that everything was all clear, in his cop voice. He dropped me off at my house with both my family and Katie's family all waiting for me. He drove off with Ricky, I never even got to say goodnight to him. I have never been in so much trouble in my life. I sat in my brother's car petrified, just waiting for my mother to come back home. I was quite certain my life was about to take an abrupt halt. I texted him, "I'm dead."

To this day I still don't understand how everything played out, sitting on the stairs with my brother holding my hand waiting for my mother's wrath to rain down as I got the pre-rage match, "What were you thinking?!" And believe it or not, that was it. Ricky texted me back as I laid in my bed decompressing. "I'm gonna call you", from then we talked until 9:30 in the morning, only stopping because we both fell asleep. He asked me what happened when I got home and I told him how mom reacted and how my brother told my mom he knew him, that Ricky was a good kid.

"So It's just you. Your brother. And your mom.."

"Uhmm.. yeah"

"So where is your dad?"

"Well, he is in Torrington," I began hesitantly, "My parents got divorced when I was little. I am supposed to go see him every other weekend. But I don't see him much anymore."

"Yeah. I don't see my dad anymore either. As I am sure you've heard."

And I did. His dad is no longer here, as Taylor told me, his father died while Ricky was in high school. I don't really know when or how. I've never asked him. If he wants to tell me he can, I don't want to push that.

I talked to Ricky everyday for hours on end. I loved talking to him. He always could tell I was smiling, even through the phone, he knew when I was smiling. But vice versa. His best friend Emily told me that every time he would talk to me he was literally the happiest kid.

Dear Friend,

That day I met Momma Scott

"You're not planning on fixing him, right? Because trust me I've tried." He's not broken, I thought to myself.

"No, of course not, don't think he needs to be fixed."

"Did you tell her how old you are, Ricky?"

"Yes mom. I don't lie to her."

"I know how old he is, he's nineteen, he turns twenty October 20th."

"Well don't you want anybody, you know... anybody else?"

I could see he was getting really uncomfortable. I mean I couldn't blame him.

"Do you wanna go on a walk?!"

We walked until it was dark enough for the stars to start to peek through the night sky, and we started to make our way back home. I don't remember how we got on the subject. But we did. What he told me will stick with me forever. "Do you know how many times I've tried to overdose?"

I froze. My hand gripped his hand tighter. He kept walking until he felt the tug of my arm when he realized I didn't move. My face was hot, and flushed. He could see it on my face.

"What? I've had a hard life."

My hand left his for a millisecond. I embraced him in the biggest hug. He hugged me back. Long and tight. I wasn't planning on moving anytime soon.

"Babe, we have to keep walking."

I kept my arms wrapped around him.

"We can do it your way" he smirked.

In one swift move he lifted my legs off the ground and wrapped tightly around his hips. I looked at him, in his soft gray blue eyes; my smile took over my wet eyes. He kissed me on the corner of the street. Cars whirred by us, I didn't give them a second thought. The cigarette reminisce didn't bother me. Not one bit. That's all it took. One kiss and I was addicted. Maybe it was all the nicotine.

Dear Friend,

And October came around...

His phone calls became less and less frequent, down to the occasional couple-syllable texts a day. It drove me crazy. My best friend told me he came up to her and asked her about me at the deli. She told him that he just stopped talking to me. What he told her, was another one of those things that just haunts me. It still sits uneasy with me. "I don't want to ruin her, I fuck everything up. Everything. I'm not going to fuck her up, not her." I guess I should tell you something about him. The rumors about his drug use, well, aren't exactly false rumors. I can understand. It's how he chose to survive. We all get addicted to the things that take the pain away. I know he has done it all, but he had stopped most everything, but the drinking and the pot. But something happened in October. He won't tell me what, but I am certain of it. He went back on the binge he was stuck in back when he was in high school. Back to the acid. The k-holes. The cocaine. The heroin. I wish he didn't feel like he needed that much of an escape. I could never judge him on what he has done. And if you are, I suggest you stop reading now, and look at your own self. Unless you have lived in his life, experienced what he has experienced, and your hands are spotless, I suggest you hold back your judgment on him. Don't get me wrong I understand that it is bad. I understand that completely and thoroughly. But who am I to look at someone when they are down, and walk away? For what? My own well-being? My innocence? No. You help them back up.

After the October Binge, K-holes, and trips, November finally came around. And we went right back in the swing of things. One day in particular, I went over his house, after watching two horror movies, we went outside and sat in his little truck for the rest of the night. That old truck barely functioned, in fact it didn't even back up. He told me about his binge, it took him a long time to be able to look me in the eye, to tell me. I know he didn't want me to be disappointed, everyone in his life thinks of him as a strew up, even his mom, even Austin. I wish he knew I didn't think that. I was laying down with my head on his lap as Johnny Cash and the Stones played on his Windows phone. I just laid there, listening, hearing me let me in. He looked at me, talking about the death of his grandfather, and a little about his dad. "It's hard when you lose so many people in your life." I leaned in to his scruffy face; and in an instant I kissed him without a word. He laughs his genuine belly-laugh. "Shut up." He laughed. "I didn't say a word." I didn't have to.

Dear Friend,

The shit storm. The royal shit storm.

12:44am. My phone when off interrupting my much needed sleep. I was so out of it; I thought it was my alarm telling me it was a new day, to get my tired butt out of my bed. Come to find out it was Ricky. Never had I heard him so low. It made my heart sink.

"What happened?"

"So much, this weekend was just emotionally destroying."

"Really, babe, what happened? Are you okay?"

"I can't tell you. I won't."

"I can't help you if you don't tell me."

"I can't."

"That's okay."

"Look, I think you need a hug and some sleep, I know you go to bed at four, and it's only one, but sometimes you just need to not think, and sleep helps."

"Steph. If it were only that easy. Can I please call you tomorrow?"

"Yes of course you can."

"Okay."

"Okay."

When I saw him leaving the deli sadness just radiated out of him. All I wanted to do was make him better. But like he said, it's just not that easy. Before he left he called across the restaurant to me, asking me to call him once I got out of work. The remaining five and a half hours droned on. I solely worried if he was okay. At 7:45, Justine, a mutual friend of ours came up to me, she was the sweetest girl.

"So are you and Ricky still talking?"

I smiled, which should have been enough, but I added, "Yes, yes we are." Her eyes narrowed and then grew very big.

"Do you know he has a girlfriend?"

Honestly, I still wish more than anything that it was just another rumor running around the deli. That would be too easy though. Life loves to whip a good, hard curve ball at you. Hard and fast. Right to the stomach.

You are right F. Scott. "And in the end, we are all just humans...drunk on the idea that love, only love, could heal our brokenness."

However, Fitzgerald, you forgot to mention what happens when that love is simply not enough. What happens when that drunkenness just leads to a hang over?

Dear Friend,

At the current moment, I have to say my story could have ended there, or more like it, it should have ended there. Alas, it did not. I realized a lot about myself in the past six months. I guess there lies my silver lining. There are roughly a dozen things that I have realized about the girl behind this keyboard throughout this whole endeavor.

Sometimes, I can't be everyone's goddamn cheerleader.

I can be sad too, sometimes.

That is okay. I think.

I fake smile like a Goddamn champ.

I'm pathetic.

I forgive people way too easily. In my defense, I think it's just because I'm not ready to no longer have them in my life.

I use far too many commas.

I have like three friends.

I will continue to look for the best in people.

I make my own opinions on people.

Shit storms are inevitable.

I regret nothing, at one point I made my decisions because that's what made me happy.

I make stupid decisions. I make mistakes too. But they are my decisions and my mistakes.

I am selectively but completely and thoroughly trusting. In other words, I am naïve.

Lately, far too many of my friends have come up to me with the typical, "I really hate to say it, but I told you so." They did. They did tell me to stay away from him. They did tell me he was bad news. They did give me fair warning of the inevitable outcome. However, if I were to do it all over again, I would. I am not deterred, not even a little bit. Other people may see it as foolish to put as much faith in people as I do, and maybe you do too, and that's all right. For me, hope is the one thing that makes life, possible. If we expect the worst from life, or worst yet, if we expect nothing at all from life then there wouldn't really be a point to it all. Sometimes, things just don't go according to the picture we make up to be in our heads, no matter badly we want them to. Sometimes, you just have to forget how much it hurts and try again.

Well, as Hemingway said, write hard and clear about what hurts. I want to thank you for letting me bleed, for listening, for understanding. I thought I would lose it if I talked about it. I guess that's the point, isn't it?

Love Always

Yours truly.