

If the Morning Ever Comes

On some deep, self-aware level, I know this is an unsustainable pattern.

A scientist would call it a positive feedback loop, when one thing spirals into another spirals into another and sends it crashing down faster and faster. The snake eating its own tail. Only, in this case, instead of ocean acidification or the carbon saturation in the atmosphere, it's a thankless, soul-crushing job. It's building up a tolerance to every single drug you can get your hands on. It's fighting with your girlfriend, and making up with boring, unfulfilling sex until you go to work pissed. It's coming home pissed. It's a drawer full of empty blister packs under your desk. It's fighting more when she finds that.

It's breaking up.

More accurately, it's getting dumped. I got dumped. Big deal, right? It was just law school hookup number eight hundred. I'm not the kind of person to get dumped, though. I'm the kind of person to do the dumping. Getting dumped is pathetic, and it's exclusively for pathetic people.

For me, the positive feedback loop doesn't end in the oceans turning to caustic acid and killing all the fish or in the earth heating up and slow-cooking us all. Instead, my world ends with a classic Hallmark tearjerker *it's-not-me, it's-your-addiction* speech when my ex has to peel me off my own vomity bathroom floor. Not my proudest moment.

Skip to my sixth drug-fueled midweek meltdown since I got dumped. But who's counting? I wish that was a joke, but the problem is, I am. It's distilled itself into a miserable, predictable pattern.

Seeing as it's 1:47 in the morning, that means it's time to scream at my ex. In two minutes, I'll realize I hit the wrong name in my contacts. In five minutes, I'll scream at my best friend, which is better but not by much. In the morning, I'll hurl and get a latte and show up at work five minutes late.

“You don't love me. Why didn't you ever love me?”

“It's... Two in the morning, Bea, goddamn it, I've got work tomorrow. *You've got work tomorrow.*” Danny's my best friend, or else he used to be before he got so busy sounding exhausted by me. That it's two in the morning doesn't enter into it; when I helped him dump the asshole that kept beating him up, I didn't make it sound like talking to him was some big chore — even when it was. His voice is slurred around the edges from sleep, or it could just sound that

way because I'm laying on my side with my phone smashed under my cheek. Fuzzy like this, he sounds enough like *her* that I don't realize my mistake just yet.

"Don't you *Bea* me. You never loved me."

"Tris." Only Danny calls me Tris. This has to be Danny. I pull my cheek off my phone, squinting through the sweat-and-makeup imprint it left on the cracked screen. It's Danny, and it's 1:48. I guess the silver lining here is that I'm ahead of schedule.

"I hate you!" Maybe I figured it out, but something ugly rears up in the back of my throat at his tone anyway. He sounds like he can't bear listening to me. Like if he were standing here watching me be pathetic — and on some deep, self-aware level, I recognize how pathetic this is, but right now I'm busy wallowing — he'd be giving me that look down his big ugly nose like I'm something sticky he stepped in. "You never loved me either."

Danny yawns. I can hear the sheets move as he shifts around, and it's a long, annoying pause I can't help but take personally. "Call your dad," he says, because he's known me long enough to know I won't. "I bet he's feeling out of the loop on people who never loved you."

"Call *your* fuckin' dad," I shoot back sorely, because I've known him long enough to know it's a sore spot.

1:53. He still hasn't said anything, and I feel the lump in my throat sink down, down, into my stomach. Plato or Socrates or some other crusty old Greek used to think the uterus floated around women's bodies, driving them crazy. Maybe the lump is my uterus folding itself in half and half again to wedge itself between the folds of my small intestine and rot there. Maybe it's cancer. It's probably cancer, I don't know.

What I do know is that ever since Judie dumped me, I've stopped getting my period. My uterus, that bitch, must be looking for another way to drive me up the wall. It burrows in between the vertebrae at the base of my spine and sends guilt creeping up my back.

I know it by heart; this is the part where I crash. Keep your hands and feet inside the ride, ladies and gentlemen, and brace for impact.

"I'm sorry," I tell him into the pillow, but I don't need to. He knows this song and dance by heart at this point. "I'll start taking my meds again. I swear. I promise I'll take them." I try to stay quiet and play hard-to-get like he's doing. It's easier to pretend he's doing that than that he's fallen asleep on me. Before getting dumped, I'd have slashed his tires for it. Since Judie left me,

I've had all the temper of a wet carrot. I try and count to ten before allowing myself to sob into the phone some more, but I only make it to eight. "I'm broken and I'm not going to get better. Nothing's ever going to get any better. Do you love me, Danny?"

It's two in the morning, and we've known each other since he was ten and I was eight. I love him, or I used to. I don't know. You get dumped, and you think you'll never love again, but it's not like that. Danny's always liked the self-absorbed ones, and I'm that for sure, but not the way he likes. I'm like quicksand, I'd drag him down. I know this, I know this, and any other day it wouldn't bother me, but it's two in the morning and I'm cavernously alone.

The angry vindictive harpy bitch parts of me, they're screaming at me to chuck the phone at the wall since he doesn't care. I'm frothing-at-the-mouth rabid, looking for anything to prove my point when he says it: "Okay. Sure. Go to sleep."

It hits me like a gut punch. Anything would be better than empty numb nothing.

"You're lying to me." God, I hope he's not.

"Okay." He repeats it like a mantra, turns it in his mouth like a hard candy. "Sure. Go to sleep."

"You hate me." God, I hope he does.

"Okay. Sure. Go to sleep, Tris."

"I want my things back," I snap. "I want my Amanda Palmer shirt back. It makes you look like a faggot." What I want is anything but these bland answers, where I just know he's trying to bait me into reacting. There, now I have.

"Okay. Sure."

Judie put a rock in my chest my lungs had to grow around. I used to make fun of Danny for being a weepy tragic mess and wearing guyliner in high school and balling up his sleeves in his hands like a cutter, even though his arms were clean. I'm the cool friend. Not the pathetic useless depressive lump that doesn't leave her bed except to vomit up bruised bananas or work or get more tissues.

"An even bigger faggot."

Who am I kidding? That's exactly what I am. That's what I've been for two weeks and counting.

“Go to sleep.”

But *fuck that guy* for rubbing it in when he’s done so much worse.

“I hate you.”

“Tris.”

“I *hate you*.”

“Tris!”

“Yes.”

“Go to sleep.”

There’s some rustling on my end as I drag myself to hang over the end of the bed in the dark, stretched out diagonally across its length so I can plug my phone in. Briefly, I try to put myself in his manic pixie head. He’s probably thinking about what a trainwreck I am. If the roles were reversed, I’d be stifling laughter, but that’s not the point. He knows I never had shit for a heart in the first place. That’s part of the appeal, for someone as emotional as he is. Or he was, I guess.

Now that I’m the one that needs stability at two in the morning, all I want is to go back to when I couldn’t feel anything.

I pick at some black stains on the sheet, trying to work out whether they’re squished bugs or tiny bite marks. They’re neither; they’re mascara smears. God, that’s sad. Normal Tris, not Weepy Sadgirl Tris, she’s off somewhere laughing at me.

I hate her.

“Dan. Daniel. Daaaanny.”

“Go to sleep, you harpy.”

“I miss you.”

I do, though. It's funny. One day you're a couple of dipshit kids, jumping out of trees and taping playing cards to your bike spokes. Then you go your separate ways and everything goes wrong and you go batshit and there's no untangling yourself from that spiderweb of downward spiral.

The old me would have decided against the whole notion of failure, and then gotten us both hammered. The old me wasn't the kind of person that got dumped, or the kind of person that worked a soul-crushing paper-pushing job at Limited Liability Double-Sided Copies Incorporated, or got high on that stuff in Mexican cough medicine that gave Lil Wayne a seizure. The old me wouldn't be convinced hitting a rough patch meant hitting rock bottom.

"I miss you, too," he says, and on some deep, self-aware level, I'm praying the old me is only lost somewhere inside this slow-motion car crash I'm trapped on, not dead in the wreckage.

I'm out of bed by the time I hear him say it, tinny on my speakerphone. I must look like a crazy person, half-naked by the window, throwing empty blister packs out by the handful like confetti. The foil on one side reflects the streetlights as they flutter down eight stories to land in the trash alley. I keep throwing and throwing, until I feel light like I've thrown up a Thanksgiving meal. Until I'm so light I could float away, and I'm grinning like an idiot at a quarter past two in the morning. The whole drawer of garbage spins its way down to street level and I collapse in bed, burning with spite.

"Save it," I tell him, knocking my phone off the bed when I go to grab it. "I'm over it already. It's not even a big deal. She had weird-looking boobs, anyway."

I fall asleep to the sound of him laughing, ugly and sweet like bruised bananas.