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Sonia

Perfection is impossible to achieve as a human, but Sonia came close. I played basketball with her as a kid, but our friendship really took shape in high school. She was the person I could always make laugh. In junior high, I gave her a nickname, just her last name backwards, and she made it her Instagram handle.

Sonia was dependable in a way that felt almost impossible. She sent me photos of sunsets whenever they were beautiful, even if it meant pulling over on the side of the road. In the summer of 2019, I briefly talked to another girl who tried to send me a sunset picture. Instead of feeling flattered, I felt like I was cheating on Sonia.

For years, I joked that we would get married someday. One afternoon at the beach, I pointed my phone camera at her while she packed up an umbrella.

"Will you say we're going to get married someday?"

Without even looking up, she nodded. "We are."

The tension between us had been building for years. We both knew something would happen eventually.

On August 1, 2019, it finally did. Sonia and Myles came over after I finished babysitting. We sat by my parents' pool until I grabbed Sonia's hand and pulled her inside the house. Myles tried to follow us, but I shut the door in his face.

We were laughing about it when I pushed Sonia against the basement door and kissed her.

It was everything I wanted it to be.

And somehow, I still felt empty.

I didn't understand it then, but I think I was terrified. Every relationship I'd had before Sonia came with an expiration date. Sonia didn't. A future with her felt permanent, and to a twenty-year-old, forever was a frightening thing.

I told myself I didn't want a relationship. I talked about taking things day by day. Then I'd text her things like, "Sometimes you make me want to rip my heart out and hand it to you so it's yours forever."

Try setting boundaries after saying something like that.

The truth was simple: Sonia gave me her whole heart immediately. I didn't do the same. I kept dating apps on my phone. I flirted with other people. I was honest about it, but honesty didn't stop me from feeling guilty.

Despite my fears, our lives became more intertwined than ever.

When college started, our campuses were an hour apart, but we found reasons to see each other constantly. Along with Myles, we became our own little family. We slept in dorm rooms, took road trips, celebrated holidays, carved pumpkins, built gingerbread houses, and did every stereotypical New England couple activity imaginable.

My parents adored her. My mom called her my future daughter-in-law long before either of us knew what the future held.

And honestly, I understood why.

Sonia fit into my life so naturally that sometimes it felt like she'd always been there.

When the pandemic sent us home from college, that didn't change. If anything, it made us closer. We bounced between our parents' houses, attended Zoom classes together, and looked for ways to make an isolated world feel normal.

Then my mom texted me a picture of a puppy.

"Do you want him?"

The next day, Sonia, Myles, Claire, and I drove to Maine to pick him up.

His name was Sullivan.

He cried the entire ride home. Sonia fell in love with him immediately.

Soon, Sully went everywhere with us. She took him out in the mornings because she knew I hated waking up early. She helped potty train him.

Together, we raised a gentle, affectionate dog.

Looking back, Sully felt like a preview of the life we could have built together. He became a symbol of us.

By July 2020, Myles and I were planning on finding an off-campus apartment together. Apartment searching with Myles reminded me of what it felt like to be alone with him. I realized that I missed us and our old dynamic, before Sonia became ingrained in it.

We moved in by late August. It was the perfect, newly renovated, two-bedroom apartment. There were even two full bathrooms and a fireplace. We made it feel like home right away. Sonia practically moved into the apartment with us. Having that apartment made us feel like adults. The relationship stopped feeling like an adventure and started feeling like a life.

Sonia cooked dinner for Myles and I every night. She made a really good steak that we ate together in the living room. Myles sat on the big, gray chair. He was watching Tiktoks on his phone while he ate. Sonia and I sat together on the couch. I was enjoying it until I put a piece in my mouth and tried to gulp. There was no movement. I opened my mouth to try to inhale. I couldn't. I tried my nose. No luck. *Holy fuck, I'm choking.*

I jumped up from the couch and looked at Sonia with wide, scared eyes. I placed my hands around my neck to motion that I was choking. Sonia jumped up faster than I did and turned me around. She started giving me the heimlich. I was staring at Myles, who was still glued to his phone, with a tear going down my face. It took her less than a minute to help me throw it up. Yes, this girl literally saved my life.

I ran to the bathroom to hyperventilate while my mind processed what just happened. I came back out to the living room, "Sonia, you actually just saved my life."

Myles finally looked up and said, “Did something happen? I thought you two randomly started wrestling.”

That became a running joke.

A few months later, I had that same feeling of being unable to breathe. I was longing for spontaneity and adventure.

We were predictable. Wake up, zoom classes, eat, clean, work, video games, sleep, repeat. There had to be more to life.

I viewed Sonia’s personality as one of a grandma’s. She loved puzzles, laughed at dorky jokes, and fell asleep too early. Almost every night we would sit in the living room doing our homework together. I would look over and watch as she fell asleep with her hand still on the keyboard. Instead of thinking, wow she worked herself to sleep. I rolled my eyes and felt annoyed.

Another round of New England holidays arrived. Decorating, pumpkin carving, cooking, movie marathons. I smiled through visits with her family while feeling increasingly disconnected from my own life.

She was giving me things that I wasn’t ready to ask for: stability, unconditional love, and understanding. Everything I’d always claimed to want. The problem was that when it finally arrived, I didn’t know what to do with it.

I stayed. I let this anger and annoyance grow inside as I attempted to push it down. I forced myself to play the part of a girlfriend who was still all in. I spent less time cuddling her at night. I completely stopped having sex with her because I couldn’t fake it. When she would ask about it, I would make up an excuse that I didn’t have a sex drive anymore.

Still, fights never came. She completely accepted the lackluster relationship that I was giving her.

In January of 2021, Myles, Sonia, and I decided to plan a trip to Florida for Spring break. Sonia’s uncle had a condo that he was willing to let us use. Finally, something different. We spent a couple weeks planning it out. We bought our flight tickets and had something to look forward to.

Meanwhile, zoom university began to stir something up in my life. A crush was forming. We had most of our English classes together and I would pin her camera to spend the entire class looking at her. I would lean into my computer in awe of the way she articulated her thoughts. I craved a simple conversation with her. She was the spark of inspiration that I was desperately searching for.

I spent a lot of time contemplating my next move. *Don’t you dare fucking do it.* Part of me already knew I was playing with fire. *It’s not going to end well, you’ll be creating a bigger problem for yourself.* I emailed her:

*Hey,*

*This is so random but I love everything you have to say in class. There aren’t a lot of English majors at our school so if you ever want to talk or get to know each other, feel free to text me.*

Waiting for her to text me was the most tortuous excitement. I knew I wasn't going to be able to hide this girl from Sonia. I told her while selectively leaving out key information. I sat at my desk while she was in my bed, "I emailed this girl in one of my classes. She's super smart and I think it would be beneficial to make a friend with similar interests."

"Oh. That's awesome!" Sonia replied.

Sonia wasn't dumb. She could read between the lines but she chose to skip them.

Messaging this new girl followed with feelings of being stuck, happy, confused, and miserable.

One night in late February, texting this girl became too real. She started mentioning a future and hanging out. *What the fuck am I getting myself into?*

A panic attack struck. I felt tingles throughout my body. Sweat poured out of every part of me.

Sonia got to the apartment after work. I was on the bathroom floor hugging the toilet bowl. Myles greeted her, "She's having a panic attack right now. I'm not sure how to help her."

Myles and Sonia came into my room. I could feel my heart rate rising as Sonia got closer to me. She tried to kneel next to me and rub my back, "I'm sorry, please don't touch me right now," I said to her.

Sonia was accustomed to my panic disorder. She walked over to the thermostat and put the A/C on for me. I knew Sonia deserved someone that could give her the world, and I realized that could never be me.

I used my panic attack as an excuse to escape. I walked over to Myles and Sonia to say, "I'm going to pack a bag and go to my sister's. That's where I need to be right now. I'm so sorry."

I stopped responding to Sonia's texts and calls. They made me sick to my stomach because I knew what I had to do. Our trip to Florida was only two weeks away but I didn't have it in me to fake my feelings anymore.

After a few days of no responses, Sonia accepted what she already knew. It was such a short text, "If it's me. I mean if it's me that is making you feel that way. You can tell me."

I stared at the message for almost an hour. I typed responses and deleted them. There wasn't a version of the truth that didn't hurt her.

Eventually, I sent the only three words I could, "I'm sorry, Sonia."

I watched her start to type a response then stop.

I knew what she was thinking, but I looked anyway. I opened the camera app for the apartment to watch as Sonia packed a bag while crying to herself. The end of our relationship was a sunset I wish she never had to see. I watched as she pet Sullivan's head, "I love you so much, Sully," she said before walking out the door.