

A Little Bit Lonely

The clock blinked it's way to 1:30 AM. Holly watched it The TV played some inane show with tinny, canned laughter and faces that looked plastic.

"And, Mrs. Smith, will you be going for the \$10 000 prize?" The host's smile became painfully wide, and for some reason the tinny laughter issued from the speakers in the background.

Holly watched this taking place, bored, the audience, silent. The Host pressured Mrs. Smith to make up her mind between the money and the surprise prize. Holly thought he must be wearing lipstick. She had never seen a man with such red lips. Cherry red. Poppy red. Raspberry juice red.

Holly was in a strange mood. It was Saturday morning, she was just home, well for about 45 minutes. She had spent the day and most of the night at her best friend's house, sitting in the basement, not quite a party. Well, not for Holly anyways. Most of the other people were having a good time.

Holly was over thinking. Being introspective. Thinking about her friends and what they didn't say to her. What she didn't say to them.

The truth buried deep inside them. Sometimes evil, sometimes hated. Sometimes too joyous to share. Holly meandered about the house, holding a blanket around her. Everybody else was softly asleep, she could hear her older brother snoring from where she stood at the bottom of the stairs. It was very peaceful, she felt. All the lights were off.

So, Holly, she thought to herself, what are you doing? You might as well sleep.

She found herself by the bathroom. Flicking on the lights, she stepped inside and took a look at herself. A good long look.

Why, hello there Holly.

Dark hair, still slightly wavy from earlier, framed her pale face. Her face seemed paler than normal, making her brown eyes seem darker, almost sunken. Lips dried, a bit chapped.

The look on her face was odd, the expression in her eyes. Holly almost didn't recognise herself. A little bit lonely, the face said. A little bit lost. But the expression wasn't unfamiliar. Just on her face it was. Holly glimpsed it from time to time, when her friends let their guards down momentarily, strangers lost in thought. Holly had ignored it in her friends. This expression seemed to be connected to sadness, but now, as she experienced it herself, she knew it was more than sadness, it was deeper.

All these feelings welled up inside her chest, and seeped through her veins like lead weight, leaving her feeling heavy. She wanted to talk to someone. No, not "Hey, what's up?". She wanted to stare her best friend in the eyes and say "What are you really thinking?" and get a real response.

A moment of panic overwhelmed her. Tomorrow morning this feeling would wash away in the shower; roll down the drain with last night's hairspray. She wanted to use this moment of clarity. Holly wanted to connect with someone that felt this way too. Something about the time of night made her feel stripped down, bare. Just her raw feelings ruling her.

She woke the computer out of hibernate and logged onto her email. Without thinking, she started typing.

Hi.

I dunno. Maybe I'm still a bit buzzed from the party. Or maybe the lonely hours get to me, and I've just realised it. But, I want to say to you all, what's going on? Do you have anything you need to say to me? Anything. I just need some honesty right now.

If you get this tomorrow morning, don't bother responding. Your not in the right mind frame.

Holly

Then she clicked her contact list. Holly looked over each person carefully, thinking about their reaction. Holly settled on 4 of her best friends. May, Jean, Seth and Joy. May and Jean had been her friends since third grade, and Seth was her cousin. Joy had moved here the year before. Before she could over think, she sent it.

Goodbye sanity! You have overstayed your welcome!

10 minutes later, Joy's reply was in the inbox.

Hey Holls,

I dunno even how to start. Well, I guess I'm glad your asking. I feel so bad. I need someone to be honest to.

Remember the second time I slept over? When you looked at me and said "You look sad." Well, your right. I'm horribly sad. And then I went to the bathroom. I'm sorry your mom accused you of taking her sleeping pills. I should have 'fessed up. It was me. I stole them because I had planned on taking The Big Sleep. You know, suicide. I had it all planned out. I even had a note. But I chickened out. I put the pills back as soon as I could. But then I turned myself in. I told Dad. He spazzed. You know, I've been hiding the fact I've been on prozac and going to a shrink for 3 months. From everybody. I just needed to say it aloud. I'll understand if you don't want to hang out with a crazy girl anymore.

ox Joy xo

P.s. please don't tell anyone.

Holly had known about the prozac. She had seen Joy taking it every now and then. But the sleeping pills? Suicide? That wasn't Joy. Joy laughed at everything and danced with everybody at parties. Joy got straight A's in school and helped little kids out with their homework after school. Joy was everybody's dream. Their envy. She got close to perfect and decided that was good enough. She didn't push herself beyond her limit. Holly couldn't imagine Joy any other way. Especially not sitting alone in her room with a glass of water and a bottle of pills. She seemed so secure and happy. But, apparently, happiness just sat on top of her skin, and everything underneath was turmoil.

Holly didn't have time to digest Joy's story. The inbox beeped and she found Seth's reply.

Your buzzed too? Haha, thats my little cousin. But about this honesty thing, I do have something to tell you.

Remember that night you and Aunt Liss (Holly's mother) picked me up from Samantha's? The night me and Sam broke up? Man, I've never felt that low before. It was like I had been winded. I remember Aunt Liss asked if I was ok. And I said "Yeah, I'm just gonna walk home." Then you glanced over and I felt like you saw straight through the semi-happy cover-up. I just had to get out.

Holly, I didn't go home that night. I slept on that hill near the park. Just watching the stars. I cried and cried that night. Then tried to count the stars. I actually got to 237. I'll always remember that number because I actually bothered to count that high. Then I just sat and noticed things for the first time. Like how grass feels tickling the back of your neck. And how rain sounds on the leaves of that big birch tree on the hill. And how slow some people walk through the park at night, like their delaying themselves... trying to put off going home. I felt calm, almost. Relaxed. Definitely detached from reality. Then I fell asleep. On the hill. I know! Me, sleeping on the hill. I can't tell anybody else the details of that night. I dunno, they might get the wrong impression... it does sound a bit too poetic, doesn't it? You know the guys. They will probably get a wrong impression. Like, gay. Trusting you not to tell

anyone. From Seth.

Seth. The cousin that could easily be the stupidest, thickest person she ever met. He was loud and sometimes obnoxious. But people liked him that way. If he was ever seen sitting alone, quiet, people thought he was sick. That's actually a hard reputation to keep up, stupidity. Especially if you had the sparks of something else inside. But Holly could imagine him sitting in the rain, feeling grass tickle his hands and neck and realising that this is what poetry was. Holly decided she liked that image of her cousin. It made him seem human.

Beep! Went her email inbox. May's letter sat unopened there. Holly hovered the mouse over it, thinking about more secrets to be shared that night.

Hey babe!

I have no clue why your email made me remember this moment. But yeah, I feel the lonely hours too. I know what your talking about.

But anyways, it was your 10th birthday party. Just after the juice chugging contest. I had to pee. And I mean, BADLY. Like, I was bursting. But your dad was in the bathroom! What bad timing, eh? So, I, uh,... yeah. I sorta went in the big cactus plant in the upstairs hallway. But it started to smell, so I sprayed it down with lysol. That's why it started to die. I'm sorry. But the next week, when I came over, your mom was crying in the kitchen. I accidently walked in on her, and I knew it was because of the cactus plant. I knew it was her favourite plant in the whole house. I've never felt like such a shitty friend before. So, you sorta guessed I'm the cactus gram lady.

Love you! May.

Holly couldn't do anything but laugh. Poor May, peeing in the cactus plant. But the guilt must have really gotten to her. The Cactus Gramme Lady was a mystery to Holly's family for years. After the big plant had died, every two weeks a miniature cactus plant in a little pot would arrive on the door step, with a note saying "Love the Cactus Gram Lady". Her mom had really loved that cactus. When it died, she was nearly inconsolable. But those little potted cactus's had cheered her up. Oh my, May. What a sweet girl.

Holly sat back and tried to process her friend's secrets. A hidden unhappiness. A tenderness that had to be kept away from the world for the sake of a reputation. A funny secret that had knawed away at one of her friends. The lonely hours didn't seem so sad anymore. Holly waited to see if Jean would reply. After another 10 minutes and no message, Holly went to bed, feeling slightly better than before.

The next day Joy and Holly were at Jean's house.

"So, feeling better today Holls?" Jean smiled. "I just read your email."

Holly shrugged, grinning. Joy's eyes' never left her face. She could nearly hear her thoughts, please don't tell, please, please, please don't tell.

"Did you get any reply's though?" Jean asked, re-reading the email.

Holly shrugged again. "A few."