

## When Over's Not Enough

*Holly Hedberg*

I watch the checkmark scar above your lip punctuate your words, yet I can't make out a single syllable. I watch the fan in the far corner of your dorm room spin, over and over. The cool air lets off a soft whooshing sound and makes goose bumps appear on my leg.

"Are you listening to me? This is serious, I just don't think we...," you begin.

We don't get along. We don't have any fun. We don't have the same hobbies. It doesn't really matter how you finish that sentence. I focus my attention to the chipping white paint on the ceiling, which gives way to a layer of yellow water stains and brown spider lines from too much rain. It's funny how a coat of paint can hide such an ugly mark. I wonder how long ago it was painted. How long did the truth hide behind the curling paint? Your lips are still moving, and your scar still checks off your list of reasons.

"I didn't want to do this, but really there's no choice."

I roll my eyes to the window. For some reason I don't cry. Why am I not crying? I sit politely on the bed we sometimes held each other in. I try not to look at the torn spot on your navy quilt from the night, giggling, we wrestled and my ring caught on the thread, ripping a small, dime-sized hole. Instead I look at a fly buzzing outside your window. It's like he's looking at me, watching this scene unfold, like some sort of TV show for him. I wonder what he's thinking. I put my hands on my knees and think of something to say. I really should say something.

"You know, if it hadn't been for that phone call from Ashley, things would never have turned out so bad," I say, amazed at how mousy I sound.

Your eyes darken and your eyebrows crease as you drone on about how she has nothing to do with us. Your shoes rub softly on the ground as you pace. You pause at your desk to fidget with your calculator, put it down, and then effectively cross your arms.

I fix my gaze on your face. Your eyes are as green as fresh watermelons and there's a spot of dirt on your cheek. I hold my hand down from wiping it off. I watch your scar move up and down as you continue. I think you're on apologies now. Sorry we can't make things better. Sorry to do this to you after two years. Sorry I've had my eye on someone else while you were catering to

my every need.

I remember when I found out about Ashley three days ago. I knew of her from the softball field years before I knew you. I remember her putting on lip gloss before getting up to bat, smelling of lemon berry perfume, while my chapped lips pursed and sweat dripped from my brow beneath my catcher's mask. You left your phone in my purse and when I heard the beep alerting a new message, curiosity pushed me to take a look. She had left you a message, angry at you for not returning her call earlier, expressing her feelings and asking you to call back, like you had apparently told her you would. When I called back and told her who I was, I found you'd been talking to her all summer; you'd known each other since middle school and had run into each other at the beach.

Last night you told me I was too fat, at least that's how I took it. When I brought up Ashley, you said you were starting to become attracted to other girls, girls with nicer bodies, girls like Ashley. You said something about how I was not as small as I used to be, and that you'd noticed I couldn't fit into the clothes I used to wear. All I did was cry. I cried and begged you to keep me, promised you I could change.

I haven't had more than crumbs to eat since then. I face you now, wondering what the hell I expected you to say when I got here. It's not every day you invite me over for a serious talk, you always hated those.

Something tingles in my chest, my heart shivers. It twists and aches. My stomach feels as if it has completely botched an attempt at doing a perfect cartwheel, falling hard and fast, no hands to ease the landing.

I think back to the first time you told me you loved me. We were on the old railroad tracks in Berwick, dangling our naked, dirty feet over the edge. We were sixteen and the smell of worms from the creek below and ditch weed from the woods behind us filled our nostrils. I looked into your eyes and declared them the brightest I'd ever seen. You looked into mine, smiled and said you loved me.

I will my feet to move. I wiggle each toe in my thin white sandal dangling from my foot. You're still talking, more for yourself than me. Taking off the guilt like the plaid cotton robe I bought you for Christmas. Untangling the thick belt and shrugging off the long sleeves, draping it over some chair. It's easier for you

this way, after two years of love and promises, you don't want to cling to the fact that it's you letting go. You'd like to believe it was me. If only I had taken better care of myself, you wouldn't have had to do this. I feel something in my blood boiling, rising slightly like the red line in a thermometer.

I use my hand as a coach to guide my leg. I push my palm onto my calf. It feels like thick skin. For a minute I get a surge of energy and I think I like this calf. Then I realize I'm not fooling anyone. Not even myself. I don't like this calf and it doesn't feel like thick skin, it feels like a lumpy pillow. I keep pushing my calf, hoping that my feet will take over my stubborn heart and just move me out of here. Get the hell out of here. Save face. It's really only a game I'm playing with myself. I already know I won't leave until you practically have to push me out the door.

On you go. Talk, explain, blame, and justify. Your pace quickens and your hands fly about you like wild birds. My eye catches a moth on the floor and I stare hard at it. I burn my gaze into its tiny little body; examine the wafer thin wings, the intricate tiny veins in each one, the small head that bobs around looking for something it sure as hell won't find in here.

You near the end. A stern hand disguised as gentle reaches towards me and you pull me off your bed. We stand face to face, not a word uttered. We avoid each other's eyes until with a wistful sigh your arms go around me in a final goodbye. I inhale the smell of pepperoni on your breath and fabric softener in your shirt. I touch your shoulder blades and dig my head into your chest. The tears drip from my eyes onto my lips, filling my mouth with a taste of wet salt. I cling to you, focusing on the small buttons on your shirt, the yellow threading that holds them in place. If even one of those threads broke, the entire button would be at risk of popping off and rolling away. I leave tear stains all over your shoulder, black mascara streaks inside wet blotches. For some reason, I want to laugh. I know that when I leave, you will quickly take off your shirt and spray it with Shout.

You gently tug away, pulling from the dark place that is me. You cringe at the thought of how I'll do this, if I'll just break down, and you wonder if maybe you should have just written a letter, or left a message, but that would have left you with a bad taste in your mouth and a feeling of running you couldn't handle.

It's better for you this way. You kind of pat my shoulder and I wonder what that gesture is supposed to mean. What does

that mean? I'm not your buddy, your pal. I'm not some girl you just met. I've lain naked beside you, tracing your veins with my fingertips, skimming my lips across the softness of your skin; do you let just any girl do that to you? When you lost your license I drove you around endlessly, never complained once. When you quit your job to "focus on sports" I paid for everything, dinner, movies, anything you wanted to do

I move back from you, almost losing my sandal as I turn away. I take a quick glance around the room and realize the moth has flown out ahead of me.

Well this is it. I grab my purse, dry my eyes with the back of my hand and bite my lip, hard.

Something doesn't feel right. I have this icky sensation of being just another old pair of your boxers, with holes in the butt and stitches that have come undone. I've covered your ass for years and now I'm being tossed out with the trash. Your poetic justifications-honey this is the best thing for both of us-; and my sissy compliance-yea, uh-huh, okay, you're right. I lift my face to his.

"Oh, remember that comment about my weight?" I ask.

"You know I didn't mean it that way..."

"No really, it's okay. Just do me a favor," I almost crack a smile, which makes me feel better.

"What's that?" you ask, eyebrows creased and surrounded with tiny wrinkles.

I walk to the door. I glance back at you, as if this takes no effort, like brushing my hair or teeth. I keep my gaze still and steady as I say, "Go fuck yourself."