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## Cold Coffee

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## Cold Coffee

I had that sick feeling in my chest, and it's not like I hadn't felt it before. I'd felt it a few times, ya know, every time I had to break up with a girl. This was probably the eighth one. It's not like I enjoy breakups, I'm not saying that at all, but after a while I hit an expiration date. Usually after around six months, give or take, depending on the quality of the girl I'm with. My feelings fade and I fall off the map. Then I wait for her to calm down before I burn the bridge. This one was Emily. That day marked five months and thirteen days, a bit early.

I gripped the steering wheel of my car as I neared the diner. I chose this place to ease her nerves a bit, we frequented this place. Usually in the late hours of the night, or early hours of the morning, depending on whenever we finished our business. I enjoyed the place, they made a good burger, but we hadn't been there in about a month and a half.

As I walked through the door, an old bell jingling above my head, the familiar smell of stale coffee and frying grease invaded my nose. I tried to exhale my anxiety out of me, but the reek only made me feel more nauseous.

My eyes scanned the long diner until I saw her sitting very upright in the corner booth. She was a lanky girl, tall and thin, with a decent amount of lean muscle leftover from her basketball days in high school, or so I assumed. She had stick straight, lackluster red hair that fell far beyond her shoulders and pale skin from winter, no longer tan from that summer when we started dating. But her brown eyes stared out the window, refusing to acknowledge me. Hm, I thought, this might be easier than I was expecting.

But as I sucked in and released another breath, the tension in my shoulders only increased. I came over and sat in the booth across from her, not saying anything, just giving a forced smile, but still she ignored me. A skinny waitress came over and offered me coffee, which I accepted with a nod.

"So, uh, how's it goin'?" I finally asked.

"How do you think it's going, Ben?" she spat at me, her eyes remaining on whatever was so gosh darn interesting outside.

I winced as I took a sip of the coffee, the boiling hot liquid burning my mouth. I cursed to myself as I brought my fist up to my mouth, trying to prevent the tears that wanted to fall from my eyes.

"Good," she commented, not a bit of sarcasm reaching her tone.

I set the mug back on the table and chuckled. "Jeez, you're really pissed."

She looked at me with a blind rage. "How many times did I call you?"

"Psh, I dunno." Twelve. She called twelve times. And it was more annoying than ever. I had only called back because in the last message, her tone had changed. It was no longer angry, desperate, or pleading. She sounded like she was done, the perfect time to pull the plug.

"Oh my God..." she laughed, obviously disgusted with me.

"Listen, Em, I'm sorry alright?" Maybe I was, maybe I wasn't, but the facts were all the same. About a month ago she had gotten really clingy, and that's not my deal. I tried to show the signs, no PDA, saying "love you" instead of making the effort of saying "I love you." But it only made her cling harder, so I stopped responding about a week ago. "It's just, gahh, I dunno. I just haven't felt as connected to you lately. I think it's time we move on." I was waiting for the sick feeling to lift, but it only got heavier.

She brought her balled hand up to cover her mouth, her elbow resting on the table as her gaze returned to the window.

After a few awkward seconds, I spoke again. "Em? What do you think?"

She sighed audibly. "I guess you're right," she said almost too nonchalantly.

Confusion clouded me as I tried to read her face. I could tell there was a lot more she wanted to say. Dare I ask?

"That's all?" I pressed. I noticed then that her face seemed very fatigued, as if she hadn't slept right in weeks. Her eyes were sunken and her cheekbones sharper as if she were sick or something.

"No, of course that's not all," she scoffed. "I called you a thousand times, left a thousand messages, and you ignored me that whole time. You know, maybe there was something wrong."

I tried to think of how to respond, but failed to come up with an answer. But as I looked up at her face, I could see that a tear fell from her eye. Normally, this was a normal happening while I broke up with a girl, but Emily's face was pinched in such a painful expression, it was hard to ignore. The cold feeling spiked in my chest as my heart rate began to speed up. Her face began to nag me; I was not annoyed or angry, I was terrified.

"Em?" I asked. "Em, was there something wrong?"

The pained look on her face only increased as she pressed her fingers to her mouth, trying not to cry.

"Em!" I tried to keep my tone hushed, trying not to attract attention from the other customers in the diner.

After a few minutes, she calmed herself down and wiped her face of the tears that stained her cheeks. I waited patiently for her to be ready to speak, sipping from my coffee which had begun to get cold.

Inhaling and exhaling a quivering breath, she nodded as if signifying that she was ready to talk, finally looking me in the eye. "I took a pregnancy test."

I nearly choked on the coffee, slamming it down on the table. My head felt like it was spinning. Out of all the girls I dated, this had never happened. But we were safe, right? We never went without! Except maybe that one night, after the Christmas party...

I brought my hands up to my head pressing into my temples, praying to God that my brain wouldn't shoot out of my ears.

She then smiled faintly, her sad eyes falling on her own cup of coffee. "But it's okay, I guess," she said slowly. "I already took care of it."

I looked up at her in horror. "What?"

"Now we can breakup, and you don't have to look back."

"What do you mean, you took care of it?" I said through my teeth. I already knew the answer, and I didn't want to hear it. Please don't say it, I thought, please don't let it be that.

"I got an abortion." The words I had dreaded. Her face was oddly apathetic as she said it, like she was stating a fact.

But me, I felt like someone had stabbed me, collapsing my lungs, sucking out all my blood. My hands were visibly shaking as I raked them violently through my hair. This time, I couldn't stop the tears and they fell from my eyes unwillingly. I was hyperventilating, and I didn't know what to say. And suddenly, the words came to my head that I thought I feared for my whole life. I could've been a daddy.

"Oh my God..." I cried.

Emily resumed the erect posture she had when I first walked in. She had this uncomfortable look on her face as she watched me. “Stop it, Ben. Most guys would be jumping for joy.”

I looked at her and saw a new monster. Was this the girl I had spent almost six months of my life on? My heart was breaking, because of her, but mostly for that baby. My baby.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I accused.

With a look of stubborn triumph on her face, she simply stated, “You didn’t answer your phone.”

I felt like throwing up right then, self-loathing drowning me. “I’m such an idiot...” I breathed, the sobs shaking my shoulders again.

“Ben, get yourself together. You’re making a scene. It’s not like I was ready to be a mother anyways,” she said. The word “mother” sounded foreign and cold coming out of her mouth.

We sat for a long time, the hate I felt for myself growing stronger by the second. I kept going back and forth, unable to decide who was the most to blame, but I knew it was me. It was my fault. I wished with every ounce of me to go back in time and fix things, to answer the phone. We could’ve been a family. I would’ve loved her; I would have loved that baby.

The coffee was ice cold by the time she stood up and said, “So that’s that.” I was in a trance as she shrugged on her plaid coat and scarf and strutted out the jingling door, leaving me by myself in the isolated booth.