

The Art of Leaving

By Mayson Taylor

Chapter One. *The Period.*

B: Hey...

Are we okay?

The messages pop up at the top of my screen, waiting to be responded to. I quickly swipe them away; we don't need to have this conversation if I don't see them. Anxiety fills my stomach as I try to force any feeling out of me. Still, I focus on getting through the rest of my day and figuring out a response later. I don't know how to answer the question, 'Are we okay?' as if we've been "okay" for the past few weeks.

Nothing but petty fights and crazy hookups to make up for it, still able to call this a relationship. The six months that have been what we call us have been something I never thought I would get involved in. I can't recall a moment when I have been through something quite like this in my 19 years. I know it hasn't been a reasonably long life, but no relationship like this has caused me so much stress. I want nothing but to make her happy, but how am I meant to do that when I am like this?

Complete with selfishness and hypocrisy that brings a level of distrust to our relationship. This makes this decision even harder because all I want is *her*. It would never work out for her; she would constantly compromise to give me what I liked. The shaking of my hands brings me out of my thoughts as the phone slips out of my hand from the amount of nerves shooting up throughout my body. What am I doing here? About to end my first-ever relationship with a girl who genuinely likes me? All I can feel is genuine disappointment in myself. I pick my phone back up and into my shaky hands again, trying to write the message communicating precisely what I'm feeling...

A: I don't know...

I'm an idiot. Why can't I communicate my feelings without being so cryptic all the time? I mean, if anyone should know how I feel, it should be my girlfriend? Right?

B: Adeline, please just talk to me.

She's begging for someone she doesn't even truly know. But do I even honestly know myself at this point? My life has been nothing but hers, but now all I can think about is all the bad and the what-ifs that could happen between us. And as I think more and more, they start to manifest and become real.

A: I don't want to hurt you.

B: You're not telling me what's going on, which is doing nothing but hurting me.

And just like that, her words hit me like a knife to the stomach. Every decision I try to make will hurt her more and more. How can the person she fell in love with do nothing but hurt her?

A: Briar, I know that all I'm going to do is hurt you in general.

I'm not good for you.

B: Addy, please not again. You can't keep doing this to me.

A: But Briar, all I keep doing is hurting you

I have to stop; I only know how to leave.

B: Adeline, I beg you, please, please just don't.

I throw my phone down back onto my bed, unable to respond anymore. Tears flood my eyes as I curl my body up into a fetal-like position to try to comfort the pain I just caused for both of us.

All I do is hurt the ones that I love. Everyone I touch gets hurt. Why must I turn everything into a finite ending? As the tears keep flowing more and more out of my eyes, causing a pool of black smudge to cascade onto my white pillowcase, my phone buzzes with constant haptics. I reach for my cell phone, already knowing who it will be.

Briar <3 is calling...

Her name flashes across my screen, awaiting me to click the answer button. My phone buzzes at me, almost angrily, screaming, “ANSWER HER.” My body is shaking uncontrollably as the nerves completely take over my entire being. A decent human being would at least pick up the phone, right? That’s what they do, then why am I not doing just that? How come I can never just do the right thing? As my thumb finally gets the strength to hit the green phone icon to answer the call, it dismisses it and hangs up. A feeling of relief waves over me until the feeling of buzzing snaps me out of that feeling that lasted .5 seconds.

“You can do it,” I whisper to myself like I’m some Nike ad coming out of nowhere. Waves of emotions hit me all at once, and I’m not quite sure which one was the one that determined me to click the answer button, but here I am. I raise the phone to my ear, hearing sniffing on the other side. She’s been crying; I mean, granted, I broke her heart into a million different little pieces.

“Hello?” I answer as if this is a professional call and my potential employer is on the other line, not just the ex-lover I just made.

“Adeline, what is going on?” I hear her voice, and that is when my heart breaks again. How can I hurt someone who has done so much for me?

“Briar, the last thing I wanted to do was to hurt you,” I try to explain that I didn’t have any harsh intentions towards her. I wanted to love her; I attempted to love her. I just don’t know how to force that to happen.

“Well, you did, and now what are we supposed to do?” Her voice hits me like a bag of bricks cause I’m not sure how we go about this. Can we be friends? Do we have benefits on the side if we are friends? How are we meant to do this?

“What do *you* want?” I regret asking this cause I just heard sobbing instantaneously hit me over my phone speaker into my eardrum.

“I wanted you, Adeline. All I wanted was to be with you.” Her words continuously stabbed me in the heart. Why must she say such beautiful things while I’m breaking her heart?

“Briar, I just can’t give that to you. You knew this would happen inevitably.”

“Maybe I did, but I didn’t think you’d be tearing me to shreds this soon.”

“I figured this would be better than trying to force this anymore; the more this goes on, the more I hurt you in the end.” Tears start streaming down my face more and more as I try to get my point across. I hate hurting people’s feelings. I never like feeling like I have disappointed someone, and this is a first for me. I never thought I would be the one to end this out of the two of us. I did honestly want this. I guess wanting something isn’t always enough to be able to have it.

“I know, but all you have been doing is hurt me, Adeline; you’ve caused me pain this entire time we have been together.” Her voice turns violent and sends chills up my spine as I get my tears under control.

“Briar, I did want you. I tried my hardest to love you. I just can’t force it.”

“Adeline, you’re broken, you know that? You need help, truly, you just need a lot of help.” As her words flow more and more out of her mouth, guilt takes over my body. Is that true? Am I truly broken? What have I become?

“Well, if you truly think that, I have made the right decision. We can talk later about this. What’s done is done.” I wipe the remaining tears off my face as the pounding of my heart continues to take over me. I pull the phone away from my ear. I can’t take this anymore. I mean, this isn’t what I wanted to happen. Still, I’m feeling every single negative emotion I can have at this very moment.

I sit in silence for what feels like forever. The numbness of what just happened fills the void of the emptiness that I’m feeling. I am quickly snapped out of all the emotions I’m experiencing by a knock at my door. The door soon after opens, and a familiar face peeks in.

“Hey, would you want to grab Lu-Adeline? What’s wrong?” she looks at me with genuine concern as the happy smile she comes in with drops as soon as she sees me.

“Briar and I just broke up.” Her eyebrows furrow as she tries to understand what I just said, clearly surprised by the news I just let out.

“Aw, honey, what happened?” She came over and sat on my bed with me as I shook my head back and forth.

“Quinn, I just- I couldn’t do it anymore.” Tears come out of my eyes as the guilt buries deeper within me, and the words come out of my mouth, making what just happened real.

“It’s going to be okay,” Quinn rubs my back as she comforts my body, and the tears shudder out of me. I lay down with my head on Quinn’s lap, trying to deal with the guilt continuously manifesting within me.

“Just let me lie here for a bit.” I just want to curl up into a ball and not deal with any of this.

Chapter Two. Our Meet Cute.

The feeling of the plastic menu being held between my two hands is all I can focus on as I try to find something I can see the least bit appetizing. My eyes trail up and down the menu, trying not to settle on something so familiar to me. I've been attempting to be more adventurous with my taste buds recently. Still, it doesn't seem to be helping when this menu isn't quite my cup of tea.

"I can give you a few more minutes if you need to look over it some more?" The waitress's voice breaks me out of my trance, and I quickly look up at her. Her brown curly hair shapes the oval shape of her face perfectly as her brown doe eyes look at me with almost concern deep within them. I'm sure I look like I'm going crazy, so the concern is granted.

"Um, yeah, could you give me a few more minutes? I'm sorry. I thought I knew what I wanted." My voice cracks as I finally break out of the trance that was so focused on the beautiful girl standing before me. She can't be older than me, probably around the same age. I wonder if she goes to school around here... The food I need to order, not focus on all these details about the waitress, I know nothing about. She might not even be into girls.

"Yeah, of course, take your time." She put her pen and ticket pad up in her waitress belt, and I could've sworn she left me with a wink. Did she? What if she didn't? Am I reading too much into this right now? I think I'm going insane. I believe that is the only viable option that is being presented to me at this very moment. My heart is suddenly beating out of my chest as she walks away. I probably look like a maniac, or I'm having a heart attack. Either one is a viable option at this point. Even if she did give me a wink, I'm on a self-love journey. That's why I am here today, at this cute little restaurant I found to take myself out on a date. Even though I'm surrounded by all these adorable couples on Valentine's Day, I'm sitting here all alone. If I don't

look insane, I look sad. I'm sure all these people here are pitying me, even though I do not need it. I am happy, at least. That's what I continue to tell my single ass as I try to get through this wretched holiday that so many people seem to love. But that's the thing: what even is love? Cause I can't seem to understand how it begins to unfold. Especially when all you end up doing is *cutting off a beating heart*. I'm a pessimist when it comes to things like love and trust issues out of the wazoo forced upon me by all the past loves in my life that ended up cutting off *my* beating heart. Now it's dead. Wow, that's dark. Oh well, it's the truth. Call me a hater of love because it will never change.

"Are you ready now?" Her voice sends a warmth up my spine, which I haven't felt in so long. I look up at her and notice that she put her hair up in a claw clip to move it out of her face, yet just two little strands are making their way out at the top, framing her face perfectly. This is when I'm supposed to speak now, right? Words are supposed to come out of my mouth instead of my eyes, just continuing to stare at her.

"Oh, yes, I'll just have whatever you recommend." I close the menu in my hands and pass it to her as she begins writing down what I said. She finally grasps what I said.

"What?" she looks back down at me, flabbergasted at what I just said.

"Just get me whatever you recommend. I trust your judgment." I shoot her back a smile as I lift the menu closer to her to show that I'm firm in my decision.

"And what if you hate it?" She still looks at me uneasily. She clearly isn't good at making decisions.

"I will still eat it, don't you worry." I continue to give her a confident smile while I try not to waste her time too much longer.

“Okay... I’ll have that right out to you,” she finally collects my menu from my hand and walks away. As she walked away, she continuously turned to look at me, and I just stayed smiling at her. As she rounds the corner towards the kitchen, my smile drops as I realize what I just did. Was I just flirting with her? After what I just rambled in my head about? Oh well, it’s just harmless flirting. Who’s to say it will turn into anything? I’m just having fun on this lovely Valentine’s Day.

As I look around, I notice all the couples holding hands on the table, looking deep into each other’s eyes, as I sit across from an empty table setting, staring into my lonely soul. It’s a good thing I brought my book. I am having no fun not being able to talk to anyone. How is someone supposed to sit here for a full meal and not have anyone to talk to? All the talking in my head isn’t enough right now, and I need some form of entertainment.

I pull out *Pride and Prejudice* by the one and only Jane Austen. Right now, the classics have been my jam. I feel such a connection to the worlds that these fantastic authors depict. I don’t think literature has ever been the same since the world of the classics. I just love reading my little heart out as I wait for my mystery food to arrive at the table that Elizabeth Bennet has now joined. It’s funny. I always gravitate towards romance and love stories, yet I have never wanted to fall in love. It’s okay to find entertainment in what you don’t wish to. At least, that’s what I tell myself.

“Here is your hibachi chicken with fried rice. Can I get you anything else?” Her voice gets me out of the world of Jane Austen, which I was just transported to. I look up at her as she sets the plate in front of me. The aroma of the food hits my nose. Oh. My. God. I just know that this is going to be so good.

“And if you don’t like it, just let me know, and I can get you something else you like.” Her gorgeous voice hits my ears again like a melody. I know I will like this; even if I didn’t, I would still eat it. I wouldn’t want to make her feel bad.

“I would like this just fine. I love hibachi chicken!” I was mainly worried she would come out here with sushi or something too exotic for my liking, but she chose one of my comfort meals. And I know I wanted to try something new, but she decided it for me, so it doesn’t count.

“Do you need anything else with it?” She looks worried, as if my last statement never registered with her, and she is still concerned that she made the wrong decision for my meal. I can see the anxiety blister across her face. Did she try to poison me or something? I don’t know how someone could be so nervous about something like this.

“I think all I need is your number.” As I say this, I look her deep in her eyes and give her a smirk that makes her flustered. Oh, so she does like me. I wasn’t making this all up in my head now. See, I’m not entirely insane. It’s just a tad bit since I don’t even know what I’m getting myself into right now. Her face turned bright red as she registered what I said, ultimately taking her off guard from what she might think I would have asked.

“OH, sure, yeah, let me write it down for you, and I’ll give it back to you with your check.” She hurries away before I can even say anything else to write her number down and grab my check for my meal. I can’t believe I did that. That’s something I, Adeline Fraiser, would not do. And just like that, I see her whip back around the corner from where I’m sitting and is coming back to me. As she notices I’m watching her, her pace slows down, trying to seem like she’s not excited to hand me this piece of paper.

“Here you go, also, um, what’s your name? I forgot to ask.” She seemed so shy when she simply asked for my name.

“It’s Adeline, Adeline Fraiser. What is yours?” I ask as I grab the piece of paper from her along with the checkbook. I place the checkbook off to the side until I finish my food. I pull my phone out of my pocket to go ahead and put her contact information in my phone.

“Briar, Briar Ashford. It is lovely to meet you, Adeline.” Her smile beams across her face when she notices I’m already putting her name and number in my phone.

“What a pretty name for a pretty girl. I’ll definitely be texting you about seeing you sometime out of this restaurant.” My words visibly hit her like a train, clearly leaving her all flustered as her chest rose up and down quickly and sporadically.

“I’ll, um, be looking forward to that.” She turns around, utterly red in the face, as she returns to the kitchen area. I giggle to myself once she walks away, proud of the shot I just took.

I hurry up and eat my food and leave cash and a hefty tip to cover everything, with a cute little note to let her know my gratitude for her number for later. I can’t believe that happened, and I honestly can’t wait to see where this goes...