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## AT THE COPA

*Ivy*

Is it possible to have a good day when it's Barry Manilow waking you up? My *it's-been-busted-for-two-years-clock-radio* came back to life. The alarm I had been using to wake me? Well, it made no sound. Music blaring from the radio woke me up. I slapped the snooze button, the power button. The music wouldn't stop. I shot upright as the time registered, twenty minutes behind. Late for the first time all school year. I scrambled from bed, knocked over music theory books, and jammed a toe on my cello case.

My day started with Barry Manilow and a full band. A disco-Latin music mashup syncopated to the max. Peppy, filled with strings, horns, congas, and backup singers - *Copacabana*. I knew that Lola the show girl would be dancing in my mind all day. I checked my phone.

**Aiden:** You up?

*Sent 24 minutes ago.*

I yanked a brush through my hair while grabbing my backpack. I stuffed a granola bar into my mouth while “*Her name was Lola; she was a showgirl...*” looped in my head like a curse. A high-kicking, boa-draped curse.

I bolted out the door chewing and yanking my right shoe on mid-run. I spotted Tyler and Aiden several blocks ahead. They laughed and ambled along in stupid long-legged sync. I pushed away the urge to catch up. There’d be no matching their strides, Aiden’s especially. He grew taller overnight and woke up with his legs already taking him somewhere. I had no chance to catch up; I was too far away to call. I missed a chance to tell Aiden what I needed him to know.

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### *Things that Messed Up My Morning Plan*

- Barry Manilow and everyone responsible for *Copacabana*.
- My alarm clock.
- My own feet.
- Aiden and Tyler’s ridiculous growth spurts.

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### *Lunch*

Lunch would've been the prime opportunity to grab a chat with Aiden-five months ago anyway. When we still ate lunch together, before basketball took over. I spotted Aiden surrounded by teammates at a far table. Basketball boys being basketball boys, tossed grapes into each others' mouths. I hovered, direction undecided, then heard, "Ivy! You have to see this!"

Jenna waved me over to see a viral cheer routine. Aria had a group chat screenshot I had to read. Someone asked about music camp. Chris Olsen tried to flirt with me, which I completely missed. I looked up. Aiden was gone.

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### *Things That Got in the Way During Lunch*

- Jenna's emergency TikTok analysis.
- Aria's group chat drama.
- Chris Olsen and his inability to flirt transparently.
- Me—I got in my own way.

What I needed to tell Aiden? It wasn't a confession, an uncomfortable truth. Just a fact. I'd be gone all summer. Why couldn't I say it?

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### *Two Days Before the Last Day of School*

We had a plan to walk home after eighth period, like old times. Aiden texted at 2:47.

Coach added a meeting. Rain check?

I said sure to a rain check that never came. He said he'd meet me the next day.

I'll meet you by the front door.

He didn't show. I waited long enough to memorize the slant of sunlight through the trophy case.

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Back in second grade, we started walking to school. We had our own rhythm. Aiden would hop sidewalk cracks and walk backwards while cracking jokes. I didn't need that much movement—I liked a steady pace. We were different, but our steps matched. Now? I wasn't sure how many of my steps equaled one of his. Wasn't sure I'd get a chance to figure it out.

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My four-year-old cousin, Miggy, managed to text me goodbye. My preschool cousin who didn't even have a cell phone.

**Miggy:** Bye Ivy!! Why do you need a camp for music? Do you sound way, way better far away? Don't forget socks and string.

### *People Who Actually Said Goodbye*

- Miggy – aged 4
- Aria
- Emilia (twice)
- Tyler
- Maddie
- Jenna
- My dentist
- My cello teacher
- Mom, repeatedly
- Dad – he'd say it at the airport. I felt it now in his hugs.

### *People Who Didn't*

- Aiden

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Way back on the first day of kindergarten I was scared. Aiden showed up, helped me find my cubby. He was excited that we were cubby next-door-neighbors. He sat beside me at snack time. When my hands shook that first day, he handed me a string cheese and said, “You got this, Princess.” He wrapped his pinkie around mine on the way home. Now, I couldn’t even get a reply.

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### *Last Day of School*

I saw him in the hallway, digging through his backpack. I opened my mouth to call his name just as someone bumped into me. The bell rang. He looked up and saw me, I think. Tyler pulled him into a side conversation, and he disappeared into the classroom. I could've chased him. I didn't.

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### *After Supper, My Last Night Home*

I started typing:

I was hoping to get a chance to—

I meant to delete it. Reword it, make it sound casual. Instead, I hit send and panicked. Immediately followed up with...

Never mind, Aiden. Hope you have a great summer.

Read. No reply. If he thought about what it meant, he didn't say.

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I kept thinking we'd get back to normal. One more week; one more walk; one more laugh. But we hadn't been normal in a while. Not since spring break—maybe before. Walks shortened. Texts went unanswered. Plans fell through. I kept waiting.

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### *Reasons I Signed Up for Summer Music Camp*

- To develop my cello abilities further.
- To meet people who understand key signatures.
- To NOT spend the summer waiting to be remembered.

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He used to call me Princess. Not in a sparkly, tiara way. It started when we were little—something he picked up from my dad, but made his own. Building mud castles. “You rule this kingdom, Princess.” I gave him a snack I’d brought for a walk. “Royal delivery!” He noticed I was nervous on the first day of school. “You got this, Princess.”

It wasn't a throwaway nickname. It meant something. Said I was more than the quiet girl next door. I don't remember the exact moment when he stopped saying it. But I noticed.

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That last night, I wandered into the backyard. Felt the still sun-warmed grass. Heard birdsong in the air like background music. I found the tallest dandelion and held it between my fingers. I was too old for wishes. Too old to think a single breath could change anything. I didn't care. I closed my eyes and blew. Each seed lifted into the air like it had somewhere better to be. Somewhere else to go. Each one carried a piece of me I was forcing myself to let go, a memory, a wish, a maybe.

I didn't want to leave without saying goodbye. But I guess he didn't need one.