

1

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.