

Pinky Promises, Unanswered Calls, and Loving a Boy Called Carrot

Ready for our pre-scheduled facetime, I eagerly wait to see if he'll call first, but never having been one for patience, I call him, expecting for him to pick up within five seconds because that's how it always used to be.

The facetime ringtone continues on and on, adding insult to injury. But I still wait the absurd amount of time that facetime allows you to wait for someone to answer, and I stare at the phone imploring to get that one beautiful word: *Connecting*.

Instead, I simply get *FaceTime Unavailable*. My heart drops, and I text him, asking if he's still free. Part of me knew he probably wouldn't answer but my mind had wanted to argue that *Of course he'll answer, he always does*. My day goes on, and there's no response. I convince myself he must be busy, I always knew him to be forgetful, but as of late, it was hard to ever get ahold of him.

Eventually, I forget about it, only remembering every few weeks when I think about trying again, but I'm too scared.

Riley and I were best friends throughout high school. Teasing one another throughout the day, always choosing the seat next to one another, we were obviously inseparable to anyone around. We would laugh loudly in the halls, text throughout the evening, and facetime at night just to goof around.

Despite spending all of our time together, we were never romantic. Rumors and suspicions flew around us, but we were fairly unbothered, we both had significant others and they knew the rumors were false, so it didn't worry the two of us.

I saw him as a brother, maybe because both of mine were off at college and I was lonely, or maybe I knew I couldn't see him as anything more at the time. Our motto to one another was "If you die, I die" because a life without one another seemed too painful to even consider. That type of love is wholehearted and unabashed, and I felt lucky to have ever been a part of it.

Toward the end of our last summer before college, I insisted that "When we go to college, we've still got to facetime at least once every two weeks! You're going to be too busy for me, so we have to schedule it!" He was going to NYU to play basketball, and I knew that his schedule was going to be extremely demanding, more so than it already was, especially being in the school of engineering. Laughing, he promised. "Pinky promise?" I dared to ask, knowing that he prides himself on never having broken a pinky promise. He kept his word over every other promise we made, so why would this one be any different? Our pinkies wrapped together, both of us committing to the creation of a pipe dream that we knew would be hard to keep alive.

While we were friendly for years prior, we solidified our bond during chemistry sophomore year. He would inevitably walk in late to class, take his assigned seat in front of me, then promptly turn around with a mischievous smile and say "Hey, do you have a pencil I could borrow?" Every day, without fail. It became so regular that I would automatically hand him a mechanical

pencil that I had designated as “his” with the eraser completely whittled down from constant use, without being asked. On the days that he didn’t show up to class I would quietly put the extra pencil on my desk away, a little tug of disappointment that he wasn’t there. From there, our friendship blossomed. He teased me incessantly for being so gullible, and I always looked forward to seeing him. Soon, we got so close we only called each other by our nickname for one another: Carrot.

The story behind the best nickname I’ve ever had is actually quite simple. One day when we were walking together to lunch, as we often did, and being the random person he is, he said “You know, I really wish I were a carrot.” Laughing, I said “Well if you’re a carrot, I want to be a carrot too!” That day, we changed the contact names for each other on snapchat to Carrot. On the rare occasion that I snapchat him now, I often accidentally search his actual name, forgetting briefly our shared nickname. I wonder if he changed it back to my actual name. I don’t think I’ll change it anytime soon.

At the time, we thought our bond was unbreakable. Yet, no one really tells you how hard it is to adjust to a new life while trying to hang on to old friendships. When I got to college, people I had previously texted everyday soon faded to the background. I broke up with my high school boyfriend because the distance wasn’t going to work. Everyone was moving on with their lives, including me. Yet, he was the one person I tried to hang on to.

He didn’t ghost me, or at least that’s what I tell myself. He’s someone who always had about 1,400 unread emails, countless texts and snapchat notifications throughout the day, and I knew he rarely checked what they all were. He was just an incredibly well-liked, popular person, but the trick is that he would only respond to the people he was close to, the people he cared about. To be in that small circle felt like you won the lottery. I would know, I got to be a part of it. I guess I’m just not in it anymore.

Having someone know everything about you is something that’s really scary. You put an incredible amount of trust into them to not turn around and use your vulnerability against you, but you can’t help but divulge every single aspect of your life to them because you rely on them so much.

So, what happens when you’re no longer that close?

I can tell you. You don’t forget anything. That information is stored. For when, I don’t know, but I know I won’t forget anytime soon. I know I still remember everything about him, and I often wonder if he remembers the same about me. I know he doesn’t eat candy or anything particularly sweet, he used to be really lonely despite having a lot of friends, he is incredibly smart and doesn’t like to show it, he sets himself up for failure by befriending people who advantage of him, when he first got to NYU, he was extremely unhappy, and he wanted to transfer schools for a while but never did. I treasure this information because this is how I prove to myself that this was real, that we really were the most important person in each other’s lives for a while.

In the beginning of attending college, my phone calls and texts were quickly answered, and we continued our routine without skipping a beat. It was only as time progressed and our phone calls

became heavier as we both struggled with anxiety and depression from being so far from home and one another that we began drifting away. We didn't know how to support each other while being on opposite ends of the country, and each of our burdens were so heavy it was impossible to support ourselves and one another, no matter how much we wanted to be there for each other. So, slowly, he stopped responding. Stopped answering my calls and facetimes, and I stopped reaching out. We occasionally get together still, but the people we sit across from now are different. We're not exactly sure how to communicate how we used to, and the knowledge that things won't ever be back to how it was before we left hangs unspoken and heavy between us.

My friends now ask about him, only knowing about him because I gushed about him so much in the early stages of college. I often struggle to put our friendship into words because how could I ever describe loving someone with my whole heart and mind, but never being romantic. Is it possible to explain to someone who wasn't a part of it that losing him as a close friend simply due to distance is something that shatters my world and ruins my day if I think about it too much? That I cannot look at pictures of us without being sad and I know I cannot simply dial his number and hear his voice again. That I have to remember that if I were to text him, I would probably not receive a response.

And it's not like he's completely gone, what I lost was just that moment in time where we were so close it felt like everyone else was on the outside looking in. But that's the thing about relationships like this because even though it hurts more than I can say that we aren't as close as we used to be, I still get to look back on our time together and remember all of our fond memories together. Like the fact that I consistently wore a ponytail to school and daily, like clockwork, he would swing behind me and gently pull on it so I knew exactly who it was. Or him dropping off my favorite flavors of ice cream to my house after I got rejected from my dream school. Or the fact that we accidentally matched perfectly for homecoming, despite not discussing it ahead of time. Or any of the other hundreds of amazing memories we have together.

While it still is difficult, I think it's mostly because I felt I never got to say goodbye to that friend, the one who could practically read my mind. Sometimes the people you wish you could've said goodbye to are the ones who are on your mind the most.

And while sitting here, writing this, a notification popped up on my phone, Riley commented on my TikTok.