

Please respond

By: Sadie Goldberg

The glass cracked first. Then it shattered. Until it finally fell on my lap. What is happening? I look around. I look at my mom, and she looks right back at me, horrified. Confusion fills me, what's wrong? Everything seems to be moving in slow motion. I feel dizzy, really dizzy, like I have just spun in circles thousands of times. I touch my forehead with my hand. When I look at it it looks red, bright red. Did someone pour kool-aid on my head? I laugh off the thought. Then what is on my head? I touch my neck, red. My shirt seems to be red too. Where is all this invading red coming from. I look back at my mom, her eyes look watery. Why are her eyes watery? And still, the red invades. Red is my favorite color. I love when it rises in the morning with the sun and how it goes to sleep at night. But I don't like this red. It is bright and dark and reminds me of fear. I think time has stopped. Think. About mom, sitting next to me. Jacey, I wonder how his basketball practice is going, I'll have to ask him later. Dad, where is he now? Probably walking Red. Red, his wagging tail swishing back and forth as he trots through the neighborhood. I named him that, Red. And Carson. My last thought is about Carson.

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I love camping, out in nature with the bird and the trees. Where you witness the beautiful sunrise and set. I love it, except when I don't. When I wake up on the second day of camping my arms itch with mosquito bites and my neck is already sore. But I'm not gonna be a downer, so I unzip the tent zipper and walk outside. I immediately squint at the blinding sun, smiling down, so I smile right back. I walk up to where Ross, Brad and Andy are talking. They sit in camp chairs around a fire pit, a camp table filled with gear and food stands nearby.

"Good morning," Ross says not breaking eye contact with the fire.

"Morning," I respond. I pour myself a bowl of cereal and pull up a camping chair next to Brad. The fire is already crackling, and Ross is already roasting marshmallows. Some of my oldest friends, (well except for Jess) sitting next to me. I asked Jess if she wanted to go camping but she kindly rejected, then punched me in the arm and told me I was an idiot for thinking she wanted to go camping, in the nicest way of course.

After I finish my cereal and put the bowl down I pick up a mug filled with crisp well water. I immediately drop it. Thankfully I don't spill on myself, but right when the mug hits the floor I feel like something even bigger has shattered, something life changing. I shake off the weird feeling and go to pick up my mug. The spilled water slowly makes its way through the dirt, turning all dirt around it into mud, a little river follows. As I stare at the water I feel a buzz coming from my pocket. I pull it out cautiously, there is no signal here, what is happening? I already tried to call my mom on my first night here but I couldn't get a signal. There is one text, which is strange, and it is Jess. *Hey! How are you? How's camping?* It reads.

It's good, but how are you getting a signal? I reply

It's a...new wireless plan, she doesn't sound very believable, but I am too tired to care.

Cool, so what's up? I ask. And our conversation rockets from there. We catch up on recent events. I tell her about camping and she explains how (apparently) boring her life has been. We usually don't text this much. She isn't very good at checking her phone, or we just call or meet in person. It's a little strange, but she did say she was bored. The boys ask me what I'm doing a few times, but I tell them to mind their own business. Right now I am content texting my best friend.

It has always been Jess-n-Carson, Carson-n-Jess, forever and always. We met when we were in second grade, on the field. It wasn't how you would usually meet people, but it worked for us. The field meaning a soccer field. Being the competitive little second graders we were we battled each other to the death, well not literally but, like I said, we were in second grade. I don't remember who won but we were inseparable after that.

Then, like she can read my mind, a text comes in, reading *Do you remember who won that soccer game? :P*

Ha, I was just about to ask you the same question :p I rack my brain trying to remember, but I still have no idea.

Then, suddenly, unexpectedly, *What would you do if I died?*

Umm, what? Why?.....

"Hey, dude we're gonna take a hike by the river, come if ya want to," A voice says above me, pulling me out of my thoughts. I look up and see Andy, Brad and Ross scurry around behind him.

"Uh yeah, sure I'll come. Just gimme a sec..." I respond, distracted. My brain still whirs about what Jess said while I stumble around, looking for my shoes and water bottle. And finally, when we are all ready, we head out.

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Hey, do you mind if I call you? There are so many cool things around the campsite, I text Jess after we get back from our hike.

No, the...plan doesn't cover it, sorry, she responds with remarkable speed. This unsettles me, yet I don't know why. Does she really have nothing to do?

Oh, okay, I'll just take some pics to show you.

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I can't sleep tonight. I don't know why. Something makes my spine shiver. Tossing and turning, getting no sleep. So I remove myself from the tent, dragging my sleeping bag behind me. I lay my blue sleeping bag on the ground and snuggle inside, trapping myself in its warmth. I stare up at the stars. Some blink, some just shine bright. Then, I see something fly by, a shooting star. I make a wish, and soon I am drifting into sleep.

I have a bird's eye view of the world. It spins so fast I get dizzy looking at it. Then, suddenly it lurches to a stop. And I start to dive. It looks like I am going to smack into the ground, even burst into flames. But no such thing happens. I hover over the ground for awhile. People rush around, but all is silent. Then I see Jess. She looks in pain, I call out to her. That's when I realize she is hovering too. I call to her over and over. She finally waves back, but it is stiff and unnatural. Then she picks up a metal cup. She holds it for a minute, then drops. It shatters into a million pieces, like glass.

I jolt awake, unsure what to make of my dream.

The next few days fly by. With texts from Jess and hikes with Ross, Brad and Andy. When it is finally time to leave the campsite, we pack up slowly, not wanting to go. First we disassemble the tents, then the food and other camping gear slowly start to disappear and there is no evidence that we were ever here. We jump into the loaded cars. Two were brought and I end up in the passenger seat of Brad's car. He starts up the car and we drive forward on the bumpy dirt road, leaving our campsite shrinking in the distance.

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When we get back into signal range my phone starts to buzz frantically. It sounds like two bees are chasing each other inside the car.

"Wow, your phone's really blowing up," Brad remarks.

"Yeah, I heard," I joke then go to check the texts. From my mom, dad, even my sister, and there are so many. I look to see if Jess has texted at all, but there's nothing. Then I start to read the texts.

Honey?

Hello?

I know you probably can't read this...

Honey, this is important

Dufus, answer your stupid phone!

Sorry, that was harsh

I want to tell you in person...

Respond right now! Please

Please?

Hello?

Hello?

Carson?

Carson? Hello?

Please?

I know you can't read this, but I need you to come home as soon as you can!

Now I really start to panic. My hands sweat and my heart races. Why is everyone freaking out? Brad glances at me.

"Dude, are you okay? You look like your gonna be sick." Brad says, concern filling his voice. Brad can be pretty emotional. Not that it's a bad thing, not at all. I actually appreciate it. "Deep breaths," he continues, and I follow his instructions. What could be wrong? Oh no, oh dear.

I panic the rest of the way home.

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Heart pounding, I barge through the door with my bags, immediately throwing them down. Brad drives away behind me, I convinced him it would be fine and I'll text him later. My dog starts to bark frantically when I appear, but when he sees it's me, he wags his tail like a wrecking ball. I push him aside and rush into the living room, where I see my mom sitting gingerly on the couch, and she looks like she just finished crying. The first thing I notice are the dark bags under her eyes. They still shine through her red, puffy eyes. She cradles her head in her tiered arms.

When she hears me come in she looks up at me hopefully, then rushes to my side. She pulls me into such a tight embrace I have no choice but to hug back. Then, unexpectedly she bursts into tears. I comfort her, but I still don't know what I am comforting her about. I carefully lead her to the couch.

"Hey, what's up?" I ask gently, in case she breaks.

"Oh, honey," pause. "It's Jess," a million possibilities rush through my head. She's hurt, she is moving, she's sick, on and on and on.

"She, well," my mom stumbles over her words, and I try to coax them out of her. "Well earlier this week, she was in a car crash, on the second day you were camping. I'm so sorry. She died in the hospital," my world stops. She's gone. No. No. No. This can't be. This isn't right. She was texting me. At this point my mom starts crying again.

"But..no..that's...not right. No" My world is gonna fall apart. But no, she texted me, through the week. "No," my words are messy now, blurring with tears.

"Oh honey," she sobs. She is trying to be comforting. We are both sobbing on the couch.

Then my phone buzzes. I'm scared to look. I slowly pick up the phone, like it might explode in my hands. My phone has one more notification, a text, from Jess.

Goodbye.....<3 It reads one last time.