

Going Clear

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Going Clear

by [Nomad \(nomadicwriter\)](#)

Summary

Jane comes by with a lock of his hair.

I knew him first as your disreputable best friend, still living like a college boy long after it stopped being cute: stubble and band T-shirts and that shabby old blue raincoat, living on dreams and couches and borrowed cigarettes. I didn't like him much, either. He always seemed to have that mocking edge when he talked to me, a little bit cruel; always made a point of bringing up your ex-girlfriends, always seemed to show up at just the right time to disrupt our plans.

He used to flirt with me just to be outrageous - he didn't mean it, not then, but it got under your skin. I couldn't figure out how he was your friend when he seemed to be so determined to stop you being happy. I felt like he was jealous I took up so much of your time, that he wanted to drive me off so you could go back to being carefree bachelor boys together like you were before.

I think I was half right, but I didn't really understand. We were all so young back then. Maybe things would have been different if we'd only understood each other more.

So I didn't like him, and he didn't like me, but you know how stubborn I get. The more he tried to make you choose between us, the more I tried to push the other way. Smiled and invited him to join us whenever he showed up, even when it was supposed to be just the two of us; brought up his name before you could whenever we made a guest list, suggested the two of you go out and do things together.

That was when he started to get interested in me - and no, still not the way you think. I like to think he realised I was different from the other girlfriends that he'd driven off before: a worthy adversary, maybe, the one who was going to stick no matter what antics he pulled.

He's different, isn't he, when he's decided you're someone worth knowing about, somebody *interesting*? That was the missing puzzle piece, the side of him I didn't see before. He was trying to figure me out, but he managed to reveal so much of himself while he was doing it. Those grandiose dreams - they weren't just some childish pretence to avoid having to face up to adult responsibilities. He meant them. He was burning for something bigger, something *more*, and he almost made me feel ashamed for sleepwalking through life, mindlessly checking off all the boxes on the list of things I was supposed to want instead of stopping to wonder what else I could be.

We started to see in each other what you saw in both of us... but that didn't make you happy like I would have thought. You turned so cold and suspicious, got so possessive. And then that night at the restaurant - I could tell you were going to propose, and I just didn't know what I was going to say; I wanted to say yes, of course I did, but you'd just been so *angry* all the time for so long, and it felt like you only wanted to ask me to marry you to stake your claim. And then he showed up out of nowhere with the rose to serenade us, and I just burst out laughing - partly the tension, but honestly, it *was* funny, and very sweet too.

You didn't think so. He was giving us his blessing, in his own way, but you just didn't see it.

It all fell apart, after that.

You were so hurt when I said I was going to need time to think about your proposal, started spitting all these accusations that it was him who'd come between us - but it was always you, you know. You were the one who broke us apart, who broke all of us. You couldn't trust us both to love you like we did.

Funnily enough, I think it hurt me more to see how it was hurting *him*, you cutting him out of your life like that. He was drinking so much, he just looked so lost...

You know he as good as bankrupted himself to buy those tickets for you? To get you something you would love, to show how much he loved *you*. And you turned him down without a thought, acted like he was trying to bribe you, accused him of being *guilty*.

It was an impulse to offer to go with him, really. It just broke my heart to think of him being so alone. You can think we stole off behind your back if you want, but we both would have preferred you to be there.

He was a whirlwind that night, like I'd never seen him. We went dancing, sang at the top of our lungs in the street, laughed at all the people who stopped to turn and stare. If you'd been there, you would have been appalled, but you'd still have danced with us. I know you would.

After, it was quiet, and we went walking through the dark. He showed me all the secrets, the city through his eyes. The world's a different place with him. I know you miss that - how could you pretend you don't? I do too... but since that night, I don't think I've ever looked at the world through the same eyes again.

We climbed up on the rooftops, lay on our backs looking up at the stars. "I've got to leave, Jane," he told me. I think I always knew that was what he was going to tell me. "I've got to clear my head, go somewhere far away. There's nothing here for me anymore."

"That's not true," I said.

"No, it's not," he said, with the saddest smile. "And isn't that almost worse?"

I know what he meant. To be so close to what you want but not quite there, to know you've got to choose which part you want because you can't have all of it - well, maybe that hurts even more than knowing that there's no chance to have anything at all.

"Where will you go?" I asked him.

"I don't know. Maybe the desert. Somewhere clean. Somewhere there aren't any ghosts."

He got a knife from his pocket - I don't know what I thought he was going to do, but he cut off a lock of his hair.

"To remember me by," he said.

"I don't think this is really for me, is it?" I said. I wasn't the one he wanted to remember him.

"It is," he said. "As well." And kissed me on the cheek. "I could ask you to go with me," he said. "But I know you wouldn't go."

"No," I said. "But I don't think I'll stay, either." Because there's a world out there, and you never would have gone with either of us, would you? Not then. And he showed me I needed to get clear just as much as he did.

I loved you, but I didn't want to be your wife. I didn't want to strangle in the life we would have fallen into if I'd stayed after he was gone.

So I had to go too.

*

Do you want me to tell you we slept together that night? Maybe we did, maybe we didn't. If you still think it matters, then maybe there's no point in me being here at all.

But I'm here.

Because maybe I was wrong then too. Maybe we all were. I could never stay and be your wife; he could never stay and pretend you were the friends you were before. But maybe those were never the only options.

Or perhaps they were back then - but are they still?

I'm going to see him, after I leave here tomorrow. He's building that house in the desert, you know, that one you didn't believe he'd ever manage to stay in one place long enough to build. Maybe you should write him a letter.

Maybe you should bring it yourself.

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