

Phases

Selina Sheth

Sharan watches the Boy and Girl in the park and knows they are in Phase One. She gives them another month of clammy hands, sloppy kisses, shining eyes. Phase Two will come abruptly, but innocuously, when the Girl's phone calls will be returned but never on the same day. In Phase Three, the Boy will not return calls, neither on the same day or on any other day. He will occasionally respond by text, about pressures at work, urgent family events that require his presence after work, a sinus infection that demands long hours of sleep and silence before work. The Girl will be in denial of his rejection at first, but then Phase Four will swoop down on her with a white-hot rage that creeps like lava up her spine and explodes at the centre of her forehead. The Girl will send the Boy expletive-ridden hate mail, cursing him with lifetimes of toxic karma. The Boy will respond once, and only once, to curtly state that the Girl is too much Drama, he knew it all along, see? Then he will block her number, obliterate her on his social media accounts and smoothly get on with life as if she never existed. In Phase Five, the Girl will despair, repent and beg for forgiveness. She misses the Boy. She will ask his best friend to mediate, she will write a sentimental ink-stained letter by hand, she will find his new address, she will send across gifts of home-cooked food and pure love, she will deliver more and more desperate letters. The Girl will wait for a reply, hope for a small signal of past affection from him, pray for a sign of conscience, remorse, sadness, emotion, desire, humanity, anything will do, but nothing will come. She will then chance upon a Facebook post of another mutual friend, and see the Boy in a photograph, gym-toned and beaming, his arms around another (vaguely familiar?) girl he once described, back in Phase One, as too short, too dumb, too needy, not his type at all. In Phase Six, the Girl is part zombie. She will sleep all day, run for miles at night, travel aimlessly to the mountains, have sex with a bald man who propositions her on a bus, cry for hours, lose the colour in her face, crack her nails, cut her flesh, break down, and end up in

therapy, where she will admit that the Boy has left such sadness and anger festering within her, that she feels such a loss of dignity, such shivering helplessness and powerlessness, that it's like a truck hit her, like a diagnosis of terminal cancer, like unending rape, like all three together.

But life will continue. Some months later, the acuity of the pain will transition into a cold, dull throb. Not visible, just there somewhere, below the skin, like a faint pulse. A wound denied closure but still doing its best to heal. Not pretty, but bearable.

Sharan is neither happy nor unhappy, merely a proud resident of Phase Seven where love has forever lost its magic, and she wants to tell the Girl, the Girl she once was, the Girl she now sees smiling in the park, 'It's alright. You'll survive it too.'

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