

My Dear Madison,

I am writing this letter to you after nine years of friendship, three years of separation, another few months of friendship, and then two more years of separation.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry for everything I did to you – had you do. We were friends for so long. Best friends. Even after that day in the park, with you on your bike. I had asked you to meet me and I knew you would show. You thought it was hidden, but you wore your love for me out on display like a baby animal in a cage.

Let me start over: I'm sorry. We became friends in kindergarten. You fell in love with me then. Well, at least the kindergarten version of falling in love. Do you remember that? It was simple. Sweet. That was the only year where I may have actually deserved your affection. I cared for you too, you know. Though you may not believe me. I never did say anything. But we were kids. Can you understand that?

In first grade, you beat up a boy for me. Adam, I think, was his name. Do you remember him? Because of me you learned what it meant to feel violence. To be violent. Ever since then you've used violence to hide behind. All of your emotions were balled into fists and you hit walls, doors, bags, people - yourself. Because of me. You stuck up for me, but I never did the same. I never said a word when those girls made fun of you. Everyday they made fun of you. Every day I kept quiet. If I had said something, maybe you wouldn't be so violent. Thinking back to it now, I think I may have joined them. It was all fun and games, you see. Wasn't meant to hurt you. But it did. I see that now. You stayed friends with me, but you deserved better.

Third grade. Remember Timothy? He was your bully that year. He would always point out your fucked up right hand and the fact that you don't know who your real parents are. He would've screamed it to the world if he had the power – I have no doubt. But our third-grade class was enough to start. I don't think there was a single person to stand up for you. Do you still think about those days? Do you remember the whispering voices and giggling that surrounded you? What am I saying, of course you remember. I'm sorry I wasn't the one to stop him. I noticed after a few weeks how the words became numb to you – just pointless repetitions. I guess you have always been the one capable of standing on her own. But you shouldn't have had to stand on your own. No one should have to wipe away their own tears like you did.

I picked a girl over you in sixth grade. I pushed you to the side – I saw how it hurt you. I knew your feelings had only grown since kindergarten. But I ignored them. Ignored you. I treated you like a dog. I gave you attention when I needed to so you wouldn't leave my side. But once I reeled you back in, I would treat you like shit. It was an endless cycle that I put you through. I realize that now. I'm sorry it took me so long. How come you never said something to me? Or maybe I just wasn't listening.

I didn't listen in eighth grade either. That day in the park. I should've listened. You said no.

I'm sorry. I took advantage of your heart – of your hand. You gripped the handlebars of your green hand-me-down bike, but I begged and I pleaded, singing songs of fake lust. We were up among the trees, hidden from the rest of the world and I thought you wanted to. You had loved me for so long. We had been going to that park since we were old enough to walk. We climbed the same tree, any day that we could – all the way to the top where both felt free. But this trip was different. We were past the tree. Past the playground. Up where no one ever really walked. I wanted you to get off your bike, to come join me behind the trees. I was trying to grab your hand, wanting you to relax. Your

grip was so tight. You've always been so strong. It took a few tries but I finally got you to let go. I don't remember what I said. I don't remember why. I don't remember how long we stood there in the midst of those trees. But you had let go and your hand went where I wanted it to.

I'm sorry, most, for that. Though, what came after was worse. So much worse. After that day, I left. Left you with false hope about the possibility of us. I left you to your thoughts with a broken heart and broken trust not more than two steps behind. We had a fight. More accurately, I yelled at you. I shouldn't have yelled at you but I did. You wouldn't do what I wanted you to. I called you things. Slut. Tease. Bitch. I shouldn't have said any of it. I told him what you did that day in the park – rather what you didn't do – but I made it a reality with the pile of lies that spilled from my mouth. I told him because he was a friend, I knew he would be proud of me. Praise me.

I don't think you really understood what happened – not for years. Because you asked me to your senior prom. For some reason you decided to trust me again. Even after I lied about moving away – pretending we couldn't be friends anymore. Even after I lied about betraying you – I promised you I never said a thing. Even after I lied about what happened that day in the park – you didn't do any of it.

You had given me another chance at prom. You needed me, and I knew that. I had another chance to keep you in my life. And I blew it. I ditched you. It took me till three hours before – but I ditched you. Again.

You blamed yourself. You always blamed yourself. You thought something was wrong with you and that's why I treated you the way I did. You built up hatred and I only wished you had realized that I was where the hatred wanted to go – but you kept it for yourself, the least deserving of its wrath. It ruined you, tore you down for so many years. You lost your trust in people. Not just me – everyone. You kept everything you felt inside and turned against yourself. But the problem was never you.

I know you will probably never forgive me and I understand, truly. That's not why I am writing this letter. But I want you to know how sorry I am. For all the pain I put you through. I never deserved your friendship. I never deserved your love. I had something good and I threw it away. I'm sorry I was never better to you. And I'm sorry you had to develop so much strength so quickly. I accused you once of being a terrible friend – but it was me who was the terrible one. I don't want you to forgive me.

Madison, you were my best friend. At one point you loved me. I will never get that back and I will never be more sorry than I am right now. I hope you have found better people – ones who will cherish you in the way you deserve. Know that it was never your fault. It was mine.

Apologetically Yours,

A.H.