

TALONS

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"GOOD MORNING! ☺ HOW R U?"

Another wake-up text. Every day for the past two weeks. Crap. How on earth do I keep getting myself in these situations?

I sent a quick response. I've learned from prior experience that if I don't, I'll have ten more waiting for me by the time my first class ends.

I have come to admit I have a problem: I'm too nice. I'm utterly unable to tell an obsessed girl that I'd rather undergo months of Chinese water torture than date her. Not all girls. Just the ones that, of course, I seem to attract. You know, the crazy type who imagine guys have nothing better to do than send silly, emoticon-laden texts all the live-long-day. And then talk on the phone for two (or more) grueling hours every night. And then, if that wasn't bad enough, every waking moment you're not communicating via mobile devices you need to be hanging out, which usually consists of you listening, hoping, at best, to get three or four complete sentences in, while she goes on and on about her oh-so-selfish roommate who, oddly enough, doesn't subscribe to the belief that she should bequeath all the power outlets to the crazy. It's either that or her plans for our new future together. And all this for a girl I don't even like. For a girl I'm too nice (or too wimpy) to just break it off.

But I'm not sure how much longer the niceness is going to plague me. The clinginess, as well as the ensuing suffocation, has brought on an insufferable gloominess. The kind of gloominess in which I painfully see my life coming to an inglorious end (figuratively speaking, of course).

I get to the student lounge to do some reading before class and, like clockwork, in less than five minutes, she's zeroed in on her prey like a hawk and plops herself down onto the seat next to me and then scoots it closer. Too close.

"So, I was thinking," Kayla says, holding

out the syllables of all her words and twirling her hair in her fingers. I guess she thought that was cute. "We should definitely hang out tonight after you get off work. It seems like it's been forever since I've seen you."

Forever? Twelve hours. Oh, yes, an eternity.

"Oh, well..." Crap. The last two post-work date proposals I was able to finagle my way out of. But those were both made over text messages, allowing me the time to formulate an excuse. The fine art of evasion is much more difficult to carry out in person.

Apparently my pause was too much of a tip-off. "You don't want to, do you?" Her voice grew to a pitch I'm certain any self-respecting 80s metal band would've envied, and she extricated her fingers from her now-tangled hair. "I was talking about you with mom last night, ya know. And about how weird you've been lately and all. And she told me if you really cared about me like you should you'd wanna spend every precious moment with me, instead of making up these lame excuses. So tell me how you really feel."

My heart stopped pumping for a brief moment, I believe. Here was my chance, my opportunity to once and for all end it and to once again be a free bird.

"Kayla, I think maybe—" and then I saw the sadness in her face and the tears beginning to freely flow. "Maybe I'll be free

tonight," I muttered. All prior pretenses of hope were decisively crushed. The glee began to return to her face as anguish and suffocation once again enveloped me. As she shifted the conversation back towards her trademark banalities and our future together, which sounded more *Friday the Thirteenth* than *The Notebook* to me, I saw a text from a friend. A friend with whom I was supposed to hang out tonight. I interrupted. "Now that I recall, Ben and I had planned to hang out tonight. And beyond that, I'm not convinced this is gonna work out I'm just a freshman and I'm not really looking for a girlfriend at the moment." I said it all as if it were one long polysyllabic word, taking no breaths in between. I'd done it. I could finally breathe again.