



LEFT ON READ

by Jenny Ireland



I checked my phone one more time. I'd promised myself I wouldn't, but it was like a compulsion.

No messages.

'He's ghosting you,' Mia said matter-of-factly from over my shoulder. She was doing my hair for Olivia's party, curling it into soft waves. 'Sorry babe.'

'Do you think? Really?' I asked, knowing what her answer would be.

'Yep. The exact same thing happened to me with Marçal last summer. Remember? One minute we were completely in love, and the next? Nothing. *Totally* heart breaking,' said Mia.

She had gone to Barcelona for two weeks over the summer and fallen head-over-heels in love.

'Yeah, maybe it is the same,' I shrugged. But it didn't feel the same. Joe and I had been going out for a year, and I thought he really loved me. He'd *said* he did anyway. But over the last few weeks he'd been distant. Maybe Mia was right.

'Oh my God Amy, you need to forget him. When Marçal did it to me I sent him a message making sure he *knew* we were over. You need to break it off. You don't need this negativity in your life.'

I avoided her blue-eyed stare in the reflection and resisted the urge to take out my phone again.

'I mean is he even coming to this party?' she scoffed.

Joe had been really looking forward to Olivia's party. He'd been working so hard for his A levels and was using it as a reward for all his hard work. 'I don't think so,' I replied.

When Mia went to the bathroom, I checked my phone again. Still no messages. The last few I'd sent had been left on read.

Maybe Mia was right. Maybe he was breaking up with me. Maybe he was just too much of a coward to say anything. I thought about the time a couple of weeks ago when I told him that *hilarious* story about my dad mistaking our head-teacher for a pupil on parents' evening, and he didn't even laugh.

I thought about how he'd stopped waiting for me after school, and how he hadn't even smiled when he saw me this morning. My heart sank when I thought about how much of an idiot I was.

But there was another feeling – an ache inside my chest for him. I thought how sad he had looked lately. How his eyes didn't light up when he was talking about Minecraft like they normally did and how his hugs lasted a few seconds longer than usual when we said goodbye.

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I sent him a message.

Me: Are you okay? You've been kind of distant lately.

Joe: I don't know what's wrong with me.

Me: What does it feel like?

Joe: Nothing. It just feels like nothing.

Me: Can I come over?

Joe: I'm not very good company at the minute.

Me: I'll be there in ten. I love you.



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