

# *Sketch*

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## Changes From You

Hayley Scheuring\*

\*Iowa State University

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# Changes From You

Hayley Scheuring

Now that you have been gone for over a month-- a month and five days to be exact-- I can finally bring myself to listen to your songs and read through your emails. Smiley face icons turning sad, and poetic verses of unfinished songs saying what you really wanted me to hear. I was always envious of your ability to make anything rhyme. The first time you sang to me we were at Marion Park. The shade of the oak tree made the heat of the afternoon bearable. We sat, beneath the tree on the blue and green checkered blanket I made in high school, among a pool of clovers. You lay on your belly while you slowly fingered the clovers until you found one with four leaves, picked it, and tucked it behind my ear. We talked about luck and superstitions.

It was me, you said, who brought you luck when you won the Anthology of Poetry for Young Americans contest for the poem you wrote about our day in the park. We marveled over the congratulations letter, and went for a celebratory lunch at Mad Greens, talked about our love for health, our hatred for the government, and made “us” official.

The boyfriend I have now doesn't read poetry. I don't read it anymore either. Quoting Keats or Wordsworth no longer makes me giddy. Together, my boyfriend and I read the newspaper at the kitchen table, discuss politics and drink coffee—black with extra sugar. When he and I make the two hour drive back to town to visit my family, both of us sing along with the radio, slightly off key. The drive home reminds me that I am doing something I should be proud of.

The next fall your younger sister moved out, we talked about the future. You strummed your guitar and told me why you never finished high school. The world always seemed so big, and you were just way too small. I told you how important education was to me, and that I didn't think it was too late for you to go back to school. We talked about changing the world, and made plans to help feed starving children in Kenya. We sat on your bed and mocked the old man and woman from the Feed the Children Foundation, and swore that we could do better, we wouldn't be so gimmicky.

You surprised me when you enrolled in a program at the Learning Center to get your GED, and I helped you organize your homework in exchange for help with math. There was that Thursday we met at the Perry

Library to study. You brought apple cinnamon rice cakes and I brought green tea. You pulled a book of poems by Byron from the shelf and read me “Darkness.” I laughed because it was so depressing and you got mad. You slammed the book closed so hard that green tea spilled into your lap. I giggled at the sight of your wet crotch, and you smiled and sang a cheesy song about peeing your pants, which somehow led us to a fascination with naturalists and the hippie movement.

We made a promise not to cut our hair. My mother frowned at the hair gathering over your shoulders, and how I let mine get matted and stringy. We decided that we would look good with dreadlocks, and got a book called *Dreadhead* from the library to teach ourselves how to do it correctly. I sectioned your hair into even squares and you sang *Light My Fire* in perfect harmony with Jim Morrison. You complimented my new green tie-dye sarong, and I commented on the smell of the incense you bought. I backcombed your hair into snake-like knots and tied them with hemp at the base of your neck. The hemp left a red burn on your neck for months, but you refused to take it out.

I knew Perry was too small for me, but when I left for college I cried. I wasn’t sad to be leaving town; I was more upset to be leaving you. You made me a bracelet with clay beads that you molded into shapes yourself, and reassured me that I shouldn’t worry. You gave me a poem that explained that no distance could keep us apart. The first week, I called you when I got lost on campus, and you made me laugh when I’d been ready to cry. I contacted you every chance I could get. I emailed you at 4:00 a.m. when I couldn’t sleep. You replied with a poem about a girl who dreamed big.

Three months later my dreams changed. Literature seemed less realistic, and a possible career in political science made my mother smile. I didn’t get lost on campus, and my new friends began taking me out at night. When we finally talked after months of awkward moments in which I convinced you that I was busy, made excuses to ease my mind, you let me know that you stopped going to your GED classes, and spent your time writing songs and poems. Cigarettes, sadness, and all the pain in the world. You emailed me a few, but I never could bring myself to read them. You were still holding on and I was already gone.

I thought about you the day I cut off my dreads and bought a hairbrush. I know you would have talked to me; you said it in one of your emails. I actually read that part, but stopped when your pleas turned into a song.

The boyfriend I have now likes my short hair, so does my mother. It is trendy and looks like a politician's. When I spend time with my new friends that, I no longer stick out. They all have hair like mine, short, styled, in place. If you were around I'd take you to the library and show you books about Jackie Kennedy. You would probably frown at my obsession with her.

Now that you have been gone for over a month, I have finally made myself read through your emails. I let myself get lost in all of your songs, fade into the unfinished rhymes about a girl who you no longer recognize, and a boy who will stay true to himself—even if it means he will never be good enough.

One third of the children in Africa are malnourished. I read that every year fifteen million children die of hunger. You always wanted to help them, to make a statement and be something—you just didn't know how.

Sometimes at night after I have dragged my fingers through my hair and smoothed out all the knots, I reach into my nightstand and pull out a book of poems I stole from the Perry Library. The cover is faded and stained with green tea. I admire it for a moment before I nestle under the covers and fade into the warmth of my new boyfriend's body. The world is so big, and we are so small.