

Too Late for I'm Sorry

The dulcet strum of a busker's guitar momentarily punctuates the cafe's familiar hubbub. I glance towards the door.

'Are you expecting someone?'

I shoot Barney a look loaded with questions. 'No. Why?'

'You're distracted. You keep looking at the door,' my big brother says.

'I thought you might've invited *him*.'

Barney takes a sip from his mug, then sets it down so it teeters on the saucer's interior ring. 'Christ, Em. What do you take me for? I wouldn't ambush either of you like that.'

'I know you wouldn't,' I offer in my most apologetic tone. I reach across the table and straighten his mug. 'How is he, anyway?'

'Why don't you ask him yourself?'

'Barney'

Our server appears, saving me from launching into a regurgitated explanation. She sets Barney's lunch down in front of him. Branston pickle and cheddar on sourdough. *Ugh*.

'Anything else?' she asks, gazing at the empty space in front of me.

'I'm good, thanks,' I say.

Barney shakes his head and tucks into his sandwich the second she turns her back. I look away in time to see the door swing open. A father and his young daughter scamper in, bringing a charge of playful affection into the cafe.

Barney's still chewing when he says, 'It's been nearly seven months, Em. How long are you planning to keep up the silent treatment?'

'You're not blaming me for this whole mess, are you?'

'Who walked out during Christmas dinner?'

'You were there. Dad was being horrid. What he said about my being selfish, uncaring, and destructive. They were really hurtful.'

'I seem to recall you being grossly unpleasant to Lucy, which, for the record, she didn't deserve. Besides, he said those things in the heat of the moment. He didn't mean any of it.'

I sink deeper into my chair. 'I just don't understand why he waited until Christmas to tell us. Mum hadn't been gone two years. *Lucy*. Her best friend.'

‘She makes him happy, Em. Don’t you think dad deserves to be happy, especially after everything he went through with mum?’

I shrug.

‘You’re both too bloody stubborn to be the first to apologise,’ he hisses. ‘One phone call.’

‘I think the deadline for a simple ‘I’m sorry’ call passed ages ago.’

Barney groans. ‘You’ve said some stupid things, Em, but that takes the cake. *Deadline*. Between a father and daughter? All I’m saying If you and dad were characters in a novel, would you want their story to end ... like *this*?’

‘Real life doesn’t always churn out Hollywood endings, Barney.’

‘That’s a shame because you are my two favourite characters in *my* story, and I want a happy ending for you. Mum would, too.’

Damn him for pulling the Mum Card.

‘Fine,’ I say and unlock my phone screen. ‘I’ll do it for mum.’

Barney flashes a smug smile.

Dad picks up after three rings. ‘Emma?’

‘Hi, dad.’

‘It’s great to hear your voice, love.’