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The digital numbers on the dashboard read '09:01', officially making you late. You didn't anticipate the roadworks and the not-working traffic lights to add an extra ten minutes to your five-minute drive. '*When will I learn?*' you chastise, over hooting. Although, if you know her – and in this regard, you still do – she will probably be late too.

When you do eventually make it through the traffic into the car park there are hardly any spaces left. Too many self-important Land Cruisers have been double-parked.

"Table for one?" the waitress asks, with a bright – if not artificial – smile, as you scan the room for her. '*Maybe she's on time,*' you hope, but you know that she isn't.

"Two, please."

You take a seat at the table she leads you to. Perusing the menu, you busy yourself until she arrives. You wonder if today will be the day that you try something new. When she finally walks through the door, you can feel it before you see her, like your friendship has given you a sixth sense.

Her arms reach out for you. "Ah!" she exclaims, engulfing you in a familiar, but slightly awkward, embrace. "It's so good to see you!" (Which you would like to believe is true.) "We have so much to catch up on!"

Her hair is an inch or two longer than you remember. She's also dyed it, like she always said she would. You think it looks good and you tell her, so she feels obligated to compliment your shirt.

You both order cappuccinos, she asks for hers with oat milk. "I'm vegan," she explains to your raised eyebrow, as though you were supposed to know.

You think, '*That's new,*' but you say, "Oh, right. Of course."
'*Let's see how long that lasts.*'

A barrage of small talk ensues. She asks about your family, and you ask after hers – her sister loves the mugs you got her for Christmas. You discuss the unseasonable weather and horrendous traffic, the news and your favourite T.V. shows. You are shown photos of her new puppy that you already saw on her social media (though you secretly suspect it is just an opportunity to show you that she has the brand-new iPhone) even

so, you comment on how cute he is. She regales you with tales of her back-packing trip overseas, that she insists has profoundly changed her as a person. Then again, you could not imagine her packing for a six-week trip in a single rucksack, so maybe she is different person.

You try to remember, between sips of hot coffee, if your conversations have always been so stale. Always filled with esoteric jokes, that you aren't privy to. Droning on and on about old school friends that you haven't spent a moment thinking of since. Her fingernails catch your attention: they're long and colourful. She must have stopped biting them.

The twinkle lights that cling to the ceiling, that are supposed to be 'aesthetic' (you hate that word), create a distracting sequence. In the irritating artificial glow, you look at her over the mug in your hands. For a moment everything stops... and come to a troubling realisation.

You are not friends anymore.

Not real friends, at least. It isn't that you dislike her, or that she dislikes you (that you know of). You just do not really recognise her. It has nothing to do with her hair or her perfectly manicured hands. Surely, you have to have changed too; you know that. This meeting was out of habit, not any real desire to see each other.

A part of you wants to salvage a decades old friendship. The other is already drafting the lengthy speech that you will give to her: thanking her for the invite, but that you two are flowers that have outgrown one another's gardens – or some other similar cliché. Yet, you do neither. You join her in hollow laughter and ordering a croissant. You tell yourself that after this coffee date, you can simply stop talking to her.

To your relief, the bill is finally laid between the two of you, bringing an end to your agony. You tell her that you have somewhere to be, so she is not tempted to prolong the chatter. With a final hug and remarks about how lovely it was to see her, you leave, resolved that this is the last time you will see her.

On the drive home, an unsettling thought creeps into your mind. Is it possible that you are the problem?

Perhaps not, because in six months' time, you will find yourself sitting across from her at a very similar table once again, catching up over coffee.