

Ten

written by

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OVER BLACK

A little girl cries, with the muffled sounds of parents yelling at each other in the background.

FADE IN

INT. CAFE - DAY

Penelope, 30 and plainly dressed with unstyled hair, looks down at her wrist while counting.

PENELOPE  
(every second)  
One, two, three, four, five, six,  
seven, eight, nine, ten...

BROTHER (V.O.)  
Everything will be okay, Penelope!  
Just count to ten, and breathe.

Penelope breathes deeply, then glances back at the angry coffee aficionados waiting behind her, then turns back with wide eyes. A college student-aged barista drums his fingers near a cup of steaming coffee on the counter marked "Penelope".

BARISTA  
Penelope, right?

Penelope ducks his gaze while snatching her cup and walking off.

Penelope settles at a table nestled near the window. One of the recently vexed people in line glances toward her. Her eyes return to her watch.

PENELOPE  
One, two, three, four, five, six,  
seven, eight, nine, ten.

She takes a breath, and opens her laptop. The rattle of a crafts kit draws her attention to Jeanette, at a nearby table making a sock puppet. Penelope stifles a giggle, which prompts Jeanette to make her half-finished sock puppet dance around. They both fall into laughter.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Penelope pulling up a chair

B) Penelope and Jeanette chatting and animated

C) Penelope touching Jeanette's hand, confidently but reverently. Jeanette pulls away, their eyes locked.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

Penelope lifts her hand to reveal a phone number. The door swings shut, with Jeanette out of sight.

Penelope sips tea, regarding the number. She finishes her tea. She stares at the number, then reaches for her phone. She dials but doesn't send the call.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Penelope walks along a crowded sidewalk and gets bumped. She freezes focusing on her watch.

PENELOPE  
One, two, three, four, five, six,  
seven, eight, nine, ten.

She breathes and resumes her gait, nearly colliding into someone.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)  
Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry!

Jeanette faces Penelope as her smile and dimples surface. Penelope freezes, mouthing "sorry" one more time, with a question in her eyes and her hand clenching her wrist. Jeanette giggles, and Penelope timidly joins in.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Penelope and Jeanette, backlit by the golden sunlight, admire a luxuriously rich slice of chocolate cake in front of Penelope. Penelope grips her fork with pale knuckles. Jeanette eagerly moves to shovel at the dessert, but Penelope's pleading eyes give her pause.

PENELOPE  
The counting... It's...

JEANETTE  
Okay.

Jeanette touches her hand.

JEANETTE (CONT'D)  
It's okay.

Jeanette leans back as Penelope sets her fork down, their eyes locked. Penelope's eyes slowly lower to her watch.

PENELOPE

One, two, three...

Jeanette rests her chin on her hands.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

...four, five, six, seven, eight,  
nine, ten.

Penelope closes her eyes and breathes deeply. She sniffs the air and cracks an eye open. Her fork is dirty. A bite is missing from the cake. Jeanette's stuffed mouth chews unabashedly. Penelope's tension washes away, and she laughs.

Jeanette's eyes narrow as she leans in. Penelope carefully wipes chocolate off Jeanette's lip, smiles in anticipation, and kisses her.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Penelope's counting reiterates as the sunshine glitters along a spring green park's sparkling water.

Penelope finishes her count, and snaps a picture of Jeanette. She buzzes about her, lining up shot after shot, then calling for her to hold for another 10 count. Click.

Jeanette admires the yellow flowers, cuing Penelope to take her next shot. A series of photos follow, each showing Jeanette immersed in natural beauty, posing with almost as much patience as adoration.

Penelope lies by Jeanette's side over the grass, finishing a count to ten. They hold hands as the clouds give way to stars.

INT. JEANETTE'S OFFICE - DAY

People drone about outside Jeanette's uninspired gray-walled cubicle. Jeanette's left hand on her cheek props up her head as her right texts "I'm dying here" to Penelope. Jeanette's bleary gaze sees the clock showing 3:07. She drops her phone and tilts her coffee mug to reveal only dried coffee residue.

The clock clicks to 3:10pm. An email arrives and she opens it. Jeanette sees herself frolicking along the yellow flowers, basking in glorious sunshine. The right corner of Jeanette's lips curls. At 4:10, another picture arrives, and again at 5:10pm. Jeanette replies "Dinner?"

EXT. OUTSIDE PENELOPE'S HOME - EVENING

A hand knocks on a door.

INTERCUT WITH PENELOPE'S LOBBY:

Penelope stands still behind the door, counting, as the knock returns.

Jeanette waits at the door, then has a realization. She counts on her fingers, and sure enough, the door swings inward, right on time.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Penelope playfully blocks Jeanette's view as she guides her into the room, then, she steps aside to reveal a table adorned with an immaculate arrangement of sushi and yellow flowers. Jeanette attacks Penelope with a kiss.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) INT. BEDROOM - DAY - Jeanette styles Penelope's bedroom, with bright, cheerful decor.

B) INT. PENELOPE'S LIVING ROOM - DAY - Sock puppets made to look like Penelope and Jeanette, dancing and singing in unison.

C) INT. PENELOPE'S BEDROOM - DAY - Jeanette is adding the sock puppets to the bedroom's decor. Penelope surprises Jeanette with a slice of chocolate cake, but the plate falls. Jeanette looks at her pants in shock while Penelope starts counting.

D) INT. BEDROOM - DAY - Through the bedroom window, a timelapse of Penelope and Jeanette spending time together. Then Penelope and Jeanette step in front of the window, at normal speed. A view of a cloudy gray sky from the window. The bedroom is still in a timelapse behind them, becoming gradually more dreary. A rear view of Penelope and Jeanette at the window, with the bed in view, disappearing as night falls.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Slide from window shot to show Jeanette in bed, with Penelope standing nearby, rummaging through something.

Jeanette's eye opens.

JEANETTE  
(groggily)  
Penelope?

Penelope furiously searches through a purse, her parents' shouts echoing through her mind. Jeanette's eyes widen and she springs bolt upright.

JEANETTE (CONT'D)  
What? Hey! Get out of my bag!

Penelope turns, tears flowing.

PENELOPE  
I just needed a watch battery! My watch stopped working and I can't count.

JEANETTE  
You don't search through someone else's...

Jeanette looks up to see Penelope's face. She takes a deep breath.

JEANETTE (CONT'D)  
Look, let's go to a drug store or something.

Penelope embraces Jeanette, her tears unrestrained. Jeanette holds her while lost in thought.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Jeanette is in her cubicle, joking with Greg, a coworker with blue eyes and rugged stubble, comfortably sitting on her desk. He leaves but Jeanette can't shake the laughter as she tries to get back to work. At 3:10, an email from Penelope arrives. Jeanette swiftly clicks "Mark as Read" and resumes typing.

INT. CAFE - DUSK

Penelope arrives and freezes upon seeing Jeanette chatting with Greg. Jeanette laughs at a joke, and spots Penelope, waving at her. Penelope fixates on her watch, then stiffly approaches.

JEANETTE  
Penelope! Greg likes photography too.

Penelope rubs her temple, hiding an eye roll, then recomposes herself and sits. Greg nods and eagerly describes some of his experience to Penelope, who politely listens, nodding, with hard-won, fake smiles.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Penelope scans her surroundings as she explores a trail, towing a less self-motivated Jeanette along by her hand.

PENELOPE  
Hold that pose!

Jeanette smiles politely, squinting. Penelope repositions herself with uncertainty.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)  
Could you face the sun a bit more?  
Not too much.

Jeanette turns a bit.

JEANETTE  
The sun is too much.

PENELOPE  
Perfect! Right there! You're  
radiant! My sunshine!

Jeanette steps into the shade of the trees.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)  
What? But, I was going to...

JEANETTE  
Stop torturing me.

Penelope's exuberance drains from her eyes.

They reach the parking lot, kiss briefly and perfunctorily, then split toward their cars. Penelope waits for Jeanette to drive off, then pulls out her watch.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Penelope, gazes out the window, sitting alone at her familiar table in the cafe. She looks back at her laptop and continues to scroll through her photos, evaluating each.

In an email window, under her chosen photo, she types "You deserve so much love." then erases it. She types "You're my perfect 10! :D". She erases it. She types, "I miss you."

The text once again disappears, followed by the photo,  
leaving only a solitary blinking cursor.

FADE TO BLACK

PENELOPE (V.O.)  
One, two, three, four, five, six,  
seven, eight, nine, ten.  
(deep breath)