

32 Flavors

By Eve Ellis

Sara's neck and shoulders were hunched as she squinted intently at the computer screen. Her fingers flew, stumbled, backspaced, and flew again over the keyboard. When the phone rang, she kept her eyes on the hand that remained typing and groped for the phone with the other.

"Hello?"

"Hey, girl. It's Molly."

Sara smiled in the dark, clicked the save button, and leaned back in her chair. "Hi. What's going on?"

"Same old shit, girl. Too much to do, tired, hungry, cranky, the works. That guy I was telling you about, the hottie with the nice car? He's a dick. He never called me back. But fuck that. I already spotted somebody else who's way better anyways."

"That's good. Tell me about him."

"Don't worry, I will. So anyhow, I'm calling 'cause I got tickets to the Ani DiFranco show at the Orpheum this Saturday. You wanna come with me? I feel like I haven't seen you in foreeeever."

"Yeah. But my car's in the shop again. Could you pick me up?"

"Sure, but I'm going straight to my friend Tyler's party afterwards. If you want, you can come to that too, and then just stay in my room for the night. My roommate's gonna be home fucking her boyfriend the whole weekend, so it's no big deal. I'll drop you back off at school in the morning."

"Sounds good. When should I expect you?"

"Let's say eight. We'll miss the opening act, but it's just some local dork anyway. It's gonna be rainy and cold and shit, so just wait in your room and I'll knock. Damn, I'm so psyched that you're coming! Hey, you got a minute? I really should go back to the studio, but I just have to tell you about this beautiful guy I met last week. I'm not keeping you from your work, am I?"

Sara glanced at the screen. "Not at all. Go for it."

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"Motherfucking traffic. I think there must be a game tonight. And why is this guy behind me crawling up my ass and around the corner?" Still lighting her cigarette, Molly took her free hand off the wheel and stuck it out the window to flip off the white minivan behind her. "Hey, you're even quieter'n usual. Am I getting the silent treatment or something?"

"No, I'm just a little out of it. I spent all day by myself in the stacks again."

"Damn. I will never have your crazy work ethic, girl. Thank God for art school. Hey, wouldja look at that? Free parking on a Saturday night. Somebody loves me."

Getting out of the car, Molly suddenly grabbed Sara's hand and kicked her door shut behind her with her steel-toed boot. The two sprinted hand in hand through the rain, laughing breathlessly and plowing through puddles. When they skidded in the theater door, they heard cheering and Ani DiFranco's guttural laugh from the stage. Molly walked ahead, navigating to their seats. The first chords broke as they took off their rain-soaked jackets and settled in. Molly's smile flashed white in the darkness. She squeezed Sara's hand again.

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Sara choked and coughed on the dense, smoky air in Tyler's apartment. The kid next to her on the couch was animatedly telling her about the dangers of septum piercing. She tried not to flinch from his reeking, whiskey-soaked breath and glanced across the room over his bobbing head and through the shifting bodies. Molly was perched on the lap of her friend Tyler. Their heads were bent close together and Molly was smiling. Someone waved a joint in front of Sara's eyes. She shook her head politely and mouthed "no thanks."

A few minutes later, she looked up again and couldn't spot Molly. The chair where'd she'd been was empty.

A hand clasped her shoulder. "This place is beat. Let's go home."

Out in the car, Sara strapped herself into the seat and then paused. "Do you want me to drive?"

"Nah. I had one beer, like, two hours ago. Big fuckin' deal. I'm cool."

Swerving quietly through the streets, Molly glanced over at the passenger's side. Sara's head was leaned up against the foggy window. "I'm glad you came with me. Did you have a good time?"

"Of course. Tyler seems to like you a lot."

"Yeah, he's a big sweetie. But he still thinks that I'll sleep with him if he kisses my ass enough, and I'm just like, no fuckin' way. I love him to death, but we're such good friends, I'd feel like I was having sex with my big brother. It'd be like incest to hook up with him, y'know?"

That whole fuck-your-friends deal works for some people, but not me. It makes everything so messy."

"Totally." Sara closed her eyes again.

"How's Matt doing? Have you talked to him lately?"

Sara played with the ring on her thumb. Matt was her boyfriend of almost a year. "Yeah, he emailed me yesterday. He's coming up for our anniversary in a couple of weeks."

"It's so cool that you guys are still together. For me, it's always out of sight, out of mind. I just don't have that kind of dedication to anyone. Why should I? I like my freedom. Nobody tying me down."

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"Dude, she took her sheets with her. What a freak." Molly gestured at her roommate's bare mattress.

"Well, I thought I was staying on the floor anyway, so I brought my sleeping bag." Sara tossed her jeans on a chair and rummaged through her bag for her sweatpants. Molly flopped on her bed face-first and wailed into the pillow. "I am soooo friggin' tired. Come sit." She patted the bed and moved towards the wall. Sara moved to the bed and sat indian-style, brushing her hair out.

Molly turned over and sat upright. She idly played with a loose thread on the sleeve of Sara's T-shirt. Sara kept her eyes on the bedspread's geometric patterns and waited.

"You don't really want to sleep on the floor, do you?" Molly took Sara's chin lightly between her thumb and forefinger, turned her head, and kissed her. Reaching back, she flicked off the lightswitch.

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A small stream of sunlight through the blinds fell on Sara's face and woke her. She was about to roll over when she felt the weight of Molly's arm draped across her stomach. So she lay quietly, examining the craggy texture of the poorly painted ceiling. Molly stirred a few minutes later. She felt the body next to her and turned her head towards it.

"Good morning," Sara whispered, kissing her on the forehead.

"Mmm. What time is it?" Molly sat up and peered bleary-eyed at the alarm clock on her desk. "Fuck! I'm supposed to meet somebody in the ceramics room in half an hour." She crawled over Sara out of the bed and picked up a sweater off the floor. "I always oversleep. Always. If I'm gonna drive you back we're gonna have to leave in, like, ninety seconds. I'm really sorry. I totally forgot about this meeting."

"It's okay." Sara grabbed her underwear between the sheets and got up.

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"Mind if I turn on the radio?" Molly asked. Aside from occasionally swearing at a passing car, she'd been quiet since the two pulled out of the parking lot and headed for Sara's suburban campus.

"I guess not."

"You okay?" She peered at Sara over the rim of her sunglasses.

"Yeah."

"You don't sound like it."

Sara cautiously touched Molly's wrist. "How come we never talk?"

"What d'you mean?"

"How come we never talk about this stuff?"

"What stuff?"

"Don't play dumb," Sara said hoarsely.

"Yeah, well don't be mysterious." Molly tried to laugh. "I mean, what the hell're you going on about?"

Sara looked out the window. The blur of passing trees made her dizzy. "About you and me," she said. "About what we do and how we never talk about it."

Molly just kept driving.

"Moll, every couple of weeks you call me or I call you and we get together. We do the same thing every time. And later, it's like nothing ever happened."

More silence.

"Why are we hiding like this? Even when we're alone, I have to pretend that there's nothing going on."

She stared pointedly at Molly. "Will you please just say something?"

"What do you want me to say?"

"Take off those sunglasses, look me in the eye, and admit to what happened last night."

Molly felt her throat closing. "I can't."

"Why not?"

"Just stop. Just stop, okay?"

"No. I'm not going to let you get away with it this time."

"Get away with what?"

"With lying to yourself. Putting on this big pretense like we're just friends."

"Well, we are just friends."

"Then how do you explain what happened after you turned out the lights?"

"It—it was a goddamn accident, okay? A weird impulse."

"Oh, some accident! Just a fluke, huh? So that's why it happens again and again and again."

"Will you please stop?"

"You know, sometimes you really sadden me, Molly, you really do. You come off like you're so open and free and not afraid of anything. But you're running away like—"

"Fuck you."

"We already did that, remember?"

Molly reached over and cranked the radio's volume up to near full power. Sara shut her eyes and leaned back in her seat until the car pulled through the school's front gate. Then she adjusted the volume of the music and said, "I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

"Thanks for inviting me."

"No problem." Molly shifted the car into neutral and sat with her hands pressed between her knees. Sara hesitated, then unbuckled herself and stepped out onto the curb. She leaned over the door. "I'll call you."

"Yeah. Do that." Molly muttered, pulling the door shut. She shifted gears and sped off. Sarah watched her go, but didn't wave. She walked slowly through the open door into her dorm.