



A Sexy, Little Catch-22

by ***

A Sexy, Little Catch-22



Dedicated to ***, for inspiring so many light bulb moments,
and ***, for never allowing me to mistake the edge of the rut for the horizon, if I may
borrow the colloquialism. I love you both; thank you for your unending support.



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For most of our adolescent lives, we are bombarded with conflicting instructions and downright frightening warnings about sex. Have it; don't have it; being a virgin is good; being a virgin only means that nobody wants you. There are those who say that you should wait until you're married; but then again, just as many tell you to have as much sex as you can, as soon as you can, and as often as you can. With friends, family, the media, half a dozen religions, and the entire general public all positively screaming for you to heed their advice, you get to a point where you've not the faintest idea which sources you should trust and which you should promptly disregard. Eventually it seems that the only safe route would be to assume the fetal position and wait for a single verdict to be reached. I recommend getting comfortable though, because you will be waiting for a very, very long while.

This all starts in the seventh grade; or at least it did where I went to middle school: Sex Ed. The phrase alone was enough to start us all giggling. From kindergarten until eighth grade, I attended a very small, private, Christian school, and our Sex Ed. program was slightly different from the stereotypical public school assemblies about how to recognize herpes and properly roll a condom onto a banana. At my school, a comically decrepit, old woman would screech her way through a power point on the moral dangers of sex, and we would all double over in the chapel pews, biting our knuckles to stifle our laughter so as to avoid the withering stares of our rather withered speaker.

Another major difference between ours and other schools: our teachers could get away with encouraging us to "stay pure," and "wait till the wedding night," which always seemed like such inflammatorily religious instructions in the public schools. On the other hand, if they ever so much as mentioned the word "condom" or gave any other reference

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to the dirty little details of what actually goes on during sex, then the parents would naturally assume our lecturer had entered the room throwing condoms into the air, proclaiming that sex is fabulous and we should all get ourselves laid as quickly as possible by individuals of the most questionable hygienic status that we could manage to find. Knowing that this is how many of the parents would react, I may suffice it to say that their resulting fit of protest could make you think the principal himself had shown us pornography on the old projector screen that hung in the chapel right next to the twelve foot crucifix.

As a result, Sex Ed. in our school was not in any way related to learning about sex itself. Our teachers and even the shriveled, little guest lecturer could not breathe a word of real sex education because of the possibility that it might offend some poor little soccer mom who looked as though she only had kids because no one had ever bothered to inform her of where babies really came from. Thus, while our friends in other schools were given practical information, such as how to put on a condom and keep from becoming mobile STD incubators, we were kept in the dark and ordered not to have “sexual relations” outside of wedlock, lest God punish us with the clap. However, when we asked for a definition of this unfamiliar term, the fault lines in our aged speaker’s face deepened with what we assumed was embarrassment for not knowing the answer herself.

“That’s a conversation you really ought to have with your parents,” was her default answer. Yeah right, what self respecting twelve year-old is going to go home and ask mom and dad where gonorrhoea comes from?

Due to these unfortunate restrictions, our little gremlin of an instructor could tell us that, “Abstinence is the way to go, kids!” but was very limited in what rationale she

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could give us as to why. Since parents viewed an educated individual teaching their kids the basic facts of sex as wildly inappropriate, our teachers instead tried to frighten us into abstinence with religion. Once our initial giggling over the word “sex” had subsided, I must admit, they weren’t completely unsuccessful. Some students took to wearing purity rings and, if I remember correctly, a select few even held hands and cried at the end of a particularly frightening assembly about premarital sex being a gateway to hell. I distinctly recall rolling my eyes as one girl swore that she would remain a virgin until the very survival of the species and God himself demanded otherwise.

I supposed the individuals responsible for writing these lectures figured that, if most of the gruesome facts and images were off limits, regular old religion ought to scare us sufficiently enough. Using the Christian atmosphere unfairly to their advantage, they did far more than simply drill it into our heads that sex was a fantastic way to get pregnant and pick up a whole slew of diseases we couldn’t even spell, much less identify. Oh no, it was far more than that. Sex was the grease on the slippery slope that would send us right to the ***e circle of hell as all the prostitutes and sexual deviants. This was the truth according to our teachers and lecturer (who, you should note, were several middle aged women whose practical knowledge of sex was sketchy at best).

Now giving my alma matter the benefit of the doubt, I am sure that their original intent to teach us about protecting our virtue was very honorable and good; but honestly, their method of doing so caused the only information I retained from these assemblies to be that if you had sex even just once, the next thing you know you’d be knocked up, a veritable cesspool of sexually transmitted diseases, and out on the streets living in poverty and squalor since, of course, your parents would have cut you off financially, and

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any boy whose morals would allow him to take your virginity would also allow him to run out on you and your illegitimate bastard child. As if that weren't enough, you'd be sent straight to hell too for engaging in such immoral conduct. So who could blame us for feeling so terrified that we swore eternal chastity before God and everyone else in the immediate vicinity? When you're twelve years-old and hearing about sex for the first time, the only concepts that tend to really stick are the genuinely frightening ones like bastard children and spending the afterlife in hell with only the prostitutes for company.



Just like all good things, though, middle school eventually came to an end, and I left my small group of companions for the great unknown: public high school. Once there I was astonished to find that what the rest of the world has to say about sex as soon as they're sure no soccer moms or Christian school teachers are listening is another story entirely. I honestly have no idea why people criticize the public school system so harshly, because it wasn't until my freshman year of high school that I learned a vast number of facts that didn't get taught in private school. Boys, for example, have to lose their virginity as quickly as possible. It's not a question of sex drive (well okay, it is that too), but more a matter of status. If a guy still possesses his virginity by the time he graduates high school, then my God something must be wrong with him! Maybe he is that creepy guy with the greasy mustache who ogles girls' breasts and breathes too loudly. You know the boy I'm talking about: the one who is socially awkward in the non-endearing way and who no girl would have allowed to touch her even if her life depended on it. I also discovered that the reason for a boy never having had sex cannot simply be that he is shy or, God forbid, respectful. According to the laws of high school,

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still-existent virginity at age eighteen invariably indicates that something is seriously the matter with the poor boy. The possibilities for this unknown defect are endless, yet in every case the fault will always be his. What I learned next pertained to the girls who, unfortunately, receive more mixed signals on the matter than any of us knew what to do with. It's the Catch-22 of female adolescent life, and the options are thus: you may refuse to have sex and find yourself branded as either an insufferable prude or the girl who is such an unfortunate mix of awkward and ugly that no boy wanted you; or you may go ahead and have all the sex you want, but be prepared to have a nice, big stamp slapped across your forehead that reads, "Easy," or any number of other words that are uncomplimentary towards the sexually active female population. It hardly seems fair, but then again it would not truly be high school unless it caused each of us as much mental, emotional, and moral distress as possible.

For those first three years of high school, my best friend (let us call her ***) and I agonized over the rules of this awful little catch more avidly than any real study material. This really is saying something when you stop to consider the fact that *** was among those select few students who considered exhaustive studying as a relaxing activity. Consequently, we became quite efficient in the practice of applying the "Easy" sticker to any girls we knew who dared to choose the latter of the two options. *** and I could go for hours on ethical tirades about the stupidity of those girls who would spread their legs for any boy who claimed to love them (you didn't even want to get us started on the moral fiber of the boys who would take advantage of such girls). On the occasions that *** and I discovered a female friend of ours had lost her virginity, we would shake our heads in our morally righteous indignation and state how very disappointed we were

in her decisions. Don't judge us too harshly though. However misguided and unforgiving we might have seemed, this was our way of protecting ourselves and the girls we cared about most. In our eyes, a boy couldn't hurt you if you refused to give him every part of yourself (or at least he wouldn't have the ability to harm you as thoroughly as if you had). However, it was not until the summer after my junior year that I was finally given my own practical examination on the subject to see whether or not I would be as ethically upstanding as I had always claimed I would be.



That summer there was a boy who, for his sake and mine, shall have his name changed to *** for the duration of this narrative. *** and I had quite a few mutual friends, yet we never spoke and hardly ever had reason to even acknowledge one another's presence. As the school year drew to a close, *** dragged me along to a party hosted by a friend of hers. I vehemently opposed this since I did not personally know the host, but I did personally detest several of the girls who would be in attendance. To keep from making myself the party's token bitch, however, I put on a smile and did my best to mingle and also ignore the earsplitting shrieks and horse-like laughter of the scantily clad blondes whom I so passionately loathed. *** further tested my ability to keep on a cheerful face when she attempted to set me up with the host, ***, who, though very sweet, was of little interest to me.

The party continued this way for several hours until finally two events occurred which greatly improved my mood: first, the blondes announced that they were leaving (as if they expected us all to fall on our knees begging them to stay), and second, a new group of boys arrived. Among them was *** whom I recognized from a class we had shared

the previous semester. Much to my surprise and delight, the already present and newly arriving boys expressed their vehement approval of the exodus of shrieking girls who, according to one boy, had, “obviously never learned how to shut the hell up.” And on that note, the party really got started.

I quickly earned the approval of the boys, *** especially, when I embraced their choice of loud country music, to which the blondes had put up such a loud and high pitched objection that the boys had had no choice but to hand over control of the stereo, lest they be consumed by the angry, shrieking tide of estrogen (which, as we all know, men fear above all else). Around one in the morning though, *** decided it was really time we headed back to her house for the night. I regretfully agreed. We bid the boys goodnight and set about extracting our cars from the dozen or so crammed into the driveway. *** drove straight to her house while I made a detour in order to drop off another friend of ours. As the girl dozed quietly in the passenger seat, my thoughts were anything but tranquil and lingered on *** back at the party.

When I finally arrived at ***’s house, I slipped inside and up the stairs to her bedroom where she sat cross-legged on the bed, her laptop propped on her knees.

“*** left his number on your wall,” she said. My eyes widened at first with surprise and pleasure before I laughed at the sadness of the fact that the first thing we did upon getting home from a party was log on to Facebook.

“Really?” I asked, attempting to feign disinterest.

“Mhmm,” she said with a tone that matched mine and a look that clearly inferred she saw straight through it. “He said it was good to meet you and that you should call sometime.”

“Think I could log on for a sec?” I asked as casually as I could, but she smiled widely. It was never any use trying to hide my feelings from ***; she had an uncanny ability to figure out whatever I happened to be thinking.

“I can just read you the number, if you like,” she offered, still grinning.

“Yes please,” I said, blushing and returning her smile.

After I had safely stored ***’s number in my phone, *** and I passed the hours until dawn laughing about the blondes who had made such thorough asses of themselves and discussing the various boys who had been attendance at ***’s party. When the sun started to rise, *** finally dozed off, leaving me to contemplate ***. Obviously he left his number just to be friendly, I told myself. He probably does that to every girl he meets, I thought, attempting to quash the hopeful feelings stirring in my chest. I continued this silent self-berating until I too slipped into an exhausted sleep.

I never called ***. For this I was grateful since ***, to my knowledge, never made any attempt to call me. Weeks passed and I found that this really didn’t trouble me too much. On the contrary, there was another boy who had stolen into the forefront of my thoughts. Yet before I launch into the next phase of this story, allow me to first take you back to my sophomore year. I was fifteen and one of about five girls enrolled in a history class called [title of history course]. The class title alone provides enough explanation as to why there were only five girls in a class of thirty. I sat next to the wall on the far side of the room and in front of a senior boy whom I considered to be the most beautiful creature I had ever laid eyes on. His name was ***.

*** and I rarely spoke, if ever. It wasn’t that I didn’t wish to speak to him, but I was far too timid to strike up a conversation without any encouragement. Add the fact

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that I was a lowly sophomore and he a gorgeous, unapproachable senior, and my ability to even produce intelligible sounds became severely limited. I therefore sought other, less direct methods to nurse my crush on him.

*** always arrived just as the bell rang, and every day as he walked past to get to his seat, he would look down and make eye contact with me for just a moment. I quickly found myself looking forward to those precious seconds more than any other part of the day. It was a good thing that *** sat at the desk directly behind mine, for I fear that if he had sat anywhere else I would have spent entire class periods staring unapologetically at him. Occasionally I would turn myself in my chair so that my back faced the wall which was normally to my right, and I pretended to look out the window at the back of the classroom so that I could steal glances at *** as he took notes. Yet whenever I did this, he was always looking directly at me when I chanced a look at his face. Mortified at his having caught me, I would blush horribly and immediately look down at my hands. But all too soon, the semester ended, taking with it my only occasions for seeing the object of my affections.

Returning to the present, I am seventeen and have not seen *** since our class together ended. You therefore may understand my surprise when one particularly sultry day that summer, I received a message from none other than *** himself. I must say, I find it incredibly irritating when a boy flirts with you via Facebook (or any internet related media, really), but in his case I found myself feeling unusually forgiving.

“You should know, I thought you were really cute in that class,” he said, completely out of the blue. Instantly I started to grin like an idiot and found myself prancing around the house happier than a manic Stepford wife. With this encouragement

I finally confessed to him the crush I had harbored two years previously. After that, we simply kept talking.

I had liked boys before ***. I had liked quite a few boys, actually. However, I had never encountered one who could make as positively, well, giddy as *** did. For the next few days we sent each other messages, and I couldn't help but adopt a big, goofy grin whenever I heard from him. Finally *** told me that I should text him sometime so that we could talk when we weren't both glued to our computers.

"I don't have your number," I had said, expecting him to simply send it to me.

"If you want me, you'll figure it out," he said. This was not at all what I had expected. "Consider it a test. I'll be waiting."

For ten seconds I stared at the computer screen, completely horrorstruck. Well, so much for that, I thought. He's never going to hear from me again. Then, however, the light bulb above my head flashed on, and I smiled as I realized my salvation: ***. Not only was *** incredibly intelligent, but she was also incredibly well connected, not to mention crafty. Put those three qualities together and she became my solution to virtually every conundrum.

"I need a really weird favor, no questions asked," my text to her read. I can only imagine what ran through her mind as she considered what crazed thing I might ask her to do. I quickly relayed my plight to her, knowing that *** had never met ***, nor did she have any idea who he was, but having complete faith in her ability to locate his cell phone number for me anyways. Sure enough, within minutes she sent a message back with the number included.

"Do I pass?" I inquired of the voice which answered.

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“You do,” he replied. “Look at you.” I could almost hear the smile in his voice, and I grinned in response.

As I said, I had liked boys before. Yet the moment one of them happened to return my interest, he immediately ceased to fascinate me. In fact, I would nearly always turn viciously on the poor boy, becoming horribly irritated with him for having suddenly become boring. The more I talked to ***, the more I dreaded this phenomenon would repeat itself; however, it did not. He challenged and intrigued me over and over, just as he had by forcing me to find his number instead of merely giving it to me. Nearly every word he spoke took me by surprise, and I found myself becoming even more mesmerized by him than when I spent entire class periods trying to sneak glances at his face.

This continued for several weeks during which time I was spending the first month of summer at my grandparents’ cottage in Northern Michigan. I would fall asleep on the sunny dock, phone in hand, and wake up eagerly to its chiming with words from ***. Some nights I stayed awake until the sun came up so that I might talk to him a few hours longer. I smiled all the time, especially when I read and reread the messages in which he begged for me to come home sooner. I laughed more easily than I ever had, particularly when he proclaimed his undying affections for me; and I could feel myself becoming lovesick, particularly when he called me by his various terms of endearment (Honey Bunny was my favorite, and if you’ve seen Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, you understand why). Eventually *** had me breaking my number one survival rule when it came to boys: don’t ever, for any reason, get attached.

When I finally returned home, I immediately called *** who was home from college for the summer. The entire six-hour car ride home I had envisioned myself

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running to meet him the moment I arrived, but to my dismay, this time he did not answer me. Days passed and I became more and more anxious that I had not heard from him. I felt like the pathetic, insane girl who couldn't take a hint. You know the kind of pathetic girl to which I am referring: the girl who goes out of her mind agonizing over where the boy could possibly be, what he might be doing, and why in God's name he doesn't answer his phone. There is absolutely nothing more frustrating (or unnerving) than being made to feel so desperately frantic and generally pitiable.

When I did finally speak to him, he seemed less than enthused to talk to me. I deftly said that I was running late for some unspecified event so that I could both end his apparent boredom and extract myself while I still possessed the slightest semblance of dignity. I could not understand what had changed. I mentally reviewed every inflection of every word of every conversation. Nothing seemed offensive, and no particular instance seemed to spark the change in his behavior towards me. I was baffled, heartbroken, and I felt horribly foolish for having grown so attached to the bastard in the first place.

After that I swore that I would not contact him in any way. If he was going to make me feel this wretched with his indifference, then I at least would not make matters worse for myself by giving him further opportunity to reject me. I quickly stopped smiling, I rarely laughed, and I grew excruciatingly lonely as *** had gone abroad for the summer, and I generally refused to go out with any of my other friends for I did not wish them to see me in this state of depression. As more time passed, though, I started forcing myself to go out again. Partly I wanted to spite *** (whether he was aware of it or not) and partly because I felt less pathetic whilst surrounded by other people.



You may at this point wonder why I bothered to detail my brief encounter with *** at the beginning of the summer. Well, my dear reader, I will tell you. One afternoon I was driving rather aimlessly with a friend when my cell phone chimed. As the responsible teen driver that I am (here I will pause for laughter at the idea of a responsible teen driver), I asked my friend (***antha, though everyone called her ***) to see who the message was from.

“Who’s ***?” *** asked. I nearly ran a stop sign in my complete and utter surprise.

“Um...a boy I met at a party a while back,” I answered uneasily. “What does he want?” I wondered aloud, more to myself than for the benefit of my companion.

“He says he’s bored. He wants to know if you’ll meet him downtown. Gee, should I go home so you can meet your hot date?” she laughed and winked pointedly.

“Absolutely not,” I said. “You’re coming with me.”

*** sent him my reply, along with notice that I was bringing a friend. I found myself feeling sincerely grateful for her presence as my heart palpitated uncomfortably at the idea of meeting *** alone.

As it turned out, however, *** was far from alone. When we pulled into the lot he had specified, he leaned against the back of his truck taking a drag from a cigarette and talking to several other boys who leaned out the windows of a second, smaller car. I pulled into a spot alongside the smaller car, further away from ***’s truck. After putting the car into park, though, I was thoroughly uncertain as to what I should do next. I neither knew nor recognized anyone besides ***, and I was mortified at the mere idea of

getting out of the car, only to stand there awkwardly listening to the boys' conversation. So there I sat, *** laughing quietly at my look of panic until ***'s face appeared in my open window.

“Hey,” he said. An anticlimactic greeting, yet in his voice it sounded like an incredibly suave thing to say. I had also forgotten how attractive I found him, which did nothing to improve my anxious state.

“Come on, Kat,” *** said to me as she stepped out of the car. She and I spent the next hour or so sitting on the back of my silver impala while *** shifted between talking with us and talking cars with his friends. Neither she nor I dared to enter that particular conversation, for nothing good could come of us embarrassing ourselves with our lack of knowledge about the internal workings of one truck versus another.

When the sun began to set, ***'s friends bid him farewell and departed, leaving the ground around where their car had been littered with cigarette butts. *** then turned back to us and said that he too ought to get going.

“I'll give you a call, and we can chill sometime,” he said, looking directly at me. Normally I would cringe at an invitation to “chill” from anyone, but as it was coming from ***, the only response I could manage was an uncharacteristically quiet, “Alright.” He smiled at my response and with that got into his truck, lit another cigarette, and drove off.

In all honesty, ***'s promise to call was not one I expected him to make good on. My thoughts were so consumed with the promises that *** had already broken, that I did not really feel any boy was capable of following through on his word. Therefore imagine my surprise when the very next evening, *** did.

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When my phone rang, I had already decided to barricade myself in the house for the evening and was lounging on my bed with a book, hair up, clad in ratty sweats. My heart skipped sadly at the sound, hoping for ***; I was surprised, but not altogether disappointed to find that it was ***.

“Let’s go get something to eat,” he said. I half sat up on the bed, deliberating over whether or not to accept his invitation, for want of a less formal description. I was on the verge of saying no thanks when I thought of ***, who was most likely not going to spend his evening alone at home. In a surge of defiance I told *** that yes I would love to join him; I was certain he did not consider this a date, but, thinking of ***, I said to myself, “He doesn’t need to know that.” On that note I immediately changed out of my sweats and into my favorite jeans and the tallest heels I owned.

Shortly thereafter, ***’s truck pulled into my driveway. I could hear the music blaring from the cab even as I locked the front door. Climbing into the passenger seat, I already felt slightly foolish for my choice of footwear and hoped we wouldn’t go anywhere that might require walking over uneven surfaces.

“Hey,” he said once again as he fiddled with the radio. “I know this great place, you’ll love it.”

“Alright,” I too said again. With that *** put the truck in reverse and eased it smoothly out of my driveway. We drove for a few minutes in silence. I hadn’t the faintest idea what to say to him and already felt wretched for having rashly agreed to this outing. I started in surprise when *** turned onto the expressway, not having expected that we would be traversing any great distance.

“Do you plan on telling me where we’re going?” I asked.

“It’s this little bar. It’s sort of in the middle of nowhere, but I think you’ll like it,” he replied casually. A bar conveniently located in the middle of nowhere. I half considered pounding on the windows to catch the attention of another driver and convey to him or her that I was being kidnapped and possibly taken to my death. I half considered it before I realized that, for the first time in weeks, *** was not at the forefront of my thoughts. ***’s presence undoubtedly being the reason behind this, I decided I would take my chances and settled in for the drive.

After half an hour, we finally pulled into the unpaved lot of a little dive bar in the middle of nowhere, just as promised. I sighed when I opened my door and looked down: so much for avoiding uneven surfaces. *** chuckled as he watched me teeter towards the entrance, and I playfully smacked his arm, saying that it was his fault for not warning me. After that the conversation became less strained, and we sat down at a greasy little table in the corner of the bar. The general atmosphere had already caused me to give up any hope that my clothes might survive the evening without smelling of smoke, so I didn’t mind terribly when he lit a cigarette. I declined, however, when he held the pack across the table gesturing that I should take one.

“How do you know about this place?” I asked, referring to the general splendor of grease and the stench of cigarettes.

“My uncle comes here a lot. He’s a friend of the owners,” *** replied simply. Sure enough, a middle aged woman called ***’s name just then, and she bustled over to ruffle his hair fondly. She kept a hand on his shoulder and stood with her weight over one leg, her hip jutting out to the side, and looked expectantly from ***’s face to mine and back again. Understanding her meaning, *** introduced me. When the woman had finished

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exclaiming how wonderful it was to meet any friends of ***, she asked for our orders, and *** requested two burgers. Normally I would have been thoroughly annoyed with someone speaking for me that way, but in this case I chose not to object since it meant not having to handle one of the bar's menus, which frankly looked quite a few times greasier than the table.



The evening wore on and I eventually found myself able to talk and laugh with *** quite easily, so long as the conversation did not veer towards his truck (which he very obviously loved more than any woman in his life). It was dark by the time we left, but, according to ***, still far too early to head home just yet. He drove in the general direction of home, taking a very circuitous route so as to take up more time. On the way he shuffled through dozens of mixed CDs crammed into an old, beat up case. I had mentioned at dinner that country was not my favorite genre of music, and I couldn't help but laugh in response to his enthusiasm as he played me all of his favorite songs in an attempt to change my mind.

When we finally got back into town, he parked in a nearly vacant lot and rolled the already cracked windows down the rest of the way. The air was still warm with the heat of the day radiating up from the blacktop. *** again offered me the pack of cigarettes but this time insisted when I shook my head.

"It's a social thing," he attempted to persuade me. "Come on," he spoke through a seductively crooked grin. "Just so you can say you have."

I took a cigarette to appease him. Putting it to my lips, I leaned forward to meet the lighter he held up for me.

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“Inhale,” he nearly whispered the word. I looked up at him as I did so, the light from the small flame casting an eerie shadow on his crooked smile.



After *** drove me home, I cautiously slipped inside the front door. Certain that no one was around, I hurried to my room, pulling off my clothes as I went in an attempt to hide the scent of smoke. Shutting the door to my bedroom as silently as possible, I seized a bottle of sweetly scented perfume from the dresser and doused my shirt and jeans in a fine mist before throwing them into my hamper, which I then also sprayed until I was satisfied that the odor of cigarettes was thoroughly masked. I felt completely exhausted, and with *** gone my thoughts soon wound their way back to ***. As I crawled into bed I set my phone on a nearby table, wishing he would once again call to wish me a goodnight and tell me that he would dream of me as he once so often had; I blinked once and a tear fell onto my pillow as I accepted that he would not.



For the next few days I heard from neither *** nor ***, and I feared that I was going to grow used to this feeling of abandonment. Had it not been for ***, I feel rather certain that I would have lost myself in a debilitating depression that summer. *** had graduated along with *** that June, and with *** still gone, she rapidly became my closest friend.

I am not a person who trusts easily, especially when it comes to individuals of my own sex. Anyone who has interacted with girls between the ages of eleven and eighteen knows what happens when one girl goes to one another and says, “Don’t tell anyone this,

but...” However, there was something about ***’s easygoing nature and ability as a listener that made me very inclined to trust her; I soon found myself sharing thoughts with her that I dared not speak aloud to anyone else. I detailed for her all of the disappointments *** had caused me, and I also described to her my experience with ***. It was nice having someone to confide in. Of course I could still talk to *** via phone or internet, but something about the nature of these relationships made me hesitate to share all of the details with my best friend, for she would undoubtedly expect me to stick to the strict moral code that we both theoretically observed. As such, it was ***, rather than ***, whom I confided in when I finally did hear from ***.



When I left ***’s house a few days later, I drove with the windows down and the radio blaring at an uncomfortable volume. The hot air mingled with his scent on my skin, and I still tasted the flavor of cigarettes that hung on his lips. When I walked in the door, I threw my keys onto the kitchen table and walked into the living room. There I sat down on the piano bench so that I faced the wide window. Eventually my phone buzzed quietly in my pocket, breaking my reverie. It was ***.

“How did things go with ***?” she asked slyly. I had nearly forgotten that I had told *** all about ***’s request.

“It went...fine,” I replied. My tone sounded confused, even to my own ears.

“Did you have sex with him?” she asked. One thing I respected about ***: she was not one to beat around the bush. If she wanted to know something, she would ask you directly.

“Yes,” I said the word slowly, fearing her response.

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“***!” she shrieked.

“Don’t judge me!” I said with real pleading in my voice. I wasn’t sure if it was *** I spoke to in that instance or ***.

“I’m not,” ***’s voice was even, and, though my natural instinct was to assume that this was a lie, I could not help but believe her. “Were you safe?”

“Yes,” I said again.

“Well that’s good,” and with that she changed the subject, understanding that I did not wish to speak about it anymore just then.

As *** talked, I could not help recalling the conversation that had brought me to my present place on the hard, little piano bench.

“Would you be interested in a one night thing?” *** had asked me.

“I can’t tell if you’re being serious or not,” I replied, wondering if he was playing some cruel trick on me.

“Yeah, I guess.” He backtracked, “Whatever though, it doesn’t matter.” My breathing sped up. *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

“Oh. I don’t know...”

“We could use my truck...It’s warm out,” he enticed.

“I...would rather not be outside. I’d be too afraid of getting caught.”

Thump.

“I could come home from work for an hour or two; my parents should be out.”

Thump.

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“That works.” My cheeks felt suddenly cold; maybe that’s what it feels like when all the blood leaves them. I was vaguely curious but couldn’t feel my legs in order to stand and locate a mirror to check.

Thump. Thump.

“One o’clock?” he asked

“Sure. I’ll come by then.” My mouth felt rather dry all of a sudden.

Thump.

“I like this,” he said. “It’s like a date for sex.”

“I think they have a word for that,” I whispered.

“Nah, it’s not like that,” he reassured. “It’s just an experiment between friends.”

Thump. Thump. THUMP.

Heartbeats are a funny thing. They speak to us; they tell us secrets; they say aloud in a rhythmic, universal language what we will not admit to ourselves. We can always lie, though; we can pretend to be calm, fain composure, and even command ourselves not to feel afraid. We can always lie; our heartbeats cannot. That *thump, thump, thumping* will always pound out the truth in our chests whether or not we want to hear it. I didn’t want to hear the truth beating in my chest, because I did not want to acknowledge what I was agreeing to. Just then, ***’s face flashed in front of my eyes, and the pounding rhythm changed slightly. It was still frighteningly loud, but now the rhythm was disjointed, almost ragged with pain. *** had abandoned me, and ***’s interest made me feel marginally less wretched for it. Why then shouldn’t I just give in?

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And so I sat on the piano bench with the phone still pressed to my ear. ***'s voice eased me back to the present, and I licked my lips: the foreign taste ***'s kiss had left there was beginning to dissipate



We learn that the first time you have sex it must conform to some arbitrary definition of ideal. I broke that rule; my first time was far from perfect. The room was not lit by a thousand candles, no wilting rose petals littered the floor, and we did not spend the preceding hours gazing lovingly into each other's eyes. In fact, we were not in love at all; he did not fill me with feelings of safety, and I certainly did not trust him. Strangely though, I did not, and still do not, regret it.

According to the idealistic definition, my first time wasn't perfect (well, alright according to *any* definition it wasn't perfect); but then again, I wouldn't have wanted it to be. One other major concept that I found foisted upon me by the school's extracurricular curriculum was that notion that the first time you have sex it absolutely must be the epitome of romance. Again, you know what I am talking about: a fire in the fireplace, a bearskin rug draped over the floor, and every detail painstakingly planned. Yet that summer, I very slowly began to realize that all of the rules and requirements for losing your virginity have become so twisted that their original intent got lost somewhere along the way. If that summer taught me anything, it was that the crazed lecturer at my old private school and the awful double standards of high school actually shared a common purpose: they were, originally at least, meant to protect you.

I may only speak for my own sex when I say that losing your virginity is, frankly, scary as hell. It is awkward, uncomfortable, and, let's face it, sometimes downright

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painful. Hence, in private school the teachers tried to scare us into abstinence with religion, and in public school the girls were threatened with social retribution. What I had to discover on my own was that the purpose of all this is nothing more than to protect girls from having to feel alone and exposed as I did (for obviously I chose to learn it the hard way, as I so often do). However, the boys do quite a nice job of confusing this message by saying that we are unwanted and not want-able if we do not have sex with them. Thanks so much for that one, boys.

***'s merciful understanding showed me that the threatened repercussions of the sexed up little Catch-22 need not apply to me if I didn't want them to. What I still feared though was that ***, whose opinion I could not help but value, would still apply the rules to me as we had to so many girls before. Now I know what you're thinking: if she really is your friend, she would never even dream of judging you in such a way...would she? To be honest, I wasn't sure. However, I WAS sure that I was far too terrified of her thinking me a dirty slut to find out. So for seven full months, I kept my mouth closed. In all conversations where sex was brought up, I avoided eye contact and would only give a noncommittal "Mmm" when she voiced her disapproval of the morals of our friends who were engaging in that kind of behavior. As a result our friendship slowly deteriorated as I kept my secrets from her.

At the end of seven months, *** and I were to be found sitting across from each other at a table large enough for four in a local Starbucks. From the perspective of anyone observing us, we clearly needed the space to accommodate the vast numbers of emotional bricks that prevented us from actually speaking or making eye contact.

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Realizing with muted horror that this standoff could possibly mark the end of one of my most valued friendships, I finally decided to confess.

“***, I am going to tell you something,” I began, without the faintest idea of whether or not I had the gumption to actually finish the statement. “I..”

“Slept with ***?” she finished my sentence for me.

I stared at her. If I had ever doubted ***’s ability to understand my thoughts, I never would again.

“Knowing that...well, a lot of things make sense now.” *** looked at me seriously for a moment and continued, “You know I don’t care, right? I love you no matter what. All I need to know is that this was your choice and that you’re okay.” She waited for my response.

“Yes, it was my choice,” I said. “I mean...I felt horribly depressed at the time and *** just made me feel slightly less like throwing myself in front of moving traffic.” I laughed and *** smiled, understanding that I wasn’t entirely serious, as she always could.

“You’re okay now, though?” she asked. I nodded.

From the perspective of anyone observing us, the large table was no longer necessary to support the invisible barrier. Within moments we were huddled together across the table, talking as animatedly as we had the night I slept over after the party. I felt incredibly foolish for having kept secrets from ***, fearing that she would think less of me if she knew all that had happened while she was away that summer.

In school, as in life, we learn many things. Much of it, such as how to find the equation of the line tangent to whatever the next dozen symbols mean, can promptly be discarded upon graduation. The basic premise of this sexy, little Catch-22, however, is

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one lesson that ought to be remembered. These guidelines exist to encourage girls to wait for someone they trust. They have, unfortunately, been so twisted out of their original intent by gossiping snobs and boys who were desperate to get into some poor girl's pants by any means necessary, that this original message is nearly always forgotten. If you retain anything from your school years though, let it be this: losing your virginity is frightening. Girls in particular are told by religion, family, and a myriad of other sources that postponing sex is for the best. We are rarely, however, given a satisfactory reason as to why. Well, ladies, allow me to tell you. When I slept with ***, I did so because I desperately wanted to feel less alone. I had no trust for *** and therefore felt far more frightened than I needed to be. When we are told to wait, it is not said for the sake of being commanding; it is said to protect us from feeling exposed and frightened. However, if I had the opportunity to take it back, to wait for someone who loved me, I wouldn't. It took me some time to recover from *** and *** both, but the experience is now part of who I am. It also gave me *** and a thoroughly re-enforced friendship with ***. For them, I am more than grateful; because of them, when I look back on that summer, I barely remember the pain at all