

SHE GETS THE GIRL



Young Adult

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Minor Restricted
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Page	Content
1	<p>The hipster dude clutching an IPA like it's his firstborn son. ...Brendan, the bartender, too distracted to realize he's made not one but two rumless rum and Cokes.</p>
3	<p>We're barely through the door of her cramped Manayunk apartment before she's kissing me, her lips tasting like the cheese pizza and warm beer she has after every show. It's a blur of kicked-off Converse shoes and hands sliding up my waist as she pulls off my black T-shirt, the two of us stumbling across the space she escaped to after graduating last year from Central High, the public school just across the city from mine. ...Her bedsprings squeak as we tumble back onto her messy sheets, the door clicking shut behind us. ...My mom, on the other side of the city, probably half a handle of tequila deep after spending the afternoon guiltig me over "leaving her" just like Dad left us. ...I zero in on the feeling of Natalie's skin under my fingertips, her body pressed up against mine, working up the courage to pull away, to say something, when I feel her soft whisper against my lips. "I love you." I pull her closer, so wrapped up in her that I hardly register what she just said. ...My eyes fly open and my heart hammers in my chest as I jerk away, those three words bringing with them a flood of moments much different from this one. Thrown plates and screaming. My dad stooping down to say "I love you" before he got in the car and drove away, into a new life. A life without me. Never to be seen or heard from again. ...I see the question in her face illuminated in the glow of the yellow streetlight outside her window, so I quickly disguise my sudden movement by reaching out to run my fingertips along the black strap of her bra. ...I kiss her again, harder now, the kind of kiss that usually ends any conversation.</p>
8	<p>We've been together for five months and I haven't met any of your friends. Just your past hookups.</p>
10	<p>Adjacent to the coffee shop is the diner where we would hang out every Saturday in the corner booth, stealing kisses between bites of pancakes bigger than our heads.</p>
12	<p>My eyes glaze over as I pause on individual names: Melissa, Ben, Mike. Coworkers that never became more than acquaintances. People I've met working behind the bar or at school, each text chain I try to start left empty as I see how I just... lost touch with them, months passing since the last text as I ignored their questions or their offers to hang out, so busy with schoolwork and taking care of my mom I didn't have time for anything else. But I also realize most of them are... hookups. Or, I guess, potential hookups, just like Natalie said. A lot of them. Girls I flirted with just to see what would happen, knowing I could never commit to more than just this moment. Knowing I could never have more than the temporary. Some don't even have names. Brown hair, Starbucks. Freckles, pizza place. There are ten like that. Maybe more. Just some generic description of a girl followed by where I'd met her.</p>
37	<p>I'm barely past the small kitchenette and into the hall when the bathroom door flies open and I'm body-slammed by a still-wet, very shirtless, very hairy boy wearing nothing</p>

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	<p>but a small white towel. A way too small white towel. I know that because as we go tumbling to the ground, it does not cover even a single ball. I can feel the entire outline on my leg like I'm back at my first middle school dance, and Matt Paloma is grinding his little heart out on me. ... I grimace and push away as we both scramble to our feet. And... as if this entire situation couldn't get any worse, that's when I notice it. He has a boner. He tries to hide it with the tiny towel, but it's no use. "Are you kidding me, Jackson? Really?" Heather says as she pushes past me to grab his arm. Jackson. Her boyfriend. I press my back up against the wall as they slide past. She drags him across the apartment, and just before she slams the door to her room shut, she glares at me. Me! Like his boner is somehow my fault.</p>
45	<p>One of them is holding a banana and a mint. The other one is swinging around a balloon stuffed full of Ping-Pong— That's not a balloon. And those aren't mints. "Oh. My. God," I whisper, mortified as I watch the woman roll a condom down over a banana, the one in my mouth suddenly making me nauseous as I try to choke it down. ... "Free banana?" He shrugs. "Plus, you'll always know how to properly use a condom." "Yeah, I'm, like, super gay," I tell him.</p>
47	<p>We watch the woman stuff ten more Ping-Pong balls into the condom. "If he ever says he's too big, ladies, now you know. It's bullshit." She tosses it across the room like a rock star throwing a guitar pick into the audience, and it lands in the hands of a girl who absolutely did not want to receive it.</p>
48	<p>It's a ten-minute drive to his rental house in Lawrenceville, which rivals East Liberty for the most gentrified neighborhood in Pittsburgh. You can pick up a rock from a crumbling row house and throw it across the street into the private pool of a twenty-million-dollar apartment building.</p>
50	<p>"No drinking and driving." "Okay, Mom." I laugh. "I probably won't even do any drinking." "Well." He shrugs, giving me a look. "Maybe do a little drinking."</p>
52	<p>I wanted to get the Wi-Fi password from Heather this morning, but she's been giving me the cold shoulder since the boner incident with Jackson yesterday, glaring angrily in my direction every chance she gets.</p>
54	<p>I turn left and head down the street, dodging around girls in tiny black dresses and boys with water bottles filled with vodka, screaming their way to some party.</p>
55	<p>Sneak into a concert and disappear into the crowd after someone buys me a drink.</p>
57	<p>"Brie is already there, and she says there's only a keg. And like... Fireball." Ew. Gross. My mom is a certified alcoholic, and even she won't go near that stuff. ...Clearly they're about to be doomed to a night of choking down cinnamon-flavored whiskey. ... "You're twenty-one?" she asks skeptically. Up close, I see she has a nose ring. Silver. Cute.</p>

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	<p>I lean casually against the shelf next to us, the metal cool under my arm. “Depends on who’s asking.”</p> <p>She laughs, rolling her eyes. “So that’s a no.”</p> <p>“Well. What about you?” I say, leaning closer until her face is inches from mine, her hazel eyes widening as she looks up at me. “If you were behind the counter, would you give it to me?”</p> <p>...I pull away, determined to turn around and go back to my snack hunt, but then she swipes a crumpled twenty from her friend’s hand and holds it up. “Whatever. We’re desperate. We need a six-pack. Mike’s Hard, preferably. But we’ll take Seagram’s. A cider variety pack. As long as it’s fruity.”</p> <p>...There’s no sign of it. Just rows and rows of IPAs and light beer.</p> <p>...“You wouldn’t happen to have any Mike’s Hard, would you?”</p>
65	<p>I find my way into the kitchen and grab a red Solo cup off the stack. I hold it against the ice dispenser attached to the fridge and peek back at the drink selections: a keg of beer, a half-empty six-pack of Mike’s Hard, three handles of Fireball, and some cans of Coke, so it takes me a minute to realize no ice is coming out.</p> <p>“That’s busted,” a big sweaty boy says, coming up beside me with a cup filled with a brown liquid that’s probably not soda.</p>
66	<p>I head through the other doorway out of the kitchen, where a plastic beer pong table is set up in what should probably be a dining room. I always heard Cora was a killer pong player, so this seems like the best place to keep an eye out for her while also blending in.</p>
67	<p>My face immediately fills with heat, and I know it must be redder than the cup I’m holding. The room explodes with cheers and claps as a boy in an unbuttoned polo shirt takes my drink and chugs the whole thing, then spits the ball out onto the floor, barely missing my beaded sandals.</p> <p>“Is this just Coke?” He scrunches his face up at me, and I go into full panic mode.</p> <p>“What? No. It’s—” He burps, handing me the cup back before I can come up with something.</p>
71	<p>I head up, squeezing past a couple making out at the top like it isn’t the most inconvenient spot to be doing that in the entire house.</p>
75	<p>“I’m not that cool,” Alex says with an unconvincing smirk as she sips on a bottle of Mike’s Hard.</p>
77	<p>“Never have I ever been a virgin at eighteen,” Alex finishes.</p>
78	<p>Every single person in the circle is laughing at me.</p> <p>All except one.</p> <p>...“Never have I ever illegally bought alcohol for a stranger,” Cora says, narrowing her eyes at Alex, who laughs, clinks her bottle against Cora’s even though she doesn’t extend it, and then downs the rest of her hard lemonade to end the game.</p> <p>“I gotta get a refill,” Abby says.</p> <p>...“Will you get me a refill, pleeease?” she asks, flipping her empty bottle around in her hand. “I think I’m drunk enough to stomach some of Kristen’s Fireball.”</p>
81	<p>“Maybe just a bit,” Cora says, laughing as she grabs my arm and leans into me, the cinnamon scent of Fireball moving over me in a wave.</p> <p>...This isn’t Philly, and I am not a fan of strolling around after midnight in a place I am not</p>

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	even a little bit familiar with. Especially when I've hit my self-imposed two-drink limit and am definitely a bit buzzed.
87	How this night still took a precarious turn, Cora's hand sliding up my thigh only a few moments ago. Chapter 8: Molly
98	I picture how it could be, me and Cora together, walking to biology, holding hands, talking about all the things I've never gotten to talk about with anyone, a group of friends waiting for us when we arrive. I even think about kissing her. A first kiss with Cora Myers?
116	"Oh my God, Molly!" She leans across the table toward me. "I'm not asking you to suck his dick. Just ask for his number. This way you really won't care what happens." ..."She's... definitely straight," I say, trying to stall, well aware that she's got a beanie and a flannel on in eighty-degree weather, but it's not like she's got a Pride symbol tattooed on her forehead, so...
131	"Y'all want anything from inside? Beer? Cider? Cans to go?" ..."Drinking on the job was all I did for about twenty years," he says as he flips one of the burgers. "Recovering alcoholic."
133	That's a lot of food, if you're not buying mochas from the school coffee shop. And probably enough for a week's worth of booze for her. But I can't let her go back to Tommy. I can't.
143	Like my lesbian ass hasn't religiously watched the movie adaptation with Helena Bonham Carter a thousand times more than that.
169	"I. Know. Nothing. About. Rugby. Okay? I'm not one of those sporty lesbians you hear about. I literally could not hit the broad side of a barn with anything."
188	"You've never heard of Wynonna Earp? And you're... a lesbian?"
217	"Try these, too," she says from the other side of the stall door as a pair of light-washed, high-waisted Levi's come flying over the top. "They're not as tight as most of the other jeans, but they're still going to make your ass look good."
218	My face goes red. Getting undressed in front of people isn't really something I'm used to. I've never played sports, and I managed to successfully dodge PE all four years of high school by volunteering in the main office. Not that getting undressed in front of Alex should be a big deal. I mean... it's Alex. As we peel off our shirts, we face away from each other and I make sure I'm angled away from the mirror, too.
220	Her hand reaches out, landing on the purple bruise that has managed to spread the length of my torso over the last couple of days. I suck in a gasp even though her touch is as light as a feather, something about it startling me. "Sorry," she says, pulling her hand back. "I didn't know it was that bad. You should've said some—" Her voice trails off as I look down at her push-up bra, her chest rising and falling in rhythm with my breaths. Down farther, my eyes trace the soft outline of her abs, her blue underwear peeking out from unbuttoned pants. I force my eyes back up to hers, but she's not looking at my face. She's looking down at me, too. My skin flushes as her eyes scan over my stomach, across my white bra, and then up to my face.

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228	<p>“She’s got a pretty twisted view of her heritage.” Molly prods at the bulgogi with her fork. “She was adopted from South Korea and grew up in a white family in this total craphole of a town, and people were just really shitty to her....” Her voice trails off, and she cringes. “And part of me gets it. When you grow up getting called racial slurs and being pushed into thornbushes in elementary school, or shot with a BB gun on your walk home from the grocery store, I can see why you’d start hating that part of yourself and everything else associated with it.”</p>
229	<p>“No worries. I’ve had my fair share of mom-induced embarrassment.” I laugh and swing my legs back and forth under me. “My mom has gotten thrown out of quite a few Applebee’s for blacking out on their Dollarita Dollar Strawberry Margaritas.” ...“Has she always drunk a lot?” I scratch my chin. “It got way worse after my dad left, but, hey, at least the fighting stopped.”</p>
251	<p>“You’re, like... really good. I thought you told me you weren’t a ‘sporty lesbian.’”</p>
299	<p>It looks like an entirely different guy. “No fucking way,” I say, my head swiveling between the photo and present-day Jim. He pockets the phone. “Crazy what ten years of drugs and alcohol can do.” He grabs another box of potatoes off the storage shelf and drops them at my feet. “I’m sober now, thanks to a rehab up in Erie and my weekly AA meetings, but I lost it all. My friends. My family. My fiancée.”</p>
310	<p>I’m well past my two-drink limit, and we both know it. The door is still swinging shut when her lips find mine, our bodies press together, her fingers lace in my hair. All of it with a desperation that makes me feel, well... ...Her face pops into my head and I push it away, focusing instead on the feeling of Natalie’s shirt beneath my fingertips. I pull it off, and our eyes lock as she reaches up to push me lightly backward, her arms wrapping around my neck as we go stumbling back into the oversize bed, kicking our shoes off as we go. She smells like the menthol cigarette she smoked on the way over here. The Victoria’s Secret spray she keeps tucked into her guitar case. And... despite myself, I can’t help but think of the soft floral perfume Molly wears, how this one is musky and rich in all the ways hers isn’t. Natalie’s hands move down my body, her fingers quickly undoing the button of my jeans, slowly pulling down the zipper.... “Stop,” I say before I even realize I’m saying it, wrenching my mouth off hers. ...She kisses my neck, not even listening to me. I want to tell her about the plan. I want this to be different this time. “Natalie. Come on. I’m serious.” She stops, groaning as she rolls off me and stands up from the bed, crossing her arms over her chest. ...She leans forward, tugging at my T-shirt. “I mean, I haven’t seen you in a month.” I bite my lip. “But what about what I want? What if I want to talk right now?” Natalie rolls her eyes. “What? Do you want to talk about all the ways that Molly girl took my place? Or do you want to bitch about your mom’s alcoholism? Like, come on, Alex. Opening up is never going to be your thing.”</p>
329	<p>“Miraculously, there isn’t a scratch on her. No one else was involved in the crash, but she was heavily intoxicated at the time of the accident and clocked in... well above the legal limit.”</p>

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331	<p>“Is this... a normal occurrence? How long has she been an alcoholic?”</p> <p>“I... she...” I stammer, struggling to string words together, struggling to admit it. “A while,” I finally say.</p>
369	<p>Her lips barely graze mine, but somehow they manage to set my whole body on fire. I reach for her, but before I can even pull her closer, she lunges forward, knocking me back into the shelves. A few books fall onto the floor with scattered thumps, but she doesn’t stop kissing me. I wrap my arms around her, my hands grabbing on to her hips as I pull her body up against mine. I hear her heels hit the floor, and then her hands are sliding up my neck, into my hair. There isn’t a single inch of space between us, but somehow she still doesn’t feel close enough.</p> <p>I’ve kissed... plenty of people, but it has never been like this. The floor and the ceiling and the stacks of books all melt away, everything fading except for the two of us, the feel of her sequined dress beneath my hands, my heart hammering so hard in my chest that I’m sure she can feel it.</p> <p>When we eventually pull apart, she rests her forehead up against mine, and a small smile dances onto her lips as she sways back and forth in my arms. “You know, you never told me what step five is,” she says.</p> <p>...“See? I told you my plan would work.”</p> <p>“Shut up.” She laughs and reaches out to grab the collar of my T-shirt, tugging me into another kiss.</p> <p>And for once I actually do.</p>

Profanity	Count
Ass	19
Bitch	3
Dick	1
Fuck	30
Piss	4
Shit	55