

On the Verge Writing Contest 2023, Second-Place Fiction Winner

By Eva Haas

Slurpees

“You should go to Planned Parenthood,” Jess said.

“No way.”

She reached over and rubbed my knee. “It’ll make you feel better.”

“What if it’s something bad?” I said. “What then?”

“Then at least we’ll know.”

I folded my knees up to my chest and wrapped my arms around them. I felt like a sulky kid. Jess had her head tilted to the side, searching my face.

“Have you told Tyler?” she asked.

“No.”

“Are you – are you planning to?”

I shook my head.

“I can go with you,” she said. “I really think you need to call. And it could still be nothing.”

A lump rose in my throat.

It had been hard enough to even tell Jess. She had never liked Tyler that much anyway. I wanted to come to her with a better story – I knew she was curious because I’d told her how insistent Tyler was. I’d finally let him go down on me like he’d been asking for weeks, and when I woke up the next day I went to the bathroom and found weird white bumps all over me.

Jess scooped over on the couch to wrap her arm around my shoulder. I sniffled. “Do you think this is the grossest thing I’ve ever told you?”

She elbowed me. “It’s not gross.”

“I’m just... I mean, come on. Do you?”

“You’ve told me a lot over the years,” Jess said. She swung her gaze up to the ceiling. “The Great Clog of 2013 comes to mind...”

“Hey! That’s not my fault. I had food poisoning.”

“Just don’t worry about it, babe. I’ve heard worse.” She looked back at me. “And I’m really glad you told me.”

My eyes welled all of a sudden. I looked away. “Stop being so nice about this. It’s so dumb.”

“No way,” Jess said, squeezing me. “We’ll figure it out.”

I didn’t reply. My throat still felt full. Instead I just leaned into her and she rubbed my back in silence.

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The next day, Tyler was at my locker before homeroom.

“Rough night?” he asked as I approached. I didn’t even have the energy to scowl. I was wearing one of my dad’s flannels and shapeless jeans. Tyler took hold of my shirt and rubbed the fabric between his fingers.

“Butch,” he said.

“Can you not?”

“What?”

I twisted my combination in and popped the lock open. “Just... all of it. I’m not in the mood today.”

“What’s got your panties in a bunch?”

I looked back at him, my hand still poised on the history textbook in my locker. He looked so proud of himself: crooked smile, bad posture, glint in the eye. His camel-colored hair flopped over his forehead. It was such a cliché.

“Seriously. What’s going on?” he asked.

I didn’t answer.

“Hey,” he said. He folded me up into a hug. The familiar smell of his deodorant and fabric softener was almost sedative. I let my eyes close, head falling against his chest. “Come over tonight,” he murmured, lips against the top of my head. “I think I have a few ideas about how to cheer you up.”

I pulled back as gently as I could. “We could watch a movie,” I said. “Tonight, I mean.”

“At your house?”

“No, like, go out. We could go to dinner.”

“Who knew you were such a romantic?” Tyler said. “We never go out to dinner.”

“I know. It might be nice.”

Tyler grinned. He narrowed his eyes like he thought I was joking. “Dinner, huh?” he said. “Where?”

“Anywhere.”

“And what about dessert?”

I paused. He was still smiling. I felt like I unstuck from my body for a second and looked at him – us – really looked. My spine prickled.

“Tyler. Seriously.”

“What?”

“Can we drop the sex stuff? Like, for a second?”

“What? Why are you pissed?”

“I’m not,” I said. Even I could hear it in my voice. “I just wanna talk about something else for once.”

“You’re not telling me it wasn’t any good, are you?” Tyler asked. The smile had finally slipped off his face. “Is that what this is about?”

“No.” I pulled my textbook out and hugged it to my chest. “I’ve gotta get to class. I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

Tyler ran a hand through his hair. “Okay. Fine.”

“I’ll see you.”

“Yeah.”

I closed my locker and walked away.

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All history class, I thought about venting to Jess.

I didn’t want her to think badly about him. He could be a bit of a dick sometimes, yeah, but he could also be sweet. And Jess didn’t always get it. He brought flowers to my house when I was sick. And I was lucky, too – lucky someone was so head over heels for me.

I had finally decided not to tell her by the time she showed up at my locker at the end of the day. I couldn’t help but let out a huff when I saw her.

“Did I not get the memo?” I said as I walked up. “Why’s everybody hanging out here?”

“What?” Jess said. “It’s just me.”

I shook my head. “Never mind. It was just... Tyler was here this morning.”

“Oh?”

“It was nothing.” I put my textbooks back and grabbed my coat. “What’s up?”

“I was wondering if you thought any more about what I said,” Jess said. “I might’ve done some Googling. There’s a walk-in spot at Planned Parenthood –”

“Could you say that any louder?”

“Sorry.” She leaned in. “There’s a walk-in spot this afternoon.”

“I feel like a spy or something,” I said. “So sneaky.”

“Seriously, Ella. Are you going to come with me or not?”

I shrugged. “I guess so.”

Jess’s eyebrows shot up. “Really?”

I had to laugh. “This is like Christmas to you.”

Jess beamed. “I’m proud of you. Let’s go.”

It was weird. As we were getting in the car and going, I hardly thought about Tyler. I hardly thought about my weird bumpy vaj. Mostly I was thinking about Jess, and Jess’s old Jeep, and how glad I was for her, and how stupid it was to be glad she was my friend while we were on our way to Planned Parenthood, and the way that the sun shined on the dust of the dash. I didn’t talk much. I just listened to Jess’s playlist.

My nerves burbled back up as we pulled into the parking lot. She offered to go in with me but I turned her down.

“It’s okay,” I said. “I’ll figure it out.”

I don’t think the receptionist noticed that my hand was shaking as I filled out the paperwork. There were a few other girls there in the chairs, one with her mom, biting her nails. I tried not to look at them as I sat down.

“Ella?” the nurse called. I looked up. She had short brown hair. For some reason I was surprised she was wearing scrubs.

I got up and followed her down the hallway.

She left the room while I was undressing. I slipped my jeans and underwear off and put the bundled pile on the chair – I didn’t know what else to do. I clambered up on the table and slid my feet into the stirrups and there I was, blaring my vagina to the whole world.

Her hands were cold even through the blue gloves. At one point I flinched. “Sorry,” she said. “I’m trying my best.” I stared at the ceiling. “It’s fine.”

Finally it was over. She stood up and pulled her gloves off. I shuffled my feet out of the stirrups and scooped into a sitting position. I was so acutely aware of being half-naked that I almost wasn’t listening when she said, “Well, it isn’t an STI.”

I was dizzy with relief.

“It’s probably just an internal yeast infection,” she said. “I can write you a script and you can get it filled anywhere.”

I just nodded. She gave me a small smile. “I’ll get going while you get dressed.”

I didn’t need to call Jess. She was just waiting in the parking lot on her phone. Seeing her across the way – feeling my own phone sitting like a brick in my pocket, knowing Tyler hadn’t called, hadn’t checked on me at all – I nearly skipped to the passenger door with my script in my hand.

“Everything okay?” Jess said as I got in. Noticing my expression, her own face split into a huge grin. “Okay. Thank God. Good.”

I didn’t say a word. I just put my seatbelt on and she rolled down her window. “So I’m thinking... Slurpees?” she asked.

I could’ve melted into the seat. “Jess. You know I love you. Right? I love you so much.”

As she pulled out of the parking lot, she looked over at me. “You’re an idiot. I love you too.”

The next day when Tyler appeared at my locker, I knew exactly what to say.