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Illicit

Friday

“You know what I was thinking about today?” Liz sits across from me in a booth at Burger King. “What if we tried pot?”

We’ve discussed this before, but never seriously. You see, Liz and I are not exactly the chilliest people. We’ve got nothing against the *idea* of smoking in general, but we both agree it’s probably not for us. Just the thought of possibly getting more paranoid or anxious than we already are on the daily is enough to put us off.

“Actually, I had the same thought today. Like, if I *were* to try it, I think I’d want to try it with you.” I really did have the thought today out of nowhere. I was just walking along, minding my own business, when I was struck by it.

“Maybe it’s a sign that we should do it.” We both laugh at that, but then Liz stops laughing and says, “What if we

did, though?”

“Wait, are you serious? I thought you didn’t want to.” From all our previous conversations, I know exactly where Liz and I stand on this issue. Fine for others, not for us.

“Seriously. Like if we just tried it one time and then we could know for sure. Who knows, maybe we’ll like it.” To my surprise, I’m not entirely against the idea. It kind of does feel like a sign, how we both thought of it today. It’s certainly not something in my regular rotation of thinking, nor in Liz’s.

“Well, if you want to, I guess I’ll do it with you.”

There’s a bit of a rush you get when you agree to something out of the ordinary. It’s pleasant but scary at the same time, like a spike of adrenaline. Of course, there’s still a lot of planning to do before anything actually happens. The following questions pop into my head all at once: *Who do I know who can get me weed? How much is weed? How much weed does one need? What else do I need? When can we do this? Where do we do this? How do I do this? Are we really doing this?* You know, just your typical thought spiral.

“I can think of exactly two people who might be able to get us weed,” I tell Liz. “One is Katie, but I bet she would want to smoke with us and I really want it to just be the two of us for this first time.”

“Yeah, I think we should wait and just tell people after we actually do it. So who’s the other person?” See, this is another part that’s making me anxious. Because the other person is—

“Sylvie.”

Sylvie is this girl I’m sort of friends with, but she’s not really in the main friend group and I kind of want her to be, but I’m so awkward that I’m bad at making that happen and I’m not sure making her my drug dealer is the solution to that issue and I’m getting off-track. Sorry, my brain does that sometimes.

“She mentioned it once or twice in passing and I mean, she’s not in our friend group, exactly, so that means she wouldn’t tell anyone.” That is actually a major plus of asking her instead of Katie. Even if Katie were okay with not smoking with us, it’d still get back to the rest of the group and we don’t want that yet.

“Okay, so do you think you could get in touch with her? I mean, my only option would be my aunt. She smokes sometimes and is always saying I’m welcome to join her, but I think I’ll pass. Just send Sylvie a message or something.” Liz says this as though it’s the most obvious solution in the world, which I guess it is, but there’s another million questions to answer about this. *If I ask her for weed, am I expected to smoke it with her? Is that a thing? Or is this just a drug deal situation? Shit, is this a drug deal? Is she a drug dealer? If I text her and say “weed,” can I get arrested? What do I say? Are there code words?*

“What the fuck am I supposed to say? ‘Hey, it’s Megan, would you happen to know where I can find weed?’” *Yeah, that seems like a great idea. Then I’ll get arrested because the phone company will see the text and report me and I’ll go to jail for organizing a drug deal and I won’t even get to try weed first and I’ll get kicked out of college and be unemployed and homeless.*

“No, just send like emojis or something. Like...a leaf...and that little blowing wind thing.” Liz pauses. “And a question mark.”

“So, I’m supposed to send her a text that has a leaf, a gust of wind, and a question mark. We are just killing the game on the whole drug deal thing,” I say dryly. “I’ll just ask if she’s working at Jimmy John’s tonight or nah, and if she is, we’ll swing by and I’ll ask her in person. That way there’s no emojis and no mention of pot. Just a clean, simple exchange.” I say this as though I know what I’m doing, but I would like to emphatically state that I do not.

I pull up her number and type out the message—delete, retype, repeat, add an emoji, delete. Liz watches the process

from across the table. “What’d you write?”

“I just asked if she happens to be working tonight.”

Then we wait. Liz and I chill in the Burger King as I continuously check my phone. *Sylvie probably thinks I’m fucking insane, just texting her out of the blue and asking if she’s working. I bet she thinks I’m a stalker. Holy shit, I’m basically a stalker. I’m just chilling across the street from where she works and finding out if she’s there so I can come over for a drug deal. What the hell am I doing?*

“Dude, what does it even look like? Like how will we know if what we get is actually pot?” We know it’s green, obviously, but that’s about it.

“Shit, that’s a good point.” Liz pulls out her phone. “Here we go, there’s a BuzzFeed quiz.” She turns the screen toward me and I see nine boxes of things that look identical. “Which one is weed?”

“You go first.” She looks intensely at the screen and taps one of the boxes. “Did you get it?”

“It’s fucking oregano.”

“Great, so we’re screwed.”

We go back to waiting. Liz is pretty used to my alternating bouts of rambling internally and rambling aloud. One time, my therapist asked me to draw my anxiety, and it turned into a giant mass of spirals in black and blue that filled up an entire page. Things that spike my anxiety include, but are of course not limited to: people not texting me back, talking about my anxiety, talking about the future, classes, the word “homework,” and trying to put money back in my wallet as quickly as possible when I’m at the cash register and there’s somebody behind me just watching me struggle.

But then my phone buzzes.

“Yeah, why?” *She responded and therefore doesn’t hate me or think I’m a stalker, even though I probably am, but I’ll deal with that another time.*

“What’d she say?” Liz starts to lean toward me to peek

at the message, but I just pass the phone to her. She reads it and hands it back. “Now what?”

“I guess we go to Jimmy John’s.”

Ten minutes later, we’re still sitting in my car in the Jimmy John’s parking lot.

“Okay, so one more time. What’s the plan?”

“So we walk in and go up to Sylvie. And I’ll just be like ‘Hey, what’s up?’ And she’ll be like ‘Not much, what’s up with you?’ And I’ll be like, ‘Not much, I just wanted to talk to you about something later, if you have a minute.’ And then we’ll message and figure it out later. Then the final step is us getting the weed.” It’s a foolproof plan, which it should be after we’ve spent ten minutes discussing it. “What if I panic when she says hi and I just yell ‘I want to buy weed!’”

“Dear god, please do not yell that. Actually, just don’t say ‘weed’ at all. I think that’d be a good rule for you. You can’t just go into Jimmy John’s and start yelling about drugs.”

“Got it. No ‘weed.’” *I can do this.*

After pinky-promising Liz that I will not shout about weed, I follow her into the restaurant. And there’s Sylvie, making sandwiches behind the counter. We make eye contact and I feel an immediate spike of anxiety right in my chest, but I can’t give up now. Once you pass the Jimmy John’s threshold, you’re past the point of no return.

“Hey, Megan!” Sylvie smiles at me.

“Hey, how’s it going?”

“You know, just making minimum wage serving sandwiches to assholes. Same old, same old. What about you?” And now the pressure’s on, even though I could theoretically still back out. But I’ve totally got this. *I definitely do not got this.*

“It’s going well. Just thinking about getting some dinner or something. Any recommendations?” *There’s literally like ten fucking things on the menu, why am I asking for*

recommendations? I'm the worst. Liz and I are both trying so hard not to awkward-laugh that it hurts.

“Ummm, the tuna’s pretty good. Chips are great, too, if you just want a snack.” I nod as though this is important information.

“Mmmhmmm, that sounds good. I think I’ll just do some chips. Liz?” I need back-up.

“Yeah, I’ll get a cookie and some chips.”

Sylvie steps over to the register to ring us up and I take out my wallet to pay. It’s now or never. “Also, Sylvie, there’s something I wanted to ask you, but not, like, here.” She looks at me, confused. “I just mean, it’s not the kind of thing I think you should discuss at a Jimmy John’s, you know?”

“What?”

“It involves...illicit activities.” *“Illicit activities?” I sound like a fucking idiot.*

There’s a moment of silence before she seems to get it. “You mean pot?” I’m startled at her boldness, the way she just says it. “Dude, no one here cares. They all smoke.” And then there’s the familiar feeling of lameness that usually accompanies my attempts to step outside my comfort zone. *Great, everyone does it. Everyone but me. Yay.*

“How much is it?”

“Only like \$5 for a gram.”

“Sylvie, I’m just going to go ahead and ask you all of the stupid questions, so bear with me.” I begin talking as though I’m discussing an important business concern. “How much is a gram?”

“That’s enough for three times.” *I’ll figure out what three times means later.*

“Okay, so then what?”

“Then you go buy a bowl. They’re like \$15.” My eyes widen at the thought of buying a bowl, which I make a note to Google later, in a public place. It’s so permanent. *What if we don’t like weed? Then we’re just stuck with a bowl and we’re*

out \$15? Sylvie sees my fear and says, “You know what? I’ve got two, you can just borrow one.” *Thank god.* “Do you want it like right now? I can get it to you in ten minutes.” *This has escalated so quickly.*

“Well, that’s very nice of you, but we actually have a thing we have to leave for... What about tomorrow?” If we get it tomorrow, we’ll have the place to ourselves and it’ll all work out perfectly. Nobody needs to know.

“Yeah, I can do that. Just hit me up whenever.”

“Sweet, will do.”

Saturday

I wake up at 2 a.m. in a panicked sweat at the thought that I will, at some point today, buy drugs. I go back to sleep, only to wake up two hours later with the realization that within 24 hours, I will have tried pot, and what if it makes me just as paranoid and anxious as I worry it will? I’m having anxiety at the thought of becoming anxious, the irony of which is not lost on me.

Each time I wake up, I just have the realization again that this is actually happening, it’s not just a dream. *Is it too late to back out? It’s definitely too late to back out. I can’t just be like, “Hey, remember that time I asked you to buy me weed? I actually changed my mind.” What is the return policy on weed?*

When I finally wake up for the day, I send Sylvie a text to let her know when I’m free. Now it’s just a waiting game. *What do people do while they wait for a drug deal?* I begin to work on my homework, but I keep getting distracted. Even though I can feel myself reading the words on the page, I absorb none of them because I keep zoning out thinking about my plans. I jump from one worst-case scenario to another for most of the morning, followed by a quick break for lunch. I then return to my regularly scheduled fatalism.

Liz joins me once she wakes up and we realize we know

next to nothing about the actual smoking of weed. So we hop on the Google and type every possible question we can think of. What do bowls look like? What is packing a bowl? How do you light it? How do you avoid getting caught? What are some fun activities to do high? What are good movies to watch while high?

Inception—Harold and Kumar—ride a rollercoaster—exercise—have a deep conversation—try new food.

After about an hour of searching, I get a message that Sylvie's free to meet up. I gather my cash and head over to her apartment.

I knock on the door and wait, trying not to look suspicious. I'm not sure how anyone would possibly know that I'm here for a drug deal, but you never know when it comes to these things. Or maybe you do, because you're cooler than me and know plenty about drug deals.

Sylvie finally opens the door. "Hey, come on in." I've never been in her apartment before. It's pretty sparsely decorated, but it's also about the same as every other college apartment you'll find, complete with a futon. She makes her way to a small coffee table next to the futon and retrieves a small bag of what I'm assuming is the pot. "So how's it going?"

"It's good, how about you?" *I'm making small talk as I wait to pay for drugs. Do I pull out the money now or will she ask for it? Why is there no how-to for this?*

"It's going fine, it's going well." She looks around for a moment and moves into the kitchen, opening a few drawers before finding what she's looking for. "You'll need this," she says, pulling out what Google has informed me is a bowl. "This is a bowl. You'll take that," she gestures to the pot. "And pack it into here," she points to the little open part of the bowl. "Then you light it, holding this hole here, and inhale. When you're done, you release the little hole and exhale."

“How do you get rid of the smell?” I looked at like seven articles and forums this morning, but couldn’t figure out exactly how to deal with all the smoke. Liz and I decided we are definitely doing it in the apartment, but we can’t exactly have a cloud of weed smoke when we live next to the RA.

“Oh right, you’ll want one of these,” Sylvie crosses back to the coffee table and pulls out a water bottle-looking thing. “This is called a sploof. You just cut a water bottle in half, fill it with dryer sheets, secure it with a hair tie, and you’re good to go.” *I am learning so much today.*

“Got it. I shall get a water bottle.” To be perfectly honest, I still don’t quite believe this is really happening. I mean, it’s my first ever drug deal, and it’s all happened so quickly. *What a wild ride.*

Sylvie pauses in the living room and looks at me seriously. “Also, I’m not like a drug dealer or anything.” She sounds surprisingly vulnerable, and I realize this is probably kind of weird for her, too.

“Dude, I didn’t think you were. Although I wouldn’t judge you if you were. After all, I’m the one who came to you looking for weed in the first place.” She nods and looks somewhat relieved. “Honestly, Liz and I were talking and it’s always been a joke that we’d never try it because we’re both so fucking anxious anyway that we didn’t want to risk it. But then yesterday we both separately thought about it and figured that must be a sign so we just decided to try it, but we don’t want to tell anyone beforehand and you’re doing me such a solid, so thank you.” I didn’t exactly intend to just dump a bunch of my baggage at her feet, but here we are.

“You’re welcome. And I hope you have a good time tonight!”

I gather the weed and the bowl and I head back home. Liz and I decided that we wanted to wait until later tonight,

so we've still got a few hours to kill. We go to the grocery store and stock up on the essentials: fruit snacks, pizza rolls, and brownie mix. When we get back to the apartment, we put the brownies and the pizza rolls in the oven. We clean the entire apartment while they cook, trying to kill some time before we do anything. The weed sits in my bedroom, hidden from view in my nightstand. My anxiety has faded to its usual constant rumble of white noise in the back of my mind rather than bursts of panic attacks.

At 10:00, it's time. The apartment has been cleaned, the pizza rolls have been eaten, the brownies have been baked, the sploof has been constructed, and we are officially good to go. Liz and I sit on the couch and look at the assembled supplies in front of us. We have a bottle of Febreze and a fan blowing facing the cracked window to as a back-up plan for smoke.

"You ready?" I ask Liz, noting her look of trepidation.

She nods, so I start to follow Sylvie's instructions. *Take some pot, pack the bowl, light it up, breathe in, breathe out into the sploof. Got it.*

Turns out lighting a bowl is really fucking hard. Liz starts, because I'm apparently shit at using a regular lighter, but she keeps burning her fingers. We wind up using a candle lighter, which is obviously ridiculous, but it does the job. Once the bowl is lit, you have to inhale right away, or you're just wasting weed. When Liz goes to exhale into the water bottle, she misses and smoke gets everywhere. *Off to a great start.*

Whereas Liz is great at lighting and terrible at smoking, I am terrible at lighting, but great at smoking. Once we realize this, we figure out a system so that she lights the bowl as much as possible, inhales, passes it to me while she exhales, and we keep passing it until it goes out. The first bowl runs out pretty quickly, but neither of us really feels anything yet, so we get another one going.

“What if this isn’t pot?” Liz asks.

“What the fuck else would it be?”

Halfway through the second bowl is where we really hit our stride of passing, smoking, passing, smoking, so we keep going until that one’s done, too, then we start the third and final bowl. Shortly into the bowl, it hits me. *I think it’s working.* There isn’t a dramatic shift, like when you realize you’re wasted, but there’s definitely something happening. After the bowl is done, we just sit on the couch in silence for a few minutes as it washes over us.

“Close your eyes,” Liz tells me. “Do you feel, like, different?”

With my eyes closed, I start to think that I don’t feel any different, but then I realize that’s all I’m thinking.

For the first time in I don’t know how long, there is no white noise. There’s no constant stream of thoughts crashing into each other and swirling into new ideas or branching off into something else. There’s no rumble of anxiety, there’s just silence.

“Yeah, it does.”

“You know how, when people talk, they’ll say something and your mind will start going, not wandering, but like running away toward something else and you can’t focus and you can’t control it?”

“Yeah,” I reply.

“That’s not happening right now.” I realize she’s right. There’s currently only one thought in my mind, not the usual ten or more. I feel focused and content just talking to Liz in this moment.

“It’s weird, but there’s no white noise. Like, there’s just one thought in my head right now, not ten or more like usual,” I tell her. It’s odd to mention the white noise out loud. I’m so used to it that I never considered its omnipresence as problematic.

Liz nods, understanding. “Isn’t it also weird how, for

some people, this is how they feel all the time?”

I hadn't thought about that. Not everyone has to deal with the constant rumble. I feel a wave of sadness at the realization that I feel so much lighter without it, having never considered how heavy my thoughts could be to carry. It became my normal.

“So how do you like it, Liz?” She considers the question and I watch as she mulls it over.

“I could see doing it again. Maybe not like a regular thing, but it's nice to have the option if things get too rough.” Even though the night isn't quite over yet, I already like the idea of the next time.

“Same, actually.” There is something blissful about the thought of there being a next time. The thought that I have a way to take off the burden of my everyday thoughts. The burden I didn't realize I was even carrying. We come to an understanding that this is the end of tonight and begin to put things away.