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Rita starts to follow her right after she breaks up with Pearce. Every time Sage turns around, there she is. Rita knows she is no Pearce Winthrop; she can't climb trees and she hates heights. She's scared to climb, but she adores Sage.

Sage doesn't give a shit about how she looks. Doesn't wear the standard cool-girl jeans with baby-coloured angora sweaters. She wears a boy's denim jacket with its sleeves rolled up. Faded jeans, not pre-torn in a factory, and unlaced burgundy Doc Martens. She listens to weird music, jazz that sounds like dogs barking. Rolls her own cigarettes and smokes where anyone can see her. Sage has no sullen father to embarrass her with his naked mistress in a drawer. Has a mother who is, everybody knows, *as good as any man*.

Rita sticks close to her for a while before Sage deigns to talk to her. "What do you want from me?" she barks. "You're like some dog in heat or something, the way you wander around behind me."

"I like you," Rita says bravely. "I want to be your friend."

Sage stomps her boot hard against the pavement, and shakes her fist in Rita's moonstruck face. "Get lost!" she yells.

But Rita just stays there, does not shrink back, does not falter. "I'm going to be your best friend," she says. "Your very best friend, whether you like it or not."

"I don't need any best friend," says Sage. "And I sure as hell don't need you!"

But Pearce has pulled down the blinds between them. Closed the shutters. When she passes Sage anywhere, she looks right past her as though she doesn't exist.

Sage swears, smokes, and thuds around the house in heavy boots.

"What happened between you and Pearce?" Lorraine asks, gathering up her courage.

"Nothing," snaps Sage, tugging strings of tobacco onto rolling paper. Scrapes a match against her jeans zipper.

Lorraine flinches. "Did you two have a fight?"

Sage draws on her freshly rolled cigarette. "No fight," she says heavily. "She just says we can't be friends anymore. For now. She's too old for me, she thinks."

Lorraine sighs with relief and rumples her daughter's hair. "It'll be okay, you'll see," she says.

"Yeah, sure," says Sage dully. "Sure it will. I know."

Even though she's a girl, Rita is no extra bother. She has decided she'll never have a wedding for anyone to have to pay for, and she's figured out how to avoid the *getting into trouble* part by herself. She reads. She's the first female and the youngest editor the student newspaper, the *Gazette*, has ever had, and she writes movie reviews.

Sage has a part-time job at the town's theatre.

She sells Rita a ticket, one, and a box of popcorn, buttered.

"Slather on the butter," Rita says.

"It'll take a minute to melt," snaps Sage, turning her back to stir the butter cube around in the melter.

"Aren't you supposed to talk with your customers?" asks Rita. "Isn't there some kind of rule? Don't you at least have to be polite?"

"I don't get paid enough to be sweet. Besides, it isn't in my nature."

"But it wouldn't kill you, would it? What's the movie about?"

"Hey, I don't get to watch. I just do this."

"You never watch the movies?"

"Someone has to mind the store out here. They don't pay me to watch movies."

"Why don't you come in with me?" Rita asks. "We'll sit at the back, and you can come right back out here if we see someone get up."

Sage snorts. She drizzles the melted golden liquid over the corn, and licks some off her finger. "That'll be a buck-seventy."

Rita waits until Sage puts out her palm. She counts out her dimes slowly, touching Sage with every one. Seventeen times she touches Sage's hand.

"Okay, you've got your pound of flesh," says Sage. She opens the cash drawer, letting those dimes slide down between her fingers into the tray as she watches Rita walk away, and get swallowed by the theatre.

The theatre lobby lights frame the window, turning it into a perfect screen. Sage is at its centre, counting out box office cash.

Across Main Street is the post office, which is where Pearce slouches against the war memorial, watching her.

Sage is the star of Pearce's movie. Her hair falls around her eyes, her head bent in concentration.

Pearce knows every penny has to be accounted for. Accounting is Sage's most detested activity.

Pearce folds her arms across her chest, pressing one warm hand around her breast, watching Sage across the street behind the glass.

If anyone asks, she's just killing time, carving the word *fuck* into the war memorial.