

gold star

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gold star

by [sarsaparillia](#)

Summary

Sam goes to college. Paulina... also goes to college. They're being very normal and very cool and very totally regular people about it. Obviously.

(It's a twelve-hour drive from NYU to Amity Park. A lot can happen in twelve hours.)

Notes

listen, i was a nineteen year old queer in 2011, i know what i'm talking about here. this is for emily and naomi, without whom i would probably have never finished this bitch.

hell — tegan & sara.

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(ETA. 12 HOURS; NEW YORK)

So. The thing is.

Gas is expensive. That's the thing. Gas is expensive. Which isn't actually something Sam thinks about a lot, what with the whole inventor-great-grandpa-money thing. But gas is expensive, and Amity Park is a twelve-hour drive from New York on a good day, and Sam's parents would rather buy her love than legitimately pay her any attention, so she's got a really fast car that she can barely drive and pretty much zero applicable navigational skills.

Getting home is a nightmare, is what Sam is saying. She's not enough of a douche to take the *helicopter*, okay? She's trying *not* to kill the planet!

Which—okay, that's exactly why she's in this predicament in the first place.

Paulina's lounging in the driver's seat of Sam's car, slouched back like she does this all the time, mirrored aviator sunglasses slid down her nose. Her hair is pulled back from her face into the most severe high ponytail that Sam's ever seen, and she's in tiny shorts and one of Sam's wrinkled old thrifted-plaid shirts. She might not be wearing a bra.

Sam hates her whole life. *No one* should look that good before the sun is up.

G-d, straight girls are the *worst*.

"Ready to go, babe?"

"Don't call me that," Sam grumps, and sets her last bag carefully into the backseat. She's so neat; the bags set straight. The contrast is stark; Paulina's stuff is tossed in careless, and Sam grinds her teeth because everything about Paulina is frustrating, actually, every single thing about her is *so* frustrating and Sam can never fucking escape it because she is *everywhere*—

"Then get in and buckle up," Paulina laughs, high and bright. She sounds like cotton candy, sick-sugar-sweet and just as pink as her mouth. "We've got a long drive!"

"You don't have to do this every time," Sam mutters. She has to fight not to slam the door behind her. This whole thing is so *dumb*. "I could just—I dunno, *not* go home?"

"It's easier to go together," Paulina says, easily. She very pointedly waits for Sam to buckle her seatbelt. "And you don't wanna make your grandma sad by not coming home, do you?"

"*Ugh*," says Sam, with feeling.

Paulina just laughs again, even higher and brighter, an unreal sound. Her palm is loose around the stick, the elegant curl of her knuckles as she shifts from first to second silent over the smooth purr of the engine. They're peeling into thick New York traffic, heading west on the I-80.

There's twelve hours of driving ahead of them, and Sam's already gritting her teeth.

Paulina dangles an opaque reusable water bottle in front of Sam's nose. Her eyes are on the road, flickering indignant between the upcoming turn-off and the bright yellow taxi in front of them who isn't moving as fast as Paulina clearly wants it to; hardly paying attention to Sam at all. "It's iced the way you like."

Sam should hate her for this, too, but it's pretty hard to hate someone who knows exactly how she takes her coffee, especially this early in the morning.

"Thanks," says Sam. "That's—this is nice?"

Paulina just snorts.

"Oh please, I know how you get. Drink that and go back to sleep."

Sam kind of hates that Paulina knows the coffee won't keep her up. She pretty much hates everything, actually, because it's just not *right* that Paulina knows what Sam needs when she's also so—so—

(Sam glances over. A wispy curl has escaped the severe ponytail to float in a spiral around Paulina's face. It's a tiny imperfection that makes the rest of all that unearthly beauty feel more human; pre-dawn lazy is a good look on Paulina.)

—so fucking *pretty*.

Sam unscrews the lid of the bottle over the rumble of the engine. Sips slowly, savours.

G-d *damn* it, the coffee is fucking *perfect*.

—

(ETA. 8 ½ HOURS; PENNSYLVANIA)

"Albuquerque."

"Elgin."

"Niagara."

"Another A? Why."

"You love it," Paulina smirks.

"Ugh. The Arctic."

"Does that count?"

"Yes. You have a C."

"Kay, if you say so. Canada."

"Paulina."

"Sam."

"*Ugh!* I hate this game," Sam huffs. She runs her hand through her hair; shorn short after an altercation with a ghost who *really* liked gum. There're some things that just don't come out, and ghost-gum goop is one of them. When Sam looks in the mirror, she thinks she looks like Danny used to; the reflection is all sharp cheekbones, sharp hair, sharp eyes. It's a little bit like déjà vu, and a little bit like it suits her.

"We can play something else," Paulina says innocently. She slants a sly look in Sam's direction. "Giving up, Manson?"

"Never. Austin. Go."

"Niagara Falls."

Sam makes a wordless noise of outrage. "That shouldn't count!"

"Hasn't been used! You have an S," Paulina says, so cheerful about it, and she's the fucking worst, worst, *worst*. Sam wants to kiss her stupid face so much it makes her insane.

"Santa Clarita!"

"Antwerp."

"Philadelphia."

"Akron."

"North Carolina—"

"Ha! Point for me, you used that earlier!" Paulina punches the air, before Sam's even finished the second word. Her head tips back, the long unbroken stretch of her neck held taut. "You get to buy drinks when we stop."

Sam simmers with rage. She takes back the angry-kissing-wanting, that was stupid, Paulina is the *enemy*—

"Start over?"

"You just want to win again," Sam folds her arms over her chest, slouching back into the leather bucket-seat with extreme prejudice.

"May-be," Paulina sings at her.

"No thanks, I think my pride's been wounded enough," Sam sniffs at her. "We should stop pretty soon, though, it's been a while."

"I'm okay," says Paulina.

"We've been listening to *Sainthood* for the last two hours," Sam says sourly, over the sweet babble of music spilling out of the speakers. It's not that she doesn't like the album—what self-respecting lesbian doesn't listen to Tegan and Sara's seminal work on repeat—but it's annoying that Paulina seems to know all the words. "Are you really sure you're okay?"

Paulina flutters her eyelashes like they're fourteen again. "Never better!"

Sam glares at the roof and reminds herself that she's not going to have to speak to Paulina for five whole days. She's going to avoid her parents, and flop onto Danny's bed, and tell Tucker that his taste in superheroes is terrible. They're all going to talk about ghosts and video games and she's going to be *so* quiet about her crush on the girl driving her stupid car that neither of her best friends are even going to know it exists.

It won't even be hard. Sam knows how to keep a secret.

Because, honestly! Like it would even be hard! Danny's pretty wrapped up in ruling the Ghost Zone and macking on Val these days; it's that ridiculously doofy look he gets when anyone mentions his girlfriend, never mind that she's always trying to kill him just a little bit. Tuck's not much better, either; he's so far into the furry darknet forums that hold up the dome of the internet that sometimes he forgets to be smug about the fact that he was right about the techgeek shit.

Sam doesn't get it. Everyone she knows sucks, actually.

But New York's faded into Pennsylvania, and they speed through the toll on I-80. The hills roll alongside them, already greening up with the start of the warm weather, and the sky is seamless robin's egg blue. It's a pretty perfect day; they'll have to take the top down.

"I need to pee," Sam says.

"You're really gonna make me stop?"

"We should both stretch our legs," Sam says, mild. "And I really do need to pee."

Paulina mutters something unkind under her breath in Spanish. A tiny thrill goes up Sam's spine; it's normally the other way around, Paulina normally the one getting under Sam's skin. There's something a little illicit in being the one to cause problems between them, though Sam doesn't really want to think about why.

She knows why. It's just that it's stupid.

Paulina switches lanes. There's a rest-stop coming up, just the next turn-off. They'll have snacks, and Sam will eat all the raisins out of the trail mix like a goblin while Paulina just licks the salt off the peanuts before tossing them out the window. Which is *disgusting*, but at least she doesn't put them back in the bag anymore.

They'd fought about that, the first three times they did this trip.

They'd fought about a lot of things.

But Paulina's still the only one with a driver's license, and she's graceful as anything, easing them off the highway. The mid-morning sun lights her up like a livewire, sun-gold and shimmering, and Sam—

G-d. Sam wants.

Be normal, she tells herself, desperate and trying and insane. *Be normal, be normal.*

—

(ETA. 8 HOURS; PENNSYLVANIA)

Okay, so Sam's not being normal about it. Cool.

Paulina drifts through the aisles like a ghost, trailing her fingers over the merchandise, sunglasses slipped almost all the way down her nose. Sam trails behind her, watching out of the corner of her eye, desperate not to be a creep about it.

Sam's failing at being any kind of casual; good job, Manson!

"Do you want regular trail mix, or the kind with M&M's?" Paulina pokes her head into Sam's field of vision.

"Regular," Sam says, wrinkling her nose.

"Aww, Sammy, please?"

"You can just get M&M's. You know that, right? You know that you can just buy M&M's, you don't have to suck the salt off of the peanuts!"

Paulina pouts at her. "Where's the fun in that? The sugar makes the salt better, and I like sucking things."

"I'm sure you do," Sam mutters, more wind than sound, because the joke is so low-hanging, it's not even worth making.

It's a good reminder that they are absolutely not on the same page, here. Sam grabs the regular trail mix out of Paulina's hands and stomps off towards the gleaming wall of glass refrigerators at the back, determined to find a drink so that they can get out of here and get

back on the road before Sam does something incredibly dumb like grab her driver by the throat and kiss them both stupid.

"Sam?"

Sam resolutely ignores her.

"Sammy?" Paulina calls again. It must occur to her that Sam is being a goblin, because she trots to catch up, catches the back of her shirt to force her to stop, totally blasé about the sudden, violent stiffness to Sam's frame. Paulina drapes herself across Sam's back, a long line of heat, and hooks her chin over Sam's shoulder to blow hot, damp air right in the delicate shell of her ear. "Oh, come on, don't be like that. I'm just playing!"

"Get off," Sam says, voice flat.

Paulina huffs something unintelligible into the crook of her throat, and proceeds not to move an inch.

G-d, Sam remembers why she hates this girl.

(Why she likes her so much, too.)

"Paulina," Sam says, quiet and resigned, after a long minute where Paulina continues to not move. "Seriously, come on. Pick a drink, we need to go or we'll have to stop somewhere overnight."

"Ooh, you'd hate that!"

Sam shifts uncomfortably. She wouldn't, actually; that's like three-quarters of the problem. The other quarter of the problem is that they live together and go to school together and pretty much exist in each other's company nearly ninety-nine percent of the time, and Sam doesn't want to fuck that up by spilling her feelings all over the place.

"I don't sleep on polyester sheets, we've talked about this," Sam sniffs.

"And people think *I'm* the princess in the relationship," Paulina says, laughing as she pulls away, yanking one of the glass doors open with a flourish. Frigid air gushes over them both; Paulina guzzles battery-acid energy drinks when she's driving like it's going out of style. It's pretty amazing that her heart hasn't given out.

"I am *not* a princess," Sam mutters ungratefully, and grabs a couple of bottles of iced coffee.

(It's pretty amazing that Sam's heart hasn't given out, either.)

"Okay, Manson, whatever you say," Paulina smirks at her. The six-pack of RedBull dangles from her fingertips. The cans *clink* when they knock against one another. "Come on, you're buying."

"I am not," Sam informs her. "Those things are going to kill you. I won't enable this!"

"Uh-huh, okay, sure," Paulina says. She bats her eyelashes. "So... who's gonna drive us the rest of the way home? 'Cause, y'know, I need caffeine to drive...?"

Sam simmers with rage, and grabs the stupid energy drinks as she passes the horrible bitch by. Paulina's giggling like she's not the worst person in the whole world, and she catches up long enough to tuck her fingers into the crook of Sam's arm.

Paulina holds on, and somehow that's a million times worse.

Sam doesn't shake her off, either, so really, who's the problem, here.

The cashier is maybe-sixteen, violently pink hair and popping gum, and way more focused on the phone she's not subtly hiding behind the counter than she is on ringing them through. Sam doesn't ever remember being that inattentive; she was always too busy dealing with Danny's insane ghost shit, or Dash being a homophobic tool, or—

Well.

Trying not to focus on how pretty girls were. By graduation, *trying not to focus on how pretty girls were—how pretty Paulina was*, specifically—ate up an almost embarrassing amount of Sam's time, if she's honest about it.

Suffice to say, Sam's not honest about it often.

"These things are actually so bad for you," Sam says, quietly. "You know that, right?"

Paulina smiles with her whole face. It's the bubblegum-pink mouth and the ice-blue eyes and the *dimples*. She's so pretty that it's hard to look at her straight. "Yeah, I know. What, you care about me, now?"

Sam swallows hard. "Don't be stupid. I just don't want you to crash and kill us both."

Paulina laughs brightly and tugs Sam forward, out into the blaze of noonday heat. Her hands are strong, skin burning, summertime sun distilled into a living breathing girl. She's still wearing that terrible plaid and those tiny shorts, hair swept up and out of her face. Everything about her is perfect, and when she looks over her shoulder to wink in Sam's direction, Sam doesn't want to die.

It just does something so terrible to her heart.

Sam crosses her arms, determinedly not thinking about it. Paulina is in the driver's seat already, and she rolls down the window on the passenger side. She's still smiling, looking at Sam over the tops of her sunglasses.

"Hey, babe," she calls. "Wanna go for a ride?"

—

(ETA. 4 HOURS; OHIO)

They stop in Perrysburg for supper.

It's pretty early, but Sam's hungry, and Paulina's starting to get weird and keyed-up the way she does when she hasn't had something solid to eat in a couple of hours. She really should start carrying granola bars in her bag, or something, it's not cute.

Perrysburg is a pretty tiny town, but it's got a diner and a gas station, and it's good enough a place to stop as any. Sam doesn't feel too conspicuous, or too much like she's going to get hatecrimed and violently murdered in broad daylight for just existing, so. Priorities.

(If she was alone, it—might be a different story. But Paulina's dazzling *everything* makes a pretty decent homo-shield, and Sam's not exactly a goth, anymore. Too much queer academia, too much New York Upper East Side composure. It's frazzled her circuits, but at least her mom isn't always nagging to get her to smile.)

"Do you have anything that *doesn't* have meat in it?"

Sam blinks out of her reverie to find Paulina frowning at the waitress.

"Sorry, honey, we're past breakfast time. We got grilled cheese?"

"Grilled cheese is good, I'll have that," Sam says, heading off the storm brewing behind Paulina's face. *She's* the only vegetarian here, she has no idea why Paulina gets so uppity about it. "And sweet potato fries, if you have them?"

"Yeah, we do. You want ketchup?" the woman asks, clearly grateful that *someone* in the room has some social graces.

"Mayo, if I could?"

"Sure," the waitress nods, makes a little note on her pad. She pauses, though, and looks kind of hesitantly back at Paulina. "And, uh, for you...?"

"Oh! Biggest cheeseburger you have, thanks, everything on it," Paulina chirps, bright again. Her mouth puckers into a tiny little smirk. "Regular fries."

The waitress stares between them, wordless.

Sam sort of wants to reach out and pat her elbow in solidarity. It's not like *she* can explain it, though, so she doesn't bother to try. Paulina gets weird about things, and food, and making sure that Sam eats on a semi-regular schedule. It definitely has nothing to do with the two separate ER trips in sophomore year when Paulina had found her half-concussed on the bathroom floor because her blood sugar had dropped so low that she'd passed out a little bit. Definitely not.

"Oh," Paulina says. "Could I also have a coke?"

"...Sure," the waitress says, and then she's backing away like they have rabies or something else communicable, and Sam and Paulina are alone in their little capsule of the world.

"You didn't have to do that," Sam says.

"Do what?" Paulina says, tilting her head. She opens her eyes very wide so that they're two perfectly guileless blue oceans, perfectly innocent, perfect, perfect, *perfect*.

"I hate it when you play dumb," Sam gripes at her.

"You like it a little bit," Paulina counters.

Sam isn't even going to dignify that with a response. Instead she lets herself soak in that peculiar roadside-diner smell: linoleum, hot grease and cooking meat, cured with weary contentment over safe passage. They aren't the only long-haul trip in here; there's three old truckers sitting at the counter, affable and phased by nothing, and someone who's definitely a college kid curled up in a booth in the corner, chewing on a pen. No ghosts, which is pretty rare. Usually, places like this are haunted to shit.

Her grilled cheese comes out with a pickle that has a smiling crown carved into it, and Danny's insignia besides. Once King of the Ghost Zone, always King of the Ghost Zone.

Okay, so maybe Sam jumped the gun a little. Cooks can be ghosts, too.

It's a pretty good grilled cheese, all things considered.

Sam chomps down on the pickle, and can feel the building's blooming approval. Not thirty seconds later, the waitress comes out with two steaming slices of just-baked apple pie and beautiful, creamy homemade vanilla ice cream. Good G-d.

"On the house," she says, shyly, not-quite-looking at Sam. The glamour fades for just a second; her ears go pointed, and her cheeks turn faintly green the way ghosts do when they blush. *Huh*. "Your money's no good here. Cook says we owe you. Anything you want, just let me know."

"Oh," Sam says, blinking at her. "That's—uh, thanks?"

"If, um, if you see—"

"I'll tell him you said hello," Sam says, cutting the pretty ghost-girl off before she can get too far. She smiles at her, eyes a little soft. "You're doing good work."

Ghost Waitress blushes to the tips of her ears, and yeah, she's *definitely* looking green even through her glamour. But it's honestly pretty cute, and Sam's feeling magnanimous with the generous application of grilled cheese and apple pie, so.

And hey, Danny would like this place. He friggin' loves pie.

Ghost Waitress scampers back to the kitchen with a jerky kind of wave, and Sam settles into her free dessert with great relish.

For one, shining second, it's totally quiet.

And then:

"What was that," Paulina says, her stupid giant burger an inch away from her mouth. It's dripping sauce and mushrooms everywhere. Extremely classy.

"I have no idea," Sam says, which has the benefit of being both entirely true, and a blatant, flagrant omission.

"Was the waitress *hitting* on you?"

"Sometimes people hit on me," says Sam, coolly.

"*Sure*, but she brought us pie," Paulina says, glancing between the pie and Sam and back again. "And we don't even have to pay for it? She was hitting on you."

Sam can't even begin to explain that it actually has nothing to do with her, and has everything to do with Danny and royalty, and, like, politics. *Ghost* politics. Paulina doesn't talk about her ghost boy anymore, but that's probably only because Danny's barely human, anymore.

Yeah, Sam knows she's a sucker, thanks.

"Shut up and eat the free pie," Sam tells her, instead, which actually *does* get Paulina to quiet down, and is snappy about it, to boot. The pie's warm and golden, flaky crust and gooey on the inside. Sam thinks she could eat a dozen pieces.

Pretty perfect for something that might contain a splash of ectoplasm or two.

"I'm not *wrong*," Paulina says. Comes out a little ungrateful and a lot annoyed, but Sam brushes it off, leaning back against the cracked red vinyl of the booth and wiggling until she's comfortable.

Paulina *is* wrong, but it's not like Sam can really explain why.

"I didn't say you were," Sam says evenly. "I said that sometimes people hit on me. Eat the pie, would you?"

Paulina huffs, but the argument's over. They eat the free pie.

It's nice for a while.

And Sam's not thinking about it, because sometimes people *do* hit on her. Sometimes girls roll up next to her in lectures, smirking slowly, leaning in a little too close. Sometimes boys grin at her a little too much like they want to eat her alive. Sometimes people hit on her! Sam's not some kind of *troll*, she knows she's not.

It's just that usually Paulina is there in half a second, batting her eyelashes and plumping up her tits. Whoever was hitting on Sam backs right off, hands up, babbling apologies and already switching gears.

There's no competing with Paulina Sanchez.

G-d. Sam knows that better than anyone else.

(ETA. 2 HOURS; INDIANA)

By the time they're finished (and by the time's Sam's gotten up to fake paying, because Ghost Cook isn't charging them, and it would be a *little* hard to cover for that one) and have gotten back on the road, the world is hazing into pale blue dusk.

Sam's nervous just thinking about it. "Do you think we should stop for the night? It's getting late."

Paulina glances at her out of the corner of her eye. "You know we're only like, two hours away, now, right? You know that. We're almost home, Sam, don't wig out on me now."

"You don't like driving at night," Sam says, flat.

"No, *you* don't like it when I drive at night," Paulina says, smoothly shifting gears as she slows down. She's no fool; cops love pulling over a fast car with a pretty girl in the driver's seat, and they're into Chicago's orbit, which means they need to be a little more careful. No more picturesque rolling hills.

Sam crosses her arms over her chest, inhaling sharply. She doesn't want to be weird about it, but it's hard. "Look, I just—"

"Do you want me to stop at the next gas station? Will a coffee make you feel better? Will you be chill?"

"I hate you so much?"

"That's not a *no*, baby."

"I—you know what, fine, whatever! Pull over!"

Paulina laughs. It burbles through the space between them, exploding on Sam's tongue like pop-rock candy. It's always like this; by the end of this stupid trip, Sam wants to strip every stitch of Paulina's clothes off and bury her face in between those perfect thighs, just to get her to *shut the fuck up* for a while.

Not that she ever *does*, but the point stands.

And, okay, it might not be a good idea to think about eating Paulina out, because they're in a really small space and Sam's already going to be smelling Paulina's perfume for days. It sinks inside of her and makes all of her brains shut down; G-d, fuck, she's so hot.

She can't think about this right now.

Sam digs her nails into her thigh and thinks about ghosts and not about the girl driving her car. She thinks about *no i'm not* and not about the curl of Paulina's knuckles around the

stickshift and what it might feel like curling into Sam's hair. She thinks about the miles passing away beneath them and not *i know you feel it too*.

Her stupid-expensive car purrs beneath the thrum of the bass.

This absolutely does not help Sam's whole entire everything!

(Worst fucking day, honestly.)

Sam shoves out of the car before they're even totally stopped, breathing hard. She categorically does not press her thighs together like some kind of trollop. Nope. No sir! Not a chance! Not today, G-d!

"Sam?" Paulina calls.

Sam ignores her, and goes stomping down the bank of the road into a grassy field.

"Sammy?!" Paulina calls again, a little more frantic now, stumbling out of the driver's seat after her. The *slam* of the driver's seat door and the *beep* of the lock sounds far away, which is great, actually, because it means Sam might have five minutes to herself to stamp her stupid libido down. She's not gonna get hatecrimed tonight, she really is not!

"Hold on, where are you—!"

Ignoring Paulina is weirdly satisfying. It's just that Sam never quite gets away with it; they *live* together, and there's nowhere in their brownstone that Sam can escape to. So she stomps out further into the field until the scream of the highway is a dull roar, and the sound of her boots is louder than her heart, and—

Paulina grabs her shoulder. Sam wants to scream only a little bit.

"Oh my god, Sam, stop, would you?"

"No, I'm—*ugh!*"

"*Jesús maldito cristo*, Sam," Paulina snaps. She wheels Sam around and holds her face fast between her fingers, glaring like she's trying to set the world on fire. "Stop, already!"

"Lemme go, I'm not—"

Paulina smooches her.

It's a pretty bad kiss, as far as pretty bad kisses go. There's a lot of teeth, and Sam isn't sure where to put her hands, and Paulina's nose kind of jabs into her cheek at a really shitty angle. Not soft at all, and a little too wet; Paulina bites down sharply on Sam's lip, and one of her palms drops to Sam's ass and cheerfully gropes. It's terrible, the whole thing is terrible.

It's also the hottest thing that's ever happened to Sam in her entire life. She never wants it to stop.

"We're gonna get hatecrimed," Sam manages to pull away half an inch, to say stupidly.

"I don't care," Paulina says, very easily, and hauls Sam right back into her mouth.

Sam kind of stops thinking for a while, here.

It's just that it's so *easy* to kiss Paulina. Once they relax into it, days could have passed and Sam wouldn't have noticed them; she tugs Paulina's long, beautiful hair out of its high ponytail to fall in perfect princess waves around them both, buries her fingers there, holds on tight. Paulina nips at Sam's lip until she's almost bleeding; maybe a punishment, but not quite.

They kiss for a really long time.

Okay, wow, so that's a thing.

Yeah, this kind of—all makes sense, Sam thinks, nonsensically. *It would happen like this.*

"You okay in there?" Paulina murmurs against Sam's cheekbone. Sam can feel the way she's smiling. Bitch.

"Mmmm," Sam hums, which isn't really an answer.

The two girls cling to each other in the middle of some G-dforsaken field, and while Sam tries to get her breathing back under control, Paulina brushes her bangs out of her face, steals another kiss. She's only a little bit unbearably smug, so Sam figures she can have it just this once.

They're holding hands when they climb back up to the reststop, and there isn't even anyone around to hatecrime them. Super!

"Do you still want coffee?" Paulina asks. The night is soft, love-dark. The words come out sounding like *are you going to be weird about this?*

"Yes," Sam sniffs. *Not gonna be weird about this*, she means. "And a bagel."

Paulina rakes her hand through her hair, tugging gently on Sam's fingers, a ship at anchor. She's grinning, too, teeth blinding, mouth so pink. Sam thinks they both must have bubblegum lipstick smeared everywhere. The thought makes her clench on the inside; she likes it too much.

"Whatever you want, baby," Paulina sighs happily. She buries her face in the side of Sam's throat, and it's like she's been waiting for this forever, the way she melts.

Sam's heart clenches. But she's not going to be weird about it, even though it steals the air right out of her lungs.

She turns her face into Paulina's hair, and breathes, and tries not to ruin it.

They get home, and make out for ten minutes in front of Danny's house.

(Paulina slips her hand down the front of Sam's jeans. Sam's pretty sure she's going to have to toss these panties; she clamps a hand down on Paulina's wrist and whimpers *I can't ride your hand in our car in front of Danny's house, G-d, what's wrong with you*— and Paulina grins her sharpest grin and says *when we go home, then?*)

When Sam gets upstairs, waving at Mr. and Mrs. Fenton as she goes by, her best friend is staring at her like he doesn't know her.

"So," he says, pretty halting and pretty confused, which is just like him. "How long have you and Paulina, uh, been—?"

"Honestly?" Sam says, blinking dazedly at him, "I have *no* idea."

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