



*You have very little to talk about now, so you sit in the uncomfortable wire chairs and go over all the people you know in common and give updates.*

ADULTERIES

Liza was my first friend in college, Jan was my first friend at summer camp, Sheila was my first friend at the office job, Angela was my first friend in junior high, and usually your first friend is the one you shed later, because by then you have found your actual friend. But, to complicate things, by then the first friend has accrued some loyalty power and pull because she was there and friendly first, she made those first few months tolerable, she buffered the transition. She is so nice that way. But, also sometimes there is something inherently off with the first friend, in that she is so friendly because she is desperate, or she is so friendly because she wants something from you, or she is so friendly and likes you so much and it's suspicious because she hasn't even really met you yet. Why is she so sure you are soulmates? It has only been two hours and *everyone* likes that song you both like.

There is often, then, a moment about two or three months in, when the transition has smoothed over, when the initial terror has calmed, when the new locations are starting to feel worn, when the office layout is making sense, when the first friend gets dumped for the new, more well-suited friend. The first friend may not understand. She may be hurt and upset. Depending on what sort of first friend she is, she may go off to find a new group of new people. She can survive, in part, by befriending those in transition, because certainly there is no shortage of those. She shepherds them through their distress and takes them to the movies. Perhaps, then, the first friend's best bet is to find someone always on the move. A non-settler. A nomad. Then the first friend can be the perpetual best friend, since there is never a second friend at all.

Of course, there remains this curious fidelity to the first friend.

You go and have lunch with her once a week at the coffee and pastry shop that smells like spilt hazelnut extract. You have very little to talk about now, so you sit in the uncomfortable wire chairs and go over all the people you know in common and give updates. Who is freaking out, who had sex, who was rude. You want to break up with her and surely she wants to break up with you too but you are both glued together by some invented sense of responsibility so you string each other along and sip uncomfortably from the oval holes cut into coffee lids. She eats half your raisin scone. For some reason, you mislead her and don't tell her about your new friend, the real friend, the one you love now. The one who will be your friend for a long time.

You and the first friend walk around together and no one else, walking around, understands why you are friends. They wave, and different people wave to both of you and look surprised. It can be good to be from different worlds, except these different worlds do not complement each other at all. You don't feel like she has any idea who you are and certainly you're not really sure who she is either: how could she possibly like that movie? Is she serious about her political stance? Is the fake giggle a joke? Does she think you don't notice the way she glances at her shadow in the window?

You bump into the first friend when you're out to dinner at salad emporium with the real friend. Hi! you say, friendly, but you don't want her to sit with you. She asks if she can. Sure, you say, with the word 'no' running through your head. The first friend sits down with her tray full of chinese chicken salad and cheese muffins, and interrogates your other friend. Who is gentle and fine with it. Who answers the questions with interest. It's you who is twitching. It's you who wants rid of the first friend. Get gone. You hate her now. You can hardly stand to look at her. She reminds you of how it felt to move here. That never happened. You were never so ill at ease, you were never desperately lonely. As you pick at your mandarin oranges, she brings back the gripping stomachache of those entire first few months. And you no longer want to be reminded of how hungry you were then, of how her face lit up the tunnel into the next world. ■