Lily and I had planned a movie marathon weekend. I was exhausted from work and she was stressed out from her classes, so we'd promised to spend the whole weekend parked on her couch and subsist solely on pizza and crisps. No healthy food. No diet Coke. And absolutely no strict, official clothes. Even though we talked all the time, we hadn't spent any real time together since I'd moved to the city.

We'd been friends since the eighth grade, when I first saw Lily crying alone at a cafeteria table. She'd just moved in with her grandmother and started at our school in Avon, after it became clear that her parents weren't coming home any time soon. The day I found her crying alone in the cafeteria was the day her grandmother had forced her to chop off her dirty dreadlocks, and Lily was not very happy about it. Something about the way she talked, the way she said, "That's so nice of you," and "Let's just forget about it," charmed me, and we immediately became friends. We'd been inseparable through the rest of high school, and lived in the same room for all four years at Brown College. Lily hadn't yet decided whether she preferred girlish dresses or rough leather jackets, but we complemented each other well. And I missed her. Because with her first year as a graduate student and my exhausting work, we hadn't seen a whole lot of each other lately.

Lily was studying for her Ph.D. in Russian Literature at Columbia University and working odd jobs every free second she wasn't studying. Her grandmother barely had enough money to support herself, and Lily had to pay for the studies on her own. However, she seemed to be fond of such a way of life. She loved Russian culture ever since her eighth-grade teacher told her that Lily looked how he had always pictured Lolita, with her round face and curly black hair. She went directly home and read Nabokov's "Lolita", and then read everything else Nabokov wrote. And Tolstoy. And Gogol. And Chekhov. By the time we finished school, she was applying to Brown College to work with a specific professor who had a degree in Russian Literature. On interviewing a seventeen-year-old Lily the professor declared her one of the most well-read and passionate students of Russian literature he'd ever met. She still loved it, still studied Russian grammar and could read anything in its original.

I couldn't wait for the weekend. My fourteen-hour workdays were registering in my feet, my upper arms, and my lower back. Glasses had replaced the contacts I'd worn for a decade because my eyes were too dry and tired to accept them anymore. I'd begun losing weight already as I never had time to eat properly, although I was drinking an enormous amount of coffee. I'd already weathered a flue infection and had paled significantly, and it had been only four weeks. I was only twenty-three years old. And my boss hadn't even been in the office yet. I knew I deserved a weekend.

Saturday afternoon found us particularly motivated, and we managed to saunter round the city center for a few hours. We each bought some new clothes for the upcoming New Year's party and had a mug of hot chocolate from a sidewalk cafii. By the time we made it back to her apartment, we were exhausted and happy and spent the rest of the night watching old movies and eating pizza.

When the girl first met her friend, Lily...

1. ...lived with her parents.
2. ...visited her grandmother.
3. ...just came to live in Avon.
4. ...had just lost her parents.