

a call away



a short story by
e. g. fabricant

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A Call Away is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Author's Note:

A Call Away is built upon one of my free stories, *Me—Molly*, which was my entry in NPR's Round 10 of their occasional feature, "Three Minute Fiction." There, the 600-word story had to be written "as a voice-mail message." It was my first tale with an LGBTQIA theme--in this case, L--and I wanted to explore it in a wider, deeper, more emotional way. Thus, Molly's two-page struggle became 18.

A CALL AWAY



E. G. Fabricant

Milliseconds after Kevin turned the deadbolt, they—the three of them—almost burst into the foyer, chased less by the persistent Orange County sun at midday than by a tense breakfast after Sunday Mass.

Brendan lapped Kevin and attacked the stairs. “I’ll be in my room.”

Madge’s eyes narrowed. “Not so fast, young man. We still need to talk about—”

Brendan wheeled, his face contorted. “No, Ma! No more! I’m done talkin’ about her right now, okay? There’s nothin’ left to be said, anyway!” Flushed, he pounded upward.

Madge jabbed a finger toward her feet. “Get back down here, young man! I—”

Kevin intervened. “Aw, fer Chrissakes, Madge—let the boy alone. He’s 14. There’s nothin’ he can do about it; not now, anyway.”

She gaped at him for a moment, then threw her arms around his neck and sagged against him. “Oh, Kevin. What are we gonna do? It’s been almost a week, and not a word!” The tears

returned. She burrowed between his raincoat's lapels to muffle her sobs.

"There, Muffin..." Kevin encircled her waist and patted the nape of her neck. "Nothin' remains to be done, to now. We've talked to the cops; Father Tom; the principal...everybody's on alert. Don't you worry; she'll turn up."

Madge snuffled and turned her pleading eyes upward into his. Unrequited, she laid her head on his shoulder. As he turned to start an arm out of its sleeve, she noticed the flashing red light.

"Uhhhh!" Madge broke away, bounded two steps and hammered at the machine's plastic buttons. The digital attendant leapt to monotonic life.

"Message...received...eight...teen minutes ago..."

...BEEP...

Rustling, whispering—then a quiet, unsteady breath.

"Hi—it's me...well, me, and Carly Rae Jepsen; let me turn that down—"

"—and, me: Starr!"—

"—Shut UP! I need to get through this!—Not you, Mommy and Daddy. I know it's been awhile and, what with the Irisher closing down and all, I didn't want you to worry—God knows you've got enough going on with settling all that. Good thing Brendan has a strong back, right, Daddy? Um—'s'cuse me..."

"I'm okay. I'm, I'm not in the O.C.; I'm, uh, up north—"

"—The Haight, Baby!—"

"Goddamn it, Starr! Sorry. So. I'm...all right, right? I have a place to stay; it's safe. I can't say where, yet. I'm not ready—and I know you're not. Anyways, there's other people like

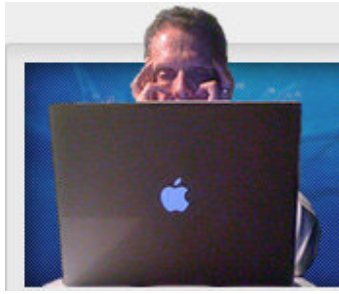
me...good people...who'll look after me awhile. Maybe hook me up with school and some work, so I pull my weight, right? Anyways..."

"Look. I'm sorry. I want you to know...it wasn't the hard times, or even the blowup on my birthday last year. 'Sweet Sixteen,' right? 'The conversation.' The 'elephant in the room.' What was I thinking? What had changed? Suddenly, 'I am Woman!' You'd see it, hear me—really, finally—and that would be that—"

"—'Behold: The Queer!'—"

"Jesus, Starr! I see now, it wasn't fair—for you, or me. It's just—I couldn't deal, anymore. Sitting in school or at Mass, staring at the crucifix—the nails, the blood. The agony on the face of Him, who hung out with rejects and allowed Himself to be lynched, to prove the wholeness of his love...for everyone. 'The least of mine'...No exceptions, right? Then, the very next thing I hear—always—is where that absolute ends...the boundaries, my boundaries—my personal electric fence. From them, it's 'Love the sinner, hate the sin.' From you, when it's not 'unnatural' or a violation of 'your beliefs'—Original Sin, anyone?—it's 'Don't worry, dear—it's just a phase,' or 'Someday, you'll find a good man and he'll change your mind.' Like, you have the right to draw a line in me, between who and what I am—like, there's a difference—so you can choose one and abandon the other. For everyone but me and my real friends, obsessing and acting on feelings and chemical urges is just awkward and teen-age—maybe even charming, right? Where's my forgiveness, huh? Hold on, I need a tissue..."

"...OW! Sorry—Starr was squeezing me a little hard."



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