

Ice Cream Man

Seems to me that they chose thirty-one flavors so you can try one for every day of the month. If it's one of those thirty-days-hath-September months, you could have a double scoop, and the last day of February you can pig out on a big honking sundae. Gary thinks that's all pretty stupid, saying thirty-one flavors was likely a random marketing decision, but I still think it's a calendar thing. The moon zips around the earth, and you've had the whole range of ice cream flavors through your gut.

It's my job to open the store at ten in the morning while Gary sleeps in, and then he closes up at night. Ice cream isn't a big breakfast item, so I have nothing to do but toke up and count flavors, backwards and forwards. You know, a lot of times Gary doesn't have all thirty-one flavors on hand. That's the kind of manager he is. If I was in charge, you know that there'd be thirty-one flavors. I'd pay attention to details like that.

Gary doesn't care if I smoke weed at work as long as there aren't any customers in the store. It's just another part of the day, like brushing your teeth or taking a piss. It's not like this job requires a lot of brain power; it's not like I have to lecture on Shakespeare. Besides, there's a big exhaust fan to the left of the cash register, so the smoke is all sucked out. No problem.

B R E N D A N H O W A R D

So there's my work day for you: smoking weed, trying to keep my mind occupied, counting up to thirty-one and back down to zero, listening to the hum of the freezers while the sun climbs the sky. It's not the best job, and not the worst either. Beats flipping burgers, right?

Business picks up in the spring, since the days get longer and hotter. Even then, the only customers before noon are moms planning birthday parties and ordering ice cream cakes. Those people always pay by check, so it's easy.

One morning two teenage kids, a guy and a girl, came into the store all sweaty and red-faced. They surprised me in the middle of a hit, and I dropped the joint right on top of my shoe. Thought sure I'd burn a hole but I didn't. The guy was wearing a high school cross-country t-shirt, so I figured they were out jogging. Details, you know.

"Anything you want," he said to the girl, puffing. "It's my treat."

"Vanilla," she said. "A vanilla cone." The girl was really pretty, with long auburn hair pulled back in a ponytail and twisted around so I could see her neck. Her butt looked kind of big; that's probably why she went out jogging with him.

The guy laced his fingers together behind his head and took a few deep breaths. "Thirty-one flavors available, and you say vanilla?" He drew a big breath. "Don't be boring. You could get vanilla soft-serve at McDonald's. Pick something crazy!"

Seemed like they were starting to bicker, so I picked up a broom and swept the dropped joint into a corner, so I could finish it later. I kept on sweeping behind the counter so I would look busy.