

The Kiss
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“Kiss me.”

Claire, who had been staring off into the foliage, turned to face Megan. Her grey eyes scanned the girl’s face for subtext, but it was unreadable, her every feature relaxed into an expression of perfect neutrality. Claire forced out a nervous laugh.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I mean kiss me. Just what I said.”

“Why?”

“Why not? I know you want to.”

This was a truth Claire had not acknowledged until Megan uttered the imperative moments before. It was unnerving to her that this girl she only had one class with and who moved in an entirely different social circle, seemed to know more about her deep, latent desires than Claire herself. She hadn’t been sure as to why she agreed to step away from the house party with Megan in the first place, and now was embarrassed at having let herself be controlled by her primitive urges.

“Why do you say that?” Claire stalled.

Megan’s mouth curled into a knowing smile; flirtatious even, Claire thought. Her heart beat faster and she felt her cheeks flush. She was thankful the spotlight that shone on the Feinberg’s back yard could not reach its outer periphery, where they were standing.

“Cause there’s something between us. Every time we’re anywhere together. At this party, in class, on the school bus, there’s a tension. Haven’t you felt that?”

“I guess, kind of...I’m not sure.”

“Well, it’s there, even if you refuse to see it. So just do it.”

Claire glanced towards the house some fifty feet away. Through the large back windows, she saw silent vignettes from the party play out. In one scene, some of her friends were gathered alone in the dining room, holding a private conference. It took little imagination for Claire to make herself the unhappy subject of their conversation. She turned back to Megan, who still was looking at her. Megan the artist; the only girl in the school who was taking the AP Art History exam, who was a known pot smoker, who didn’t go to any school dances. Claire noticed for the first time her prominent cheekbones, sharp like a movie star’s. If she grew her hair out and let the blue dye fade, she could be a model.

“What’s in it for you?” Claire asked.

Megan scoffed.

“I bet you’ve never asked a guy you were about to make out with that.”

She hadn’t, that was true. Claire thought back to last weekend, when she hooked up with Dan, the captain of the JV soccer team. He took her to an empty bedroom in the house where most of the class was congregated for another party, and stuck his tongue inside her mouth without so much as a peep from Claire.

“Well, I barely know you. I didn’t even know you were a lesbian.”

“I’m not a lesbian, I just would like to kiss you. You don’t have to be a lesbian to kiss girls.”

“I’m not saying that.”

“So why are you hesitating?”

Claire picked a leaf off the nearby bush and started ripping it into tiny pieces.

“Why don’t you kiss me?”

“Cause I know I want to kiss you. And I’ve kissed girls before. I don’t want to force you to do it. So you have to initiate.”

Megan had grown solemn, as though this encounter had now become a test of character. The violence of Claire’s conflicting desires caused her eyes to fill with tears. She blinked vigorously and turned her head.

“If you don’t want to, that’s fine, just thought you were interested...”

Megan started backing away – she had gotten so close – and sauntered towards the house, her small, boyish frame an embodiment of complete insouciance.

“Wait,” Claire commanded, and her voice echoed in the several square feet of backyard which had in those minutes become her entire universe.

“I just want to know that you’re not...messing with me. That this isn’t a joke for you because I’m on the lacrosse team and am friends with all the popular girls, and you probably think I’m really lame and pathetic.”

Megan turned around and suddenly was right in front of her again. So close that Claire saw the patches of acne on the side of her face, uncovered by makeup.

“You don’t have to worry about that, I’m...”

But Claire had already closed her eyes and leaned in.