

The Kiss

I shouldn't have kissed her, I knew that the second that I did. It was intended to be innocent, a friendly kiss. Looking back now I am reminded of a passage from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jeckyl and Mr. Hyde*: "...My demon had long been caged and he came out roaring." I thought by now those feelings would be dead or I would at least know better. I don't know why I am so surprised, I knew when I talked to her on the phone last week that this is how it would end. I imagine she will pull another disappearing act and I won't see her again for another two years. History will repeat itself again - it always does.

It had started simply enough, a phone call to get an address to send her a party invitation, but it wasn't long until we made plans to see each other. I knew then that I was in trouble. Knew that she still had her power over me, no matter how hard I tried to make myself believe it was gone. Then came the nights of laying in bed, memory and fantasy; present, future, and past. The line between friends and lovers has never been drawn with such a thin pencil. Three cheers for what could have been but will never be! Let us raise our glasses and toast the bride and groom that will never wed, the lovers that will never know *love!*

It was my twenty first birthday when we last kissed, same car, same street, same good-bye - always the same good-bye. And what of that which followed? It too far to familiar, leaving me a twisted sort of beast inside. I feigning control and failing miserably. My life has become a game of questions to which I am not sure she even knows the answers. But the worst questions of all are the ones to which I pessimistically find answers of my own.

I shouldn't have kissed her, I even told her so. "Why do we always do this?" I asked between the first joining of lips and the second. She replied only by softening her body to me as she tugged on my heart with her surrendering salutation. After this trilogy of secrets told to the heart we parted, leaving a vacuum for the awkwardness to rush into. I felt the fool. I had told myself over and over that I wanted her back only as a friend. Strangely enough I still believe that. I wonder if I am a sphere of two halves instead of one whole. On one there is the man who has chosen to devote himself to scholastics, success, and social solitude, while the other is the wounded but raging heart that is my soul. All the while that I believed I had empowered myself, my heart has ruled silently all along, tricking me into believing I could control it.

Do I love her? I'm not sure that I ever really knew what love was or know now.. My past has made me doubt myself. Too many "lovers" have betrayed me, making me question my judgment; making me question myself. I do not feel the undying desire to be with her the way I did in my youth, but I cannot deny that she is a part of my world, and will forever hold a tie to my life. In some way she fills an emptiness in me that no one else can fill, and for no reason that I can explain. I can laugh with her, talk with her, and feel with her. Maybe that's why her return scared me so, because she makes me *feel*, something I have ceased to explore, keeping to the shallow reefs of emotion.

And what now? Now that she has driven away into the dark night, perhaps not to be seen again for sometime? I find myself reluctant to let myself experience that emotion. Why? Because it hurts? Because I would have to admit I have needs? Needs I have been denying or ignoring because I have no way to satisfy them? Suddenly I feel lonely, and I am trying to ignore it, trying to distance myself from it, like some swimmer frantically racing for the surface

for a desperately needed breath. Oh God, the frailties of humanity; this fragile little place inside this rugged, and burly body of mine. Is there not some higher justice than that which we men make? Will that kiss drive her out of my life again? And if so, why? I felt her give in to it, I felt her strong hold on my body as we embraced. But none the less, I sit here, alone with myself; alone with too much time to think in this still and silent night. I have only Kevin's words racing through my mind: "Do what your heart tells you and you can't go wrong." Knowing he is right. Knowing my tie to her is so very strong. Feeling ashamed and not knowing why. But in those few precious seconds, we were soft and gentle, and perhaps in that I saw my lost self, the soul I once was - the soul I shall never be again.

Men spend their whole lives trying to maintain control of self and outward appearance of emotion. In this quest we become the rocks for others to lean on, the icons of strength to which we harbor others pain. It is in this act that we are considered men, and the act is selfless. We abandon gentleness and the recognition of our own hurt and suffering. In this act of suppression however, we lose something in the trade. We lose the ability to be our true selves. We are always what we wish for others to see and seldom who we are. There is one rare moment when a man is himself, and that is when he kisses someone he truly feels for. His hard and ridged ways and emotions soften in that moment of truth of the kiss. It is a surrendering of his act when a woman knows, truly knows that there is more there that she originally was allowed to know.

When a man surrenders his true self in that act, he becomes truly venerable because another has viewed into his soul and taken a piece of all that is there with her. Forever, will she have that power over him, and no matter how hard he tries to front himself she will forever

know his deepest *truest* self. Often a woman will not even realize what it is she has experienced, what power she has gained because she has always lived a more emotionally open life. Then there are women who know exactly what it is they have seen into, perhaps not consciously, but intuitively.

She knows my soul, a place that not even I visit anymore. There are strong and powerful ghosts there, waiting to be resurrected. Waiting for a window of opportunity to be freed. And while it is easy for me to keep them caged, it is impossible for me to keep her out. She knows the way through it all, and when I pretended not to care, even to the point that I believed it myself, she simply pulled the truth through my lips and into her. This surrendering of self would concern me less if only I knew she would be there for me day after day, but with her I never know. She cares for me, I learned that through her kiss, but only when she too is vulnerable in embrace. I want her to have changed, and I want her to have remained the same. I want to believe that she's only trying to get back into my life in the way I wanted her in it in the first place. And on the other hand I truly believe my "love" for her is gone. Perhaps I say that so that I will continue to believe it, a clause in the fine print of a contract to latter save face with. No, it is only wishful thinking, and my poor wounded heart stopped believing in falling stars a long time ago...And after all wasn't it only a kiss?