



THE KISS

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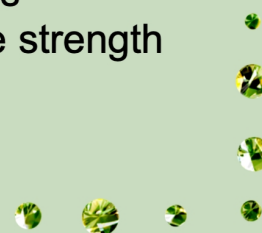


His heart raced when her full, parted, lips touched his. His mouth welcomed her warm breath, her soft tongue. From deep inside his stomach, he felt the familiar feeling of falling. Every muscle in his body contracted as, eyes closed, he pictured her face that was so close to his right now. His body collapsed in on itself while his heart thumped maniacally, exploding, like birth. He saw her wintry skin in his mind's eye. He watched her hair flow before him like blood from a wound. It was burnt amber, like falling leaves in autumn.

He was sinking. He felt small and insignificant next to her. She could cradle him in her hands. She could crush him. He opened his eyes hesitantly and watched her hazel eyes deepen before him into a green as deep as a dark, fabled forest. She was watching him, too. He could not break free from her enduring kiss.

He shut his eyes again and remembered. It seemed like he had watched her over the course of a lifetime. She had ignored him as if unaware of his obsessive observations. She sat in the lecture hall, her gentle form bent over her notes as she stared at them with the intensity of a marble statue. Her willowy form strode through the halls with an air of absolute entitlement. He could see she had the world by the short hairs – the world and all the people in it.

But Marianne saw nothing impressive in her. His friend warned him that type of woman would never need him. Would she even want him? He had said he didn't know. And what difference did it make to Marianne, anyway? He must know her. He bent all his will towards that end and let everything else slip away into a vortex spinning in the back of his mind. He built his confidence a little every day just to gather the strength to say hello.



Now she shone down on him like orange twilight or burnt sunshine, so far away. And he was still sinking. No, shrinking before her. Was he falling? Why did she tower over him? He was hard all over, tense with panic.

He experienced a waking reverie of the time he spent trying to woo her, all the while staring at her far above him. He recalled their first words for a fleeting moment, but that was soon gone. His mind was falling in on itself. Imploding. He remembered the name of her cat – Sookie. She was the darkest cat he'd ever seen. Like a deep forest with bright eyes, like her mistress. He remembered the first time he ever stepped into her apartment, which was where he stood now. No, he was sitting. His limbs felt springy. They flopped around, spaghetti-like. They slapped on the floor. His fingers felt nubby. He gazed down at them. They were alien to him.

His frantic mind turned over images around the room. He both saw and recalled his first time noticing all the terrariums in her apartment. They glowed at him with a green-tinted fluorescence. They were decorated like small jungles. He wondered then, as he did now, why she would have so many pet frogs.

His lips had left hers now. His eyes felt plump as he gazed up at her. Surely they would bulge out of his skull if these strange sensations continued. She gazed back at him with an expression he could not discern, but it made him feel helpless. Like loving her had made him feel hopeless.

She smiled and her expression changed. Her eyes sparkled and in those last moments of rational thought, he knew he had obtained her love at last. She doted on him, bending over him, gently picking him up off the floor in her enormous, pale hands. Her fingers cupped his bloated stomach. She pulled him out of his crumpled clothing. Now he had her! He could see she would obsess over him, now.

She carried his orb-like form to one of the terrariums and opened the door on the front of the tank. Gently, she slipped his gelatinous body onto the soil. His mind grew dark. He stared about and noticed the other gargantuan frogs sharing his new habitat. He gazed at his golden, bulbous eyes, tomato-like form and twilight orange skin reflected in his water dish. He matched her hair. Perhaps that made him special. Then it dawned on him that she had had a lot of first and only kisses, and his awareness slipped away with the click of the terrarium lock.

