

after the kiss

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This moment changes everything.

Becca has been head-over-heels for Alec from the instant they met. He's a brainy jock with a poet's heart—in other words, perfect for her. Camille is careful with her words and protective of her heart, especially since Chicago. Then a new boy in her new town catches her off guard with a surprise kiss. Too bad that new boy is Becca's boyfriend, Alec.

Camille and Becca have never met, but their lives will unravel and intertwine in surprising ways as they deal with what happens after the kiss.

not getting ready for a date

it's not like it's a date. how could it be a date since you don't date anyone, because dating's a trap, because dating is totally dated? because you are the girl who stays unconnected to everyone. still, you do know he will be at the lake house tonight. and he knows you will be there. and you both know that right now you are probably getting ready to be there, knowing the other one will be there. it's why you're sitting here staring at your closet with a disaster of discarded outfits on your floor. it's why you can't decide between jeans or the deconstructed tuxedo pants. it's why you wish you'd bought those killer turquoise cowboy boots you saw with mom last weekend, and why you can't decide if your hair goes down or up. he'll be there. you'll be there. and eventually you'll be there together. and you're not sure what's going to happen—what's already happened is confusing enough—but you do know you're sure something will happen. maybe like last time you'll just talk. but that was still something. something for sure. he thought it was something too because what about those e-mails? so this isn't just going to another weekly party. it's more like kind of a date. even though you don't date. which is why you're not sure why you're sitting here getting ready as though it is a date. but why you're not able to act like it isn't one, either.

the kiss

he just comes at you. you barely drop much of a *hey, how are you?* there on the back deck where people can see—and he just comes *at* you, surprising as a tornado on a sunny day, blowing the roof off, pulling up the fence. you see him and you smile and then it's just one step, two steps and he's over you and under you and all over you and it's not some *you're cute i might like you* kiss, nor a confused and disgusting sloppy-slayer fueled by all that vodka kool-aid he's obviously had. no, this is a mouth with momentum, a train on one track paying no heed to any warning clangs, a chemistry set just waiting for someone to put the wrong powder in the right tube and make something explode. this kiss says he needs you more than all those puppies put together, that he'll aim over and over at the tender haiku buried deep in your own trenches until he hits the right syllable. this kiss will wipe your mind of all things, will make you forget your name your face what town you're living in and who's driving you home. it is a kiss that, when it ends—after he's summoned laughing into the dark by shouting boys in the driveway—will leave you gasping and glossy-eyed for hours later, will follow you home as you stare in the bathroom mirror at the chewed-looking spots his stubble left on your chin. it is a kiss so loud and long that your whole mind will scream, *that can't happen again*, while your body will still twitch a little, wondering if it could just once more.

Telephone Evolution

In the old days (Mom says)
it would just ring and ring and ring,
callers counting
twenty, twenty-one, (he could be
just now running in from outside)
before giving up.

Next came answering machines
(we still have an ancient one for the telemarketers)
that allowed for screening—
deciding whether or not
to pretend to be out.

Now there is the cell phone:
more immediate, less discreet—
I can tell, for example, after two rings and a click
that for the first time
he has seen my number, hit IGNORE.

The Coffee (Heart) Break

After the superspeedway
of Sunday morning doughnut drive,
coffee chaos,
and tablewipe tumbling
there is a small lull
—a pause.

I can sip
my own coffee—break
my own doughnut into small pieces to savor.

This is the time
—Freya knows—
someone can come by
and I can do more
than wave at her like a drowned girl.

She can come
—fifteen minutes before the after-church lunchers—
and I can sit
on the patio with her a minute,
ask about last night.

It is enough time even
for her to show me her phone

—the photos she took last night at the Lake House—
and ruin my life
forever.

With Apologies to WCW

so much depends upon
the red (handed) cameraphone photo
glazed with pain
(of him) standing beside
(with his mouth all over)
the (creamy) white chick

Numb

At first a column of heat
—a lava charge—
bursts up from the tail end of my spine and
rockets
up to the top of my skull
—fills my eyes—
so that for a moment I can't see and all I feel is
heat.

But it is the last thing I will feel—this fever wind—
because after that I am ice:
a white tundra of unmoving blank:
a glacier only very slightly drifting
—unaware of its own motion—
across a dark and frozen sea.

Fury

Freya's face is a fist,
her frustration a force
unfurled and frenzied—lashing
against the redhead, my boyfriend,
the entire (cheating) world.

Coming from her each hate-filled word falls—
one poisonously sour grape after the next,
leaving a miserable, permanent stain
on everything touched.

Island of Relief

After Freya leaves, the sorrow is a tidal wave,
pounding me so hard it is difficult to see
—strident tide smashing
everything in sight.

I am a drowned girl:
lungs grabbing dark water,
filling with—[seeking]—the source that will
silence and bury.

A pale hand plunges—grabs—
and insists: rise.

I am a gasping, sputtering face,
looking for a life raft.

Nadia is calm, cool, solid—
an ivory island.

In her comforting concern I will rest and think,
gulp for air,
try to breathe again.

Helpful Advice

Janayah's left alone at the counter
and I will get in trouble,
but I don't care I
can't breathe after all.

Back in the kitchen Nadia
holds me by the scruff of the neck,
helping me stand,
cleaning me up.

*I know it hurts, Nadia says calmly,
but if he cheats, it's over.*

*Maybe not over for you
but over for him
and in that case it is just
over for you both.*

Over like the last pizza crust.

Over like hitting E with forty miles
to the next fill-up.

Over like a blackout.

Over like an execution.

Her face is still a new doll to me—something
to admire but not yet fully know.

But her voice is serious as the grave:

concrete, set and poured.

Break it off, she tells me,

sounding like some Old Testament Bible verse
about a right hand and its offense.

You have no choice, she says.

This girl usually so full of sunshine,

now black clouds sweep across her brow.

Against her finality my heart thuds, once.

But around it my soul echoes empty,

her words careening back and forth and back,
ringing like truths.

Terra Elan McVoy has been reading and writing avidly since she first learned how, and has had many jobs that center around those two activities, from managing an independent children's bookstore, to teaching writing classes, and even answering fan mail for Captain Underpants. Terra lives and works in the same Atlanta neighborhood where her novels *After the Kiss* and *Pure* are set.

To learn more about Terra's life, visit TerraElan.com