

Hoa Ngo

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BEST KISS

Jamie and I stop at a liquor store on our way to the wedding. I grab a cold six-pack and Jamie picks up a bottle of whiskey and a two-liter diet Coke, starts mixing it in a plastic cup at the register. It's 100 degrees outside so the clerk asks if we want ice to go with that. Jamie says no and the clerk repeats "No ice?" when we walk out the door.

Summer 1997. Parked on Torrey Pines Road, coast of San Diego. Midnight, top down, cool onshore breeze, surf crashing a few yards away. All me and my girl did was kiss, and we did so for over an hour. We were all over each other's faces to the point people driving by were honking and cheering. Twelve years ago, seems like yesterday.

The gentleman is lost in reverie when he finishes so he doesn't hear Jamie say "That sounded like a condom commercial." Jamie insists they're not telling the whole story (the whole truth and nothing but). When I disagree Jamie says I'm an accessory to sentimentality, to the fairy tale illusion of love. Says there is a longer history associated with each memory and maybe it should be told. And besides, it's not even about love but just mugging, sucking face, exchanging spit, tonsil hockey. Jamie is silent, trying to think of more phrases but I'm relieved because people are starting to whisper about the rude tall girl.

Jamie and I became friends when we both worked in a cafeteria. I cleaned trays and dishes off the conveyor belt (a "scraper") and she had the slightly more glamorous job of drying silverware when it came out of the washer (no real job title but incidentally she was also known as the rude tall girl there). For reasons still unknown to me, I always had to take lunch last but Jamie would draw out her own meal and then wait for me while I finished. Maybe she was in no hurry to get back to work, maybe it was an easy way to kill time, but she would entertain me daily by explaining why everyone we worked with was an idiot. Neither of us lasted very long at that job.

The back of Tattaglia's Bistro, a nice place. Up until then, we'd been just friends but we met in the hallway on the way back from the restroom and we stayed there so long that our dinner companions started to wonder where we were. We returned to the table together, holding hands, smiling in that silly way that is only possible when you're newly in love. I always thought the food was overrated, but it will always be my favorite restaurant.

Nearly everyone around our table shares a story. I find the vignettes alternately amusing or boring. Not like Jamie who is muttering something about how the last person was impolitely blocking the door to the bathroom while making out.

Although she's the most fearless person I know, Jamie feels self-conscious around my family because they're all pretty short. She hates being the "Amazon woman" when she's with my sisters. Jamie whispers to me that should I ever date a petite person (her exact words are "little troll") it would be a betrayal most dire.

We were waiting in a car for a friend. It started to rain and something about the light was perfect. It illuminated the droplets as they slid down the windshield. I looked over at her and could see the same pattern on her face. Our friend called to say he wasn't coming but by that time we didn't care.

Sometimes I don't tell Jamie what I think because she has the most remarkable talent of being able to make anything sound foolish. I could say "It's a beautiful day" and she would repeat it in a tone of voice that mocks God and creation.

One time Jamie handed me a photo and said "look at this." It was a picture of Jamie and I told her she looked pretty. She took the photo back, stared at it for a long time, and said it looked nothing like her and that's why I liked it. What can you say to that?

I met him early in the morning in Armistice Park after having not slept all night. Perhaps it was the delirium of sleep deprivation, but something just clicked. We talked and laughed and kissed all morning. I went home later and slept all day. Sometimes it still seems like a dream.

Here's what I would say if Jamie would let me: you hear these anecdotes and you either think they're stupid and laugh or you think they're stupid and remember when you were that stupid and maybe wonder, maybe hope you could ever be that stupid again.

The truth is that there may be negative endings to these glimpses. For all we know, each kiss started a relationship that ended in bitter separation. But each person who related their moment didn't so much as hint at regret. For them, the only sad thing is that those moments have passed and are not repeatable.

The reception winds down and Jamie finds a spot on the floor, decides to sleep there. She takes off her shoes, places them neatly to the side and puts both hands together under her head. Before she drifts off, she says "Guard my shoes." I bring a chair over and sit next to her. I watch over them all night long. ☞