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There are a thousand ways of kissing.
A million ways of saying I love you.
Not even the stars in the sky are eternal.

1 David

It's the first day of the ninth grade. Everything is normal. I'm sitting on the last row by the window so I can peek outside. From the back I can see everybody and no one bothers me. It's my first day at this school so I don't know anyone. My parents didn't like the idea of me changing schools, they wanted me to study economics, business or some other boring thing with a lot of paperwork. It was a tough battle but I'm sure it will be worth it. I take some notes but don't really pay much attention. It's four p.m. and this is the last lesson of the day. When this is over, I have to wait for my dad. Another rule they make me follow. I have to get used to it.

Out of nowhere the clouds opened just a little bit, a light comes in through the window that hits right on the second-to-last table in the row next to mine. She shines like an angel. Her dark straight hair nearly blinds me reflecting the sunlight. I want to see her face but I can't. What I can see and quite well is that she has a waist, a bum and some legs. WOW! Everything is round. She's not fat or skinny. She is perfect. I keep trying to see her face until the bell rings. Damn it, she's a nerd. It's the first day, there is no need for that much focus. Turn. I should have paid more attention during the day; I don't even know her name. Finally, the bell rings and I wait a bit for her to turn. She is

talking to a friend by her side. Totally worth it, she turns to put her file and her pencil case in her backpack. Her smile is beautiful, her sweet dark, so dark brown eyes. The girl has some crazy curves. I better not get up just yet.

I've been at this for a month now. Caroline is always with the same friends and hasn't talked to me yet. Well, I haven't seen her talk to any other guy either. She is beautiful, an angel. She has a beautiful name. She doesn't know I exist. But one day I'll talk to her. Oh yes, I will. But how? At times like this I could use a big brother. I'm not talking about this with my dad. I've got to come up with a plan. And some courage.

Christmas break is just around the corner. I have to talk to her before the holidays. I never talk to anyone and now I want to speak to a girl. Ah! Ah! In the morning and in the afternoon my dad makes me listen to some old fashion radio station that plays lame old music all day long. Sometimes it plays a song that makes me think about Caroline. I can't do must thinking, I man up and just go for it. If she doesn't like it, too bad. If she doesn't like it, it means she's dumb. The teacher left the room so this is it. I lean over and start:

“Oh! Carol I am but a fool / Darling, I love you /Though you treat me cruel”¹

It worked! She turns! She realized I was messing with her. Oh damn! She turned back. Damn it, the teacher returned.

¹ Reference to the song “Oh Carol” by Neil Sedaka

Maybe that's why she turned back. I'm going to try again. It should be easier; she knows I'm messing with her.

“Oh! Carol I am but a fool / Darling, I love you / Though you treat me cruel

Kind of embarrassed but she turns and smiles at me. Yes! She smiled at me. One smile just for me. She turned back the very next second but she did smile at me.

“Oh! Carol I am but a fool / Darling, I love you / Though you treat me cruel”

Another smile. She likes it. She is liking me. It only lasts a second but when she smiles at me, I can see the stars. She got up? Why? Oh, the bell rang, I didn't even realize. I have no idea what happened in this class. All I know is that she likes me. My girl likes me!

The following months I sang her that song several times and she always smiled back at me. I was happy but that was it. She is with her friends the whole time and I couldn't do anything else. Not even in the many alone hours we spend waiting for our parents by the school gate.

We are now in the tenth grade. The class is pretty much the same as last year. There are two classmates that are worth spending time with, André and César, everybody else I just ignore. I've got some headphones stuck on my ears at all times

as loud as it goes, I don't care if everybody thinks I'm antisocial. I don't care about anything for that matter, I never bothered with feeling out of place. Well, not quiet. I'm still enchanted by Caroline. Yes, enchanted is the right word. Nowadays we spend more time together, especially in the library. Every time we have a break from classes I rush over there. I always try to get there before everyone else so I can stay at one of the tables by the window that faces the inside of the school. I take a peck until I realize she is on her way to the library, from the moment I see her, in order to cover up the best that I can, I become the most despicable person on earth. I know she always ends up at my table. There are six sits per table and she sits whenever possible on the opposite side from me. Not necessarily in front of me but allowing me to take a look whenever I notice she is focus on a subject. She looks so cute. Even studying in the library, under the faint light, she shines. All of the light filaments that get in from the many windows of the darkest library in the word highlight the tenderness of Caroline's face. She has a luminous face, an angel. Sweet eyes, delicate hands, her skin is so light that it looks as if it was never touched by the sun. She's not what you would call an ordinary girl. Whenever she has lunch at the cafeteria, which doesn't happen that often, she easily tolerates the things we say so that the girls get repulsed and let us have their lunch. Sometimes she even laughs. I love that about her. Sometimes she's kinda boyish, wanting to win every debate,

executing every scientific experiment. Looks weird but I love that she fights, that she is not afraid of showing what she wants. My girl is a fighter. She is always wrapped in the fight for gender equality or arguing about some stupid poem. She makes a fuss over things that don't matter at all. To be honest, I don't really listen to much of her arguments, but I love the passion with which she defends her ideas. She talks and talks, moving her hands around, but she's my angel. She is a simple girl, not into fancy clothes, she just doesn't care. All of her friends are like that, I guess it means she's not into frivolousness. Today, all the seats have been taken except the one next to me. She sat beside me. I won't be able to study with her sitting next to me. Her smell. She doesn't even use perfume, it's just her shampoo. But I can't. What do I do? I can't think. I just start bossing her around, the hurt is all over her face. Poor thing. I'm such a jerk.

All that routine was kept unchanged for one more year. We are spending more and more time together, unfortunately to study. But we also talk a lot, getting to know each other better. If at first it was a weird attraction, now there's respect and friendship. I admire her strength to defend her opinions but I just have to shoot them down. I always find a way to get into arguments with her, most of them are just to have her fighting me back. I'm able to provoke violent reactions in those eyes, and

I admit that I get out of control whenever she attacks me nonstop with endless arguments. I love the feeling it gives me seeing her like that. It's something that I admire her for but it drives me crazy. I just can't explain it but I just can't act differently towards her. No other girl has that effect on me. She drives me wildly mad. All she has to do is talk or laugh with any other guy, I know they are just friends but it real gets me. I walk away. If it's a short recess I just stay there facing the wall with my yelling earphones trying to ignore it. Seeing her giggling to any guy tortures me. I grab every moment we are together to at least have her friendship. Well, she is the only person patient enough to listen to me. She really pays attention. We share our private thoughts, both of us have super controlling parents. Both our houses have strict rules and many pressures. That's probably why she gets me so well. I don't know how she feels about me. Actually, she had always treated me like any other guy. From my side there's a lot of attraction. I'm crazy about Caroline. She owns my thoughts by day and tortures me by night. Caroline is becoming more and more of a woman. Her curvy body is getting sexier by the day. She is wearing some red jeans that squeeze her bum in a way that just burns me up.

Spring is here, we can feel it in our blood. No doubt. We are going on a study trip to the zoo. Having to put up with this people in school sucks but it doesn't compare to the torture of being trapped one hour on this bus. We have already had many

trips together but this time she sat on the bench in front of me. We were sitting in the back of the bus and everybody was shouting, despite claiming they were singing. She kneels facing backwards to sing along. Of course, I have my earphones on and I am looking nauseated about the whole thing, while casting a look at the girl of my dreams... and nightmares. Her eyes shine, her lips don't stop moving and she's dancing the best she can in that tiny spot. She's so silly. I love it when she's like that, just happy for no reason. I want her to be so happy. I can't have her but I wouldn't dream backing off. Even if I wanted to, it wouldn't be easy, we have the same classes. Wait. What is she doing? It can't be true. She drives me wild. She is using one finger to put some sort of cream on her lips. So hot. I'm missing blood on my brain because without thinking I just got up and, absolutely surrendered to all her sensuality, asked her:

“Can I have it?”

She takes a moment, looking deeply into my eyes, then looks away to the small container and gives it to me. No. Carol, I want you to lend me your finger and use it to put the cream on my lips. Or for you to use your shiny lips and with a kiss transfer that honey to my lips. Too bad, I'm going to settle by having on my lips the same cream that sweetens her mouth. The cream has a smooth texture and a sweet smell, I can't figure it out but it says it's peachy. Chicks' things. Sissies. Any other girl and I wouldn't care. I guess all the others have these things as

well but I never noticed. Having her so close to me rubbing the cream on her lips was just too hot to look away. She doesn't look away from me while I do the same, sadly, with my finger on my lips. I got so hot with the thought that this is turning her on that I just do it over and over again. She laughs and reaches out her hand towards me.

“Oh, come on. That's enough.”

No, it's not enough, Carol. I can't say a thing. Our eyes are linked but what I really wish it would be for our lips to be united. Having her eyes on me is burning me inside. On second thought, I'm glad she hasn't fulfilled my lust right there. It would have been complicated to exit the bus. I kept my distance for the rest of the day, being close to her and not kiss her would have been just be too painful. I really have to man up and make some move because not doing it is getting unbearable.

Today is her birthday. Usually, the girls organize a way to get a present whenever it's someone's birthday. Not for me because my birthday is during the summer break. They decided to get Caroline a bouquet of light beige roses. It got her crying; she is so happy. I would have picked red roses, taken off the petals and spread them on a bed and then lay her on top of them, whatever... Everybody is singing happy birthday to her and when we got to clap Richard runs toward her, grabs her by the waist, lifts her up with his hands just a little bit under that round bum, tightens her legs and puts her on his shoulder. I simply

have to sit down; all of my blood seems to be leaving my body through the blow to my heart. At first, she screams with the shock but then she starts laughing while patting his back. He starts to run down the hall with her by his shoulder. Suddenly, every man's worst fear was right in front of me. The woman I love is happy as can be, perched on another man's shoulders. He's the one with his hands on her legs, he's the one with her chest glued to his back, it's on his back that her hands are placed. He runs, in slow motion, and they laugh nonstop with that cruelty that kills me inside. He finally puts her down. As if that wasn't enough, she leans in and without taking her eyes off his, presses her hand on his chest. Are they a couple? It looks that way. I'm so completely into her that I didn't realize. I knew he messed with her in biology classes, I get so mad about it. The stupid teacher distributed the seats in the room and they end up sitting next to each other. I burned with anger imagining the things he would say to her about all those subjects that make her laugh so much. Sometimes the teacher would stop the class just to shut them up. She was always laughing whenever she was with him. Stupid teacher, so hot that she had all of the guys drooling over her, but fuck!

During that week I pay way more attention to their relationship and from what I understood they are not dating or fooling around. I hate seeing my girl hanging on his shoulders. Those hands on the legs I want for my own, the laughter she

gives him. I want her to laugh for me, with me, with me alone. Richard has gained the habit of putting the girls on his shoulder in those last weeks and now Caroline is his new favorite «victim». Of course, she is. She loves it. I die every time I see her hair though the air in a fast and continuous movement all the way until it touches his ass. Then she stands up and slaps his back but that beautiful dark brown hair touches his ass. His ass. I had so many dreams about that hair in my hands and on my chest. And with a quick motion, he achieves in a second what I couldn't in three years. Fuck!

In the biology department at school, there's an entrance area before the classrooms. We actually only use that space on raining days. In these years no one has ever changed the lamps, only the one closest to the front door illuminates the area, leaving all that space darker than would be expected. On an April afternoon, she wants to wait inside and the teacher doesn't show up. The whole class left and we ended up being alone with André. I don't know how, but we ended up facing each other with our hands touching and our eyes connected, it really looks like we're dancing. Only our hands touch, there are three feet of desire between our bodies. We spin together very slowly. André doesn't leave neither shuts up. I can't make out of the words he's saying, but he just won't shut up or leave us. Fuck! Maybe it is just better this way, maybe she wouldn't have stayed there alone with me. We don't say a word or move our eyes no matter how

much André calls us. It's the perfect moment for me to kiss her. Chicks love this shit and I just can't wait any longer, but with him standing over here there's no place for romance. I want to kiss her so badly. Right now, I would prefer, even without knowing how to do it, to slow dance with her. I want to feel her in my arms, I want her chest against mine, feel her heart, feel her breath in my ear, smell her hair, and kiss her, kiss her nonstop. Out of nowhere there's a big fuss and we let go. Everybody walked in through the door bringing along the teacher while killing that marvelous moment that's going to keep me up all night. I never had her so close to me, never have I felt her tiny delicate little hands on mine. I need that tenderness in my life. Caroline is not a cry baby but deep down she's a sweet girl that needs a lot of TLC. We have way more in common than people would imagine or is it all in my head? I need her and I know I can and want to give her all that she needs. I'll get there, slowly but surely.

In comes May and one more birthday, this time it is Alice's birthday. The whole class is going to lunch at this new pizza place that opened recently close to school. I really hate these things but I have to take every chance I get to be close to Carol. We couldn't sit everyone at one table but I manage to sit at the same table as her and that is all it matters to me. She's ignoring me, it's like she can see through me. I can't take this. Fuck, I'm not in school so I'll have a beer and I won't be the

only one since we all know there won't be any more classes today. We got the drinks really fast but had to wait for the pizzas. If I had known this was going to happen, I would have lunched at the cafeteria. The pizza's fine but Caroline is just not into me. As soon as the bill arrives, I pay my share and rush to school. No way I'm staying here for her to just ignore me. I'm a little tipsy but I manage to get to school on my own. I sit on the benches by the front gate even though my father won't arrive any time soon, the school is going to be too loud during recess and the library is just too far today. Maybe I shouldn't have had the beer. Who cares now? Caroline arrives. She's with John and Alice. They are chatting and giggling in another bench, close to me while being a mile away. Finally, Alice leaves. Caroline and John sit next to me. I must be really grumpy because he told me to wash my face with cold water. He's thinking he's the boss. I shut my eyes, lean my back against the wall. I'm not going anywhere.

“Go on. Your father will be here soon and it won't be pretty.”

Fuck. I know he's right. If my father finds me by the school gate like this I'm screwed. I get up, I guess, and off I go towards the washroom. It's so far away. Halfway along, in comes Carol that seems to whisper:

“Come along, I'll help you.”

My girl's the sweetest. She's mine. I intertwine my right arm on her left arm. It's hot, it must be, I'm hot and she's wearing a short-sleeved shirt. My fingers touch her skin on the inner side of her arm near the elbow. And I stop breathing, and my heart stops beating. Her skin is even smoother than I ever dare to dream. My fingers slide slowly, very slowly down the runway that her arm has become. When my fingers reach her hand, I put them firmly between her fingers. Instantly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, we both lock our fingers tightly, almost as if we are tightly tightening a knot that would bond us forever. My heart beats, my lungs fill with air. There, in that microsecond, it all makes sense, all the pieces fit together. And I find out what heaven means. She's my heaven, my paradise, my promise of a happier tomorrow. I don't have the courage to look at her, and she doesn't look at me either. If anyone saw that moment, for sure they would think it was something that we have been doing all the time for the longest time now. She pushes the door that access the central area of the school and holds the door for me. She never lets me go. We cross all that area, climb the stairs, interlocked. Maybe John is right and I had too much to drink. Am I dreaming? We get to the washroom and she sides just a little bit towards me looking down at the floor a little nervous while saying:

“I'm sorry. I want to help you but I can't go inside the boy's washroom. Sorry. Do you think you're going to be okay?”

So sweet. She brings me by the hand to the washroom door and then apologize. I kinda wish she would come inside but not when I'm the way I am right now. I give her a thumbs up letting her know I'll be okay and walk in. I stay there for a bit, splash my face with cold water hoping it will wake me up, I haven't forgotten that my father will soon arrive. When I exit, she's waiting for me. I swear I thought she had taken off. But there she is, my angel. I want to hold her hand so badly but she doesn't lean in. We walk in silence. She regrets it. I'm so embarrassed, I hate that she has seen me like that. Alcohol is something I want to hide deep in my past and Carol is my future. Once we get to the gate John leaves, he was just taking care of our stuff while we were gone. We stand quiet and alone until my father arrives. She whispers to me before I leave:

“Watch out. Lay low.”

Briefly, I get a glance of her. She had never looked so concerned, neither did her eyes looked sweeter. She's so worried about me. She knows why, we both do.

That night I dreamed of her. Of us. Of the future. A dream different from the million ones in which I had her to myself. I dreamed we were older, together in bed. There's so much light in the room. Lots of laughs, ours and of two little kids. The kids have her eyes and my curly hair, cute as can be. I woke up so happy. Yes, this is all I want for my live. Together, forever with that sweet girl. Our kids will be happy and loved by

a sweet and protective mother. Carol won't let anyone, not even me, wreck our bright future. I will feel pity for whoever dares to try. We have everything to work out. Well, it lacks courage or boldness to give the first step. Or maybe that has already been given by our hands. I'm going crazy. Why is this so complicated? I think she has feelings for me, but maybe it's just friendship. What if she doesn't want me the way I want her? I want all of her, completely. I wish she felt the same and, since she fights so much for gender equality, she would give the crappy first step. I want it so much but I'm afraid of ruining it, maybe I should wait longer, maybe with time she'll feel the same. Maybe.

One afternoon in June we had to go to the stationery store near the school. Both of us quiet. On the way back a little rain starts to fall. With all this heat it feels kinda nice. I keep my pace slow but Carol starts to run. Then she notices I'm not following her and shouts:

“Come on.”

“No.”

She stops immediately and waits for me without a fuss. The girl that's always protesting is peacefully looking at me in the rain. Damn it. I want her so badly. Screw the rain, I want to kiss her. I want to pull her to me, grab that wet body and fell it against mine. When I reach her, I get covered and make some bullshit up. Anything for her to stay with me for a little longer.

“It doesn’t matter if you run or slow down, you’re going to get a little wet either way. So, it’s safer to slow down so you don’t slip along the way.”

“Ok.”

It couldn’t have worked out better for me. She agrees with me so we walked together a little bit longer. Holding her hand would be perfect. Having our first kiss right there in the rain would be even better. She keeps walking and I wake up.

Summer break is just around the corner and I don’t know how I’m going to do it if I have to spend the whole summer without seeing her. I got a job for the summer but I want to find a way for us to meet as well. César ended up solving my problem, by inviting Caroline and Alice to meet us. It’s no big deal because we have a bunch of classes together. I never liked Alice but if that’s the prize I have to pay to see my girl I’ll gladly put up with her for the whole summer. About once a week I grab my bike and meet them. Bullshit, I’ll go to her. We spend those afternoons playing volleyball, snooker, talking and listening to lots of music. Always the four of us. In the last week of August, Alice called César to invite the three of us to hang out for the whole day at her place, that way we could have lunch over there. When I arrive, the girls are in the kitchen working around the stove. Caroline has no idea how to cook.

“Move aside. You can’t get anything done.” It comes out my mouth like spit.