

Kiss-A-Licious

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They used to call me "Duck." This was not because I could swim well; in fact, I still cannot swim at all. I do not have webbed toes or feathers, and I cannot quack with efficiency. Instead, my face looked as if I was equipped with a human-like beak. To explain, over the years, my teeth had projected so far out that an overbite formed, thus making my lips protrude and landing me the cruel nickname. Then hope came—braces. However, not only did the braces dub me as even more of an outcast to my peers, especially boys, but also my teeth were now under incarceration for being so untamed. Still, nothing could tame my heart and its desire for Sean.

As a girl at the awkward age of twelve, I was stuck in between cartoons and boys, school and make-up, and the overall goal of attaining my first kiss. Every day as the morning sun passed over my house, illuminating a red and blue sky above my roof, I would scurry to the bus stop and take the dreaded trip to my junior high. Sitting there in that musty, crowded, dank, poor excuse for transportation, I would listen to the current disreputable music on the radio that hissed through the decrepit speakers. I would try to catch a word or two from a nearby conversation to entertain my fancy, but there was never anything worth paying that much mind to. There was the usual crowd: the thugs, preps, wannabes, trouble-makers, nerds, punks, goths, gossipers, and me. Nowhere did I fit in, nor did I really want to, after being such an inferior little seventh grader for so long. By this time, I knew what rejection was like, so I would instead bury my face in a textbook and finish up some homework. After all, I had better things on my mind.

Little to anyone's knowledge, even if they would care at all about me, I had an out-of-

this- world crush—Sean. Though I was a bit younger than him, I looked to Sean for friendship, guidance, and great laughs. But I knew he knew. I was sure that he knew because there were times that he caught me admiring him, becoming lost in his marble-like hazels. He would just crack his slanted smile and continue on casually with our conversation. Even today, I do not remember what was conspiring in my head all of those times, but I did know that teeter-tottering in my adolescent synapses was the wish for my first kiss. In fact, engraved in my imagination was a picture of this fifteen-year-old boy kissing me. Random thoughts constantly fluttered through my brain. What would people say? Goodness, I knew my parents would not let me date! What was the use of dwelling on a daydream if nothing could come from it?

Oh, how frustrating the entire situation became! Being entangled in a fantasy world of "I think I like you/ I think I. like you, too" just made matters worse. To my parents, Sean was merely the lanky, brunette boy from around the block who pedaled along on his bicycle from time to time to hang out with their daughter. However, to me, he was a teenage god, effortlessly floating by on his polished Huffy chariot, as I forever awaited the day for our lips to touch. I know it sounds sappy, but if there was ever a person to place upon a pedestal, I surely did so with Sean. His charismatic appeal and hilarious persona made it all the easier to fall for him. And with each passing day, I fell for him harder and harder. From the heights of Heaven and with the whispers of the cool autumn breeze approaching, Sean soon uttered the words I had been longing to hear.

"You know, I really want to kiss you, but I didn't know how you would react if I just did it," he said so sweetly.

"I have been wanting to for a long time now. I knew how much you wanted a kiss before you got stuck being such a metal mouth," he continued.

Overwhelmed with joy but filled with rage for my impatience, I replied, "Wow." That was all my vocal ability would allow at that given moment. I was so distraught, yet so nervous. I was oblivious as to whether or not he was going to satisfy my lips at that very moment under that dented tin-roofed shelter at the park, or if he was going to let me stir in anticipation. Becoming distracted by his sparkling eyes and signature red backwards cap, adorned with a Nike check, I peered at the jungle gym where a few kids were swinging. I gazed back over to him and quickly changed the subject.

"Hey, do you want to swing?" I asked.

With a slightly disappointed, but confused expression, Sean shrugged and agreed. I could not take the jitters anymore and had to distract my mind from the jumpiness. Instead of lip-locking that fresh afternoon, we quietly swung on the park swings, avoiding eye contact for the rest of the evening.

Beneath my carport one drizzly afternoon, a few kids huddled up and began a game of truth or dare in my honor. Now, truth or dare was an infamous game at my house. Local kids would gather under my carport and stir up an intense round from time to time. Unbeknownst to me, this small group conspired to get Sean and me alone. Of course, Sean, with his daring personality, showed up at my house specifically to participate in the game. Excited as usual, I played, as well. It was now my turn to pick: *truth or dare*? Trying to impress Sean with my fearless character, I chose *dare*. Promptly, the group immaturely shouted, "We dare you to kiss Sean!"

With looks of shock on both of our faces, Sean and I quietly stood up, stepped over to my neighbor's carport to avoid my parents' view, and prepared for our much-deliberated kiss. I felt almost mechanical, as my mind went blank. There were no jitters and no nervousness. I became

completely numb. The air was humid, the clouds were dark, and the drizzle steadily continued. I remember seeing the mist upon his eyelashes, and, one by one, I counted the seconds before our lips connected. Our eyes closed, our faces drew nearer, and, with a light bump, our lips united. The rules had been clearly stated to us: it must be a French kiss, because pecking was for cowards. So, Sean and I proceeded to open our mouths and continue on with our luscious quest. Chills were rushing through my body, not only from the cool, misty rain, but also because my wish was coming true. However, to my dismay, Sean was toting something other than just his tongue in his mouth that day. Sporting a piece of half-chewed Bubblicious bubblegum in his mouth, he pulled away after our kiss was complete. Instead of leaving me floating, however, he left his gum on the front brackets of my braces. The pink, sticky, strawberry-flavored treat was not what I was hoping to have as a lasting impression. Rather, the gum took an impression of my braces by the time I removed all of it from my teeth.

I suppose my experience redefined what a sweet kiss really was supposed to be. Nevertheless, it did teach me a valuable lesson: sometimes, braces, boys, and Bubblicious can get you into some sticky situations.