

A Party Girl's Guide to Kissing Girls by Sofia DiGiacomo

First, make sure you've got a drink in hand. That's the most important part. It must be late into the night, when the music is loud and rattles through your shoes, when just about everyone around you is piss drunk and no one will notice the way you're looking at the girl in the moonlight. She's beautiful. Her eyes are wide and full of stars. But she's across the room, which might as well be an entire ocean. You're young. You don't know what love is. You can't imagine love is anything but the silver glistening on her skin.

Gather your courage. You only ever kiss girls on nights like these. It's the only time you feel safe doing it. It's okay. You look good, makeup done all pretty and dressed just a bit slutty. Strike up idle conversation with the loud boys as you cross the room, but drift away before one of them tries to drag you away, and next thing you know, you're next to her.

She's sitting on a couch covered in stains. Sit down next to her. You don't know whose house this is. You don't know most of the people here. You feel a little bit at home. You see in her eyes that she's as drunk as you are, and you're both like porcelain dolls with how easily you could shatter, but the smile she gives you reminds you of the dandelions you used to pull from sidewalks to make crowns with.

Introduce yourself. You've got this, now. See? She likes your dress. You like her hair. Ask her who she knows, where she's from, if she's having fun, it doesn't matter. Really, it doesn't matter, because her eyes are shining now, and when you trade drinks it's the same burning punch but her black lipstick left a smear on the side of your cup. You have a mutual friend, you learn, a girl you knew from middle school. You both dislike the thumping music rattling the house to the bones. You reach forward, bracelets jingling on your wrist, rings gleaming on your fingers, and brush a strand of hair behind her ear.

You have to wait for her to kiss you. You'll probably never be confident enough to kiss a girl first. But when she does kiss you, her lips are soft and she tastes like sugary fruit and vodka and she pushes you against the couch, and the cups fall from both your hands to spill on the floor sticky sweet and messy. Your back hits the cushions. Her fingers are running through your short hair, pulling at it, tearing at it from the roots. She tugs at the skirt of your dress. You hear cheering, loud whooping—the boys, the boys, always the boys.

And that's why you had the drinks. This is how it always has to be when girls kiss—desperately and ravenously in the shadows, clearly intoxicated so if anyone asks later on, no, of course you're not a fucking queer, you can blame it on the alcohol. So the boys will think it's a show, their own goddamned spectacle, two drunk girls making out just for them, and the thought

of it makes you angry but being angry turns you on a bit more and it means you have something to prove so you bite her lip and feel her back arch but your lungs are screaming for air so you break the kiss, pull away, eyelids fluttering open, and oh god her eyes.

Her eyes are flooded with the same fear yours always are, that feeling of being known, of being recognized. You realize it's a loop. You're a bit less alone. Her eyeliner is a touch smudged and there are flecks of mascara on her cheeks. You dream of kissing a girl sober. Wonder if you have the guts to do it. She laughs—she's soft and warm on top of you; she's all you could ever need—and the boys are jeering, shouting, encouraging you to keep going because *"Fuck, ladies, that's hot."*

You close your eyes again, wish you could drown the boys out, wish it wasn't like this, but oh she's perfect, and your legs are tangled now, bodies twisting together like roots, and you could die like this and be happy.

The aftermath is always more or less the same. You wake up alone the next morning, having gotten yourself home somehow, and there's a name and number written on your arm in Sharpie but it's too blurred to read. You remember the girl dimly, a foggy, beautiful memory. You remember moonlight. You remember silver. You look in the mirror and there are still smears of black lipstick on your dress. You tell yourself it's okay. You're happy like this. You'll be drunk the next time you kiss a girl, too, because girls aren't supposed to kiss sober. You'll keep hiding. You can't admit to yourself that you're hiding.

You're scared. But for now you'll pull yourself out of bed, head pounding and scrub the rest of the illegible writing off your arm. You'll get dressed. Go about your day. Do everything you can to get the taste of her off your tongue. She was sweet. She was so sweet.

You have dreams. You have fantasies. You watch the black water run down your forearm and drip in the sink and something in your chest twists. You don't understand. It's okay. It gets better, it does.

One day you'll meet a girl in daylight, and she'll be brighter than the sun that falls on her, and she'll kiss your cheek and hold your hand without caring who's watching, and the two of you can build a life filled with all the good things you were always taught you didn't deserve.