

A Breath Held Too Long

MANUEL GONZALES

Technically they hadn't broken into Target since Reggie had a set of keys. "Cashiers get a set of keys?" Demetrio asked. They didn't. Reggie had swiped them.

It was Christmas morning, and the sun hadn't come up yet, and it was Demetrio's eighteenth birthday, and he had all day with Reggie—a day she had planned just for him—and by the end of it, he was going to kiss her if it was the last thing he would ever do because if he didn't, he had the feeling his head would explode.

They were wearing Target uniforms—red shirt, khaki pants. Reggie insisted. They had to make it official. Reggie was wearing what she normally wore for work, and she had grabbed a pair of khakis and a red shirt for him out of the men's department. At first she had grabbed the pants out of the boys' department, har har, and even the ones she'd grabbed from the men's department were too short and when he came out, the cuffs of his pants high up on his ankles, she about fell over laughing.

"Come on, Reg," he said.

"Those were the only pair they had left," she said. "I promise," she said and did

that crossing her heart and hoping to die thing on her chest. "Someone must've done a run on big-boy pants," she said, except the last of that was swallowed by another bit of laughter.

But let's be honest here: Demetrio loved this too.

Now he was standing parallel to the pharmacy in front of the wrong end of a shopping cart, and she was standing at register 10 with the in-store phone at her mouth and an airhorn held high over her head. He tried to focus on the cart and the long aisle in front of him that ended in a row of mannequins dressed in swimsuits that he was supposed to knock over and not on the shape of her mouth near that phone, but he was doing a bad job of it.

Then Reggie's voice started counting down from five over the store speakers, and when she hit one, she blasted the airhorn, and Demetrio grabbed the front end of the shopping cart and he pushed it, running as fast as he could.

"You stay out of that car!" Demetrio said. "If you get back into that car, you'll die." It was a line from *Days of Thunder* and he said it as loud as he could without shouting it because shouting it would be weird, but so would saying it at all if Reggie couldn't hear him.

When he was fourteen, only a couple of months after his sister died, Reggie, his sister's best friend, brought him to her house, a small bungalow she'd lived in by herself since she'd left home the year before, and they watched *Days of Thunder* on DVD, laughing through most of it, except the sexy parts, which weren't even all that sexy, just a stripper pretending to be a cop pretending to arrest Tom Cruise but rubbing her hands over him instead, which he barely saw because Reggie threw her hands over his eyes, and something else in a hospital, he didn't know what, because Reggie sat on him on the couch, his face buried deep into the cushions, which smelled like her shampoo and her perfume and cigarette smoke, refusing to let him up until everyone had "their hands off Tom Cruise's junk," she'd said.

Once Demetrio was pushing the cart fast enough, he was supposed to jump into it and now that he was going fast enough he had no idea how he was supposed to jump into it. Except out of the corner of his eye, he saw Reggie smiling at him, and then he stopped thinking about how he would jump into the cart and instead just jumped into the cart, threw himself up and over, knocked his knees and ankles into the rim, fell face-first into the basket, felt some bit of plastic or metal wiring grab his thumb and hold it in a twist before letting go, another

hinge or other pinch him in the arm, and then didn't see the rest until he crashed, tumbled over, and rolled out onto the cold linoleum.

"And you wanted to stay home today," Reggie said, standing over him, her face shielding Demetrio from the fluorescent overhead lights.

Then she pulled him to his feet and Demetrio thought, Now? Is the kiss going to happen now? And for a second, it looked like his momentum would throw them into an embrace at least, and from there, it was an open horizon, from there, the sky was the limit, but, no, Reggie caught him with a hand on his chest and a "steady there, D, you'll knock us both over."

Reggie was going to quit Target anyway, so what did it matter?

Or no. Wait. She'd already quit.

Yesterday.

Was it really yesterday? That didn't feel like yesterday. Or maybe it was just that yesterday hadn't felt real. She quit Target, she broke up with Tyler. Yesterday, today, the week ahead of her. None of it felt real.

In a week, she would be gone, she and her roommate, Samantha, off to Los Angeles, Sam to try to be an actress and Reggie to be, well, she wasn't sure what, but it didn't matter, not yet, nothing mattered yet because none of it was real, and the only person she would be sad to have left behind was standing in front of her in this empty Target stacking LEGO boxes into a giant pyramid so they could knock them down with oversized bouncy balls.

"It's true," Reggie said. "One in five."

"No, no," Demetrio said.

"One in five men lactate, I swear. Milk. Out of their nipples," she said. "It's science."

"Whatever," Demetrio said. "I heard that shit in middle school. It's total bullshit."

"You're total bullshit," Reggie said and threw her bouncy ball at Demetrio, who tried to catch it, but he slipped on a smaller ball that had rolled under his raised foot, and he fell into the shelves of LEGOs. As Demetrio sat sprawled on the ground, boxes tumbled onto his head, and she bent over laughing.

It was just like in a movie.

In this moment in Reggie's life, everything felt either unreal or just like in a movie.

“Oh, shit,” she said. “Oh, Jesus, you’re so light, you’re like a little baby bird.”

Demetrio’s expression—uh-oh—was pissed, fake-pissed, but also eager, real-eager, an expression Reggie knew well enough from other men and had seen glimpses of on Demetrio’s face once or twice but had done her best to ignore.

He scrambled to his feet to retaliate or give chase, but then he slipped again and fell all over again.

“A clumsy, cute little baby bird,” she began, but then he was up, quicker this time and no messing around, and she started to run.

She’d had this dog when she was a kid, this black border collie mix named Geoff, who died just before she left home, and she’d known him since she was four, and she took that as a sign, right, that he died? She took that as if Geoff had given her permission to leave, had said to her, Don’t stay on my account, I’m on my way out too. She’d had to spell his name—G-E-O-F-F—constantly to make sure people didn’t mistake his name for the less interesting J-E-F-F. Anyway. They played hide-and-seek together. Geoff would sit perfectly still in the laundry closet and Reggie would close the door but for a crack and then she would say, “Hide,” and she would run through the house and find a place to hide, and then she would scream—because sometimes she hid far away—“Seek,” and Geoff would know to run out of the laundry room and find her.

But Reggie would cheat. She would crawl out of her hiding place and move somewhere else.

She would cheat because being still was boring.

She would cheat because so was being found.

And anyway, Geoff knew. Geoff knew she cheated and he found her anyway. That’s how smart Geoff was, or how bad her hiding was, she didn’t know, she didn’t care. She would open a door to the kitchen because then she could hide in the pantry or whatever, and he would be on the other side of the door waiting for her and she would squeal in real-fake-real terror and run and he would chase and that was what she loved.

She loved the chase, is the point we’re trying to make here.

Patrick McIntyre got the call an hour ago, but he didn’t care because it was Christmas morning and the sun wasn’t up yet and fuck whoever had decided to break in to Target today of all fucking days. Then, twenty minutes later, he got the call again and this time he was awake enough, that, fine, he would drive to

the store and check out what had happened. Someone had left the door unlocked, most likely, and snow or wind or both had jarred it open. Or an animal, maybe. Once he had responded to a call like this only to find a raccoon struggling, caught in the opened door that just wasn't quite opened enough. He'd walked to his office, grabbed the hammer out of his filing cabinet, and then walked back to the raccoon, only the raccoon had somehow managed to squeeze himself back out again.

Patrick hit a patch of black ice as he slid into his designated parking spot, stopping when his front bumper crunched against the bank of snow that had been pushed by the last plow into a mound that hid the curb.

"Son of a bitch," he said.

He pulled his Yaktrax out of his glove compartment and wrapped them around his shoes and walked to the entrance, which, as he'd expected, was slightly—only slightly—ajar. Fine. He would go inside, shut down the alarm, do a quick look around, then go the fuck back home and try—god please—he would try to go back to sleep before his kids woke up.

Except right away, he nearly tripped over a long stretch of Hot Wheel racetracks that ran from Customer Service all the way down to Shoes, the pile of boxes that had once contained the racetracks scattered farther down in women's lingerie. Then he noticed the music, too, loud over the loudspeakers. He could see over the shelving into Electronics that the televisions were on too.

Making a brief stop through sporting goods to grab a baseball bat, Patrick headed to the back of the store, his Yaktrax clicking across the floor.

Now, Demetrio thought.

Now would have been perfect, a perfect moment for a kiss.

They were in a tent. They had lined the inside of the tent with battery-operated twinkly lights. They had sleeping bags on the floor and pillows under their heads. They had just finished playing Mario Kart 8, hooked up across all the television sets in the electronics department, and for half of the time, Demetrio had let Reggie win, until she'd hit him in the arm and told him to stop fucking around, and then the rest of the time he'd demolished her, no matter which character she played, which motorcycle or go-kart she chose, no matter even that he'd given her a full-lap head start. And every time she lost, she laughed or moaned or shook her controller in the air, and then threw herself onto him, despondent at how truly bad she was at Mario Kart. It was amazing.

And now they were lying next to each other in a goddamn tent.

And Reggie.

Jesus.

Reggie was spraying gobs of Target-brand Reddi-Wip into her mouth. So.

No.

Now was not the perfect moment.

“Christ, all this time,” Reggie said, her mouth still full of whipped cream.

“All this time I thought tents were hard.”

“Nah, nah,” Demetrio said. “Tents are easy. Couple of loops, couple of poles, bing bang boom.” Demetrio sighed. “Everyone should live in a Target.”

“A Target in every pot,” she said, and handed him a Red Vine.

The can of whipped cream was almost empty, and on top of that, Reggie had had her fill of canned whipped cream, couldn't spray another foamy drop into her mouth. But she was running out of ways to run interference between Demetrio's lips and hers without telling him, “Look, D, listen, this, listen, whatever this is.” Christ, just a second ago, she turned to look at him only to catch this saucer-eyed moony look on his face. She reached for the bag of Red Vines. She smiled at him with a mouth full of whipped cream before shoving a Red Vine in there too.

Sam had texted her five times already to ask if she'd told Demetrio they were moving. Reggie had had to turn off her phone. She couldn't tell him, not yet. Not at the start of their day together, the start of his day.

“Like a Band-Aid,” Sam had said. “Quick and painful.”

“Painless. Quick and painless,” Reggie said.

Sam rolled her eyes. “You're going to break his heart.”

“Well,” Reggie said. Break his heart. That sounded so extreme, so dramatic.

“It isn't going to be painless,” Sam said. Then she said, “It shouldn't be painless.”

“Plus,” Sam said, “get it over with early and then you have the rest of the day to get him drunk so he can forget all about it.”

“Drunk? Jesus, he's turning eighteen not twenty,” Reggie said.

“It's not like you haven't gotten him drunk before,” Sam said.

But that had been an accident. That had been Ronnie's birthday, the first one after she'd died, and Demetrio's parents, kind of out to lunch back then, had left him alone at the house the whole day, most of the night.

He called her. He didn't tell her at first he was by himself. They were on the phone for almost fifteen minutes and had talked about nothing, certainly not about Ronnie, and Reggie needed to get off the phone. Reggie had plans to drink herself sick—drink what she would've drunk as well as what Ronnie would've drunk to celebrate Ronnie's nineteenth, or to celebrate Ronnie, or to celebrate no fucking thing whatsoever—and she was itching to get in her car and drive out to the water tower and sit in the shade of the tower like she and Ronnie used to except it was dark outside and there was no shade, but no matter, she would sit there and send herself spinning, and finally she told Demetrio she had to run, she was sorry but she had to go, "And say hi to your folks for me," and he said he would and then paused and then said in his quiet, still sweet-boy voice, "When they get back. I'll tell them when they get back." And of course Reggie had to ask: "Get back? Get back from where?"

"Jesus," she said. "I'll be there in five minutes."

Of course she brought the liquor, a bottle of tequila she'd swiped from her parents' on her way out the door a year ago and that she'd been saving for a special occasion, and an opened bottle of vodka that she had found when she moved into her rental, left behind by the previous tenants in the cabinet above the refrigerator. She was going to leave the liquor in the car. She was going to stay just long enough so Demetrio wasn't by himself the whole fucking day and then go do her thing, except out of habit she brought the bottles inside and Demetrio saw them and his eyes went wide and this made Reggie laugh and he laughed and said, a little nervous, "Are those for us," and that's when she decided sure why not let him have a drink, today of all fucking days.

By the time his parents came home, he was in the bathroom, throwing up, moaning into the toilet and then giggling at the sound of his own voice echoing back to him.

For a second, Patrick McIntyre stopped in the LEGO aisle. The shelving unit was a wreck. Boxes of LEGO sets were strewn across the floor. Oversized bouncy balls, too.

For a second, Patrick McIntyre wondered what would be the harm in taking one of the LEGO sets for himself, or, rather, for his son. For Christmas. Boxes had been opened, crushed. He could see a clear cellophane bag of pieces tucked under the endcap down the other end of the aisle. His son had wanted a set with

space aliens in it, but Patrick preferred his son to keep his imaginative play rooted firmly to the ground. He picked up a box with a fire engine on it and a Jeep—a fire Jeep? Patrick couldn't imagine what a fire Jeep would be good for—and tried to imagine the consequences he would face should he simply take this set home with him, wrap it quietly in the basement, add it to the other presents under the tree before the boy was awake.

Then he shook his head, changed his mind, returned the box to the shelf before bending down to pick up the box with a space shuttle on it. A compromise, then. Space, if not space aliens.

He set it to the side, where he would remember to grab it on his way out, and then stomped his foot heavily down on another box on the floor, for good measure, before continuing to the back of the store.

Tyler was pissed. When Reggie told him they were breaking up and she was moving away? He was so fucking pissed. She knew he would be. She hadn't planned on telling him until the night before, or not telling him at all, leave and let him figure it out himself. But then he got pissed at the Christmas with Demetrio thing even though she'd told him about it like a month ago, and they fought, and everything came out all at once and finally she just said, "It doesn't even matter, Tyler," and then stopped herself before she said too much.

But Tyler wouldn't let that go. Of course, of all the things he wouldn't let go, he wouldn't let that go.

"Doesn't matter? What does that mean?"

"All the time all you say is how much things matter."

"Everything matters to you. All you do is complain about how everything matters and that I don't take it all seriously enough."

Like that, on and on and on, and finally she just told him. They were done. In a week, she would be gone. So, no, this, all of what was this? Did not matter. Whether he thought it was smart for her to spend an entire day with Demetrio on Christmas. Whether he thought Demetrio liked her a little too much. Whether he didn't like the way asshole dads creeped on her while she was at work. Whether he liked Sam, which he didn't, who he also thought might like her a little too much. None of it mattered anymore.

Once, after they'd been dating a year, she told Tyler how she and Ronnie—Reggie and Ronnie, double trouble—had had to break into Reggie's ex-boyfriend's

house to get her stuff back. He'd been a class A asshole, slapped her the once, which was all Reggie needed to know ("Wish you hadn't needed that much," Ronnie had told her). Her ex worked nights as a security guard, and close to midnight with a few drinks in them, she and Ronnie snuck in through an open window and they stuffed her shit into a duffel bag and they were going to leave but Ronnie said, "No wait," and pulled open his dresser drawers and started grabbing his clothes—boxers and undershirts and socks and shit. "Take these," Ronnie said, and Reggie said, "Those are his," but of course Ronnie knew that, and Reggie already had them in her arms because whatever Ronnie handed her, Reggie took, and Ronnie had a big armful of his clothes, too, and she took them outside and Reggie followed, and she threw them in a pile on the ground in the middle of the street and Reggie followed, and then Ronnie ran back inside and was gone for a good two minutes, and Reggie didn't know what was going on, felt conspicuous and vulnerable standing in front of a pile of clothes in the middle of her ex-boyfriend's dark, unlit street, until Ronnie ran back out, a bottle in one hand and something else in the other, and she squirted the bottle over the clothes and Reggie could smell it, the lighter fluid, and Reggie opened her mouth to say something, but she couldn't have told you what she would have said, when Ronnie flared the match in her other hand and dropped the lit match onto the pile of clothes and *whoompf*—that's how it sounded, like *whoompf*—the whole pile lit up like a bonfire.

And after she told Tyler that, he said, "Well, why the fuck did you tell me that story?"

"I'm just telling you," Reggie said. "Don't be an asshole."

"Did that even really happen?" he said.

"Don't be a fucking asshole, that's all."

And yesterday she could see it in his eyes, the asshole lurking not too deep under the surface, could hear the words in his mind like they were floating in the air or something—"You fucking bitch cunt, don't you fucking leave me, you're the dumbest bitch if you leave me, what the fuck is a dumb bitch like you going to do in California"—could hear them as if he were saying them out loud. But he wasn't. He was holding them in, giving her a harsh glare with his eyes that she gave not two shits about, but everything else he was holding in. Because: Tyler liked his clothes. Tyler spent a lot of money on his clothes. Whether or not he believed her story, he didn't want to find out the hard way it was true, and he let

her go, and maybe he was an asshole, at the end or even from the very beginning, a class A asshole, but it didn't even matter, none of it even mattered.

The thing was, Demetrio was a good kisser.

At least that's what he'd been told.

He'd kissed a handful of girls from school. Well. More than a handful. Some he had dated and they kissed because they were dating, but there were a few who he hadn't been dating, but who had come up to him while he was standing outside talking to someone else at a party, or grabbed him by the arm while he was walking down the hall in school, or leaned over to him after he'd given them a ride home after school, and these girls had just kissed him out of the blue, or, well, not entirely out of the blue, because he could sense it, a subtle shift in their bodies, a different something in their eyes, or maybe in the air, something he'd come to recognize like you recognize the difference between the smell of a winter rain and a spring rain, and then their mouth would be on his mouth, their soft, darting tongue seeking out his. The ones who were not his girlfriend would finish the kiss, pull away slowly, he could feel their lips peel off like they'd been stuck together, and say something like, "I'm sorry, I just had to," but they didn't look sorry, they looked pleased, either with themselves or with the kiss, he couldn't say, and then they slipped away and he would watch them leave and would have no idea what to do with himself once they were gone.

Or, well. He had some idea.

The girls he'd dated and kissed were not that different except they didn't fade away. One girl named Susan he had dated in ninth grade who played trumpet in marching band and maybe because of this wasn't a bad kisser herself, interrupted him once by saying, "No talking, just kissing," and so he stopped saying whatever he had been saying and kissed her, and she broke away only briefly to tell him, "Kissing, that's what you're good at, remember that."

Which was why he knew, why he was so certain, that all he needed was one kiss, one chance at one really good fucking kiss.

Demetrio's sister, Veronica (Ronnie, actually; no one except his mom called her Veronica), died in a car but not a car accident. He had to explain it that way whenever anyone who didn't already know asked about her, the way his parents would have to explain, when people asked them how they met, that they met in

high school, but that they hadn't been high school sweethearts. Demetrio didn't know why it mattered so much to them, the notion that people might imagine them as high school sweethearts, but he didn't know either why it mattered so much to him that people might imagine a car wreck. Ronnie was a shitty driver. He hated being in the car with her, her driving made him nauseous. But she hadn't died in a car accident.

She had died in a car.

On her way home from school.

Stopped at a red light.

Then a severe headache, maybe, or blurred vision, or a sense of confusion, Demetrio didn't know, he hadn't been there. The only thing he could say for sure was that a blood vessel in her brain had bulged and then popped. That's how he imagined it, cartoonish, unreal. An oversized, growing bulge, and then a pop. He had read details about cerebral aneurysms, had read about them a lot, especially late at night when he couldn't sleep right after she had suffered one—although it didn't appear as if people suffered for long. He ruled out nausea and vomiting, common side effects, since no one had reported sick in the car. He couldn't imagine the drooping eyelids—Ronnie had pretty eyes, she liked to tell people they were her best feature, her dark eyes—but sometimes he imagined the blurred vision, the sensitivity to light, the headache, the confusion, and sometimes he liked to imagine her sitting in the front seat of her car, reaching for her phone to change the music on the stereo, feeling a slight pressure at her temple, maybe even whispering a soft, "Oh," before reaching for her head with her fingertips, and then everything going dark before her hand could even find her face.

The man behind her at the stoplight found her. The light turned green and she didn't go and he honked and honked and honked, and he could have driven around her, but, no, that wasn't enough, he had to get out of his car and have some words, except there were no words to be had, or, maybe, no one to have them with. She'd been eighteen. Demetrio had been fourteen or just about, almost, not quite, two weeks away. And then there was the service and then the reception after and his mom sobbing throughout both and his dad near her, his hand always on her back and looking like he'd been scooped out, like someone had cut a square into the back of him and scraped him clean out, and Demetrio alone on a bench in the backyard watching or not watching everyone in their Sunday best walk up to his parents, say a few words, walk away, walk up to him

but hesitate at the untethered look of him (he imagined) and then fade back into the scenery, until Reggie climbed over the back of the bench and slotted herself next to him and placed an earbud into his left ear, the sister bud in her right, and that was when he first heard David Bowie, and of course he would fall in love.

Who wouldn't fall in love?

With Bowie, with Reggie.

Everyone would fall in love.

Reggie wasn't intentionally keeping the move a secret from Demetrio, though. She would tell him. On her own time, she would tell Demetrio. Before next week, at the very least she would tell him before she moved. Sam had to chill out, was all. Reggie had all day to tell him.

She checked her phone, saw another six messages from Sam, deleted them all without reading them. She had too much to do, had to be present for Demetrio, not on her goddamn phone. The day was all planned out. Next they would go to the warehouse where she'd already set up a projector and screen and they would watch *The Goonies* and eat popcorn and Junior Mints and Peanut M&Ms. Then they were off to the Hendersons for a winter swim in their heated swimming pool—the Hendersons were out of town till tomorrow and she still had their key from when she house-sat—and then to Dirty Martin's for the best burger in town, and then to the mini-golf course, which was covered in snow, hills of snow, the windmill, the giant Tyrannosaurus rex, the giant Paul Bunyan, covered in drifts of snow, and where her pal who worked summers at the mini-golf had carved out tiny toboggan runs for the golf balls at every hole so that they could each and every time putt a hole in one and watch the golf balls toboggan through the course, all of which was waiting, glistening, sparkling in the moonlight and—holy shit.

Holy fuck, holy Jesus fucking Christ.

Reggie had planned an entire date for her and Demetrio. All she was missing were the flowers and chocolates, a reservation at Alonzo's, the red-sauce mecca for kids looking for a fancy tablecloth kind of dinner for prom.

What an asshole. What an idiot.

Sam was right. She should have told him first thing and then canceled the rest of the day and then taken him somewhere and gotten him good and drunk, gotten them both good and drunk, and then disappeared at the end of it all in a cloud of hazy drink and drug-filled smoke.

Patrick McIntyre could see the lights twinkling from inside the camping tent. He could also see the opened package of batteries, bags of chips, the jars of salsa and two-liter bottles of soda, the empty cans of whipped cream, and the mess. So much mess.

He wished he'd taken the Yaktrax off his shoes when he'd come inside, though, because on the linoleum, they hurt his feet, set him off balance. But the racetrack had distracted him, and then he saw everything else—knocked-over mannequins, stacked boxes of LEGOs, poinsettia flower petals on the floor in the shape of naked breasts and a penis—and that had really distracted him, and now he was walking around with tiny spikes riding under the sole of his feet. If he were smart, he would stop and take them off before confronting whoever was inside that tent, whose voices—laughing and giggling—he could hear, or thought he could hear, even over the music blaring through the speakers. But he wasn't feeling smart right then. He was feeling angry and tired and impatient.

He crept, even though he probably didn't need to creep, the music was so loud, but he crept anyway, right up to the edge of the tent, where he grabbed the zipper and he yanked.

Demetrio had a plan. Not, like, a large plan, like what might happen after the kiss happened. He had only the slimmest notion of what could even happen after this magical kiss. The kiss itself you could blame on his sister, if you got down to it. When he was thirteen, she told him, "A kiss, Demetrio, with the right person? At the right moment? That's how you know. A good kiss? It's the only way you really know." He'd wanted to ask her how you really knew what, but he was thirteen and self-conscious about everything he didn't know, which seemed literally like everything, and then she'd died before he could come back to it. All he knew, at this moment in his life, was that he'd kissed a few girls and didn't feel like he knew anything about anything, least of all them, and so those must have been the wrong kiss with the wrong person, but not this kiss. If he kissed Reggie, that would be something else entirely.

Here was his plan, which he was still making up as he went along: The whipped cream was gone, the Red Vines were also gone, the warmth of their bodies had warmed up the tent, warmed up Demetrio's hands, even, which were, so often, too cold for bare skin. By shifts and stretches, Demetrio had managed to scooch himself and his sleeping bag close enough to Reggie that he thought

he could feel his leg pressed up against her leg, except actually his leg was pressed up against the bunched-up material of his sleeping bag pressed up against the foam edge of the sleeping pad, but did it matter? No, it did not.

His heart still raced.

His belly still fluttered.

His plan was to reach his hand down, to send it seeking out her hand, his fingers searching for her fingers, because, otherwise, he did not know how it would begin. Once he found her hand, and took it, she would look at him, and he would give her hand the gentlest of squeezes, and she'd ask, "What are you doing?" and he'd say, "I don't know, but is this okay?" and she'd shake her head, just a tiny, barely noticeable shake of her head—no—but she wouldn't let go and in fact she would squeeze his hand back, because that was how Reggie had always been as long as he had known her, using language and words and small gestures as a shield against what she really wanted, which she told you loud and clear with her actions, with her movements, with her body, and he would move himself closer—he was taller than her, had been for a couple of years now, and he would have taken this into account, would have laid himself out next to her so his head would be level with her head, making it nothing at all to turn to his side, and she would turn to her side, too, and they would look right at each other, and she'd ask, "What are we doing?" and he'd reach out his free hand and move the hair from her face and say, "I don't know, but is this okay?" and she'd be perfectly still, the two of them, in fact, so perfectly still, giant immovable boulders on a mountainside, unmoving deer standing still in a field, without even barely a muscle twitch or quiver, the two of them staring into each other's eyes, until, like a breath held too long, they released, fell into each other, and finally they'd kiss.

That was his plan.

But he waited too long, or that will be what he thinks. If only. For the rest of his life, that will be what he thinks about when he thinks about Reggie. If only he hadn't waited so long, if only he had tried to kiss her through the whipped cream, if only he had leaned over from the passenger seat of her shitty Chevelle and just kissed her after they ran pell-mell out of the Target and Reggie fishtailed across the ice and snow with Patrick McIntyre in his spiked shoes chasing after them, if only he hadn't tried so hard to be cool that last hole at the mini-golf, had kissed her before she could tell him she was leaving, or if only he hadn't been so

pouty as Reggie drove him home after, had sat with her in her car in front of his parents' house for a moment longer, just long enough to kiss her then.

If only, if only, if only.

Because in just a moment, before Demetrio even had a chance to send his hand to seek out hers, the tent's zipper was going to be yanked open and a splotchy, red, angry face was going to shove itself into the gap of the now opened tent, and the man who owned this face was going to look at the two of them, at the twinkly lights, at the packet of Red Vines, the bunched-up sleeping bags, until his eyes landed finally on Reggie, and he would shout, "Reggie? Reggie Miller? What the hell are you doing here?" and Reggie would say, "Fuck," and the man with the red, angry face would scramble for his phone, and he would yell, not ask but yell, "Have you been *living* with this *boy* in this *tent*?" but he would barely get the word *tent* out of his mouth before Demetrio popped himself up, placed his palm on the man's exceedingly large bald forehead and shoved him backward out of the tent, much to Reggie's surprise, and then Demetrio would grab Reggie's hand and he would pull her out of the tent and they would run.

