

## *Slippery When Wet*

### Chapter 1: Sans-speech

My first kiss happened rather late in my life compared to average, but I wouldn't have had it any other way. I was 19 years old, sitting alone on a train to nowhere when it all began...

"Is this seat taken?" She said. As she lowered herself across from me, not waiting for my response. I could smell her perfume as the air from her hasty collapse brushed passed my nose. It reminded me of summer-- the smell of a lake in a mossy wood as the mist rolls onto the shore after a cold night. "Hi, where are you headed?" she said, in rhythm with the train. Her speech seemed to be perfectly punctuated with each 'clickety-clack' of the metal wheels on the rails. "I've yet to decide. Somewhere new." I said somewhat annoyed. "That's cool, I'm heading to..." she replied hastily...

I finally looked up from my book (undoubtedly about something nerdy that I do not recall) and saw her face for the first time. She was beautiful. Astoundingly, absolutely and resoundingly gorgeous. Her hair was deep brown, just below her shoulders. Her eyeliner; deep and dark, I loved it. She swept her hair behind her ears after every other sentence she spoke to make sure it wasn't in her face. I never believed in love at first sight. And surely I did not believe in it then. But in retrospect, if I had to say that is what it was, I would. I remember thinking I never wanted to see another beautiful person, because they would never compare to her.

She was explaining how her adventure had begun. I didn't hear a word. Because I was so taken back by how beautiful she was. The way her hair laid haphazardly around her face. I never realized how beautiful brown hair could be before her. Her curls bounced around her face as she spoke. The way her eyes shot between indiscernible objects around the train entranced me. She was so real, so alive, so full of something I was missing; and so desperately wanted to be. It seemed like she was unable to explain anything without using her entire body as a prop. Her hands never sat still, shaking and gesturing with each word. To such a degree that handing her a hot beverage almost required a blast-shield for bystanders. "... anyway, that's how I ended up in..." she turned towards me and locked eyes for a second. Only a second. But it was the third longest second of my life. My eyes darted away in fear. Of what, I still don't know.

I've been asked many times in my life "If you could have lunch with one person, real or fictional, who would it be?" And naturally I always gave it a thoughtful answer: Jesus, Kurt Cobain, Einstein, or any number of souls taken far too soon. I now fully believe for the rest of my life, my answer will be her. Whenever we talked we touched on everything: sex, love, drugs, rock-n-roll, art, literature, religion. Everything that matters, I mean.

We continued to talk for the remaining three hours of the train ride, or at least she talked, and I nodded. We finally arrived in New Orleans. She took me by the hand as we grabbed our respective backpacks and exited onto the platform. "... let me take you to..." Leading me to a

## *Slippery When Wet*

café some number of blocks down the road, talking the whole way. Her favorite place in the city as I found out.

She ordered for me. A caramel macchiato. What's the difference between a macchiato and a latte? There was never a silent moment with her. And I liked it that way. It kept me out of my head. I was never much of a conversationalist despite my yearning to be so. She on the other hand, was. I worried she might eventually speak every possible combination of words in the English language, and then have to go completely mute.

"So, this is New Orleans." She said with a wide, pearly grin.

"I like it so far." I said, having only been to what seemed to me a Starbucks. "This is my first time here, what's worth seeing?"

"Everything!" She replied.

"Well, where do I start?" I inquired.

"Bourbon Street, of course!"

We had barely finished our coffees when she shot up and led me out of the café. We walked down Bourbon Street. Mardi Gras was weeks earlier, but you could still see a forsaken set of beads stashed in the crack of a building or hiding beneath a dumpster. We stopped in front of some street performers. A trio of young men, one on bass, one on drums made entirely of buckets, and one singing with a guitar. They played 'House of the Rising Sun', a fitting song for the city, however cliché. It came to be known as her song. I can't listen to it without tearing up. Standing before our private show, I finally developed the courage to grab her right hand. My palms were so sweaty, at least partially from the heat, but mostly from my earth-shattering anxiety. She had that effect on me. I was always completely enamored in her presence.

"I think I like you." I stuttered, trying with every fiber of my being not to let my voice crack.

"I like you." She said, with a resounding confidence.

...."You're beautiful." I exclaimed, nearly yelling, after a deafening minute.

"Thanks. So are you."

I chuckled as a wave of relief washed over me.

That was the thing about the two of us. Polar opposites, that happened to meet in the middle. That middle being the God-forsaken state of Louisiana. But I loved it more than I believed a man could love any individual state. Because of her. Because we met there. It's like how you love your favorite artist, not because they are specifically the best artist to ever exist, but because every time you hear their songs, or their poems, or see their art, you feel something. You think of someone or something that you love. That is why I love Louisiana. Because it means something to me.

I was finally learned her name. At least, at a time I was actually listening and not completely distracted by staring at her (a habit she didn't seem to mind.) Elizabeth. She preferred any nickname instead: Liz, Lizzy, Eliza, Beth, Bethy. Anything. "Elizabeth is the name of a dead

## *Slippery When Wet*

English lady!” She would exclaim. I’m a strong believer in ‘God given names’, and tend to use them instead of nicknames when at all possible. But she would have none of that.

We had been dating for only about a week. Hopping between any number of her friends’ houses and Motel 8’s. Liz never liked living in the same place for more than a few days. And I guess I didn’t either. Or maybe it was only because I liked her; that I liked whatever she liked. Looking back, it was obvious she was running from something. Her past? Probably. Her family? Likely. Herself? Definitely. We both were.

### Chapter 2: Love Me Two Times

Now to the aforementioned kiss. Just like I am with everything in my life, I’m hopelessly and unendingly, gutless. I can never bring myself past that point of comfortability, on to what always turns out to be the best memories of my life. Someone always drags my sorry-ass into them. I’ve only ever had regret for the things I never had the balls to do, but desperately; with all my heart, wanted to.

We were sitting on a dock, somewhere in a swamp, sun setting over the trees and shimmering off the nearly stagnant water. The plague of insects was relentless. But neither of us minded, as we were preoccupied with each others company. I never knew exactly where I was when I let her decide where to go. It was always an adventure. Her phone sat between us playing some song that I didn’t know. But in true John Green fashion it would have been Otis Redding. “Hey.” She said. “Hey” I replied. We locked eyes and she smiled.

Now onto the second longest second of my life.

Let me preface this by saying that fiction has an unhealthy fixation on moments. Single seconds that define everything for the protagonist-- after which nothing will be the same. The observer is always aware of the significance and relishes the moment. Life isn’t like that. Life is a bullet train that’s on fire. It’s an accumulation of moments. And what you do in each one is not important. It’s what happened in all of them, all of your many moments, that make you who you are. Now forget all that inspirational-speaker drivel.

You know that moment when you close your eyes and lean in? The orbit and spin of the Earth stop. You put yourself on display in the most intimate way to the person you care about most in the world. There’s that moment. One singularly-cataclysmic moment. You pray to every God there is or was: Oh-Please-God! I hope she leans the last 10% of the way!..

Then she does. And you have to re-acclimate yourself to an Earth that rotates.

We kissed once, then she leaned away a little. I grabbed her just above her hip and pulled in for more. Cherries. I tackled her onto the dock, wanting desperately to occupy the same space at

## ***Slippery When Wet***

the same time. I remember thinking this was so much more awkward than movies make it out to be. But it was fantastic. I loved every moment of it, of that dock, of that song, of her...

### Chapter 3: Monologue

Allow me to derail the story briefly for my existential monologue.

Depression is a weird thing. You wake up one morning. Like thousands before. Only this time, you realize you're not okay anymore. Nothing brings you joy. You struggle to keep from crying in front of your friends. And all you want to do is lay in your bed and dissolve into the sheets. Your only escape... drugs and a shiny blade that draws in crimson. I hated sleeves. They felt too restrictive on my body. Like my clothing was trying to strangle me. That is, until I had too many scars to hide. Then my sleeves became shields against the leers of judgment.

You don't know why you feel this way. And you definitely don't know how to stop it. You just are. You wade through the day like mud. Some days you're too sick to eat. The days drag on to weeks, then months. And then you can't remember a time you didn't feel this way.

The thing is, the people you love most can tell when you're not okay. And if they're decent people they'll try and help you. They're almost always bad at it -- treating you like you're diseased, but the thoughtfulness is there.

You can't control when your lowest is going to be. There's usually a trigger, but not always. It feels like the sky is falling and the ground is cracking at the same time. You can't help but dissociate. In my case at least, every fiber of my being yearns in earnest to destroy itself.

### Chapter 4: Slippery When Wet

Driving back to our motel from my first and most lovely kiss, we were just merging onto the highway, chatting about something dumb I'm sure. I don't recall. Before long she fell asleep in the passenger seat with her feet on the dash of the rental. She always objected to seatbelts, they obstructed her sleeping position.

Louisiana has a tendency to hold near monsoon levels of rain, basically whenever the fuck it wants, without warning. One of these 'end of days' rains came in. Hard.

I couldn't help it. It wasn't my fault. You just dissociate. You don't think about it. You don't think about anything. All you see are the reflectors on the median. And your left hand drops. Pulling your steering wheel with it. And then. The longest second of my life.