

THE GIRL OF THE PURPLE KISSES

What I loved most was visiting Maura at her auto shop.

There was something about that place — the smell of warm metal, the dark oil, the light filtering itself between hanging tools — that made everything seem more real, more intense, as though the world, upon crossing that threshold, acquired a different density.

As though everything weighed a little more.

As though nothing inside could remain light.

But it was not only that.

It was because I always returned covered in those kisses.

Kisses not conventionally red, as most imagine the marks of a kiss to be, but purple; a deeper shade, more restrained, as though they did not belong entirely to the surface of the skin, but had instead been placed there with a more persistent intention.

Purple.

Always purple.

Maura possessed a peculiar fascination with leaving me those purple kisses. She never fully explained it — and I never demanded that she do so — but within her way of giving them there was something repetitive, something not accidental. I suppose it was a sort of fetish, or one of her fantasies, a way of appropriating the most common gesture and transforming it into something more intimate, more secret.

And I accepted it.

I accepted it the way one accepts things that require no explanation.

Or should not require one.

Those kisses...

had presence.

They never entirely disappeared.

Not like others.

They remained.

Even when I ceased looking at them, they remained there, as though their existence did not depend upon my gaze. As though they existed regardless.

As though they had always existed.

Some were scarcely insinuated, as though they had been given with a delicacy that sought to leave no trace and yet did so regardless. Others, by contrast, were darker, denser in color, as though the gesture had persisted one instant too long.

One instant too long.

Long enough.

I liked discovering them afterward.

Always afterward.

After leaving.

After separating myself from her.

Afterward.

When I was already alone, before the mirror, barely turning my neck or slowly lifting my sleeve, as though that small gesture demanded a particular precision. As though seeing them formed part of the very gesture that had left them there.

There was one, just beneath the collarbone, that seemed to change with the light. In the morning it appeared faint, almost uncertain; but by dusk it acquired a different depth, as though awakening.

As though it awaited that moment.

That one I covered without thinking too deeply.

I covered it.

Another, near the wrist, possessed a diffuse shape, as though it had been left carelessly. That one detained me longer.

Longer than necessary.

I observed it without touching it.

Without touching it.

“They suit you better than anyone, beautiful Emma,” Maura would tell me. “On you, they look different.”

Different.

The word did not disappear.

It remained.

Different... as though they could belong to no one else.

As though they should not.

And those words never left.

They returned.

Like the kisses.

They always returned.

With time, I learned to live beside them. To choose my clothing according to where they were, to let my hair fall naturally, to avoid certain gestures. It was not discomfort exactly.

It was caution.

Caution not to reveal them.

Caution not to lose them.

Caution not to think too deeply about them.

Because those kisses were not meant for everyone.

They should not have been.

And yet there were the gazes.

On the street, in cafés, within unexpected reflections, there was always an instant in which someone seemed to pause one second too long.

One second too long.

I felt it.

They noticed, I thought.

They noticed.

Not the kisses themselves — not exactly — but what they implied.

Us.

Us.

And sometimes — very rarely — an idea insinuated itself.

Faint.

Uncomfortable.

What if they knew?

I did not think it.

Not entirely.

But the thought returned.

It always returned.

I had heard stories, spoken in lowered voices upon the radio, as though they belonged to another world: women exposed, pointed at, dragged into a violence that seemed to require no explanation.

I did not dwell upon it.

I should not have.

But sometimes...

“People do not understand,” Eleonore said once. “But they do not need to.”

They do not need to.

The phrase was closed.

Complete.

There was no need.

I nodded.

That night we dined together.

The table was small, the light dim, everything contained within a calmness that seemed complete. Eleonore sat before me, with that particular way she possessed of occupying space effortlessly.

Effortlessly.

Then it was she who extended her hand.

Not as one who asks, but as one who arranges.

As one who already knows.

And I allowed mine to descend toward hers.

Her touch was firm, certain.

Mine lighter.

My fingers settled into hers as though that place had already existed.

As though it had always been there.

It had always been this way.

Always.

And in that instant — precisely that instant — something ruptured.

It was not merely the sound, though there was one: dry, fractured. It was the manner in which the space itself yielded, as though something invisible had torn apart.

As though what was solid ceased to be so.

The door ceased to remain a boundary.

They entered.

I do not know how many.

I do not know when.

I only saw them approach, saw their hands find her arm, saw them separate her from me with a facility I could not understand.

I could not understand.

A voice spoke.

“Ma’am... you are under arrest for assault.”

Assault.

The word did not fit.

It fit nowhere.

“Assault?” I said. “What do you mean assault?”

I looked at them.

At her.

“No... you do not understand,” I began. “She... she is the kindest woman alive, she would never hurt anyone, she has her shop, she works all day, you do not know...”

You do not know.

You cannot know.

“This is because of us,” I continued. “It is because of us, isn’t it? You cannot do this.”

You cannot.

“You cannot do this to us for being two women.”

Two women.

“We are two women. We are not doing anything wrong.”

Anything wrong.

“We are two women who love each other.”

Love each other.

“You cannot do this.”

You cannot.

You cannot.

You cannot.

They took her away.

And I remained there.

With the words still inside my mouth.

Still emerging.

“You cannot do this.”

I climbed the stairs.

I do not remember deciding to do so.

“You cannot do this.”

One step.

Another.

“We are two women.”

The house was silent.

“We are not doing anything wrong.”

The door.

“You cannot do this.”

I entered.

The mirror was covered.

Covered.

I did not know why.

“You cannot...”

I approached it.

I took the cloth.

Pulled it away.

The reflection appeared.

Me.

And the kisses.

Many.

Too many.

Everywhere.

More than I remembered.

More.

I moved closer.

Searched for the shape.

The shape that was always there.

It was not there.

I blinked.

Nothing changed.

I moved closer still.

The edges were not soft.

The color was not uniform.

There were no lips.

There was no shape.

There was no kiss.

I raised my hand.

Touched one.

It hurt.

I remained still.

Touched another.

It hurt.

Another.

It hurt.

It hurt.

It hurt.

It hurt.

And in that instant — without anything else changing — I understood.

I had never truly seen them.

Not like this.

Never without the word.

Never without naming them first.

The mirror had not changed.

Nor had the skin.

Only the way of seeing them.

The way of thinking them.

The way of naming them.

And for the first time,

looking at them,

still feeling them beneath the skin,

I no longer knew what to call them.