

Eternally and Forever

(c) Copyright 2008 Brett Paufler
www.Paufler.net
Brett@Paufler.net

Do you remember our kiss?

I do.

I would love to hear your recollections of it sometime; but for now, indulge me. Let me tell you of the kiss as I remember it.

At the time I was just a boy, a lad, a child, and you were younger still. I don't actually remember the year. Do you? I think I might have been thirteen? Or was it fourteen? Or fifteen? I honestly don't know. You might think that I would, haunting me as it has over the years, but I don't.

Perhaps it is because most of my youth from eight to eighteen sort of blurs together. Perhaps it is because I engaged in the pursuits of childhood for far too long, but no matter. It is what it is; and it is, also, what I regret.

Do you remember those innocent years of playing Kick the Can and its endless variations? I loved the game and running about in the dark when we truly were kings of all we surveyed. But as I reread the line, I think maybe I should reserve the word love for you and not water it down by using it to refer to a game, a mere childhood fancy, that I no longer care about -- unlike you.

Of course, if it were possible, if it were the thing to do, perhaps I would still be playing the game today, and forced to relive the moment endlessly in my mind.

I think it was just nostalgia; but maybe this was in the back of my mind when I went to the old park the other night; or then, perhaps I was hoping to find you walking along, seeking the same fading memory on your own -- perhaps from a different angle. I didn't get very far. I never left the road. Even from where I stood, I could see the red glow of cigarettes, maybe worse, from those

who currently call the park their home. Who knows what they were really up to? Besides, let's face it. I've aged. We all have. And my time to run in the park is long since gone.

I notice that I am stalling and dancing around the subject. Please forgive me. My note is not coming out as eloquently as yours. How could it? But perhaps, if nothing else, you can sense my feeling of loss and my longing for those days of old.

I often feel this way when I recall that kiss -- our kiss. Believe it or not, I recall it often. It is easy for me to pull up, bring to the forefront of my mind, and the tip of my tongue, as if it was only yesterday. There I am. There we are, lying on our bellies just beyond the tree line at the edge of the field and Tommy is searching for us -- you and I.

Do you remember that moment? Do you remember lying there with me? The mosquitoes? The sweet smell of summer sweat? The cool breeze? The crickets in the air? And Tommy's bluffing call, "Who is that?" as he pears blindly into the forest? I remember it all or at least that is my claim. Perhaps, from this distance I only see what I want and I am blind to the truth or the memory of what actually transpired.

One thing I am certain of is that Tommy didn't see us and this is what made your running off all the stranger and unexpected. One moment life is good -- as good as it gets. Two souls lying next to each other under the summer moon; and then, before I know it, before I can really even register it, you're leaving, running away, but that's not how it started. It started with you leaning over and kissing me on the cheek. You never kissed me before that and you never kissed me since; and so, please indulge me, now, if I blow this moment up into more than it is, for it is all that I have, to remember, that kiss.

After that kiss -- that lingers long in my heart, but which lasted only a moment -- you whispered into my ear, "I love you. I always have." And then, as you must have planned long in advance, you pressed a folded piece of paper into the palm of my hand: your love note painstakingly decorated over countless hours

and sealed with a kiss. And then, you went running away, into the clearing and towards home.

I always wondered about that, why you took off. Tommy couldn't see us. He's as blind as a bat and always has been. You knew this. You must have. We were safe, invisible, alone, and happy; and then, you're running like a maniac, crying out to call attention to yourself, and getting yourself caught. I realize you must have felt like you were taking a bullet for me, for us, showing your love in the only way you knew how, in the only way I'd understand; but can't help but believing that Tommy wasn't going to ever find us -- not ever -- and that you were just running away.

I suppose that sounds accusatory, but I don't mean it like that. I understand now that you were not really ready then to declare your love for another as you waited anxiously in the dark for their reply; and in truth, neither was I. I cling to this as an explanation for why everything just sort of fizzled out. I prefer to think that we were both too young rather than that I was a coward and just plain scared. I wasn't ready for us, for us to be a thing, to be going steady, to listen to the guys taunt and tease... and in all honesty to leave the rest of them behind either, because it sounds stupid in retrospect; but Kick the Can was a single man's game, what one did before there were dates on Saturday night; and I wasn't ready to move on, not yet, not just then.

Bottom line, I know it was likely -- or rather it was -- my fault that things grew weird between us. How many years had it been that we'd known each other? All of our lives? And its not like I hadn't hoped, like I hadn't dreamed of that moment, that kiss, that touch, that sideways embrace, but when it happened, it caught me by surprise. I simply didn't know what to do. I was frozen, like a deer trapped in the headlights -- for weeks and months to come.

That's what I like to say when I'm feeling sorry for myself anyway, but that's not really what I wanted to tell you. I wanted to tell you how much time I spend reliving that moment, being there with you at the forest's edge: your face next to mine, your lips on

my cheek, you hair on my neck, the smell of your body, the touch of your hand as you press the note firmly into my fingers, and your happy laugh as you run off baiting Tommy to follow.

After all these years I still have the note. Hardly a week goes by that I don't read it again, and think things through -- how I'd go back and do them differently if only I could.

For one, I'd put an arm over your shoulder, I'd hold you down, and I wouldn't let you leave no matter what: that we would have gotten caught together or stayed there together alone. And Tommy wouldn't have found us. There's not a change. We could have just laid there for hours next to each other under the stars and the moon in each other's arms. This is what I dream about, what haunts me so -- the endless possibilities of what could have been.

It's not the one moment though, not just a mere kiss. The fantasy goes on. Instead of the alienation, the awkwardness, the growing distance that enlarged eventually to an overwhelming chasm that seemed insurmountable -- instead of this unhappy state, all through our high school years there would have been a slow coming together, an interweaving of our lives, and a fusion of our souls.

Forgive me if I presume that you shared the dream, that you were not just looking for a moment in the dark, but were searching for, hoping for, taking a chance on something a little bit more. Perhaps it's naïve, unrealistic, and overly romantic, but I like to imagine our high school years spent engaged in endless clandestine midnight swaries. Of course, sooner or later we would be caught, outed by our families, our love known, but by then it would not matter. Our love would have been too strong.

I am sure given time that your parents would understand and that my parents would understand. No doubt a place would have always be set for the other at each of our houses be it for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

Perhaps it is too naïve. Perhaps it is expecting too much tolerance, but a guy can dream, and I do, and I dream about you, and an opportunity lost. I dream about holding your hand as we

walk to school, about going to prom together, and all the other dances and community functions.

I'm sure I'm leaving out a great deal, but I don't want to sound like an obsessive creep that can't let the past go, for perhaps this is a fantasy that you may no longer share. I know we're not close these days. I know nothing more about you than the talk of the town and I know it's my fault. I have only myself to blame, all leading back to a mistake I made many long years ago... in response to a kiss.

Anyway, bottom line, as you'll recall, you professed your love to me by kissing and running away leaving only a note behind to explain your actions; and so, I shall do the same, and return the favor.

Please forgive me for making a scene if that's how it falls, but more than that, please forgive me for taking so long. I have finally realized that it is time for me to move on -- one way or another. I have a decent job offer in a far away city that I plan on accepting, but one word from you and I will be happy to stay...

Or perhaps even more appealing, one word from you, the slightest murmur, the tiniest bit of encouragement, and I would be delighted to sweep you up in my arms, and take you away from here, take you somewhere where we can be young and free, carefree and innocent, and fall into each other's endless embrace as we were always meant to do.

With endless love and affection,
Eternally and forever.