

TAYLOR JENKINS REID

"How do you know?" I shouldn't ask her things like this. I told her to say something. She said it. I can't press her on it. I can't try to get her to say things I haven't scripted for her. But she seems so confident right now, so sure that I will be OK. That I want to know more about this version of me she sees. How is the Lauren in her head going to be OK? And how can I be more like that Lauren?

"I know it will be OK because everything is OK in the end." And if it's not OK, it's not the end.

I pull back and look at her. "Isn't that from one of your mugs?"

Rachel shrugs. "Just because it's on a mug doesn't mean it's not true."

"No," I say, lying down, my head in her lap. "I guess you're right."

"You know what else I know?" she says.

"What?"

"I know you have a really great year ahead of you."

"I find that hard to believe. I'm turning thirty, and I'm on the verge of divorce."

"I thought you weren't getting divorced?" Rachel says.

I roll my eyes at her. "It's hyperbole, Rachel. A rhetorical device." I am at my most condescending when I'm at my least secure. I guess the problem is that I don't know how much of a hyperbole it is. I'll insist to everyone, my sister included, that it's not going to happen. But what if it does? I mean, what if it does?

"No, I'm serious," she says. "This part is hard. But I know you, and you don't do things that you shouldn't do. You don't do this stuff lightly. Neither does Ryan. If the idea, that's because it's a bad idea."

So delicate question
her kitchen table. She
encrusted French toast
take a picture, it looks
the plate in front of me
listening to whatever she
better than it looks
forte. She makes
with cream

stretched taut. I detected a tiny tremble in his shoulders as he spoke. "That was what I believed because I'd never known anything else, but you showed me there is beauty in the world. I see it every time I look at you, or see you smile, or hear you laugh. You believe the best of people and that's a strength, not weakness. Don't let anyone, least of all me, take that away from you." His eyes burned into mine, bright with pain. "You told me once there was something beautiful waiting for me, something that'll restore my faith in life. I've found it. It's you."

I wanted to sink into his words until they became my reality, but I'd been burned before. Who knew what he wanted from me this time around?

"You keep talking about protecting me," I said. "But you hurt me more than anyone else in my life, even Michael. Even when I thought you were an ass, I trusted you to tell the truth, and you turned out to be the biggest liar of all. Just..." I sucked in a deep breath, unable to look at him, it hurt so much. "Leave me alone."

Alex's chest heaved like he couldn't get enough air into his lungs. "I can't do that, sweetheart. I'll wait however long it takes, but I'll never be okay with a world in which you're alone."

"Who says I will be? Maybe I'll find someone else."

His eyes darkened into a furious shade of emerald, and his shoulders tensed even more. Somewhere, thunder boomed. I hadn't noticed the weather morph from sunny to its current gray, gloomy state, but I wouldn't be surprised if Alex had the power to control it with his emotions. "The hell you will," he snarled. "I'll..."

'After he died, I donated most of his things to charity — his tools, the truck. But I kept his rifle. I needed something important to him to remain.'

The phone rang. Eleanor again. I headed home. After cooking dinner and cleaning up, I fell into bed still wearing my jeans, too tired to study. Anyway, calculus paled next to Odile's lesson: love is accepting someone, all parts of them, even the ones you don't like or understand.

When Eleanor got home from the fall parent-teacher conference, she slammed the back door. 'Lily?' she hollered. 'Where are you?'

In the living room, watching the boys, where else? On my lap, Joe tugged at my hair; laying on the blanket I knit for him, Benjy noticed his toes for the first time.

Eleanor strode in. 'Miss White said you fall asleep in class. She made it sound like I was somehow at fault. I'm not a bad mother! Why don't you get dinner going while I feed Benjy?'

She hiked up her shirt over her sagging belly, past a spidery web of stretch marks. I fled to the kitchen before she undid her bra and released her chapped nipple. Seeing it once had been enough. I wished that Eleanor trusted me less. I wished she'd go back to the aerobics tapes and chatting with Odile, but she spent most of her time making home-made baby food and sobbing at the sink. 'You're a mother but also a woman,' Odile had told her. It seemed to me like Eleanor had given up on the woman she used to be.

Little by little, I had stopped doing homework and hanging out with Mary Louise. Even French was *fini*. Eleanor needed me. Sometimes, she just sat and contemplated the wall. 'Don't

Where the Cannals Sink

shops; the Piggly Wiggly grocery at one end, the Western Auto at the other, the diner in the middle. Mixed in there were Kress's Five and Dime, a Penney's (catalog only), Parker's Bakery, and a Buster Brown Shoe Shop. Next to the Piggly was the Dog-Gone Beer Hall, which offered roasted hot dogs, red-hot chili, and fried shrimp served in folded paper boats. No ladies or children stepped inside because it wasn't considered proper, but a take-out window had been cut out of the wall so they could order hot dogs and Nehi cola from the street. Colored couldn't use the door or the window.

The other street, Broad, ran from the old highway straight to the ocean and into Main, ending right there. So the only intersection was Main, Broad, and the Atlantic Ocean. The stores and businesses weren't joined together as in most towns but were small, vacant lots brushed with sea oats and palmettos, the marsh had inched in. For more than two hundred years the winds had weathered the cedar-shingled buildings and the window frames, most painted white or black. The village seemed tired of arguing.

of other guests in the living room, but they might as well be light-years away. Here, in the kitchen, Alex and I had entered our own little world. "There's something beautiful waiting for you, Alex. Whether you find it tomorrow or years from now. I hope it'll restore your faith in life. You deserve all the beauty and light in the world."

I meant every word. Beneath the icy shell, he was human like everyone else, and his broken heart broke mine a hundredfold.

"There you go, romanticizing me again." Alex didn't move as I took another step toward him, but his eyes burned with intensity. "It's too late for me, Sunshine. I destroy everything beautiful that comes into my life."

"I don't believe that," I said. "And that wasn't romanticizing you. This is."

Before I could lose my nerve, I stood on tiptoes and kissed him.

It was a soft, chaste kiss, but the effect was the same as a full-on make out session. Sparks consumed my skin, and the heat in my stomach flared to life. I shuddered at the sensation my pulse beating so wildly I couldn't hear anything else. Alex's lips were cool and firm, his taste like that of spice and red velvet, and I wanted to wrap myself around him and devour him until every bit of him was inside me.

Alex remained still, his chest rising and falling with harsh breaths beneath my tentative touch. I pressed a firmer hand against his chest and ran my tongue along the seam of his lips, seeking entry—

I gasped when Alex yanked me toward him and deepened the kiss. His hand fisted my hair and tugged, forcing my back to arch while his tongue plundered my mouth.

"Not the re

"If that's true, then this is simple. Be with me. Help me put
us back together."

I can feel Jesse's eyes on me even as I look away. I turn to
look out the window, to the blanket of snow covering the back-
yard. It is white and clean. It looks as soft as a cloud.

When I was a kid, I loved the snow. Then when I moved to
California, I used to tell people I'd never leave the sun, that
I never wanted to see snow again. But now, I can't imagine a
green Christmas and I know that if I left, I would miss that feel-
ing of coming in from the cold.
I have changed over time. That's what people do.
People aren't stagnant. We evolve in reaction to our plea-
sures and our pains.

Jesse is a different man than he was before.
I am a different woman.
And what has confused me ever since I found out he was

alive is now crystal clear: We are two people who are madly in
love with our old selves. And that is not the same as being in
love.

You can't capture love in a bottle. You can't hold on to it
with both hands and force it to stay with you.

What has happened to us is no one's fault—neither of us did
anything wrong—but when Jesse left, life took us in opposite
directions and turned us into different people. We grew apart
because we were apart.

And maybe that means that even though we can finally be
together...

НА ХВИЛІ
Три українські бренди, що творять
попри обставини

КОЛЬОРОТЕРАПІЯ
Головні аксесуари літа в яскравих відтінках

BEAUTY
LA PISCINE
Ілюзія літніх канікул на Рив'єрі
в кінематографічних декораціях

JEWELLERY
НАРОДЖЕННЯ ЛЕГЕНДИ
Технологічні інновації та вічна класика
ювелірного мистецтва

НОВІ ЦІННОСТІ
Тетяна Лісова, засновниця ювелірної компанії
про зміни у сприйнятті коштовностей

CULTURE
КРАЇНА МРІЙ
Фотокниги з усієї України з історіями про
дружбу, дорослішання та красу

ЩОДЕННИК ПАМ'ЯТІ
Роботи молодих українських фотографів
про досвіди нашого сьогодення

Фото: Karolina Wilczynska

2% САЛІЦИЛОВА
КИСЛОТА
з ПОВІЛЬНИМ
ВИВІДНЕННЯМ
ТРАНЕКСАМОВОЇ
КИСЛОТИ

year in the two months it's been since I've seen him. The bags under his eyes, the furrowed brow, the sunken posture. If regret took human form, it would look identical to Ryle.

His eyes fall to my stomach again and he takes a slow step forward. Then another. He's cautious, as he should be. He reaches out a timid hand, asking for permission to touch me. I nod softly.

He takes one more step forward and then places a steady palm against my stomach.

I can feel the warmth of his hand through my shirt, and my eyes snap shut. Despite the resentment I've built up in my heart toward him, it doesn't mean the emotions aren't still there. Just because someone hurts you doesn't mean you can simply stop loving them. It's not a person's actions that hurt the most. It's the love. If there was no love attached to the action, the pain would be a little easier to bear.

He moves his hand over my stomach and I open my eyes again. He's shaking his head, like he can't process what's happening right now. I watch as he slowly sinks to his knees in front of me.

His arms snake around my waist and he presses his lips against my stomach. He clasps his hands around my lower back and presses his forehead against me.

It's hard to describe what I feel for him in this moment. Like any mother would want for her child, it's a beautiful thing to see.

129
"I have no idea what you're talking about."
"Don't play dumb. It's unbecoming."
"I'm not. You think I wouldn't have kissed Marshall of my

own accord, just because he doesn't have a perfect face and six-pack abs?" I shot Josh a pointed stare. "Looks aren't everything. At least Marshall is sweet."
His smile took on a hard slant. "You don't want or need sweet, Red. It would bore you to death."

"Oh, really?" My voice dripped with poisonous honey. "Then please, pray tell, what do I want and need? Since you know me so well."

Josh leaned forward until his mouth hovered near my ear and it was all I could do not to pull back. My heart rumbled so loud in my chest I would've missed his reply had his voice not poured into me like dark silk, dangerous yet seductive.

"You want someone who can challenge you. Excite you. Keep you on your toes. And as for what you need..." His whiskey-scented breath gusted across my skin, peppering it with a thousand goosebumps. "You need someone to bend you over and fuck that attitude right out of you."

My reaction was instantaneous.

My nipples pebbled into hard, painful points, and a rush of hot moisture soaked my panties. Every gust of air against my sensitized skin added to the need pulsing low in my belly.

"You think Marshall can do that?" Josh's voice wrapped around me like a velvet embrace. "Fuck you the way you need?"

"And you can?" I managed. Oxygen. I needed oxygen. "Keep dreaming."

"I wasn't offering." Josh's hand grazed my knee for a