

Tommy's First Kiss

by Thomas Soto

"Tonight is going to be the night"

This phrase danced around my head over and over. My hands gripped the steering wheel even tighter. I hunched forward as if to get closer to the road in front of me. I could feel my neck pulsating with every beat of heart. Then, finally, the floodgates of my armpits cracked open. Right then, I knew that it was going to be a long night.

At the age of eighteen, I was unsure about many things. I was used to questioning everything, from the meaning of life to the existence of god. I sought all the answers to these questions.

"Mom, why did you and dad really get divorced?" I asked.

"We just fell out of love." My mom said with a sour tone.

My family never talked. I mean we talked to each other, but we never "talked". My brothers and I never heard the "birds and the bees" speech, nor did we ever find out what these feelings were that popped out of nowhere during puberty. It was these feelings that I was struggling with, alone, during my teenage years.

I pulled into the driveway and let myself come to a complete stop. I sat there with the stillness and silence of the night. The gentle breeze cooled the heated beads of moisture on the crown of my head.

It was 7:55PM and I wasn't supposed to pick up my date until 8:00PM. I used that time to recall the past five dates that I had previously with the same person. Each date ended with a firm handshake or a hug with a gentle pat on the back. Each departure filled with tension and nervousness. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to think.

7:56PM. I mean I've been on several dates before. In high school I even had a girlfriend. We kissed and everything. Why couldn't I even give or receive a peck on the cheek now? My foot began to tap nervously on the brake pedal wanting me to relieve the pressure that had built up in my body.

7:58 PM. My friends told me that I should kiss on the sixth date. It's normal, right? A wimp, that's what I was. I shifted

my body a little and felt the layer of sweat scrape off my shirt. Not good.

8:00PM. I shut my eyes as the car light flickered on. I looked up and saw the passenger door swing open. A smile followed by a warm hug came into the car.

"Where to tonight?" I asked.

"Pool. My friends are supposed to meet up with us at ten. So..."

"So."

"Why don't we go to the playground around the block and talk until then."

"Okay, sounds good."

I turned my headlights on and started the car. I pulled back from the driveway. 8:03PM. I wasn't sure what to feel. Trying to capture the words to describe my feelings at that time was impossible. The relentless tapping of my fingers on the steering wheel indicated that I was fidgety. The weakness I felt in my joints made me believe that I was nervous. The collection of liquid under my armpits pointed to a switch in deodorant that needed to be made. I looked over at the passenger seat and saw the relaxed state and smile that I longed to have. I wanted to do this, I was ready, and I've been ready for eighteen years.

The parking lot was sprinkled with specks of moonlight and litter. The playground set and jungle gym stood in the middle of its dirt proudly. New wood beams that looked dark and cold in the shadows of night supported the swings. A tree that stood between the parking lot and the playground stood guard with its limbs drooping down as to obstruct the view of the playground. I turned the car off and looked down at the steering wheel trying to figure out how to speak.

"Nice night, huh?"

"Oh... uh huh, it's getting a little bit cold though." I responded eventually.

The weather?!? Not a good sign. I thought I should slap myself. I scrambled to think of something else to say before the conversation went Code Blue.

"Do you want to walk out to the playground?" I asked unsurely.

8:15PM.

"Sure."

After every date we always called each other on the phone and debriefed the date. The common complaint that we always had was "the kiss". We always agreed that we were ready for it and promised each other that the next time we had an outing we would do it. It was three dates ago when we began that promise. I was never brave enough, I explained, I didn't understand why though. In my mind I had doubts about the whole situation and I wasn't completely sure it that was what I wanted. At the end of our conversations I was always assured that it was okay to feel all the apprehensions that I was feeling about the kiss. Being nervous about a kiss is natural.

How could it be natural though?

"Let's get on the swings!"

I nodded my head and followed. I felt the breeze get a little bit more brisk. My body responded with goose bumps that started on my back and spread throughout my body. Sand was flying into my shoes as I made a slow shuffle through the playground. My hands were cooling with the breeze dancing between my damp fingers. The smell of freshly watered grass that surrounded the sandpit mixed with the air around me.

"Come on push me." I heard through the darkness. My eyes focused on the voice coming for the far left swing. I walked over and began to push. As my hands guided the shoulders of my date on the swing, I noticed the full moon and the craters that were not visible with the human eye. I began contemplating the meaning of my life. Did I bring enough money to play pool?

8:20PM.

"Hello, what's wrong? Why are you staring off into space?"

"Wha-oh sorry, I didn't, I, sorry." I said senselessly.

"Let's sit down and talk, what's on your mind?"

I hesitated. I didn't know how to answer the question, so the best answer I could think of popped out.

"Nothing."

"Come on, something is bothering you; tell me what's going on."

I didn't know where to start. There were many things which were bothering me. I didn't understand why I was different. I didn't understand why I felt gross sitting there simply talking. I didn't understand why I was so confused about my life and wasn't sure about anything anymore. I didn't understand the doubts that I had. Most of all, I didn't know why I was so scared to kiss someone that I really liked.

"So what's going on?"

"This whole thing is stupid. I don't know why I am here with you. I don't know what this means. My feelings are so weird and messed up." I couldn't stop talking. "I hate myself like this. I want to be certain of everything, but, I'm not. Why is this happening to me? Why doesn't this happen to someone else? I want it to go away!" I took a deep breath and blinked a few times to my watery tear ducts from overflowing. My heart was trying to catch up to the speed of my thoughts. I could feel the tremble that enveloped my bones and muscles that shook my inner frame violently.

"Hey, it's perfectly normal to feel the way you do. It just means you are not ready to kiss and that's okay. I wasn't ready for a long time too."

"I know but I feel I should be ready to face this already, and I am so frustrated because I can't bring myself out to do this."

We then began to "talk". We discussed relationships; I talked about my ex-girlfriend who was completely supportive of this new relationship. We explored our family ties. I confessed that I wished my mother would have been more open with me about love. Many issues came out during the course of our talk. As the stars slightly moved overhead our conversation endured the dropping temperature and the increasingly colder and stronger breeze.

9:30PM.

"Is it getting cold?" I wondered out loud.

"Yeah, are you ready to go? We could meet them there a little early."

"Sure." I said as I pulled myself off the sandy slope that my bottom created.

We were both standing and gave each other our customary hug and pat. After the embrace I headed to the parking lot near the tree that stood guard. I took no more than three steps when I heard, "We should've totally been making out right now." I responded with a simple and sarcastic, "yeah, oh well." I continued walking towards the parking lot and I looked beside me and noticed I was walking alone. I looked over my shoulder and saw my silhouette standing in the middle of the playground and in the shadow of the jungle gym.

"Just get over here and kiss me."

"What?" I asked dumbly.

"Get over here and just kiss me."

My body turned without my permission. My legs walked forward taking my body to some place I did not know nor knew if I wanted to know. The goose bumps began to envelop my body once again. The hairs on the back of my neck stood stiff. The skin that covered my body become more sensitive to the cold breeze that blew. Then I was there.

What going on here? Was it going to happen. This is not supposed to happen, not here, not now.

We both stood in the center. The world no longer existed. Sweat returned with a vengeance over my whole body. 9:35PM. My chest began to shiver and I felt a tremendous coldness encase my body. I stood there not sure of what to do next. We looked into each other's eyes and explored the inner workings of our beings. I looked at the lips that I longed to touch. I was hypnotized by the emerald green eyes I have stared at so many times before. This was going to happen.

We slowly leaned forward and tilted our heads. I stopped hearing the night, the breeze, rustling leaves, my breath. The moon spied upon us pressuring us to hurry up and get this over with. My heart couldn't stop beating rapidly. Closer and closer we came. I felt the air push out of the nose in front of me and onto my upper lip. 9:40PM. Then it happened, he kissed me.

Time crashed to a halt. The stars came down and filled me with its light. The earth spun under my feet. Every nerve ending in my body was switched on at the very same time. All doubts were crushed. The sparks, the sparks that I heard so much about, they were there. For the first time, I felt fireworks and the rockets.

"This is how boys feel when they kiss girls." I thought to myself. I knew then what everyone as talking about, this was great!

Our lips parted. 9:41PM. The feelings were still very much alive within me. I had no doubts about myself anymore. The questions, the tension that resided in me for the past years just disappeared. I no longer had to hide from myself. The world looked different; it looked friendlier but a little more dangerous to live in.

"How was that?" He asked.

I could only nod my head.

"Good."

I took a deep breath of fresh air and felt the oxygen go through my lungs. For the first time I noticed how good that air tasted. I blinked my eyes for the first time and took my first step. A new person is what I had become. Living my life from that day forward has been different. There was no turning back. There was no choice. That night, there was just an eighteen year old boy experiencing his first kiss on a playground with another eighteen year old boy.