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# A Kiss For Emily

Louise Dauner

Emily accepted Lester's party invitation casually, as she did most things; things that weren't terribly intimate, that is. It would be fun, she thought. No one in the neighborhood had given a party for some time.

This, however, was to be a super-party. Lester, for all of his spindle-shanked fourteen years, was making obvious (and often painful) efforts to achieve adulthood. He was giving a party for the eighth-grade graduates, all twenty-six of them. Emily was not graduating for another semester. But the neighborhood "gang" was as yet intact. One would not think of giving a party without inviting all of them, Martha and Emily and Eugene and the rest, whether they were graduating or not. They would probably dance to records—they were all in Saturday dancing school together—and perhaps listen in on Lester's newest crystal radio and play silly games. Then Mrs. Vaughn would serve ice cream and some of her famed chocolate cake. Altogether, thought Emily, it would be a nice break in the routine of neighborhood Young Society.

Emily and Martha went together. They were kindred spirits. When other little girls were playing prettily and demurely at paper dolls, or dressing up in their mothers' clothes for "calling afternoons," they would be flying kites, or digging trenches, (everyone was war-minded then), or perhaps digging in the commons for field mice, in a sudden excess of zoological zeal. Folks were apt to shake their heads over them and murmur what a pity it was that they weren't boys—Emily especially. Emily had always been of this opinion privately, and forthwith did as much as possible to alleviate (since she could

not alter) the unfortunate fact of her femininity.

But, although she regarded boys as by far the most satisfactory playmates, (girls were so stuffy), she had only contempt for the incipient romancing that was just beginning to make itself felt in her particular group. Jane and Jimmy were just plain silly! She and Martha agreed that it was perfectly disgusting the way Jimmy hung around every day after school waiting to carry Jane's books home for her—and Jane bigger than he was too, and amply able to carry her own—and the way they were always mooning around and trying to steal away from the others!

Outwardly Emily was nonchalant; but she dressed that night with an inward tremor of excitement. She knew the graduates only slightly, and in her more naive moments regarded them with some little awe. The boys were just assuming their first long trousers, and the girls were slyly putting up their hair and, occasionally, appearing in real silk hose. And everyone knew that there were at least two engagements in the class; Jerry Allan and Kate Parker had been going steady for months now, and so had Tom Jacobs and Lorena Smith. Emily didn't like them. Silly business, she thought—and most of the time she ignored them. But they would be there tonight. As she buckled her low-heeled black patent leather pumps, she decided that she'd keep an eye on them. For all of her romantic insouciance, she was slightly curious as to how engaged couples behaved.

When she and Martha arrived at Lester's, Emily was very glad that she hadn't come alone. For it didn't take long to discover that this terrible pairing-off bug had most of the class in its toils. Two by two they

came, and were formally ushered upstairs, the boys to Lester's room, the girls to Mrs. Vaughn's. Emily felt as much at home at Lester's, as a rule, as at her own home. But tonight, things felt different. Even the furniture looked as if it had had its face and hands washed and its mohair combed and been patted on the head and told to behave itself. Some of the girls self-consciously dusted some entirely superfluous powder over their faces before going down stairs to the living-room. Once down, they sat demurely and a little stiffly by their partners—their "dates" they called them. Two and two. "Just like Noah's Ark," Emily whispered, giggling to Martha.

Having arrived, the class proceeded to take possession. It overflowed into the dining room. It discovered and appropriated every available corner and dim spot. It whispered and sniggered and held hands. It cast a few disinterested and aloof glances at Martha and Emily and Eugene and Maurice, classified them as obvious babies distinctly not worth its time or attention, and henceforth ignored them. Emily and Martha whispered intimate nothings too, and waited for the party to commence.

Had they not already known it, the arrival of Arnold Blake, Lester's particular friend, should have warned them of unusual events. For Arnold never bothered with ordinary "kid-parties." He was seventeen, and "terribly handsome," and a violinist, and played around all the time for women's clubs. He was all the rage, and in a fair way to be completely spoiled by his feminine admirers. When Arnold and his girl came in, he with his dark curly hair rioting all over his head, his clean-cut profile always just enough turned for someone to profit thereby, Emily caught a distinct, subdued feminine rustle. There were whispers of "Isn't he darling," appraising glances cast

at his companion; and the attention of even those dependables, Kate and Lorena, was diverted for the moment.

But Emily was beginning to fidget. Weren't they ever going to begin having the party? She didn't even realize that it had actually begun when, at last, Lester came into the room with a large metal plate. At that, the girls bridled and blushed, and the boys clapped, and things livened up.

It seemed that someone twirled the plate and if you didn't catch it before it stopped spinning, you must give a forfeit. Round and round the circle it went. Emily was nervous. Never having played it before, and being suddenly overwhelmed with shyness, she bungled badly when her turn came, and handed over her best lawn handkerchief which she was carrying for the first time, as forfeit. "Butterfingers!" she scolded herself and scowled in disgust. This was a silly game! A moment later Martha confirmed her verdict. She'd missed, too. And although they grinned in sympathy at each other, suddenly each knew that the other wasn't enjoying the evening at all.

Finally everyone had given forfeits. They appointed Arnold to set the price for redemptions. Unconsciously, Emily was squeezing her hands till her small knuckles showed white. How she hoped that she wouldn't have to do anything too silly in front of all these supercilious young people!

Lester was holding Lorena's opal ring over Arnold's head and reciting the age-old formula, "Heavy, heavy hangs over thy head. What shall the owner do to redeem it?" Arnold's gaze traveled about the circle. He noticed Lorena's face, laughing, but a little strained, for all that. He laughed wickedly. "She shall . . . she shall kiss Tom Jacobs seventeen times."

The girls shrieked and the boys

roared for sheer joy. Tom and Lorena came to the center of the circle. Tom put his arms about Lorena and slowly, intensely, lingeringly, kissed her. Seventeen times. The class chanted in unison, "One! Two!" . . . Emily shuddered. For some reason, it reminded her of the scene in the "Tale of Two Cities," where the women sat in the marketplace and knitted and counted as the heads dropped into the guillotine basket. She didn't think she could bear it if Arnold made her kiss anyone. She'd rather lose the handkerchief, much, much rather!

So this was what it meant to be "grown up"! Well, she'd not do it. She'd think of some excuse to leave the room. Oh, if someone would only telephone her to come home! This was a terrible party. She glanced at Martha. Martha was looking glumly apprehensive, too.

Slowly the pile of forfeits dwindled. Still Lester had not picked up her handkerchief. She began to hope that they would weary of the game before the end—and at once knew it for an impossible hope. There wasn't a chance. They were enjoying it all hugely—even, she began to suspect, the ones who had to pay.

And then her heart thumped painfully. The lawn handkerchief hung above Arnold's head. "Heavy—heavy . . ." She tried to smile casually, but her hands were twisting. Oh God, please let him not say it! Or not so many, anyhow. . . Arnold was looking at her. He wasn't grinning now. For a few seconds the room was very still. Then it came. "She shall kiss John Lewis—seven times."

For the moment she sat still, unable to move. And then almost before John had risen from his chair, she darted across the room. Before they realized it, she pecked seven times on his right cheek. Perhaps he dreaded it, too. For she remembered later that he was a shy boy, and

that his face had turned terribly red. She grabbed her handkerchief—bought back so dearly—and raced back to her chair. It was all over before anyone realized. But she couldn't laugh and wink at Martha and pretend that it didn't matter. It did. It brought the embarrassed tears to her eyes. She couldn't let them see that, either. She stood there, gazing an eternity at the mantel. Finally she said, "What time is it?" and pretended to look at the mantel-clock, and craned her neck as though to see. But Mrs. Vaughn, who stood nearby, answered, "A quarter to eleven," and after that she had to sit down. She made a furtive dab at her eyes before she turned around, and knew vaguely, that Martha had squeezed her hand in sympathy.

After that, she didn't much care what happened. Nothing could be worse now. She had kissed a boy. She had kissed a boy . . . they played other things, finally, but it didn't matter.

Somehow the evening dragged along. It was eleven-thirty of a Saturday night. Even young sophisticates must go home then. She dragged herself wearily upstairs, got her wraps, murmured the prescribed formula to Mrs. Vaughn and Lester at the front door, and stumbled down the street, home.

"Well, Emily," said her mother cheerily as she opened the door, "did you have a good time"?

"Yes," and Emily's glum face contradicted it, flatly. Silently, she went upstairs, undressed, drew her bath. It was the worst party she'd ever attended, she thought. . . She climbed into the tub and began wearily to rub soap on the sponge. She didn't look up when her mother entered. "What's the matter"? she asked, sympathetically. Emily was often uncommunicative, but never to such a degree.

Again, the tears sprang to her eyes. "I—" and then it came out. "I had to

kiss a boy". The big fat tears rolled down her face and splashed into the tub.

But after that, she felt better. Mother was a dear. She didn't say much. And if the corner of her mouth twitched the tiniest bit, Emily didn't see.

It was nice to be in bed, warm and relaxed after her bath. Mother kissed her goodnight and tucked the covers around her. Somehow, since she had told about it, and now that she was home in bed, it all seemed very far away. Drowsily, she thought of it . . . of course it was silly. Mother had told her never to do things like that . . . but maybe you had to once in a while to achieve that mysterious state they called being "grown up." After all she wasn't a baby any more. She'd be graduating next semester. And then, with the warmth and the coziness, it came over her that his cheek had really been very soft . . .

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## A Leaf In The Stream

Betty Davenport

So often I think of Cousin Katherine. Sometimes a chance remark, occasionally a printed word, almost always the note of a violin will bring her. Even now on the creek bank, watching sycamore leaves swirl through the rapids, hesitate, and then float slowly on, I am thinking of her.

Katherine's story, as my mother has told it to me, is quite short—and very simple. She was tall, dark-haired, endowed with wit and charm.

An accomplished violinist, she spent some time studying in Germany, and was able to give a great deal of pleasure to people, both here and over there who heard her play. Uncle George, her father, bought for her a fine old violin, and its rich tone gave added depth and beauty to her music. I can see her now, as mother has many times described her, standing, violin in hand, on the concert stage. She is wearing cream-colored lace, and is surrounded by masses of pink roses. This, indeed, is the picture of her that I can imagine most clearly, and that I like the best.

When Katherine was twenty-one she married a man who was also young, intelligent, full of fun. His character endeared him to her family and friends, and their marriage seemed a near approach to perfection. They lived very happily together, until Katherine became suddenly ill. She remained at the hospital for a while in a critical condition, but, improving rapidly, was promised that she might return home in time to celebrate their first wedding anniversary. Plans were made for a large dinner party, and though of course Katherine could take no part in preparing it, it was to be given in her own home, and she would be present. Shortly before that time, her illness took a quick and unexpected turn for the worse—and then she died.

From the same place from which, exactly a year before, she had been married, she was buried—her violin sealed away with her. Her husband, who is only a few years over forty today, has never married again.

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### SAD SONG

Far and wide  
Over a lonely lake  
The gray clouds glide;  
Memories that make  
Tears fall from the present time  
Into the past.

—Jane Beuret