

little secrets

by
Alessa

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Tia always looks amazing. It doesn't matter what she wears. It doesn't matter how she styles her hair or does her makeup. No matter what she does, what bracelets or necklaces she wears, she is constantly the most beautiful girl in the whole world.

Her eyes are so rich brown, it makes me feel like I'm swimming in chocolate every time I gaze into them. Her hair is a magically wavy golden brown that I want to lose myself in forever. Her scent is soft and sweet; just being near her feels like dancing through a fragrant meadow.

When our English teacher decided to assign our seating on the first day, I was so upset that he sat her so far away from me, but after a few days, I realised how wonderful it was to have such a perfect view of her. There's no learning to be had in that class for me. All I want to study is Tia. Stevenson, Bradbury, Golding—it's a miracle I even remember the names with as little attention as I pay in that class. The miracle, however, isn't that I can remember them from class. The miracle is that Tia is my best friend and a lot more focused than I am.

Every day after school, Tia helps me study. As boring as homework and studying are, somehow it comes so much easier when I hear her gentle voice explaining everything I missed in class. Sometimes I wonder if some subconscious part of me is deliberately ignoring the teacher just so I have an excuse to ask Tia to explain it to me again.

"You there, space girl?" she asks, jolting me out of my reverie and the thoughts of her that had me lost once again.

"Yeah, no, I'm still listening," I say, adjusting myself on my bed. "This book really doesn't do it for me, though."

"What? An island full of boys isn't good enough for you?" she asks jokingly.

"They're all stupid, Tia," I shoot back with an amused smile.

"It's a story. You can pretend they're all courageous or something," she says playfully.

"Still, there is not a single thing I find interesting in the story. They're not exactly the nicest boys, you know?"

"Oh yeah?" Tia says, setting the book aside. "Would you prefer it if they were girls?" She gives me a playful grin.

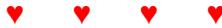
Tia and I have been best friends since the first grade. She knows me better than anyone else in the world. She knows every struggle I've had, every happy moment, and every single secret.

Except for one.

"I'd rather read a story about just two girls on an island together," I lament wistfully. "They'd be BFFs, and their names would be Tia and..." I trail off, losing myself in her eyes.

"Sounds like a nice vacation," she says cheerfully. "But I'm sure you'd want to hang out with someone else eventually," her voice still friendly and playful.

Never as long as I have you, I think to myself.



When we were in the fourth grade, Tia and I were bored one day, hanging out at her place over the weekend. While trying to decide what to do, we started talking about the future, love, and romance. She asked me if I'd ever kissed a boy before. I said "no," of course, and she hadn't either. We started talking about what it would be like to actually kiss a boy.

I always assumed that it was normal for boys and girls to kiss when they loved each other. My parents, of course, insisted that I wasn't allowed to kiss boys until I was much older, and I think they'd still say the same thing if I asked them if I could. I never really had the urge, though. I figured I was still too young, and it would change as I grew older, but now I'm almost thirteen and still haven't felt that desire.

Tia had an idea that day. She figured that, seeing as how neither of us knew much about kissing, maybe it would be a good idea to practise. I naturally asked how we would practise without any boys to practise on, but she already had that covered. She suggested that we practise on each other. I remember getting up to close the door to her room to make sure no one would overhear or see us if they walked by.

I was so nervous, but somehow I felt safe kissing her. She was my best friend, and I already knew that I could trust her with anything, so it somehow made sense that we could practise kissing each other. As the reasoning played out in my head, I suddenly found myself staring at her pretty face, gleefully imagining how it might feel.

My heart beat faster as I returned to her bed, where she was sitting. I sat on the bed across from her, timid and shy. I looked deep into her brown eyes, seeing a beauty I'd never allowed myself to recognise before. I put my hands behind her head and looked down at her lips, asking if that was the right way to do it. She guessed it was and did the same. Slowly, hesitantly, we drew our faces closer to each other. There was a brief pause before the crossing of that final thin barrier of nitrogen and oxygen, past the boundaries we had always known but never understood, and then I pulled her in the last centimetre and we pressed our lips together. We held each other like that for a split second before pulling apart, laughing at ourselves.

I told her that was kind of fun, trying to hide how desperate I was for more. Thankfully, she asked if we could try it again, saying that she wasn't sure if we were doing it right or not. We tried it again,

attempting to hold our composure a little longer. We asked each other what it felt like and how we might do it better. We couldn't let the boys down, she said. We practised again and again and again...

I knew that afternoon that there was no one else in the world I ever wanted to kiss.



"Why do you want to be on an island full of boys anyway?" I ask. "How many boys have you turned down despite never having a boyfriend?"

She scowled playfully at me. "Ew gross. You know what the boys are like at our school."

She had a point. The boys at our school are nearly all insufferable, especially to women and girls. They'll respect a teacher to the extent that it doesn't affect their grades, but that's about all you could expect from the guys there.

"Fair point," I say.



I saw her at school the day after our first kiss and felt my heart leap for joy in a way I'd never felt before. It was all I could do not to kiss her right then and there in front of our entire school, but I only just managed to resist the urge. She smiled at me, and we went about our business as usual. When she came over to my house after school, I couldn't help but ask her if she wanted to practise kissing again.

"We shouldn't do that anymore," she frowned at me while busying herself with a bundle of sharpies.

"But didn't you like kissing me?" I asked her, not even considering how that might be interpreted.

"We should save our kisses", she looked away. "You know... for our future boyfriends."

On that day, I reluctantly accepted her sudden change of heart and agreed with her. The devastation of discovering Tia, only to lose that precious joy the very next day, has never really faded.



I look at Tia's lips, my mind drifting back to *that day*, as it so often does. They had only become more beautiful and kissable over the years. I miss the taste of her strawberry lip gloss. I miss the soft tickle as they brushed up against my own lips.

"Hey, Tia," I say, trying not to let her see how nervous I am.

She smiles at me and I can feel myself start to blush.

"You remember that time when we practised kissing?"

She laughs and it sounds like music to me. "Haha, we really thought we needed to *practise* kissing. I doubt we learned anything, as bad as we were."

"I don't know about that," I say. *I learned about me*, I think to myself.

Despite my desperate attempt at a poker face, I'm losing my mind inside. Part of me is screaming to just tell her finally how I feel, while another part of me is terrified that I'll ruin everything with my stupid, selfish desires. I look up into her eyes and my heart melts all over again.

"I was actually wondering if we could try it again," I say, my nervousness finally creeping into my voice. "After all, we know a lot more now, so maybe we'll know if we're actually doing it right," I tried to justify myself.

Tia looks down, seeming to ponder for a moment, then gets up and closes the door to my bedroom. She slowly walks back over to my bed and sits down across from me. She smiles.

"Are you sure?" she asks.

I hesitate for a moment. She's given me a chance to back out if I want. Maybe she wants me to back out?

My nervousness must have been apparent.

"I don't mind trying it again if you really want to," she says in a reassuring voice.

I stare into those rich brown eyes again, glancing down at her lips as I brush her hair back. She places her hands behind my head, just like the first time. I close my eyes, leaning in slightly as I get ready to live this waking dream. Before I can close that gap between us, like I did years ago, I feel her lips press into mine. I wrap one arm behind her back, cradling her head with my other hand, pulling her close into me.

We held the kiss for what felt like ages before breaking away, and we didn't laugh this time.

"How was it?" Tia asks.

"Better than I remember," I say, forcing my mouth not to beg her for more. "How was it for you?" I manage to ask.

"Do... do you think we could try again?" she asks shyly, her round cheeks flushed with cute blush.

I nod, drawing her back into me. She presses into my hands, pushing me gently down onto the bed... and we kiss. I hold her close. My head sinks into the pillows under her pressure. I feel her fingers run through my hair, and her curls tickle my cheeks. But all too soon, she pulls away.

Tia sits back up and asks, "Did I ever tell you why I didn't want to do this again?"

"You said that we should save the kissing for boys," I remind her.

"That's what my mom told me," she explains, and I sit myself back up too. "I kind of told her what we did after you went home. She wasn't mad or anything, but she told me that girls aren't supposed to do this sort of thing. She told me that I should only kiss my boyfriend or husband."

I blink, beginning to see that I'm not the only one who has kept a part of myself secret since then.

"I've never forgotten that day, though," she continues. "And to be honest... I've been wanting to do this again ever since."

"Me too," I say, watching her eyes sparkle as the words leave my lips.

"Then, does that mean you want to practise some more?" she asks.

I smile and feel a joyful tear begin to form. "I think I've had enough practise," I say. "Do you think we can try it for real?"

She dives into me once again, pushing me back down on the bed. Her hands find mine and our fingers lace into an unbreakable bond. I'm barely aware of kicking the book off the bed before I lose myself completely in Tia's kiss. We continue kissing until Mom calls us down for dinner.

"I think we have to take a break," Tia says, pulling her mouth away without unpinning me from the bed.

I raise my head back up to her lips again, stealing one last kiss in a futile attempt to preserve this moment forever.

"You're so pretty," Tia says, carefully pushing herself off of me.

"So are you," I respond.

As Tia and I reluctantly drag ourselves out of my bed, she asks, "What would you do if I said I liked you?"

I blink and look at her for a moment. We've already crossed so many lines between us that her question perplexes me. The answer is obvious, but it feels strange after everything we've done, even just now.

"I love you," the whisper crosses my lips before the hope in Tia's eyes can turn to concern in my hesitation.

Tia wraps her arms around me, and I hug her back with all the strength I can find in myself. I close my eyes and lose myself in her scent and the warmth of her body pressed against mine.

"I love you too," she says softly in my ear.

Our special moment is broken once again by Mom calling us for dinner.

"Come on," I say as I take her hand. "Let's get going before my mom gets worried."

We walk together, holding hands until the last moment before mom sees us. Someday we'll have to tell her, and Tia's parents too. For now, however, we'll keep this our little secret. We'll steal kisses whenever we can, cuddle whenever we're alone in one of our rooms, and hold hands whenever no one's looking.

The future has never felt brighter than it does now. No matter what we face in our lives together, I feel as though it will always be fine. No matter what struggles and trials and hardships come our way, as long as she's by my side and I'm by hers, I know we can overcome anything.

The End