Loveless















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Loveless

Alice Oseman

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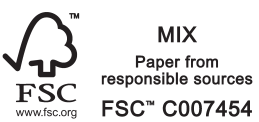
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If it proves so, then loving goes by haps:
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.

Much Ado About Nothing, William Shakespeare

PART ONE

LAST CHANCE

There were literally three separate couples sitting around the fire making out, like some sort of organised kissing orgy, and half of me was like, *ew*, and the other half was like, *Wow, I sure do wish that was me*.

To be fair, it's probably what I should have expected from our prom afterparty. I don't go to parties very often. I hadn't been aware this actually was the culture.

I retreated from the firepit and headed back towards Hattie Jorgensen's giant country house, holding up my prom dress in one hand so I didn't trip, and dropped Pip a message.

Georgia Warr
i could not approach the fire and retrieve the marshmallows because there were people kissing around it

Felipa Quintana
How could you betray and disappoint me like this Georgia

When I entered the kitchen and located Pip, she was leaning against a corner cupboard with a plastic cup full of wine in one hand and her phone in the other. Her tie was half tucked into her shirt pocket, her burgundy velvet blazer was now unbuttoned and her short curls were fluffy and loose, no doubt due to all the dancing at prom.

'You OK?' I asked.

'Might be a tad drunk,' she said, her tortoiseshell glasses slipping down her nose. 'And also I *do* fucking love you.'

'More than marshmallows?'

'How could you ask me to make such a choice?'

I slung my arm round her shoulders and we leant back together against the kitchen cupboards. It was almost midnight, music was thumping from Hattie's living room, and the sound of our classmates chatting and laughing and shouting and screaming resonated from every corner of the building.

'There were three separate couples making out around the fire,' I said. 'Like, in unison.'

'Kinky,' said Pip.

'I sort of wished I was one of them.'

She gave me a look. '*Ew*.'

'I just want to kiss someone,' I said, which was odd, because I wasn't even drunk. I was driving Pip and Jason home later.

'We can make out if you want.'

'That wasn't what I had in mind.'

'Well, Jason's been single for a few months now. I'm sure he'd be up for it.'

'Shut up. I'm serious.'

I *was* serious. I really, really wanted to kiss someone. I wanted to feel a little bit of prom-night magic.

'Tommy, then,' said Pip, raising an eyebrow and smiling evilly. 'Maybe it's time to *confess*.'

I'd only ever had a crush on one person. His name was Tommy. He was the 'hot boy' of our school year – the one who could actually have been a model if he'd wanted. He was tall and skinny and conventionally attractive in a Timothée Chalamet sort of way, though I didn't really understand why everyone was in love with Timothée Chalamet. I had a theory that a lot of people's 'celebrity crushes' were faked just to fit in.

Tommy had been my crush ever since I was in Year 7 and a girl had asked me, 'Who d'you think is the hottest boy at Truham?' She'd shown me a photo on her phone of a group of the most popular Year 7 boys at the boys' grammar over the road, and there was Tommy right in the middle. I could tell he was the most attractive one – I mean, he had hair like a boy-band star and was dressed pretty fashionably – so I'd pointed and said *him*. And I guess that was that.

Almost seven years later, I'd never actually talked to Tommy. I'd never even really *wanted* to, probably because I was shy. He was more of an abstract concept – he was hot, and he was my crush, and nothing was going to happen between us, and I was perfectly fine with that.

I snorted at Pip. 'Obviously not Tommy.'

'Why not? You like him.'

The thought of actually following through on the crush made me feel extremely nervous.

I just shrugged at Pip, and she dropped the discussion.

Pip and I started to walk out of the kitchen, arms still slung round each other, and into the hallway of Hattie Jorgensen's fancy

country home. People were slumped on the floor in the corridor in their prom dresses and tuxes, cups and food scattered around. Two people were kissing on the stairs, and I looked at them for a moment, unsure whether it was disgusting or whether it was the most romantic thing I'd ever seen in my life. Probably the former.

'You know what I want?' Pip said, as we stumbled into Hattie's conservatory and collapsed on to a sofa.

'What?' I said.

'I want someone to spontaneously perform a song to declare their love for me.'

'What song?'

She gave this some thought.

'"Your Song" from *Moulin Rouge*.' She sighed. 'God, I am sad, gay and alone.'

'Solid song choice, but not as attainable as a kiss.'

Pip rolled her eyes. 'If you want to kiss someone that much, just go talk to Tommy. You've liked him for seven years. This is your last chance before we go to uni.'

She might have had a point.

If it was going to be anyone, it was going to be Tommy. But the idea filled me with dread.

I folded my arms. 'Maybe I could kiss a stranger instead.'

'Fuck off.'

'I'm *serious*.'

'No you're not. You're not like that.'

'You don't know what I'm like.'

'Yes I do,' said Pip. 'I know you more than anyone.'

She was right. About knowing me and about me not being like that and about tonight being my last chance to confess the crush I'd had for seven years, and the last chance to kiss someone

while I was still a schoolkid, while I had a chance to feel the teenage-dream excitement and youthful magic that everyone else seemed to have had a little taste of.

It was my last chance to feel that.

So maybe I would have to bite the bullet and kiss Tommy after all.

ROMANCE

I loved romance. Always had. I loved Disney (especially the under-appreciated masterpiece that is *The Princess and the Frog*). I loved fanfiction (even fanfics for characters I knew nothing about, but Draco/Harry or Korra/Asami were my comfort reads). I loved thinking about what my own wedding would be like (a barn wedding, with autumn leaves and berries, fairy lights and candles, my dress – lacy and vintage-looking, my soon-to-be-spouse crying, my family crying, me crying because I'm so, so happy, just, so happy that I have found *the one*).

I just. Loved. *Love*.

I knew it was soppy. But I wasn't a cynic. I was a dreamer, maybe, who liked to yearn and believed in the magic of love. Like the main guy from *Moulin Rouge*, who runs away to Paris to write stories about truth, freedom, beauty and love, even though he should probably be thinking about getting a job so he can actually afford to buy food. Yeah. Definitely me.

I probably got this from my family. The Warrs believed in *forever love* – my parents were just as in love now as they were back in 1991 when my mum was a ballet teacher and my dad was in a

band. I'm not even joking. They were literally the plot of Avril Lavigne's 'Sk8er Boi' but with a happy ending.

Both sets of my grandparents were still together. My brother married his girlfriend when he was twenty-two. None of my close relatives had been divorced. Even most of my older cousins had at least partners, if not whole families of their own.

I hadn't ever been in a relationship.

I hadn't even kissed anyone.

Jason kissed Karishma from my history class on his Duke of Edinburgh expedition and dated a horrible girl called Aimee for a few months until he realised she was a knob. Pip kissed Millie from the Academy at a house party and also Nicola from our youth theatre group at the dress rehearsal for *Dracula*. Most people had a story like that – a silly kiss with someone they sort of had a crush on, or didn't really, and it didn't necessarily go anywhere, but that was a part of being a teenager.

Most people aged eighteen have kissed someone. Most people aged eighteen have had at least one crush, even if it's on a celebrity. At least half of everyone I knew had actually had sex, although some of those people were probably lying, or they were just referring to a really terrible hand job or touching a boob.

But it didn't bother me, because I knew my time would come. It did for everyone. *You'll find someone eventually* – that was what everyone said, and they were right. Teen romances only worked out in movies anyway.

All I had to do was wait, and my big love story would come. I would find *the one*. We would fall in love. And I'd get my happily ever after.