

One Kiss

by Jodi Barnes

"It was one kiss. No tongue. What does that even mean?"

Lindley tried to see Leah as any other patient, "What do you want it to mean?"

"I don't know," Leah whined, tears welling, "something, maybe. You know I hate surprises."

Her sister was not another patient. Leah was histrionic, self-absorbed, sold on her imagined misery. Demanding an emergency session to talk about a damned date. "No, you hate not being in control."

A squawk of anguish sounded from the back of Leah's throat.

Lindley looked at her wall clock.

Leah noticed, "Yes, I know. Time, money." She took two tissues from the *Keep Calm, Carry On* decorative box beside her.

Lindley remembered being twelve, mother placing Leah in her arms for the first time, "Do you like your life?"

Leah's mouth hinged open, her eyes chocolate Tootsie Pops Lindsey would bring home from the grocery store once she could drive, a year before their mother was killed by a drunk driver. Lindley anticipated the wail of a baby, seconds after its vaccination. But Leah remained silent.

"If you don't like your life, change your mind."

Leah blinked but her mouth didn't close all the way.

"Get off all those antidepressants that I won't prescribe but I know you're on. Start eating meat again. Unplug. Get a dog. Walk it. Volunteer at a shelter. And for god sakes, look up. The sun still shines, despite the clouds' best efforts."

Leah closed her mouth and rose, slowly.

Lindley stood up, walked toward the door and opened it. As Leah passed, Lindley touched her sister's arm, leaned in and hugged her hard. As Leah began to step away, Lindley grabbed her again and kissed her sister's cheek.

"Is that an apology?"

"It's whatever you need it to be."

