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Morton Marcus

KISSES

When I was a boy, *The Kiss* waited in the hall or around the corner, always outside the classroom where our voices droned.

When I was awake it hovered in my dreams, and when I slept it fluttered beside my bed, holding its breath.

I could tell you that *The Kiss* was like a butterfly, but you've probably already thought of that.

Of course, there was more than one, there was a skyful of kisses migrating toward me from another hemisphere, like windblown rose petals, but they hadn't arrived, not yet. They were just over the horizon, although their perfume billowed ahead, engulfing me in clouds of cidery scents that watered my eyes and tugged away my breath.

Each spring the kisses hid behind bushes and trees, but even though I dashed from trunk to trunk, even heard the beating of their wings, I could never find them.

Then all at once they appeared, swarming over me until I couldn't breathe—not butterflies, but a yapping kennel of kisses, all on show, and I was the judge. There was the woman walking her poodle kiss, snout in the air; another with her bulldog growling in my face; and a third with her nibbling pekingese.

Then came the lion-licking kisses, the bear-nuzzling, pig-rooting, horse-teeth kisses;

kisses like sharks and barracuda sliding around a drowning man and bumping against him, or piranha kisses that shot straight at me, clicking their spiky teeth.

There were deep-throated lily kisses, open-mouthed orchid and daffodil kisses;

rainstorms of kisses, blizzards of kisses, hurricanes, typhoons, even tornados of kisses.

Kisses, kisses—kisses finally cold and far away.

In the end it was wind-swept planet kisses, sun-spurt kisses, showers of static, cosmic belches and glittering galaxy kisses, kisses like star systems erupting as soundlessly as exploding hearts, icy black silence kisses, and faint, almost imperceptible radio-signal kisses that twitter even now from deep in the night and wake our children and grandchildren with a start.

When God said, "Let there be light," his lips kissed each other, some people say, and the spark from that contact flared through the dark and was the first day.