

## Kiss Me Here

By Hannah Badalova

Delaney can hardly stand in the severe wind. She holds her script, shaking. She cannot read it because the sun is still too bright. Her son Tyler finally comes in his blue pickup truck.

She fixes her static skirt between her full thighs. Tyler's truck squeals, parking at the curb. The car smells as if it's burning, Delaney thinks. She pulls the handle and climbs up into the high passenger seat.

She cannot see his face at first because the sun makes everything away from it darker.

Get in, bones. Your makeup looks like dust all over your face.

She says hi to the shadow and it answers "Hey." He looks down at her thin script and grunts, smiling. She sees his mouth first, then the rest of him. Back when he had long black hair he could hide his teeth, but now his hair is gray and sparse. His smile is overwhelming. He could hide nothing from her, she thinks.

He combs his stringy hair with his fingers.

"We're picking up Alexis," Tyler says.

"That's fine." Delaney answers. She has gotten used to it; picking up her granddaughter from his ex-wife's house. The wife who moved across the city before she even divorced him. This would mean an hour's worth of her time wasted looking out the window at houses forever waiting to be built. Miles and miles of dirt mounds.

Delaney waits for the carsickness to catch up with her. The car whirrs while Delaney reclines her seat and conjures up a beginning for her dream. She can feel the whirling in her stomach; as if the car is inside of it, making endless upward circles and looking for the exit through her mouth.

Lay down sleep don't snore don't drool.

She dreams of Tyler twenty years ago: She is sneaking into her boyfriend's car and she looks up at his bedroom window and sees him kneeling there. She sees his nauseated face even though the light is bad. He gives her an adult look, a mix of superiority and pity, and she turns to her boyfriend saying she forgot her jacket. Running back inside she yells, "Tyler, what do you want from me?" And he answers, "I feel sick." She sees him come down the steps and she says

“kiss me here” pointing to her powdery cheek. He does, and sneezes. Then he turns to the steps behind him and vomits.

Grey bitch stop twitching.

Delaney wakes up feeling hot-water nausea rise in her throat. She rolls down the window and then looks at Tyler. He is getting heavy, she thinks. His thick legs are spread open and out and his stomach is smashed against the wheel.

“Why don’t you grow a beard?” she asks, touching his ever-expanding chin.

“You want me to look like dad?” he snorts.

“Unless you have worms eating your face you won’t look like him,” Delaney says, smiling.

Tyler scratches his gray-blue stubbles making a ch ch sound. Delaney looks out the window and sees a vandalized stop sign.

“Who are you voting for president?” she asks.

“Not him,” he answers, looking in the same direction as her. “Read your script.”

“Can’t do it in here.”

Tyler doesn’t say anything.

Delaney continues, “I’m playing an angry but successful business woman who refuses to retire...”

I don’t care I don’t care

“She’s supposed to be real beautiful. I don’t know how I got the part,” she breathes deeply.

I don’t care I don’t care I don’t care

“And she has three grandkids but they’re all babies or young at least, so she’s supposed to look tired, too.”

“You’re fine,” Tyler stops her.

“Right,” she says. She wipes some sweat and eyeliner from her eyes.

“Ty, does Alexis love me more than her mother?” she asks.

“I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Do you?” she adds, swiftly.

Fuck you

“I have to piss,” he says.

“There aren’t any trees or bushes around here.”

“No one will see. And if they do,” he staggers from the truck, “it’ll be their treat.”

Delaney groans. Tyler walks to the passenger’s side. Three feet from her door he slips down his pants. It’s been so long since I’ve seen him like this, she thinks, people never stop growing.

“You’re repulsive,” she says through her partly open window.

Open your mouth again.

His piss splashes up from the grass.

After shaking off, Tyler walks back to his seat. He turns his ignition but nothing happens. “Bitch!” he screams.

“What happened?” Delaney asks calmly.

“Battery’s dead.”

“We’ll just wait. I gotta get out of this car anyway,” Delaney says, still feeling slightly repulsed by her son. She climbs out, fixing her sweat-dampened skirt. Don’t let me step in the puddle, she says to herself. She walks on her toes to the back of the car and sits on the edge of the grass.

“The sun is finally feeling good, Ty!” she shouts.

He doesn’t hear her as he taps on the breaks and turns the key. He taps again and turns.

Delaney takes her shoes off and her tights. She raises her skirt above her knees and bathes in the slightly chilled air.

A few cars scurry by and honk. Tyler glares from his window. Delaney looks at the speeding cars and reveals a bit of her underwear, the small triangle. She looks at the blurry sun. A gnat settles on the oily makeup of her eyelid, and she smears it off.

A truck putters by, then slows down and reverses. He parks behind Tyler's truck, examining the woman with exposed legs.

"Easy does it?" he asks, reading the EZ DUZ IT sticker on Tyler's truck and getting out of his own.

"It's my son's," she points out.

The man standing before Delaney is middle-aged and tall.

"So is the car stuck?" he asks, squinting under the sun.

"Yeah," Delaney answers, covering her legs a little. "Battery's dead."

"So why are you sitting back here?" he smiles.

"I get carsick even when it's not moving."

"I'll go ask your son – what's his name?" he asks.

"Tyler."

"I'll ask him if he needs my truck to start it."

"Thanks. What's your name?" Delaney asks him as he's walking to Tyler's window.

"Leo," he answers, smiling back at her as his body disappears from her view.

Delaney sees her son wobble out of the truck. She sees thin Leo and fat Tyler communicating without seeing their faces. Their voices let out laughs and murmurs.

Then Leo walks back to his truck, grinning at Delaney on the way, and drives up to the front of Tyler's truck. The trucks face each other, on the verge of kissing. Both of them are blue and clean. Their hoods pop open like widening mouths.

Tyler and Leo stand beside their popped up hoods.

Delaney walks quietly back to the car and overhears her son's put-on voice that sounds deeper when he talks to other men.

"I appreciate you asking, but she's a lunatic. Never made any man happy," she hears him say. His eyes catch hers.

Delaney opens her door, climbs in, and slams it shut, pulling the muscles in her chest and arms. Her eyes can't adjust in the dim car. She cannot hear the men anymore. They are silent. The top part of her body aches. The words in her script come into focus but they are too small.

“The children cave in on me,” she reads, “like stones, like the fat, small angels on Michelangelo’s ceiling, cracking and falling on me, shards in my eye, dust on my cheeks.”

The hood slams down and Delaney bounces in her seat, losing her place in the script. She looks out and sees Leo shake Tyler’s hand. Leo walks back to his own truck, starts it and drives away as Tyler climbs back into his truck.

Tyler starts the car and grins.

“Why did you -- What did I do to you? What!” Delaney yells. Her eyes lose aim.

Tyler is silent.

“Calm down,” he finally says.

“What did I do? What did I do?” she demands.

“Nothing, okay?”

“Then kiss me here,” Delaney says, pointing to her powdery cheek.

“You know I can’t. It makes me sick,” he says. He looks at the road in front of him.

“Run over me,” Delaney says, her eyes on her script. “Run over me! Run over me!”

“Stop reading in here, stop screaming!”

Delaney rips her thin script and rubs it into her son’s mean face. He pulls his face away, his fat arm pushing down the trembling figure of his mother.

Delaney falls into her door, her hand squeezes the handle and she stumbles from the car. Her skirt is hopelessly fixed to her legs by static and sweat. She runs to the front of the steaming truck.

“Run over me, run over me, run over me, just run your fucking truck over me!” she shrieks, jumping out and embracing the hood of his electrified car with her spasmodic arms and breasts.