

# The Avenue

Spring 2018

© 2018 Leslie Briggs

Literary Works from  
Saint Joseph's University  
Graduate Writing Studies Program

© 2018 Leslie Briggs

**Editor in Chief**

Leslie Briggs

**Editorial Board**

Savannah Brown

Shyheim Williams

**Publicity**

Tor Lydon

**Faculty Advisor**

Tenaya Darlington

**Layout**

Leslie Briggs

## Maybe

by Leslie Briggs

“Last but not least, popcorn!” Christine plopped down heavily on the couch next to me, the plush leather cushions absorbing most of the impact. Just like every Friday since I’d known her, Christine and I were huddled together on the couch in her basement under a fleece blanket. We had pretzels, candy, cans of Coke, and, of course, popcorn as we settled in to watch a movie marathon. This week, we settled on mid-century science fiction; *The Lost Planet*, *Them!*, and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* were among the titles.

Christine flicked on the TV and we dove into our mountain of snacks. I started off with the Sour Patch Kids, a poor decision in retrospect since the sour powder melted my taste buds with each piece I ate. I took my time with these candies, sucking the little crystals until I could taste the sweet gummy beneath. Christine started with Red Vines, a treat I hated but that she liked to pull apart and eat strand by strand. Systematically, we ploughed through snack after snack and movie after movie until our stomachs ached and our eyelids drooped.

By the time we started our fifth movie, it was well into the early hours of Saturday. The rest of Christine’s family was safely tucked away on the third floor of her house and we were trying desperately to milk some sort of caffeine high out of the Cokes we’d finished. After inserting the DVD, Christine returned to the couch and slouched deep into its cushions, resting her head on my shoulder. This wasn’t unusual, we usually ended our movie marathons slumped together under piles of blankets, but for some reason I wanted so desperately to turn the lights on in the basement or to run to the bathroom. Anything to use as an excuse to stand up, to let her head fall from my shoulder and onto the couch.

I couldn’t do that, though—I was definitely being irrational. So, with trembling hands, I grabbed a pretzel rod out of the bin on the couch next to me, careful not to jostle Christine’s head on my

shoulder. I chewed slowly, conscious of each time my molars came together to grind the pretzel into a fine powder. It felt like minutes before I could swallow, and I was consciously fighting with my throat and dry mouth to force the grainy bolus of pretzel down my esophagus. Verging on panic, I tried desperately to calm myself without making my nerves any more outwardly apparent than they already were. *Stop freaking out! We do this kind of stuff all the time.*

*Maybe, but you two definitely don't kiss all the time,* the voice in my head reminded me snidely. And it was right, we didn't kiss all the time. I mean, Christine was my best friend, we aren't like that. Neither of us even liked girls.

That didn't change the fact that we *had* kissed, though. Last week, to be exact. It was after school during rehearsal for the school musical. We were waiting in the dark wings of the stage for our cue to enter and she reached over to me and grabbed my hand. Again, we were close, so hand-holding and cuddling weren't foreign affections. She stood in front of me, my hand still locked in her grasp and suddenly, before I even realized what was going on, she leaned forward and pressed her lips to mine.

The kiss didn't last very long, maybe two seconds from the moment our lips touched, but I felt like I had eons to memorize the moment. I wished for my consciousness to float outside of my body so that it might be able to take a snapshot of how we looked then. I wanted to know the way our hands looked intertwined. I wanted to see the expression on her face as our lips connected. I imagined us like the front cover of one of those dollar romance novels, our forms shrouded in the velvety backdrop of deep purple curtains. I began running through possible titles for our love story. *Waiting in the Wings*, perhaps.

"Ladies!" the deep voice of our director found us hiding among the curtains, the sharp snap of a clipboard hitting the floor of the stage echoing throughout the auditorium, "Do you think that *maybe* you'd like to put on a show today?"

We crept sheepishly onto the stage and chorused our apologies and started the scene from the top. I half expected

Christine to kiss me again, but this time she stood on the opposite side of the wing, a sea of worn hardwood between us.

Maybe that was why I could feel an electric current at the space where her temple now rested against my shoulder, though that could have been the caffeine. Maybe that was why my stomach churned, though that could've been all the candy. Maybe that was why my heart thudded in my chest, though that could've been the scary movies. Maybe that was why I couldn't forget the soft feeling of her lips on mine, as I spent my days now recalling the shape of her mouth as I remembered it from just those couple of seconds. That would explain a lot of things, but neither of us even liked girls.

© 2018 Leslie Briggs