

## **this is how to bully a man**

It was the first warm afternoon of spring.

Ms. Emily still made the class put on their jackets before they went out for recess, since it had been cold the day before. Grace was already feeling stuffy when she stepped onto the playground, but she couldn't take off her jacket because she was a line leader and didn't want Ms. Emily to be upset with her. She searched the playground for James, and it took her only a moment to find him half obscured behind the slide. His orange sneakers were sticking out; that's what gave him away.

Grace marched up to him.

"Hey." Sing-song. She rocked back onto her heels, then forward again.

"Hey."

"Wanna be my boyfriend?"

"No way, that's gross!" He took off running across the field. She chased him.

He stopped under the big pine tree by the corner of the fence, panting. By the time Grace reached him, she her cheeks were pink, and she wished again she could take off her jacket. She blew him a kiss, but he tried to swat it out of the air. It was fun to tease him.

"Wanna get married?" She blew him another kiss, making sure the accompanying *mwah* was even louder this time.

"Ew! Stop it!" He wiped his face frantically, then held out his hands to shield himself from any more kisses that might come his way.

"I thought you loved me. Because I lo-o-ove you!" Grace was beaming now. James was mortified. She took a step closer to him, throwing her arms wide for a hug.

A moment of panic passed over James' face before he turned and ran back across the field.

"I'm telling Ms. Emily!"

## **this is how a man bullies you**

It was the first cool evening of fall.

Grace's mom told her to bring a jacket before she went out. But by that time James was already pulling up in the driveway, and Grace was running out to hop in the passenger seat of his car. Once they sat down in the movie theater, though, she wished she had listened to her mom. James had put his arm around her shoulder, but it didn't help too much against the overpowering air conditioning. After the movie, James drove them out the parking lot of the beach just down the street from the high school. They sat together in the back seat, kissing.

"Hey," he breathed against her lips, pulling back just slightly.

"Hey." She was tense, and she knew that he could tell.

"I'm so happy you're my girlfriend."

"Yeah, me too."

He kissed her again. His hand had been resting on her knee, but now it was moving up to where the waistband of her jeans met the hem of her shirt. And then under her shirt. It was cold in the car.

"You're so beautiful." Her shirt was coming off now.

"Wait." Maybe he didn't hear her. His hand moved back down to her waistband. He was still kissing her. She put her hand on his forearm, pushed slightly. He hadn't been able to get the button of her jeans undone yet.

"I love you. You know that, right?" The button came free. The zipper was pulled down. His breath was hot on her cheek. It didn't help; she was still too cold.

"Yeah. I know."

She tried not to think about it.