

Deliberate Decisions

The Long River Graduate Writing Award

He leaned in for the kiss, our noses inches apart. Breathing through my mouth, I could sense him, sense the husky darkness of his goatee, and my mind went...

What's the word I want here? Not "blank." No, my mind most definitely did not go blank. If anything, it was busier than usual, segmenting into little, buzzing portions like a honeycomb. Curiosity shouted a bit. I'd never kissed a goatee before, and I wondered if it would be as horrible as its name suggested. And of course there's Social Expectation rolling its eyes and saying, "Finally." And there, calling for order in the court, is Deliberation. You know what I mean. That's the part of you that efficiently, authoritatively makes a quick list of the pros and the cons.

I'm a big fan of pro and con lists (yes, I know I left you hanging about that kiss, just a minute). Deliberation and I made one about taking a year off between high school and college, about whether to stay in France for one year or two, and about whether to buy my second-hand car (Con: It'll probably need repairs. Pro: It's only 1000! Con: Why is it only 1000?). We've made lists about people, too, although that's usually done inside my head so the written word doesn't come back to haunt me. Those lists usually go like this:

Dating Boy or Telling Sister to Back Off or Buying the Skirt Friend Says Is Too Tight on Me

- | | |
|--|---|
| Pros: | Cons: |
| 1. He's cute. | 1. He's crazy. |
| Or | Or |
| She has a right to hear
my opinion. | She's bigger than me. |
| Or | Or |
| But I think this skirt looks
damn good. | Friend is the sort of person
who'll frown every time she
sees me wear it. |

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>2. He's on medication.</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Oh, come on. You're not going to get into a fistfight, for Pete's sake.</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>I don't need to wear skirt around friend.</p> | <p>2. How well does that medication work?</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>She also shouts louder than I do.</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Good point. I'll sneak back and buy it later.</p> |
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So, as you can see, these lists are so familiar that I practically crease a paper down the middle in order to dress in the morning. Guilty to indecisive and non confrontational, your honor, which kind of brings me back toward that kiss again, because—you can guess what happened—Deliberation started a list.

- | Pro: | Con: |
|--|--|
| 1. We've been on several dates, and he's definitely Interested. | 1. But am I capital-I Interested in him? |
| 2. He's nice. | 2. Nice, shmice. |
| 3. He's dependable. Settled, with a paying job. | 3. Dependable? I want to go to Beijing! Prague! |
| 4. Good-looking. There, you can't argue that. | 4. Is good-looking the same as attractive? |
| 5. Well, sure. Shining black hair, goatee... | 5. Dark, handsome. Not tall. |
| 6. You're not tall either. | 6. I'm a girl. |
| 7. Now you're just being ridiculous. Height is no way to judge personal compatibility. | 7. He's short with small hands and a high voice. |
| 8. A good voice, though. He plays guitar. | 8. I'm not musical. |
| 9. You're doing this on purpose, aren't you? | 9. It's my job. I'm "Cons." |

10. Look, if you don't like him, how come you're about to kiss him?
10. Oh, God, I was about to kiss him, wasn't I?

That realization caused the tricky bit.

I opened my eyes and examined Goatee. It was only an instant since he started leaning in. His eyes are shut, dark lashes against his cheek, hair and beard gleaming. He *is* good-looking, I think, and yet, I don't want him.

Speaking seriously, Deliberation chastised me for not making my mind up earlier. I agreed with her. And yet...well, Curiosity, Social Expectation, and me got a fit of the giggles. How did this end up happening? I couldn't really believe it myself. And I wish I could explain it better, if only because it makes me cringe to think of leaving Goatee hanging. But it's not like a kiss is a contract, even if there are only three inches to go, and it was just, well, would you look at that rain?