A series of kisses.

The first time that Jill kissed Cindy...

No, wait. Scratch that. That wasn’t the real start of things.

The first time that Jill even thought about kissing Cindy was because she had a dream where the two of them appeared to be dating each other. Which was really weird, honestly, because first of all, she was actually enjoying being single right now, and second of all, even if she wasn’t...to dream about kissing Cindy, of all people? Jill liked Cindy well enough, but definitely not like that. Cindy was just her overly-energetic and sometimes annoying friend. Right?

Apparently, though, Jill’s subconscious thought that Cindy would be a really good kisser.

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The first time that Jill actually kissed Cindy was really an accident. Plus, Cindy wasn’t actually conscious at the time, so Jill wasn’t sure if it counted. And that made Jill sound really creepy, but it seriously wasn’t like that.

There may have been an element of guilt that made her stick around so long that first night that Cindy had to spend in the hospital -- lingering guilt about their fight; guilt on behalf of Lindsay, who seemed more concerned with getting laid than making sure their friend was all right -- but Jill wasn’t sure what compelled her to return the next morning, stopping in on her way to work.

In any case, it quickly became a routine. Jill would come by in the morning, sneaking sips of her
coffee to the redhead if the nurses weren’t within eyesight. Cindy wasn’t supposed to have caffeine, apparently, but Jill figured that a few sips wouldn’t kill her, and the look of pure satisfaction on Cindy’s face made breaking the rules worth it. Then at the end of the day, Jill would come back again, since Cindy didn’t like being alone at night. So Jill would sit with her, talking about the latest case, or football, or foster parents.

On the fourth night of this routine, they were watching Jeopardy. When the near-constant stream of Cindy’s commentary (“Ugh. I can’t believe that Jonathan is winning. He seems like a complete tool!” ... “Ooh, I know that one! Who is William Blake!”) faded into silence, Jill turned to find that Cindy had fallen asleep.

She looked so peaceful there, her scarlet hair spread out across the pillow and her glasses still perched on the tip of her nose. Jill smiled at the sight, and gently lifted her hand to remove Cindy’s glasses. She placed them on the bedside table and then leaned down to kiss Cindy on the cheek. Right at that moment, though, Cindy shifted in her sleep and Jill’s kiss landed squarely on Cindy’s lips.

Jill’s eyes opened wide and she quickly sat back up again. Surely, things like that only happened in sappy romantic comedies. But no, it had really happened. Blushing, Jill simply gathered her things and left the room.

As soon as she was outside the hospital, she stopped to breathe in deeply, inhaling the fresh air, and then hesitantly brushed her fingers across her lips. It had only been a second, maybe two, but she felt like she could still feel the fleeting touch of Cindy’s mouth on hers.

* * *

The second time that Jill kissed Cindy, it was actually Cindy who kissed Jill. They were both conscious this time, so it felt like they were moving forward. Towards what, though, Jill didn’t know.

Cindy had been released from the hospital, and when it was time for her mother and stepfather to leave, Jill, Claire, and Lindsay assured them that they’d all be in and out of Cindy’s apartment regularly, checking up on her.

Cindy herself let it be known that she wasn’t a big fan of the ‘let’s baby-sit poor little Cindy’ plan, as the redhead called it, but she later admitted to Jill that it was kind of nice when everyone paid so much attention to her.

Even later, Cindy confessed that she was a little worried that once she was completely healed, everyone would get tired of her, and would find that they were suddenly too busy to deal with her anymore.

Jill assured the reporter that, even though she was always busy, she would always have time for Cindy. Their friendship had grown so much since Cindy was shot, and there was no way that Jill would let that go.

As she was heading out the door that night, Jill felt a soft hand on her shoulder, and turned around to find Cindy staring up at her, nervously biting one corner of her lower lip. Cindy quickly launched into a simple, but obviously heartfelt thanks for everything that Jill had done recently.

Jill smiled and was about to respond, when Cindy leaned forward and placed a soft kiss on her lips.
It was chaste, but somehow more than that too. When Cindy pulled away, Jill simply stood in the open doorway and practically gaped at the woman in front of her. Cindy merely offered a few quick words (“Right. So. Goodnight!”), and retreated inside.

If it weren’t for the fact that Cindy’s face had been almost as red as her hair, Jill would have thought that kissing was always what Cindy did to thank her friends. Now she was just confused.

* * *

The third time that Jill kissed Cindy, it was really Lindsay’s fault.

It was the first time since the Kate Hammond case that Cindy had been healthy enough to really get involved and help out with the investigation. To celebrate Cindy’s return, along with the guilty verdict, Jill, Lindsay, and Claire allowed themselves to be bullied into going out to some bar downtown that Cindy liked.

Jill was mildly tipsy when Claire left to go home, and that was when Jill started to get nervous. Because Cindy was, in a word, gorgeous. Jill had always thought more along the lines of “cute” when it came to Cindy, but there was something different about her that night, and Jill had to keep forcing herself to look elsewhere.

At least with Lindsay and Claire as buffers, Jill didn’t have to worry about what she might do if she were left alone with Cindy. But with Claire’s exit, her buffer was divided in half, so Jill was starting to get nervous.

So, when Lindsay suddenly remembered that she hadn’t fed Martha that night, Jill tried desperately to get her to stay anyway. Lindsay simply told her to have fun and to keep an eye on Cindy. Returning from the bathroom, Cindy only shrugged when Jill explained that Lindsay had to leave. She then grinned and pulled a reluctant Jill out onto the dance floor.

‘Right. Keep an eye on Cindy,’ Jill thought bitterly to herself, as she felt Cindy’s hand find her hip. If Lindsay were still there, then maybe Jill would be able to keep her eyes on anything other than Cindy.

If Lindsay were still there, then Jill wouldn’t have responded to the intensity in Cindy’s eyes by pulling the reporter close against her body. But Lindsay wasn’t there, so Jill couldn’t stop herself from leaning in and capturing Cindy’s lips with her own.

In spite of the hints that Cindy might want this too, Jill still almost expected Cindy to immediately pull away. Instead, Cindy only tightened her grip on Jill’s hip, while her other hand reached around to the nape of Jill’s neck, holding the blonde in place.

It was several minutes before Jill’s mind finally caught up with what was going on. She was making out. With Cindy. In public. And while she wasn’t completely sober, she wasn’t nearly so far gone that she could simply play this off as a silly, drunken, didn’t-really-mean-it kind of thing.

But Jill was finally kissing Cindy, really kissing her, and there had never been a chance that this would be a didn’t-really-mean-it kind of thing. Jill did mean it (did want it), and it was about time for her to let Cindy in on the secret.

Jill tightened her hold on the woman in her arms and decided that, while Lindsay and Claire were her best friends and Jill would always love them dearly, she was really glad that they had decided to leave.
The next major time that Jill kissed Cindy (it wasn’t the fourth time, but Jill had lost count somewhere around seven), it was kind of an accident too, but in a different way than the first one had been.

It was the end of an exceptionally long trial, following the long process of building up the case. This one hit especially close to home, too. Though it wasn’t obvious right away, the two murdered teenage girls had been the victims of a hate crime, killed by the one person who discovered that they were more than just friends. Jill knew in her gut that they had the right guy, but the evidence wasn’t as sure a thing as she’d like.

Still, all she had to do was think about that horrific crime scene, and then turn to see the smug look on the defendant’s face (that on its own might as well be proof; if the guy were innocent, he’d be scared shitless right about now), and her resolve to put the son of a bitch in jail for the rest of his life would shoot up even higher. Jill also found strength in the quick glances she’d steal towards the press box, with Cindy’s concerned expression having a calming effect over her.

When the guilty verdict rang out into the courtroom, Jill exhaled in relief. Finally, this latest nightmare was over.

Jill, happy to leave the post-trial media crap to Denise, was the last one to leave the courtroom, but she exited to find Cindy, Claire, and Lindsay walking towards her down the otherwise empty hallway. As Cindy caught sight of the lawyer, she broke out into a run, hurrying ahead of their two other friends. Cindy propelled herself into Jill’s arms, and it felt only natural when the collision of their bodies was followed by the collision of their lips.

They pulled apart, grinning, before their faces fell, simultaneously remembering that they weren’t alone. Jill turned a sheepish gaze to Claire and Lindsay, as Cindy buried her flushed face into Jill’s neck, refusing to look anyone in the eye.

Claire barely registered any surprise, before smiling fondly at the two women still holding on to each other, while Lindsay’s face was almost comic in its complete astonishment.

Chuckling, Claire took hold of Lindsay’s arm and started to turn back in the opposite direction. (“Come on, Linds. How about we just leave them alone for a bit... And ladies, I expect a full report at some point on how you two happened.”)

Jill waited until Claire had led Lindsay around the corner, before she urged Cindy’s face upwards once again. Smiling, Jill leaned down to whisper gently in Cindy’s ear (“I love you, Cindy Thomas, and I don’t care who knows it.”), and then reclaimed Cindy’s mouth. Cindy broke the kiss to stare at Jill in loving awe, whispering her own declaration in return.

It didn’t occur to Jill until later that it was the first time that they had exchanged “the L word.” She smiled at how easily it had simply rolled off her tongue.

It all started innocently enough, really, with a dream, and an accident, and a thank you, but love could come from the most unexpected places, sometimes. Jill had always felt the urge to run away whenever she got too close to commitment. But this time, it had come barreling into her with barely a warning, wrapped in a beautiful, red-haired, brown-eyed package.

This time, Jill was ready to simply stand still and let it happen.

THE END
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