

er. I look up, and his face is so close to mine that I can smell the sweetness of the honey on his breath. Everything inside of me is twitching and shimmying, and I'm afraid I may lapse into convulsions if he gets any closer.

"What I mean," Nate says, his voice almost a whisper, "is that I like you, a lot."

My mouth freezes. My brain freezes. My eyes lock with his. He leans closer, and I can't believe it but his eyelids are lower and he gets closer, and I lean closer and I close my eyes, and before I know it, he kisses me and my insides feel like a million pieces of machinery flying apart all at once and melting into my toes.

And then it stops. I can't hear the house creaking or the refrigerator humming. All I can hear is the bird in my chest that flutters so hard I think it might beat itself to death. Nate steps back.

Blood rushes to my cheeks, down my neck, and I imagine that my skin is the color of strawberries. My lips feel warm. Part of me wants to run to Livvy, giggling and ready to gossip. Part of me wants to tackle

Nate and kiss his whole face. But I don't move—I can't move. I sit on the stool at the Byers' kitchen counter, my fingers covered with honey and crumbs. I wonder if this is what someone feels just before they go into shock. Maybe this is shock?

"Are you okay?" Nate's head is tipped to one side like a puppy. *Like Donny*, I think. I force the image of my little brother out of my head. He isn't going to ruin this moment for me.

"Yeah," I manage to say.

"You looked like you might be sick or something."

A little laugh escapes from me, and my body feels lighter somehow. "No, I'm okay."

Nate looks relieved. He steps around the counter and sits on the stool next to me.

"Cause for a minute there, I thought maybe you were totally disgusted."

"No, it's okay. It was great." I wonder what time it is, then I decide I don't care. I hope time stops completely and lets me sit here forever.

"Good," he says, "cause I might want to do it again."