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## Meet and Greet

Matt Kessler

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MEET AND GREET  
DISSERTATION

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
in the Department of English  
The University of Mississippi

by

MATT KESSLER

May 2017

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## ABSTRACT

A collection of original short stories.

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## CHAPTER 1

### MEET AND GREET

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Jamaica Jazmine means everything to me. She's just like... it. Here's something you don't know. I listened to *Real Love* every day. For almost a year. When I couldn't get out of bed. After that thing happened with Jeff in the park. I just—I felt like I needed to tell her about that. And I made her three gifts. One was a crown. The other two, I can't tell you about, that's me and Jamaica's secret.

It starts off like this: The morning of the Meet and Greet I'm so nervous that I can't even eat. I just walk. From downtown Vegas to the Strip, and back again. April in Vegas is hot. And there's barely any shade. I mean, yeah, palm trees, but they don't do much. I'm wearing an old-school Jamaica tee with the arms ripped off, motorcycle jeans and Cuban-heeled boots. And I'm carrying this big Marc Jacobs bag with all of Jamaica's gifts. So by the end of the day, my hands and feet are throbbing. And I'm sweating. But it's a dry sweat that doesn't stick because, you know, hashtag the desert. Anyway, it's worth it, because all over Vegas, everywhere I look, I see

Jamaica's face: billboards, bus stops, building facades, freaking garbage cans. It's like I've died and gone to Jamaica heaven.

I roll up to the theater right on time. Two hours before the concert. On the dot. The theater is attached to this really lux casino, in the mall area, one level above the food court. Spotlights beam and a digital marquee spells out Jamaica's name in LED lights. I walk up to the VIP ticket counter and say my name, Butler Hayes, just like that. A woman wearing a headset and a black blazer straps a laminated gold VIP wristband on my arm, checks my bag, and tells me to wait in the lobby by the concession stand.

So I'm standing in this huge lobby with a wraparound spiral ramp. The whole place is about to get cray, but for now it's just this empty foyer with this track lighting that keeps changing colors. Blue, yellow, green. Lots of neon. The walls are—get this—carpeted and the whole lobby smells like cologne. Framed digital screens play interviews with Jamaica. She flips her blonde hair around and laughs and talks about the show. Her nose is so perfect and pointy. Her teeth are this crazy electric white.

The other VIP'ers trickle in and they're all so nice. There's this thirty-five-year-old woman from Nebraska who's like exactly Jamaica's age, to the day, and she's wearing this bang-on replica of the *Rock Me* outfit—the sequin halter top, the diamante boots, the high knot ponytail. Then there's this teenager, a gayby, don't laugh, all of us were gaybies once, and he looks like he's about to cry. And he stutters. He has this really tragic fauxhawk and I just want to squeeze him and tell him that life will get better, I promise. And then there's this tall guy in a silk shirt, denim shorts and sandals. Doesn't really talk. Doesn't even look like a Jamaica fan. Just kind of rubs his chin and stands off to the side. I don't know. I think we're all worried he's going to ruin this whole thing for all of us because Jamaica's, you know, temperamental or whatever.

And then—swear to god—*Rock Me* starts playing and I freak. I start *humping* the stanchions by the concession stand. And then these two security guards clap and say, Stop with the dancing. Right now.

The guards are hardcore. They line us up. And then they're like, These are the rules. Ms. Jazmine has a strict No Touching policy. Do not touch her, do not hug her, do not shake her hand. No gifts. And my heart just sinks, you know, because I have these three special gifts I made for her. Then they say, Hands out of pockets at all times. No sudden movements. And if anyone breaks the rules—anyone—the Meet and Greet will be cancelled. And swear to god, we all look at Lurch—you know, the weird guy—and I kid you not, his hands are in his pockets.

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## VITA

Matt Kessler is a writer. His essays and articles have appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic*, *Pitchfork*, *Dazed and Confused*, *Candy*, *Vice* and *The Rumpus*. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in French Literature from Reed College in 2003.