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She turns. Turns to look. Turns to look at you. To look at you in a way no one has ever looked at you before. The eyes wide. Opaque. Shining. The lips parted as if in surprise. The mole you notice only now near the lips the eyes shining above the mole near the lips the lips parted as if for breath. In surprise. She turns away her hair turns toward you its black and shining wall. Turns away then back. Away then back in surprise. Then back to you then turns away. Away then back to you. Away then back. Then back. To look. At you. Until you're forced to turn to her you think you're forced to turn to look and in the shining eyes the parted lips the delicate dark mole near the lips in its dramatic frame of black and shining hair in the tremble you detect in the air between you you see a wavering like the heat above a summer road a mirror shimmering in the splendor. Of what you strangely sense lies open and revealed in your own face. Joy. Hope. Wonder. Desire. Fear.

The car driven by the boyfriend jostles with the bends in the road. Voices in the back chatter and giggle. He hears nothing of what they say. Something is taking place. A softness opens at the base of his belly. Above his groin yes there a sense of giving way. All calm. Strange. He ought to be shaking though why. He wants to sag down and in to fold to give up to give way to. To what.

The young girl you met in the morning hunched beside for an hour on a white flat stone in a creek. She talks about her father the betrayer you nod your mouth grim you have a common theme. She talks about her family the misery another. Listening to the creek and the birds and admiring the pixie prettiness of the nose and cheeks and eyebrows demonic little eyebrows the strange shining beauty of the long black hair. But it's fall. And the air is full of a smell of dead leaves and damp mulch mold and rot a sweet sour smell of the happiest and saddest of seasons to you. Where the year is harvested in death and rejoices subdued and contented in the quiet. Calling more freshly than spring to love.

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He glows for days over the copy in curlicues of her phone number lying like an abandoned leaf on his desk. A flurry of noisings from the floor below this time almost comforting. Nothing is there for years and years and now between his elbows beneath his eyes there lies the phone number of a pretty girl. Inscribed with a childlike neatness. Exact. He tries to recall her face but all he can remember is the mole and the wings of the brows and the long black fall of hair. And the disconcerting stare. What is he to do? Call her up. Naturally. Once he has overcome his paralysis. So what are you so afraid of? Failure. Defeat. Rejection. Scorn. Humiliation. Self-hatred and contempt. But look what you might gain.

What might that be?

The mind goes blank. The pleasure of sex with a girl must be in some way an extension of solo sexual pleasures the rest is hazy. What is more to the point is the almost unbearable joy of having an infatuation returned. For you are already practiced in infatuation. You've had several a year see above though none have any place outside the gauzy spider-tongued kingdom of your mind. For the first

time you focus try to focus but can you focus can anyone focus on the absolute existence of a being absolutely other? Value thrust beyond these suddenly narrow walls. Your own value suddenly crushed and glorified by and through the simple unavoidable existence of this other dazzling being. Through *her*. Her appearance bright and sharp as a knife her smile or frown sudden generousities acute sarcasms. Her ability to flatter or insult with the cock of an eyebrow to build or destroy your confidence. How believe in the overwhelming radiance that you see. Or the overwhelming darkness. No. Feel. Believe you feel. Want to believe you feel. And plan your life accordingly. With at the heart of it in the wooded valley in the courtyard of the palace in the nest and herd of the mountains the hallucinated goddess who reigned over your world. Your mind awash with hosannas the clouds staggering to the sun with hosts and regiments of angels thrones dominions. Though you cannot lift your eyes to meet her eyes nor utter a single word. Thus you refashioned her in your heart's image in tossing hours of dream. Your dream. Her dream. So many thus had taken over your dreams in the past.

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But here was something more approachable. Ah it had approached him. Unexpectedly that fall. His own callowness was delicately cruel in its delicate and exquisite clarity it whispered its ridicule and giggled in all the desks behind him. The mirror winked and laughed. All he had to do was pick up the receiver and dial. But which receiver both family phones were exposed someone might break into his scene of shame at any moment ask what he was doing no lie could hide him. Suddenly the receiver was nailed to the cradle the cradle nailed to the table the cradle and table were made of marble cored with sand cased in lead anyway the digits on the paper had become indecipherable runes.

Would my voice shrink to a gag at the moment a voice calmly answered at the end of the infinitely long wire? Sweat slick my hands and sting the skin under my arms? My undependable mind go blank? A stutter flutter my damned muttering tongue?

But this had been before for one simple reason he had known he wasn't wanted by the girl he had wanted this was different wasn't it this girl offered hope in her small pointed fingers. For what exactly. And your mind went blank again. Then you remembered the pretty pixie face smiling knowingly into your eyes. Knowing what. As if she knew. As if she were hiding a secret she was only waiting to share. Or held a gift for you behind her back. He remembered her voice. Just a little shrill aggressive loud but with that sly look around the eyes and a wicked mouth a wicked mouth inside it a sharp tongue eager for action. Eager for action. A pretty little sarcastic tongue that cut away reputations like soap. Leaving nothing but a bubble behind. And promising the heat of action. Maybe that was it. To come.

A challenge waving to you across a bright summer field. Something like a dare to your young and hungry mind. Your body in its perilous innocence.

He flushed where he sat staring at the phone number. All he had to do was place his finger in the circles die-cut from the circle and dial. Of course he was betraying a friend. A friend? The boyfriend who had been his friend who had invited him to the picnic because he felt sorry for him in his loneliness. The heat of the body hardly noticed this. It did not seem to care who it wounded on its way to. What? A possibility he dared not even think of. Yet. Though he must pretend to. Or seem even callower than he knew himself to be. And to hell with minor scrupling against pain.

Picked up the phone. Put it down again.

Absolute clarity of the moment.

What after all if she were seeing someone at this very moment? You might lose your chance forever. Of course not rebukes common sense. But I'm in no mood for common sense. He tries to remember her voice. With patchy success. Her eyes are easier they grin at him

as her mouth opens and flashes. He keeps remembering her writing down her phone number and giving it to him the same gestures the same wondering look on her darkly shining face. Over and over.

He dials six numbers and hangs up.

It's too good to be true. She can't really want me to call it was a passing whim she now regrets she hardly knows me we sat and talked for half an hour and she did most of the talking. I was the good listener slowly pummelled into senselessness by my own good manners. Not senselessness in this case of course no a keen waking to sense such as he had rarely known before. Only when listening to certain pieces of music. The pretty girl with the sad tale who sat beside on the rock the rush of the stream around them the cool autumn sky above them the flickering of falling leaves the calls of the migrating birds the smell of the mossy water and the moldy earth of the creek bank. The smell of the light. And the quiet profile nodding and weaving its spell over him. Weaving its spell over him. Over him weaving its spell.

He walks away from the phone promising himself he will call tomorrow. Yes. For sure. Tomorrow.

Orion stands above him.

The white door with the glass panes of the row house looms sullenly above him. He no longer itches in his jacket and tie as he had an hour earlier. The bouquet of baby's breath he had brought with him in the early evening is now he knows though he can't see it clearly pinned on the front of the girl standing before him smiling up at him in the darkness. One did such things then. The hand does not remember pressing the buzzer but a swim of simpering faces had glowed suddenly up out of the dimness behind the glass and the door had swayed inward suddenly open.

The face he remembered hadn't been among them. Out of the early evening brightness he had moved uneasily in with a vacantly polite smile. Then down the stairs came a voice familiar already and then a movement of a form in a pretty slightly formal dress a

flickering of ankles a hand on the banister then the smiling pixie face the mole near the mouth the shining blackness of the hair.

The walk through the industrious-looking working class neighborhood to the trolley. The trip downtown. The dinner at the restaurant with the Polynesian theme. The moment he debonairly flipped a basket of rolls onto the floor while trying to make a point in philosophy or politics. Her trilled excited laughter. The movie with the saccharine and tragic subject eased with the firm serenity of Mozart. The hands held for one held hands at that time on the awkward armrest. Her thumb tickling the palm of his hand in a gently roving circle. The walk back to the trolley stop. The trip back on the trolley to her neighborhood. The walk beneath the night to her stoop.

Orion stands above him.

He remembers the moon-like smiling face floating up to him in the darkness and the kiss as the mouths open and the tongues leap over each other in the little caves of their mouths his tongue touched her teeth and slid along her palate and then suddenly she sucked hard on his tongue and then her tongue was inside his mouth fencing with his tongue and squirming like a snake. He had no idea what he was doing he followed her lead and his own dreamlike thrusts and feints it was like dreaming standing up in the darkness. He pecked her face with kisses dotting her cheeks her chin her forehead her brows he drew a line with his tongue from her forehead along her cheeks down to her throat past her throat to the seam of her dress above the valley between her breasts then up again to her ear which he tongued and gently bit. She pulled down toward her his head and covered his ear with her mouth and sucked in and blew out and he quivered. They laced their bodies together and rubbed their loins through their clothes. He slipped a finger beneath her bra until he reached a sensation of nipple and flicked the nipple with the end of his finger and listened to her sigh.

Suddenly she withdrew and smiled at him in the streetlight and kissed him one last time and suddenly disappeared up into a sullen doorway into the dark whiteness of the house.

He threw his face to the sky.

Then walked down the nightside street. And hailed Orion raising his sword to the west.

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He told no one. Many years will pass before he learns how unusual it is for the young male roiled in his natural insecurities not to spill into the nearest ear news of his conquests of the night. And how shocked had he known how the female naturally blabbed in agonies of fleshly detail. And might have for years to come remained therefore a virgin. Out of pride if nothing more. Until curiosity and hormones conquered pride. But this is speculation. It is all speculation nothing here is sure or true.

He told no one. None of his friends (he had none). None of his family (his family was a dramatic stranger). Hardly told himself. He held the memory like a shattering of joy in his hands so fragile and perilous it seemed so delicate and dangerous. A butterfly that might explode. At any moment. Not killing you. Merely destroying you.

He told no one. He turned it over in his mind like a jewel flashing in the dusty black of velvet and memory. Often at school at home he would disappear into the blank day staring out a window into a gray tangle of trees at the suddenly blank page of his book into busily empty space loomed with shadows and thinking of nothing feel an echo of what he had felt at that moment the touch of skin against skin and sigh whose bits and liquid fragments he tried to piece together weave and run together but never quite could memory never exact enough it failed him he could not live it again try as he might. Try as he might. Try as he might. Try as he might. Try. As he might.

Then it hit him. A staggering shock of light as sharp as glass and he was there again under the night filling his eyes and his mouth with her skin her flesh her body yet not her body the promise of her body

and he knew such hope as he felt he had never known before he did not know for what just hope hope hope and the world in its eternal round of disappointment and disillusion seemed right and beautiful and good. And true. And he believed.

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For a time. At that time.

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Oh to hover on the threshold and not enter in. To linger in hope and ignorance there and see passing couples appear suddenly in the light holding discourse with each other and their shadows to overhear occasional mysterious passages floating up suggesting worlds of meaning beyond your possible understanding and yet beckoning you onward to learn and join and master and conquer to dream of all of this at the edge of the crowd and wait a long a longer moment before you plunge in counting the peaks of joy in advance and imagining the future as a weaving of your life between the hands of grace. To stay and watch and wonder and not move into the waters. To stay where you are and let yourself only imagine. And wince and cringe at the couple whispering in the corner at the dancers giddy with happiness and flush at the smug local celebrity of the hour the talented poet the brilliant scholar the grinning lover the hasty contemptuous young executive the dazzling lights against the obscure background and finally be impelled into action pinched into the fray because of the envy you feel at the appearance of other people's happiness. And are you going to miss that happiness love conquest? Now is your chance. Take it. Plunge. Enter the garden.

Plunge into the sea. Hold nothing back. Grab as best you can the rewards of your assertion. Find the dream wither into the always slightly seedy slightly faded vaguely disappointing reality of the here and now. Which for endless years you will reject believing the dream to be around the next corner. This cannot be real. This cannot be true. It makes no sense. *That* must be true *that* must be real. What I see so clearly in my mind's eye. And I will accept nothing less. And onward plunge into the vast shrug of indolently laughing darkness. Seeking the source of that laughter. Imagining the mouth of the woman from which it must be coming. Imagining yourself mastering your fear and covering her mouth with your own.

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She stopped your mouth for a moment and told you to stay where you were. You were standing in the small glassed-in porch of her family's house in a western district of the city. The darkness watched through the windows. A television babbled in the room beyond the wall her brother and sister were staring from the couch into the flickering box. She disappeared into the house and you were left alone to think imagine consider but you did not think or imagine or consider all you did was stand vacantly in your blazer and tie and stare toward the dimness of the television room from which insincere laughter cascaded from a sit-com then in progress and a few minutes later she reappeared having changed her clothes from the rather stiff discount frills of a formal date between poor but genteel teenagers at the time to weekend wear denim cutoffs a loose shirt and bare feet and she dragged you by the hand back to the porch and pulling you to her thrust your hand beneath her shirt and gazed into your eyes with you amazed as you felt your hand smooth up her warm chest to the tender warm softness of her breast its nipple beneath the ends of your fingers and she whispered you're touching me and your hand moved to her

left breast brushing the valley between them and she whispered you're touching me and you felt your penis stiffen against her belly and you reached down and pulled up the panel of her shirt and bent and looked at the small mound of her breast in the light from the TV room beyond the door and then closed your mouth over her breast around the nipple and instinctively began to suck tickling the end of her nipple with your tongue. And her hand stroked your hair and played with your ear. And you released her breast and tracing with your tongue the skin of her valley along the line of its passage moved to her other breast and nibbled and bit and sucked and tongued and fluttered the tip of her nipple with your tongue and bit testing the tenderness here and there and she playfully hit you and said ouch not so hard and wondered am I giving you as much pleasure as I am sure I am receiving was he I must see. So you suddenly rose to look at her face and you covered her wounded frightened happy face with kisses and dotted her eyelids with your lips and trailed your tongue from her ear to her eyebrow down her cheek to her neck then up her neck to her other ear to her eyebrow there wonderful she has two of everything and she bent her head forward a little and shivered a little and sighed. Yes. Was that yes. It was yes. And she took your hand and pulled it into her pants your fingers tickled the edge of her pubic hair. No. Yes. No. If I do that I'll take you right here and right now. And you pulled out your hand. We mustn't. All right. We mustn't. All right all right. With a sound of disappointment yet satisfaction. Not yet. That's all right. And kissed from mouth to mouth from mouth to mouth. Until you both looked away for a moment and heard the silence. The television was no longer on. Only a single dim light was lit in the livingroom behind you both. You kissed. You both had not realized how many hours had passed. You kissed and you made to leave. And you kissed and you made to go. And you kissed. Then you had to leave. But you kissed. It's late I have to go and she let him go then pulled him back and you licked her skin and tasted her hair and tongued the labyrinth of each ear. You were silent she did the talking or most whispering do that don't do that don't bite yes there harder softer there there and you

whispered only a single word over and over against her skin against her eyes against her ear against her hair her name. Her name. I'm sorry I'm so small she whispered. You're not small you whispered back you're fine you're perfect. You're fine. And you stooped to kiss them again. And then you both cleaved into a single shadow on the lightless porch in the silent house. And your mind went blank. Then you heard yourself speaking I have to go. And you made to leave and she pulled you in for a last kiss and her tongue filled you mouth and turned in a flickering spiral. Then she opened the glass door and you descended still holding her hand and you looked up and in the darkness he could see her smiling smiling him away conspiratorially into the dark.

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... Where am I. Alone in a room far from them from there. Across generation and continent. So what is time or space then to them what memory compared to them what are they compared to memory? Who are they on the porch in the city night do I know them would they know me? Would they consider me an intruder would they hide their games in embarrassment it is only me come to help you consummate the game. I hear you whispering and I want to listen to help you reply what you didn't know how to say then I know even less now. No. Maybe we can help one another you soft and warm with youth and passion and all that generous ignorance and courage and me wan and cautious and dry with middle-age clarity apathy and civil controlled disgust.

But how can I help you who are dead?

Our ears are loud with the sound of our blood too loud to hear such distant shouts such distant whispering across so much of time it roars like the roaring of the sea.

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He went home. His skin felt as though it were made of eyes.

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Days. Dazed. But the telephone meets your hand more easily now. When are you coming over? Soon. Soon.

You lie on your bed in the bleak dark and imagine the parting of the thighs the soft cushioning of the breasts the delicious mouthfuls of skin the sighs against your ear the vacant distant expression then the burning eyes as you fumble with your cock.

You do not dare yet imagine the next act.

How unfold it? Too much happens to recall too little to recount.

He visits her family home they sit on the couch before the television fumbling with each other's bodies. Often.

They meet on the barren sidewalk outside a high school devoted to girls. Where a crowd of others meet. What has passed between them is their secret yet the air pierced with light seems to shout it to everybody. Yet what is there to tell. They don't speak of it except with their eyes. She burrows her pixie smile into him. He can't imagine what appears on his face.

There is as always a certain amount of more or less impatient waiting.

He wasn't sure he hadn't already reached an acme of happiness with her he wondered what exactly might happen next. As if it were