

You Don't Think She Is

A novel

by

Max Harrick Shenk

Several chapters and vignettes in this book have been published in different form and under different titles.

Several excerpts from this book were first published in different form as short stories in the newspaper **Green Mountain Trading Post**, under the titles "A Note From The Author's Wife," "Flip!" "Planet of the Brians," and "Six-Fifty-Seven."

These "story versions" were also collected and published in the New Plains Press collection **What's With Her?** the title story of which was itself an early version of the first section of this novel.

The Kindle short story "My First, My Last, My Only Cigarette" was a slightly different version of a section of this book.

The rest of this work has been plagiarized from various obscure sources.

Ha ha.

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YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Other works by Max Harrick Shenk

Fiction books:

Meeting Dennis Wilson: a novel

(available in seven serialized books or an omnibus edition)

What's With Her? and other stories

Interviews with a Porn Star

Standalone stories available for Kindle reader:

"Out of Sight"

"Communicate"

Nonfiction book:

A Musical Way:

How Non-traditionally trained musicians really learn music

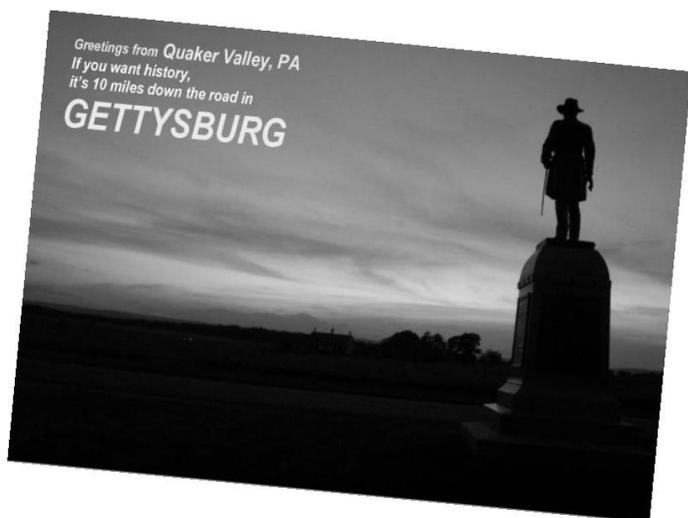
*Other works available online.
See the list at the back of the book
for information.*

Max Harrick Shenk



Setting:
Quaker Valley, Pennsylvania

**"Like Gettysburg,
except nothing happened here."
(Margo LeDoux)**



Max Harrick Shenk

I.

What's With Her?

Max Harrick Shenk

One

August 28, 1968 was a perfect southcentral Pennsylvania summer day in every way but one. Hazy, bright, with dew clinging to the grass blades... wide green lawns sparkling in the low morning sun... the air cool enough to wear a windbreaker, but once the sun got above the housetops, the dew would burn off and it'd be hot, humid.

Perfect, like I said, in every way but one...

"I HATE stupid school," my best friend Margo moaned as we pedalled down the block toward the first day of third grade. "I can't WAIT till I'm an adult and I don't ever have to go to stupid school ever again as long as I live!"

"Hey," I said, "at least we can ride together."

"Together!" Margo huffed. "Misery loves company," and then, without taking a breath, her hand still wrapped around the handlebar, she pointed with her left index finger. "What's goin' on up there?"

I saw them too: two blocks away, a mirage on the distant corner. Five kids in a close little group, standing at

the entrance to Buford Circle.

"Steve Kelly and them," I said. "They take the bus."

"The bus?" Margo said. "How come they take the bus?" Tsk! "Their *dad*, probably."

Their dad exactly: the bus took the five Kelly kids (Tom IV, Kathy, Christy, Steve and John) to Book Of Father Louis Parochial Elementary. Senator Tom Kelly wanted his kids to attend Catholic school ("I'd like them to be *grounded*, Katie"), but Katie Kelly, loathe at even a whiff of elitism, wanted her babies to go to public school ("Just because you kowtowed with Bobby Kennedy doesn't mean **we** became royalty!"), so the interfaith compromise was: Catholic elementary school; then public school from seventh grade on. ("Before they *really* get into the program," spake Katie Kelly, *nee* Sutherland, of the Quaker Valley Lutheran Sutherlands. Got it?)

Of course, Margo knew the Kellys, but since it was her first morning commute in her new neighborhood, she'd never seen them standing out there in the morning, all dressed up: Steve and Tom and John just a little hot and sweaty in black slacks and white buttoned-down-collar shirts; Kathy and Christy slightly more comfortable in crisp white blouses and green-and-black tartan skirts.

I'd seen them, though, and as we approached them, I felt myself tensing up a little. The rays seemed to get stronger the closer we got: four houses, three, two... Margo was *eying* Christy, and Christy was eying Margo back, from behind her brothers, next to her big sister. She whispered something to Kathy and, as we got within first down distance, our eyes met and she looked down. I looked down too, at the pavement moving under the front tire of my bike-- why did I feel like I had to look down?-- but Margo looked right at Steve. "You guys look like you're goin' to *church*," she called out as we passed, and as Steve said "Catholic school," Christy tsked and rolled her eyes. "I'll *pray* for you, Margo!" she snipped, and Kathy gave her a light shove.

"Yeesh... what's with *her*?" Margo said as we pedaled

away, and then, as the little yellow BFLP SCHOOL minibus passed us by to pick them up, she laughed a single HA! "At least we don't have to ride to school on the *retard bus*," and I laughed, and for the time being, anyway, my allegiances were clear.

Two

Margo LeDoux and I were best friends from the moment we met. I came into Miss Peterson's classroom on the first day of second grade and there she was, already sitting in her seat, right across from me, and as I sat down at my desk, our eyes met and that was it: I felt not only like I knew her already, but like we'd been best friends somewhere, some time before, and we'd agreed to meet again someday, only we'd forgotten about it... and now, there she was. There we were.

With Christy Kelly and me, though, it was a little different. There was *some* attraction there, but I didn't know if it was friendship, exactly. I didn't know *what* it was, but it made me feel... funny. Nervous, giddy. A *good* funny, but itchy physically, in a way that made no sense to me at age 5, 6, 7.

Like: before Margo moved into the house behind ours, when Christy's brother Steve and I were best friends, I'd go over to the Kellys' house to see if he wanted to Do Anything, and Christy would answer the door, barefoot... and she'd smile and blush before she brushed back her auburn hair and yelled "STEVIE? BRIAN!" up the stairs... and I'd catch myself staring at her bare feet... exotic... like she was the first barefooted girl I'd ever seen. Or: we'd be getting together guys (no girls) for a baseball game, and she'd be there on the Kellys' back porch with her Mom or Kathy, in her white and yellow daisy blouse and yellow shorts, watching us pitch and catch... and I'd think "Is she

watching me?” Or: Dad and Danny and I would go out to the swim club, and as we were leaving, Christy and Kathy would be coming in. “It’s Brian Pressley!” Kathy would shout. “Hiiiiii, Briiiiiian!” she’d sing. But Christy was a little more reserved. “Hi, Brian,” she’d whisper as we passed each other in the breezeway, her in her green nylon tank suit, towel draped around her neck, yellow flip-flops on her feet, and her suit creeping up her hiney so that every few steps she had to reach back and pull it down.

And then I felt like I was blushing and, like all those other times, I felt jittery, nervous, charged physically. Breathily, like someone had scared me, with butterflies in my stomach, and a little light and dizzy behind the eyes, too.

All that together made me feel like there was something happening that Christy understood, something that she wanted me to be a part of.

I didn’t have time for any of that, though. Christy was a girl, first of all, and any contact beyond “Hi” would have been an explicit infraction of unwritten, inviolable "no fraternization" rules. (Even "Hi" could have gotten me convicted if the wrong person heard it.)

The thing was, though, with Margo, I didn't *care* about inviolable no-fraternization rules. She was my best friend. I felt like it had already been decided for us. That gave us a comfort level I've never felt with anyone else before or since. I always knew where I stood with Margo. Christy (and other girls) somehow seemed to be *hiding* something, or making some *joke* I wasn't privy to, but when Margo said “Hi,” I didn’t find myself wondering what she was *really* saying.

I liked Margo, and I trusted her. I didn’t know if I liked Christy.

I *something’d* Christy, but I had no idea what that “something” was.

Yet.

Three

“It’s *not fair*,” I heard Christy whimpering from inside the Kellys’ kitchen one hazy April morning that Steve and Margo and I were tossing the football in the Kellys’ big backyard. We were waiting for Steve’s big brother Tommy (Tom IV) to get dressed so we could play touch (honest, Mom) football. Margo and Steve were down toward the trees at the foot of the yard, so they were oblivious to the scene inside the house... but I was maybe ten grown-up steps from the kitchen window, and while I wasn’t really trying to *listen*, it was hard not to *hear*: Christy talking and crying, and Katie Kelly’s gentle voice and shhhh-ing, trying to calm her daughter down:

“How come... *SHE*... gets to play with the boys... and not *me*?”

“Stevie said it’s a *football* game, Rebecca Christine. Do you want to play football?”

“Well, *she*’s playing!”

“Brian’s her best friend, sweetie.”

“How...” SNIFFFFFFFF! of blowing nose. “How come he’s best friends with *HER*??”

“Well, they *are* neighbors, sweetie--”

--OUCH!!!

“IN-complete!” Margo yelled. Her perfectly-thrown spiral nailed me while I wasn’t paying attention: the point of the ball drilled into the round of my right shoulder. I slapped my left hand to my shoulder as the ball bounced on the grass in front of me once, twice, then rolled to a stop. Margo got an *Oopsy!* look on her face. “Sorry, Bri,” she said as I came to my senses and retrieved the ball. She took a breath and stuck her hands in her back pockets, leaning back at the waist, her long hair falling in a blonde banner behind her. “Looks like this Colts defense has Brian Pressley totally rattled, Chuck!”

Colts defense. Yeah, that's it.

As I dropped back a couple steps like Sonny Jurgensen (or maybe Jim Ninowski), I could still hear Christy sniffing from the kitchen window. "Steve," I said as I launched a wobbler to him, "you think Christy might wanna play?"

Steve huffed a single dismissive laugh. "Chris isn't into *football*," he said, scooping up my pass, and by the time he passed the ball to Margo, the tears and the soothing talk behind me had moved to another room, drowned out by the Ron Drake Clambake on the kitchen radio.

Interesting Coincidences About Margo and Christy

(Yours FREE for reading this book!)

* **Christy** was a blonde who, for a time, colored her hair brown, and **Margo** was a natural blonde who wanted brown hair.

* **Margo** was a talented ballplayer who didn't think she could swim, and **Christy** was a talented swimmer who didn't think she could play ball.

* **Christy's** dad's name was Thomas J. Kelly; **Margo's** dad's name was Thomas J. LeDoux.

* **Christy** was born a little before midnight on June 18, 1960; **Margo** was born a little after midnight on June 19, 1960.

* **Christy** had a secretary named Lincoln; **Margo** had a secretary named Kennedy.

And, biggest coincidence:

* They both liked me.

Four

On Memorial Day 1969 (the last weekend before the end of third grade), Margo and I decided that it was time to do some spring cleaning. We'd co-opted an old fort in the honeysuckle hedgerow between our neighborhood and the farmer's cornfields, and Monday after the parade, we biked out to get it ready for The Season. It'd been over seven months since we'd been out there, so there was a lot of work to do: fresh green hanging vines clotting the tunnel back into the main room, first of all, and then leaves, branches, twigs -- BEER CANS!-- littering the floor.

We went right to work, and even though it was late spring, it felt like mid-summer --HOT!! So... off came our shirts... not just *my* shirt, but Margo's, too.

No biggie; at age nine, she looked the same up top as me. What was the big deal? It was just Margo.

As usual, about 80 minutes after we got out there, Margo announced "I have to hit the head," and as usual, she mimicked punching herself in her temple as she stood up and stepped back into the brush. I kept working as I heard, first, her rustling around finding a spot; then the barely audible sound of her pulling down her shorts; then the quick WHOOOSSSSSHHHHHHHHHHH! of her peeing; and, finally, her customary "ffffLLUUUUSSSHHHH!" sound effect before she pushed her way back through the thick vines to the main room of our fort.

We continued working... and I don't know why I asked her what I asked her next... we'd gone through this same scene many times the summer before... but I'd always sort of *wondered*... and every time Margo hit the head I wondered again... and that morning, for some reason, I felt extra curious... so...

"Margo?"

"Yeah, Bri?"

“How do girls pee?”

“Pfff! What do you *mean*, 'how do girls pee?' We just pee, Bri.”

“No, no, but I... I mean... you sit down, right?”

Margo was smirking. “Yeah...?”

“Well, why... I mean, where...” I took a breath. “Does it come out of your butt?”

Margo was laughing hard. “Pee doesn't come out of *my* butt!”

Now I was laughing too. “Stop it!” I said.

After a few seconds we both calmed down. “Where *does* it come out then?” I asked.

“Between my legs. You wanna see?”

And before I could think to say “Yes,” Margo was calmly pulling down her shorts and underwear to mid-thigh, showing me her Parts. Just a hairless crack between her legs. I looked without staring.

“So, what,” I said, “that's an opening?”

“Yeah, Bri. That's where it comes out.” She pulled up her shorts. “That's where you do it to make babies, too.”

I was amazed. “Really?”

Tsk! “Yeah, Bri. Don't your Mom and Dad tell you *anything*? I mean, that's where the baby comes *out*. How did you think it got *in* there?” I was looking at her like an idiot, and she was explaining it all like it should have been covered in pre-school. “When you want to make a baby, the guy puts his thing in there, and he fertilizes her egg, and that's how a baby's made.”

The guy puts his thing in there, and he fertilizes her egg?!

I had no idea what that last part meant, but the first part sort of gave me an idea. I laughed a laugh that was a third embarrassed, a third amazed, and a third... well, it wasn't “horny” at age nine, but it was something.

“Really?” I said.

“Yeah,” Margo said, and then she chuckled “*Yeah!*”

I laughed. “Whoa-ho!”

“Yeah... anyway, Bri.”

And we went back to work on cleaning our fort.

And that was how the biggest mystery of human existence was first and at once both revealed and intimated to me.

On the one hand, nothing unusual or exceptional, no biggie... I mean, it was just Margo... but at the same time, as I said that day... *Whoa-ho!*

Five

Good thing we'd gone back there to clean house: three weeks later, Margo and her family took off for their vacation (on Lake Opinicon, in Canada)... which meant I was stuck at home for two weeks of summer without her. "You'll live," Dad said when I asked him what I'd DO till she got back. And as Chekhov (Ensign, not Anton) said once, "Yes. I'll live. But I won't enjoy it."

What to do... what to do... two days of moping around wondering what to do before I remembered something Margo'd mentioned a couple times before she left. "You know what'd be neat, Bri? Is if we had a treehouse! I mean, we don't NEED one, but still..."

So... Margo was in Canada... but Steve Kelly was still around... and Steve's dad used to be a carpenter... they had all sorts of scrap wood in their garage... and Steve had a healthy respect ("Crush. It was a crush, Bri.") for Margo...

Funny how these things just seem to come together on their own.

Six

I sort of wondered if I'd see Christy, and sure enough, when I biked over to Steve's house first thing on Wednesday and threw my beat-up yellow Ross down in the lawn, she was waiting at their front door, dressed in a oversized grey PROPERTY OF WASHINGTON SENATORS t-shirt, blue shorts and red Keds, no socks. "Hi, Brian," she said from behind the screen door as I stepped up onto the porch, and then she looked past me. "Where's Margo?"

"Canada," I said. "She's on vacation."

"Canada," Christy repeated, and she turned to the stairway-- "STEVIE? BRIAN!" -- before turning back to me. "He'll be right down, Brian," she said, and she looked down and smiled before she turned to go back down the hall.

Light, barely discernable, but nonetheless distinct *Flutter* as I turned to sit on the Kellys' porch bench.

Seven

It was early in the morning but the Kellys' garage was already almost too hot to breathe in. We had tools-- I'd stuffed Dad's hammer and saw and a pocketful of nails into a grocery bag in the saddle basket of my bike (a toolbox Just Like The Pros Used)-- so all we needed was lumber. We took about five two-by-fours each, which we carried on our bikes the four blocks to our fort, balancing the ungainly armloads as we pedaled, teetering, like highwire cyclists. The 2x4s worked fine as framing or (cut and nailed into the tree trunk) as ladder rungs, but before we even nailed in two rungs, we both could see what we needed next: a floor.

So that afternoon we were back in Steve's stuffy garage, digging in the Congressional Scrap Pile.

"You think this'll work?" Steve asked as he pulled

out a jagged floppy sheet of woodgrained wall paneling.

I shook my head *No*. “Too thin,” I said.

“Yeah... I guess,” Steve said, and he pushed the piece back into the stack. I could see edges of sheetrock and paneling, but nothing that looked like plywood--

“What you guys doin’?”

I looked toward the girl’s voice, at the doorway into the house. It was Christy. She smiled at me through the screen.

“Hi, Brian,” she said.

“Hey, Christy.” (Flutter.)

Christy looked at Steve as I looked away. “What are you guys doin’?” she repeated.

“Lookin’ for somethin’,” Steve said, trying his best to get her to shut the door.

It didn’t work. Christy pushed the screendoor open. “Well, *doyyyeeee*,” she said, “but *what?*” There she was, same outfit as before, but this time barefoot, her toenails painted Granny Smith green, with little white and yellow daisies on the big toenails.

Steve tsked his *Go Back Inside And Find Your Skipper And Ken* tsk. “Something for our *fort*, all right? God...”

“Well, you don’t have to be *ignorant*, you little brat,” Christy snapped back, and that was the first time I realized: Christy was Steve’s *big* sister. I’d heard my Mom call them “Irish Twins,” and I just figured, you know, that meant they were actual *twins*.

Christy pushed in between Steve and me. “Maybe I can help...”

Steve was now flipping through the scrap pile more frantically than before. “Maybe I can *help*,” he repeated in a mocking nasal whine, and that was the first time I also realized: Steve kind of bugged me.

Meanwhile, Christy was so close to me that our sweaty arms were brushing against each other, and I looked down at her feet, at her painted toenails, and, God, I don’t know what possessed me, but...

“I like your toes.”

Steve looked at me like I'd said ***I WORSHIP LUCIFER!!*** but his sister just looked down, the light blush returning to her cheeks. "Thanks, Brian," she whispered. "Kath did it for me."

Flutter again.

I could still feel Steve's shocked energy beaming in pulses toward me, so I quickly pulled back from Christy and sputtered "We need plywood for a floor."

"Well..." Christy brushed back her straight, shoulder-length auburn hair and turned to look up and behind me. "...since someone finally *asked...*" and she pointed to the rafters, where, laid out like patchwork on the crossbeams, there were as many sheets of plywood as we could want, in practically any size we might need. All we needed was a ladder, which Steve grabbed from the wall, and in less than 15 minutes we'd pulled down a 2x3 foot rectangle and a 4x4 foot square.

Christy stood, watching us, like maybe she wanted to ride along, but then Kathy (her redheaded big sister; two years older) pushed the screendoor open and stuck her head out. She looked like a cross between a slightly older Christy and a slightly younger Katie.

"Reh-*behhhh*-caaahhhh..." she sang in a half-mocking, half-joking voice, and Christy looked down, annoyed but smiling. "You wanna go to the pooool?"

Christy's eyes darted my way for just a flash, then back over to her sister. "You wanna go *now*?"

Kathy raised her eyebrows. "Well... soon," she said, and she glanced at me, smiling, before looking back at Christy. "How come?"

Christy bit her lip, silent for a heartbeat.

"Just a sec," she said, and she opened the door and stepped into the house so she and Kathy could work out a plan.

Steve looked like a mouse who'd seen the cat coming. His panicked eyes met mine.

"We better go *now*," he said.

Eight

As for the plywood... Steve and I thought we'd each carry a board ("I'll take *this* one!" Steve said, selflessly snagging the smaller scrap), but we couldn't get on our bikes with them. Then we tried balancing the big sheets on the backs of our bikes; that was manageable for about five pedals, which got us almost to the end of their driveway. The problem wasn't just the size of the sheets; it was Steve looking back over his shoulder for Sisters In Pursuit.

"Maybe we should just walk and carry them," I said.

"No, this is faster," Steve said.

I was about to ask him what the big hurry was when I looked back at the garage and *saw* what the big hurry was: Kathy, with Christy at her heels; both of them in swimsuits, towels draped around their necks. Kathy shook her head in Boy Pity as she got on her bike. "Guys..."

Steve tsked. "What?"

"Why don't you each take, for instance, an *end* and carry them *between* you?" Kathy asked, like it was a rhetorical question.

"They're too heavy," Steve said.

Kathy tsked. "Make *two trips*, dodo," and Christy giggled.

Five minutes later, as Kathy and Christy pedaled off to the pool, Steve and I were biking the other way down the block, each of us holding an end of the 4x4 ("Let's do the big one first, Steve") sheet of plywood.

We wrestled the plywood into our fort --it didn't fit down the tunnel; we had to slide it through the fence on the outside, which was risky: the corn was barely high enough to give us cover, and we didn't want the farmer (He Shoots Salt Pellets From His BB Gun At Kids From His Tractor) to spot us-- then leaned the two big boards against the tree and worked on the support frame the rest of that afternoon... then more after dinner... then first thing the

next day (right after breakfast, before eight o'clock; earlier than school, even), we were back again, hard at work. The time flew, and even though I didn't have a watch, the light and the burned-off dew and my stomach were all telling me it was getting later, and just as I was about to ask Steve if he knew what time it was, I heard Christy's voice from down at the dead end.

"Stevie? Stevie!" A pause, and then as Steve muttered "Shit," she added "I *know* you're back there... I can see your bike. Brian?"

I was about to answer, but Steve looked at me with a *She was going to find us anyway* expression, and then sighed and yelled "What do you *want*, Chris?"

"Mom has lunch!" Christy yelled. "Come on!" I could hear her rustling through the tall grass, and I caught her eye right as she looked up at us on our platform. (Flutter.)

She looked at Steve quick, brushing her bangs back. "You guys workin' on your treehouse?" she said.

"You guys workin' on your treehouse?" Steve mocked in a nasal whine, and then he chuckled "No... we're building a *cave*. What do you *want*, anyway?"

Christy sighed hard. "I *said*... Mom has lunch," and she looked at me. "She said you can come, too, Brian... she'll call your Mom."

All right! Katie Kelly's picnic lunches were even better than her Drive-In Movie Nights. I could taste the ham salad.

I looked at Steve like I had to clear it with him, but he didn't respond.

"Thanks," I said.

Steve looked at Christy.

Sigh. "O.K., Chris," he said.

Christy just stood there.

Sigh. "We're *coming*," Steve said.

Christy didn't budge.

A third sigh. "We're not coming down until you leave!"

Christy crossed her arms. "Well, what if I just stand

down here and let you *starve*?"

"What if I just stand down here and let you starve?" Steve repeated...

...and you know... maybe I really liked Christy deep down and was siding with her, or maybe I just couldn't stand to sit through yet another episode of *Sibling Rivalry With Steve-N-Christy*, but I let my hammer fall to the ground below the treehouse and said "*I'm coming*," and I grabbed the limb, swung down and dropped to the dirt, my legs folding under my butt as I hit the earth.

As I got up and dusted off my knees, Steve climbed down and looked at his sister. "We're *coming*, Chris, O.K.?" Tsk-sigh. "God..."

But Christy was already ignoring him. She'd stepped up to the fence and was looking in at our fort. "Wow!" she gushed. "It has *rooms*..."

...and as Steve hit the ground behind me, Christy looked me --NOT her brother-- in the eye.

"Can I have a room?"

Again, who knows what swayed me? Maybe it was that Steve was starting to get on my nerves and I knew that any answer but "No" would grind his gears... or maybe, just maybe, it was that, on this hot summer midday, Christy's green eyes were cooler than the leaves around us and the cornstalks behind us, and her voice was soft and sweet like the smell of the honeysuckle, and her smile, as our eyes met, gave my soul a little tug... but whatever it was, I didn't hesitate:

"Yeah... sure!"

Christy jumped once, a happy hop, and leaned in slightly like, for a second, she wanted to kiss my cheek but thought better of it.

"*Thank you*, Brian!" she said, and she glanced at her little brother. "I'll work on it this afternoon," she said, satisfied, and then turned and walked back through the brush to her bike.

Steve, meanwhile, was in such shock that he'd missed his open window of Brotherly Veto. "Brian, what..."

what do you *mean*, she can have a room?"

"Margo comes back here," I said weakly.

Steve tsked. "Yeah," he said, crawling through the rails of the fence, "but that's *Margo*." Loud moaning *sigh*, one that echoed off the distant houses. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks a *lot*," and he followed his sister through the brush to his bike.

You're welcome, I thought as I caught a glimpse of Christy pedalling away ahead of him.

Nine

The first thing Christy did that afternoon was pull on a pair of garden gloves and hollow out a new room, separated from the main room of the fort by a thick curtain of honeysuckle and briars. Margo and I had never gone back that far ("Do *you* wanna get pricked, Bri? *I* don't wanna get pricked.") but by suppertime that night, Christy had cleared out a room, and the next morning, she was out there before Steve and me, radio on, laying down pieces of scrap carpet on the cool dirt.

We worked all day Friday and Saturday, and Sunday was our off-day, so Steve and I decided we'd meet there first thing Monday morning. I was primed to finish the supports and lift that big piece of plywood up into the branches so we had a floor, but when I got to the cornfield, there was no Steve... just Christy.

"Stevie's at the dentist's," she said.

I checked out her work --she was decorating her room with shag carpet fragments, candles, a transistor radio... even a couple pictures of Mark Lindsey and Paul McCartney, tacked into the tree bark with long locust thorns.

It looked pretty cool, although I wasn't sure what Margo'd think of it. But then, I figured once Margo got back,

Christy'd be gone and so would her improvements...

...but Margo wasn't going to be back for another six days.

Ten

Steve, however, was back that afternoon, and the two of us worked on the treehouse while Christy stayed down below, doing whatever she was doing while she listened to the radio. She was like a bird in the brush-- from up in the treehouse, I'd catch a flash of her plumage here, a snippet of her song there --and as the week wore on, I found myself getting more and more *curious*. I wanted to know how she was doing, how her decorating was going... if she liked the Beach Boys (Margo and I did)... or if she maybe needed a boy (besides her *little brother*) to help her with anything...

...and was she curious about *me*?

And every so often I'd feel like the observed was observing me, curious herself.

Eleven

Thursday morning, three days before Margo got back, I pedaled out to our fort, and when I let my bike fall down in the tall grass at the entrance to the tunnel, once again there was just one other bike leaning against the fence: Christy's banana-seat red Schwinn. "Where's Steve?" I asked when I crawled back into our fort.

Christy was leaning against the stump of the oak tree that was built into the fence, flipping through a copy of *Sports Illustrated*, and she barely looked up. "Dentist, again.

He had a cavity Monday and he's gettin' *drilled*." I noted Christy's subtle glee as I shuddered a little at the thought of the shot and the drill and the smell of the burning tooth. "He might come back out after lunch, though," she added.

I set to work while Christy sat back in her room, reading and listening to her radio. I needed to install a ladder to our treehouse, and the first step was sawing 2x4s to use as rungs... and maybe it was just that Steve wasn't there to act as a buffer that morning, but as I worked, I felt a weird sort of tension in the air. I didn't know what it was, so I kind of dismissed it... and so, when Christy excused herself to vanish even further back into the briars to "use the little girls' room" (she said), I figured, *O.K., she's just going back to pee*, and I kept right on working as the radio played.

*When I saw you I knew that I was gonna love you
And every day I thought of how I'm gonna love you
Now you're here next to me
And ecstasy is a reality...*

O.K.... verse... chorus... second verse, different from the first...

...what was taking Christy so long? I could hear a little bit of rustling around, but I didn't hear that telltale WHHOOOOOSSSSSSSSSSHHHHH... I mean, I'd learned, from being back there with Margo, that it took girls LESS time to pee than it did boys, and I couldn't figure out why it was taking Christy so long to--

"Brian?"

"Yeah?"

"Did you ever see a girl naked?"

Perfectly natural question. I thought of Margo dropping her drawers out there a couple weeks before ("You wanna see?"), but, somehow, that didn't seem like it counted.

I lined the saw blade up with the cut I wanted to make. "Sort of," I said, "but not all the way."

“Well... do you want to all the way?”

I almost dropped the saw.

"How come?" I said, straightening up, sort of fearing the answer, but at the same time feeling all those past flutters and looks and giggles and blushes and curiosities coalescing in the hot July air.

“Why do you think, Brian?”

O.K. Either she's found one of Davy Morone's old copies of ADAM back there, or...

I felt blood rushing to both my face and my groin; my heart felt like it couldn't keep up. Precious oxygen, meanwhile, was being diverted from my brain, of course. (This is how it works, ladies.)

“Well,” I said, “I... you know...”

Take a breath.

I felt like the words were pumping into my mouth straight from my heart, from the breathy center of my chest, and I just spat them out as they formed on my lips:

"Yeah. Yeah. Come out."

Soft rustle in the brush... then (alongside *What are you two doing back there?*) the last phrase I really wanted to hear at that particular moment:

“You get naked first.”

Shit.

My shoulders dropped.

“You come out and I will,” I said.

“No. When you get naked I'll come out.”

“No way!” I said.

No response.

Was she calling my bluff?

Meanwhile, the radio played:

Workin' on a groovy thing, baby

Workin' on a groovy thing

Workin' on a groovy thing, baby

Let's not rush it

We'll take it slowwww...

I took a breath. It didn't slow my pulse.

"Christy?"

A giggle. "What, Brian?"

What, Brian indeed. There I was, begging and bargaining for something I hadn't even known I *wanted* until Christy brought it up.

I've been in big trouble ever since.

I sighed. "Come *out*..."

"No." Her voice was insistent. "You get naked and I will."

I could feel myself starting to crumble.

Was it worth it? Probably.

Just one thing, though...

"How do I know *you* will?" I said.

A tsk. "God, Brian... I already *am*."

I gasped lightly.

She already is?

I squinted back into the thick growth to see if I could catch a peek... you know, just in case she changed her mind.

No luck; she was hidden behind the thickest leaves and vines.

I ran my shaking, sweaty fingers back along the elastic waistband of my shorts, like my hands had to think about this.

O.K.... Steve's at the dentist's... so that's cool.

And Margo's in Canada.

Does anybody else know about these forts?

I checked off a mental list of neighborhood kids and brothers.

My little brother Danny was supposed to be at the playground with John, Christy's little(r) brother.

That "supposed to be" worried me. On the one hand, what if Danny and John showed up while Christy and I were in the buff?

On the other hand:

God, Brian, I already am.

Well, *that* was a simple choice.

I tried to look out of the fort at the neighborhood beyond the vines. *Tried*, but I couldn't see a thing.

So... if I couldn't see *out*, that meant *they* couldn't see *in*. Right?

And the other way, beyond the fence, it was just rows and rows of eye-high corn, and then the thick swale that marked the path of the little stream that met up with Bent Run closer to town.

O.K. Unless there were some really, really, really lost flyfishermen out there, we were safe.

All of this thinking took about three seconds, while Christy waited back in the brush.

"Brian?"

I tugged my shirt out of my shorts. "I'm taking my shirt off," I said, and I pulled my t-shirt over my head and hung it on the sharp end of a branch next to my shoulder.

"I can see," Christy said.

She could?

That wasn't fair!

Fair or not, I barely paused. I hooked the waistband of my shorts and my underwear with my thumbs --*here goes*-- and I slid them together down my legs. The warm summer air on my bare skin felt strangely cool, and I felt the goosepimples erupting in the fabric's wake as my shorts fell down over my knees and onto my feet.

"O.K.," I said. "Come out."

"O.K.," Christy said, and as I stood there, shivering slightly (it was 90 degrees out and I was *shivering!*), I heard the vines and leaves rustling down the tunnel, then saw a flash of bare skin, and then Christy stepped out into the main room of our fort.

Workin' on a groovy thing, baby!

Workin' on a groovy thing

She stood in the honeysuckle and briar arch to her room, a few steps away, shivering like me. I realized that just a few steps away from that very spot, five weeks before, I'd seen Margo, but that was different.

Christy didn't have her shorts *down*; she had them

off. Shorts off, shirt off, undies off, sneakers off... I mean, *naked*.

Whoa-ho!

I had a boner like no boner I'd ever popped before --standing straight out, my eleventh finger-- and of course Christy was staring right at it, just like I was staring right at that little hairless crack in her crotch.

"God... take a picture, Brian," she tittered, even though she was staring too, and as I blushed even redder, I said, "You too," and she turned an even deeper red.

That didn't stop her, though. "Turn around and let me see your hiney," she commanded, giggling.

"You didn't say 'Simon says!'" I tittered back.

"Simon says 'Let me see your hiney, Bri,'" Christy said, and as I did a full 360, she giggled more. "Looks just like mine," she said.

"Now Simon says 'you turn around and let me see yours,'" I said, and Christy put her arms straight out to her sides and spun in place. "I see your hine-y, all white and shine-y," I sang, and it was, but I couldn't tell if it looked just like mine, because, really, I'd never *seen* mine.

So...

I saw Christy naked, front and back... and she saw me naked, front and back... and as she completed her turn, she lowered her arms, and... we... just... stood there.

It was a little overwhelming. I didn't know what to do next. I knew what I *wanted* to do next (***TOUCH!***) but I was afraid to do it, not unless Christy did it first, and I wasn't really sure I wanted *that*...

...but, God, what *did* I want?

Seven, eight years down the road, figuring out what I wanted to do once Christy Kelly and I got naked would be as simple as first grade math.

But that day, I was, like, *O.K. Well?*

It was something that *had* to be done, and I was glad we were doing it.

But was that all you did? Strip and spin?

What next?

I bet Margo'd know what to do next.

No sooner did that thought cross my mind than Christy said "Hey, Brian..."

"Hey what?"

"Bet you can't... *CATCH ME!*"

Before I could respond, Christy slipped through the fencerails and BOLTED out of the fort and into the cornfield, and I went through right after her. We ran barefoot down the rows between the cornstalks, the dewy, slightly tacky leaves brushing against and catching on our bare skin. Christy was wrong: I caught her, but only because when I got a few steps away, she suddenly stopped dead in her tracks and I ran right into her, boner first--ouch! As soon as I ran into her, I backed off and took a breath, and I heard exactly why she'd stopped.

A tractor. Coming.

"Come on!" I yelled, and I turned and jogged back toward our clothes. I figured Christy was just a step or two behind me the whole way, but when I made it almost all the way back to our fort, I said "You think he sees us?" and I got no response, so I turned and there she was: forty-some yards back, squatting frozen where we'd stopped, crying, trying to hide behind the stalks of corn.

She's doomed, I thought.

"Christy! Come on!" I yelled, but she couldn't hear me. The tractor was getting too close to her...

...but as I stood at the opening to our fort, I could see that we were safe the whole time. The farmer was just making hay-- mowing the swales of grass *between* his patches of corn --and since Christy and I had been frolicking 20 rows back, we were totally safe.

Christy couldn't see that, though: all she knew was that there was a tractor bearing down on her, and she must have figured that the farmer was coming for *her*, his BB gun loaded with salt pellets.

I went back into the briar to get Christy's clothes (they were in a pile in the middle of her room; I could have just stepped back into her room during our negotiations

and seen all I'd wanted, but it never occurred to me) then snagged my shorts and ran back down the cornrow, hunched low, as the tractor got closer and closer.

"Come on!" I yelled when I reached her, and I even tried to grab her arm and pull, but Christy was squatting there paralyzed, trembling, so I squatted down next to her and put my arm around her (naked!), as the tractor came closer and closer and closer...

...and as it passed a dozen rows away, I felt hot water seeping between my toes...

...WHHOOOOOOOOSSSSSSSHHHHHHHH...

...and I looked down and traced the muddy trickle back through the dirt...

I jumped up. "EWWWW!"

Christy gasped as she jumped, and then she started laughing.

"Oh, my God, Brian..." She put her hand over her mouth to stifle her laugh. "I'm sorry... sorry..."

"God! Gross! Ew!"

Christy got so scared as the farmer passed us that she peed, and it trickled under my bare foot.

Not what I had in mind.

Before I even pulled my shorts on, I stepped onto the nearest dry dirt and *wiped* my foot off *hard*, scratching like a hen while Christy pulled on her clothes, trying not to laugh.

"Really, Brian, I'm sorry..."

I pulled on my shorts. No shirt... I'd left it hanging on the limb in our fort. "It's all right, Christy," I said, even though it really wasn't, and I started barefoot back down the rows of corn, Christy a half step behind me, apologizing the whole way.

"I just... I got scared, you know? I didn't mean to, Brian..."

"I know," I said.

We got to the fence and I ducked between the rails so I could get my shirt and sneakers, and Christy followed me in.

"I'm just... I'm so sorry..." she said, still tittering a little as she went back into her room to retrieve her Keds. She took a breath. "But you were sweet to run back and get me..."

Sweet.

Great.

"Yeah," I muttered.

"No, really... you were..." She reached out to touch my bare arm --"I'm sorry..."-- but I was stepping away. "Sorry," she repeated, a little more sheepish this time.

I pulled on my shirt and shoes, and as I did, I could hear music from the other part of the fort: faint, tinny...

Get back

Get back

Get back to where you once belonged

"The radio!" Christy yelled. "Can you get it? It's Kath's..."

I sighed as I stepped back into her room and scanned for the radio. Follow the music, and... there it was, leaning against the fencepost: a portable GE with a metal grille speaker and a leather cover, with a red labelmaker tag on the side (MKK).

I turned it off and pushed in the telescoping silver antenna as I glanced at the work Christy'd done: shag carpet fragments on the bare ground, each one about a foot square, laid out in patchwork.

Hmmm... should I tell her about field mice?

I crouched down and stepped back into the main room of the fort, where Christy was waiting, fully clothed and shod. I handed Kathy's radio to her --"Thanks, Brian," she whispered-- and we slipped through the fence and trudged through the tall grass to our bikes, Christy silent the whole time.

I could tell she felt bad, and I didn't really want *that...*

...but... God... ewwwww.

I can't stress that enough: *God... ewwwwww.*

"Brian," Christy finally said as we reached our bikes, "you're not mad, are you?"

"No," I said.

Not mad. More... grossed out. But how could I say that?

Well... simple: as I'd learned with Margo, just say it.

"It *was* kinda gross, though," I said.

I guess I figured that Christy'd do what Margo would do: laugh at herself, laugh at it... I mean, she'd been laughing before.

Instead... she started crying.

Now I'd done it.

"Christy..." I said.

"I'm sorry, Brian... I didn't mean to..."

"I know..."

"I just... I got scared," she sobbed, and then she looked right at me. "You *hate* me!"

"Christy, I don't hate you--"

"--You *do*... you *do*..." she whimpered. "You think I'm gross..."

"No I don't!"

"You *do* too," Christy moaned. "You *said*..."

I felt stuck and confused. Had I said *she* was gross? I thought I said *it* was gross.

I started to answer, but Christy was on a roll, sobbing and sniffing. "You better not tell that stupid Margo LeDoux," she said.

Well, *now* I was mad.

"Margo's not stupid!" I said.

"I know, I know," Christy said as she got on her bike. "She's not *stupid*... she's your best friend. Your *best friend!*" She kicked down on her pedals, crying and moaning as she started to ride away.

I hopped on my bike so I could follow. "Christy!" I shouted after her. "I don't hate you... Christy!" but by the time I got moving, she was already in the street, and by the time I hit the street, she was around the corner, speeding

down the block as she cried. No way would I catch her. I slowed down as I approached the first driveway and then pulled over to the curb and stood, watching as Christy made the turn toward Buford Circle and home.

“You better not tell that stupid Margo LeDoux.”

Trust me, Christy... no one will ever hear about what happened in that cornfield.

Unless...

Christy had three brothers, one of them older.

What if *she* told?

Gulp.

As I rode my bike back home so I could disinfect my foot (the garden hose should do the trick, right?), I got more and more scared.

Christy had brothers, but worse, her Dad was our U.S. Senator.

What if she told *him*?

FBI PROBING PRESSLEY IN CORNFIELD INCIDENT

“I didn’t mean to,” says Senator’s daughter

Twelve

Christy didn't say anything, to John or Steve or Tom IV or (for that matter) Tom III, but by the time Margo got home on Sunday night, I was a wreck from three days of waiting for the phone to ring and the aftermath: Mom or Dad (or Mom *and* Dad) calling up to my room:

Brian? We need to talk to you...

It never happened, though, and first thing Monday morning, Margo and I were right back in our summer groove, biking down to our fort after breakfast. She *had* to have been able to tell that I was preoccupied, but she didn't say anything... she was too busy talking about the lake and her Grandma and her vacation. But I sort of knew what was coming...

"So, what'd you do while I was gone?" she asked me as we let our bikes fall in the tall grass near the entrance to our Fort Complex, and maybe it was just me, but I felt like she was asking me because she knew there was a specific answer that I didn't really want to give her.

Whatever it was, the sole of my right foot suddenly felt really itchy.

"Not much," I said. "Just... played with Steve and those guys, you know?"

"Played with Steve, huh?" Margo pulled off her shirt and stuck it in the waistband of her shorts, like a flag football flag, then got down on her knees, pushed aside the veil of vines hiding the entrance to our fort, and crawled ahead of me into the shady cool tunnel. "Did *Christy* come along?"

Uh-oh...

"A couple times," I said. Bright red, but Margo couldn't see me, and I don't know if she heard me or not, because she was already into the main room of our fort, crawling forward...

...which meant it wouldn't be long until she saw...

“What’s *this*?” she shrieked from down the tunnel ahead of me.

I crawled out of the tunnel and stood up, brushing off my knees and then pulling off my shirt.

“What’s what?” I said, like I didn’t know.

“All this... *rug* and stuff,” Margo yelled from the brush ahead of me. “*Pictures*. Yeesh! You don’t put *pictures* up in a *fort*...” She huffed. “Candles... Mark Lindsey... *yeesh!*” She crawled back out into the main room of the fort and stood up, brushing back her long hair. “Christy,” she muttered, shaking her head, and she looked at me. “Do *you* like it?”

Do I like it? Do I like it? Do I like it?

“Ahhh... it’s all right...” I said.

“All right,” Margo repeated. “You don’t put *pictures* and *rugs* in a *fort*! Stupid stinky smelly Christy Kelly...” she spat with a smile on her face, and even though I knew she was being funny, I also knew a part of her meant it. “Well... she can have that room, I guess... I like this one better anyway. No pricklers.” She hung her shirt on the tree (the same sharp limb that I’d hung *my* shirt on when I took my clothes off for Christy), and that was when she saw it.

“OH MY GOD!” she shrieked. “Brian! It’s a *tree-house!*”

I laughed. “Yeah!”

“WOW!” she yipped, and she hugged me hard. Our bare sweaty chests pressed together-- *squish!*-- and as quick as she squeezed me, she pulled away. “*Wow*,” she repeated, looking up at the platform like it’d appeared courtesy of Blackstone. She swiped her hair out of her eyes. “You mean you *built* this?”

I nodded. “Me and Steve.”

“Pff! Steve!” Margo repeated. “*He* bugs me too,” she said, and I laughed, and she laughed in response. “*He does.*” She brushed her hair back again. “Always... *staring* at me. Take a picture. You know?” She looked me in the eye. “Girls don’t like that, Bri. Don’t forget it.”

“I won’t,” I said.

Silence.

Funny; just as Margo told me not to stare, for just a moment, as she stood there shirtless, hands on her hips, inspecting my work, she looked less like my Best Friend In The World Margo and more like Christy... which is to say, less like My Buddy Margo With Her Shirt Off and more like a half-naked girl.

For a second I felt like I wanted to see the other half, as in the whole thing... and of course when she said "Take a picture," I thought of Christy saying those same words in that exact same spot, so *that* deepened my blush...

If Margo could tell what I was thinking, though, she didn't say anything; she just exhaled hard.

"God," she said, "you're the best. I mean... I can't believe you *did* this."

"Well... Steve helped..."

"Steve *helped*," Margo repeated, looking at me, "but I bet *you did* it."

I thought back to the last two weeks. She was right.

I nodded my head.

"Thought so," Margo said. She ignored the ladder rungs, instead grabbing the branch above her head and swinging her legs up so she could walk up the stump of the tree, forcing the words out as she climbed. "I just... hope... he won't... think he can come out here... hangin' around... *staring*... just because he helped you with this." She pulled herself onto the platform from the side and looked down at me. "You think he will?"

"No," I said. "Kit Bullard's back from camp, so he's over there."

"Kit," Margo repeated as I started up the ladder. (I built it; might as well use it). "Those two are liable to come out here *together*," and she sang "Kit and Stevie, sittin' in a tree... k-i-s-s-i-n-g..." I laughed. "So..." Margo said, "what did Christy *do* while she was back here, anyway?"

Uhhhhh...

"Ohhhh... just... stayed... down here, mainly," I said. Margo reached down to help me the rest of the way up. "Sat

back in her room and played the radio.”

“Played the radio,” Margo repeated.

“Pretty much, yeah.”

I climbed up and sat down next to Margo, my legs dangling over the edge. The breeze was light and cool, and the view was fantastic: behind us, we could see the rows of corn and the jagged tree line of the streambank, and, beyond that, the WQGB towers. Margo bounced on her butt a couple times. “This is so *solid*,” she said. “You do good work, Brian. I mean, look...” and she bounced again. “It barely moves.” She patted my bare leg. “Thanks, Bri.”

I put my hand on hers. “You’re welcome.”

Silence as we sat there. Margo leaned over slightly, and spat down between her legs; we watched it fall and splat in the dry dusty dirt. “So...” she said, putting her arms behind her and leaning back, “she just came back here and cleared out a room in the pricker weeds so she could listen to music?”

I looked down at the bird-poop shaped spit splat in the dust. “Well,” I said, “she... read some, too... I think.”

“Read.” Margo wasn’t buying it, I could tell. “So...” she said, in an inquisitive but knowing tone of voice, a tone I’d become quite familiar with a few years later, “you two didn’t play Doctor?”

I laughed. “We didn’t play Doctor,” I tittered nervously.

Margo was eyeing me sideways, and then leaned over and spat again. “Well,” she said at last, “I’ve seen *her* stare, too. God. She’s almost as bad as her brother. What is that? The Kelly stare.” She bit her lower lip. “Except... *Kathy* doesn’t stare. Her *Mom* doesn’t stare. I don’t know about Senator Tom or Tommy. The babies can’t fix a gaze.” She sighed, and then sat forward and put her hands to her mouth to filter her voice. “Apollo 11 to Houston, over.”

I put my hands to my mouth: “Rrrrrroger, Eleven... we copy, over...”

And for the next couple hours, as we pretended that our treehouse was the lunar module and I was Buzz Aldrin

taking us down to the lunar surface, and we took turns going down the ladder onto the surface of the moon, I had more than a sneaking suspicion that my co-pilot, Marguerite Francoise Neil Armstrong LeDoux, was on to me.

But she never said another word about it.

Thirteen

On the way home from our fort before dinner, Margo and I passed Christy and Kathy riding their bikes out to the pool. We saw them coming for a good block, and when they got close, Kathy sang out “Marrrrrrrgohhhh... Briiiiiiiannnnnn...” and Margo said “Hey Kath... hey Christy.” And I said “Hi. Hi Christy,” and I looked at Christy, but she just looked down, sad, scared almost, as she passed us.

“See, Bri?” Margo said as we pedaled home. “Never says 'Hi.' What’s *with* her, anyway?”

I just kept riding, eyes straight ahead. “I don’t know,” I said. “I don’t know.”

Max Harrick Shenk

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

II.

Toy Chest

Max Harrick Shenk

Fourteen

Brian Pressley

Creative Writing

"My Best Friend" - first draft

October 15, 1976

I met my best friend, Margo LeDoux, on the first day of second grade, August 26, 1967, in Miss Peterson's second grade class at John Reynolds Elementary School.

This feels like it should be your first paragraph right here!

I always start the school year with a mixture of anticipation and dread. Every adult I know was always so excited for me to go back to school, and they talked about it like I was a two-year-old:

"Ooooooh, you'll be going back to school soon. Aren't you excited? You'll have a new teacher, and a new classroom, and you'll learn new things. Isn't it exciting?"

No. *"Wanted"??*

Look, I want to scream, August is pool weather, not school weather. Maybe you like to get dressed up and go sit still inside for seven hours, five days a week, but YOU GET PAID! I don't. Can I please just go be a kid? At least until Labor Day?

These lines should be set apart somehow - quotation marks perhaps

But of course the answer is no, so on Monday, August 27, 1967, like it or not, I got dressed up in
Again watch tenses of verbs-agreement here

new clothes, with my new pencil box and pencils and crayons ("kellers") and notebook and same old lunch box, and got shunted out the door with my little brother Danny, with Mom standing at the front door, lobbing a final shot of canister at our backs:

"Have fun, boys!"

Fun. Thanks, Mom.

All of that changed, though, at around 8:30 am.

We went to our old classrooms for the anthem and the pledge, and then lined up to meet our new teachers. Mine was Miss Peterson. In line we went, and then down the hall, two by two, to our new room.

The same Miss Peterson who was teaching at Reynolds when I was in elem. school!!

That was when I met my best friend.

Nice paragraph - this is another reason why I thought you could omit the opening paragraph - it almost spoils the effect of this one. Here we SEE and MEET her gradually, just as you did THAT FATEFUL DAY!!!

The desks in the sunny classroom were arranged in a V shape, with construction paper name plates taped to the fronts. I found the one with the blue-for-boys BRIAN PRESSLEY on the front, and as I sat down, that was when I saw her. Her desk was directly across from mine in the U and she was looking down at her desk, impatient, like she'd been waiting there for a while. The first thing I thought when I saw her was "I know her from somewhere." She had straight, long blonde hair combed down over her left breast, and a red gingham dress, and red

Were the desks in a V shape or a U shape?? Details inconsistent

hightop canvas sneakers. The pink-for-girls nameplate on the front of her desk said MARGUERITE LE DOUX.

I sat down and I felt like I was being watched. I caught her eyes and she smiled and so did I, and I felt a rush of déjà vu from the center of my head to the center of my chest. We both had to look down.

I felt, in that moment, like we'd been friends already and we'd agreed to meet again someday, but we'd forgotten about it, and now, there we were.

Miss Peterson called the classroom to order, and as I sat there waiting for her to call my name, I could feel someone watching me... but every time I looked at her, she looked away: down at her desk, or up at Miss Peterson, or over at the blackboard. I'd look and she'd look away, then she'd catch me looking and I'd look at Miss Peterson, or at my desk, or at the National Geographic Map Of Our World behind her, or at her nameplate.

MARGUERITE LE DOUX.

As I sat there trying to figure out how to pronounce her name, Miss Peterson said "Marguerite LeDoux," and she straightened up in her seat. She pronounced it "la-DOO."

The "Hers" and "shes" in these two graphs have the potential to confuse, since you are talking about two females. Try to find some way to distinguish them if you can. There should be no doubt as to whom you're referring.

"It says here you are new to the school. Where did you go to school last year, Marguerite?"

"Margo," she answered, with a sigh.

Miss Peterson didn't get it. She blinked twice behind her Ben Franklin glasses. "Margo. Now where is that, sweetie? In Western Pennsylvania?"

"No, that's my name. Margo."

A few of the kids giggled, and as Miss Peterson said "Ohhhh," Margo looked at me, grinning, and I felt that feeling again, and we both looked down.

Miss Peterson wrote Margo's nickname in her rollbook, then looked up. "Well, now, where did you go to school last year, Margo?" *Don't be so sure - Knowing Margo, the poor woman was probably writing*

"Ottawa," Margo said. "It's in Canada." *UH-OH!!!*

"Parlais-vous francais?"

"Ouais," Margo replied.

The two of them said a couple lines of French back and forth, and then Miss Peterson said "Tell everyone what we said, Margo," and Margo's voice got as soft and shy as a three-year-old's. She looked down, and as she spoke, I felt like she was talking to me.

"You asked me if I speak French, and I said yes, and then you asked me if they spoke French at my school, and I said sometimes."

"Canada is bilingual, children," Miss Peterson said, and she looked at me like she knew this was of particular interest to me. "That means they speak two languages." She looked at Margo. "Do both of your parents speak French, Margo?"

"Well, Mom does. Dad tries. I translate."

"You translate?" Miss Peterson said. "How lucky for them."

"Yeah, sometimes," Margo said. *Vintage Margo!! I can hear her saying this. You handle the dialogue in this passage well.*

"Sometimes," Miss Peterson repeated. "Well, welcome to our country and our class, Margo," and Margo looked at me quick, smiled, and as I smiled back, we both looked down at our desks.

I can't remember what we did the rest of the morning. Everything is a blank right up to the most important part of the day: recess. We got in line to go outside, in alphabetical order, paired up boy-girl, boy-girl. There must have been more boys than girls in the alphabet, because guess who I was paired with? She stood next to me, looking down, swinging her leg side to side in front of her.

"O.K., class," Miss Peterson said, and those of us who'd been at our school since kindergarten knew the drill: zip your lips, hold hands, and start down the hallway. No running until you got onto the

playground.

So I took Margo's hand...

...and she said "Awwwww, mon ami," and she kissed my cheek!

Then she looked up. All of our classmates were holding hands too. She turned bright red. "Pardon," she whispered softly, and she squeezed my hand, and we followed the rest of the class down the hall.

When we got outside, we ran together over to the sliding board. I didn't know what to think. I knew what I felt - like I knew Margo from somewhere before- but on the other hand...

SHE KISSED ME! A GIRL KISSED ME!

Before I could think too much about it, though, Margo was climbing up the ladder to the top of the slide. "Watch this, Bri!" she said, and she lay flat on her belly, shouted "KOWABUNGA!!" and dove down the slide headfirst. Cool!

Unfortunately, from my vantage point on the ladder, I could see she was going to get in trouble. Miss Peterson was already on her way over. I could already hear what was coming: not just scolding ("Margo, we don't do that here"), but my name getting dragged into it ("Brian, maybe you can tell Margo about the playground rules").

("Brian, maybe you can be a weenie.")

No way. As I watched Margo hoist herself up and Miss Peterson started into her lecture - "Margo, we don't go down headfirst, honey" - I did the only thing I could: I lay belly down on that hot silver slide and flew down head first.

Miss Peterson glared at me. "And Brian, you certainly know we don't do that here. We go sitting down the slide." I looked at Margo, and she was trying not to grin.

We were marked, but I didn't care. When we ran around to the ladder, I let her go down first and she yelled "I'm going sitting down the slide, Bri!"

At the end of recess, as we all lined up to go back into the building, I had to ask Margo one question:

"Margo, will you be my best friend?"

Margo bit her lower lip like she had to think about the consequences of this decision. When she looked up, she was smiling.

"Sure, Bri. Will you be mine?"

I laughed. "I asked you, didn't I?"

And as Miss Peterson said "All right, class!" Margo took my hand and gave it a squeeze, and I squeezed her hand back, and we followed our

classmates into the building,
And we've been best friends ever since.

The End

Excellent first draft, Brian. The main problem technically is verb tense agreement and those few places where the "she-her" becomes a little confusing, and use of quotes (or lack) to offset your thoughts. Remember that the rules aren't rigid but at the same time you want to make sure that your meaning is CRYSTAL CLEAR to your reader.

Consider axing that first paragraph - in doing so, the reader is traveling along with you on that first school day, and wondering why, if you were so miserable, it was so significant. Such minor quibbles - I really enjoyed this and it gave me insights into your friendship with Margo today! Can't wait to discuss it with you! -GS

Margo LeDoux
Creative Writing
Assignment 3:
"My Best Friend"

"I Before E"

Everybody who knows my best friend Brian and me swears that we have been best friends all our lives. Even though it looks that way and feels that way, we have actually only known each other eight years (since second grade). While it's true that we've always been best friends, that doesn't mean that we've always gotten along. In fact, once we got so mad at each other that we didn't speak for two months, and it didn't end until we beat each other up.

Much stronger opening graph than your rough!

This line sets up the story perfectly.

And it was all Brian's fault!

The summer after third grade (July 1969, after the moon landing) Brian was at his house watching "The Wide World Of Sports" and he saw the motocross championships.

"I bet we could do that on our bikes," he said.

I thought that was a cool idea. So the next day, we found a vacant lot nearby where they were building a house. There were lots of hills for riding and jumping, and that was what we did all Sunday afternoon and every night the next week. (We couldn't ride there during the day because there were construction workers there.) We would go to the pool in the afternoon, have supper, and then ride right out to our private motocross course, where we would ride and jump until sunset.

A couple too many THEREs there

You got "i before e" right - now work on "must of" / "could of"

This worked great for a couple weeks. But one of our little brothers must of told our parents what we were doing, because one night after supper, when Brian came over on his bike, Mom stopped me and asked where we were going. I didn't think we were doing anything wrong so I said "We're going down the block to jump dirt bikes."

"Of" sounds right but it's a contraction - "must've" "could've" etc etc. And be glad you have outgrown spelling bees!!

"No, you are not," Mom said. "We talked wid Brian's parents about diss. You may ride da bikes but no jumping."

Nice approximation of your Mom's accent but I wonder if this explanation is necessary.

(Mom is from Quebec and says "wid" and "diss" and "da" for "with" and "this" and "the.")

*“anyway” --
no “s”
on the end!* For a couple nights we did all right. The course was fun anyways so we didn't even feel like we needed to jump. But then on Saturday, Mom and Dad went to a banquet in York, and Brian and I figured “When the cat's away, the mice can play.”

Unfortunately, the mice got caught. I tried to make a big jump but I lost control of my bike, flew over the handlebars and got knocked out. Brian's Mom ended up driving me to the emergency room and I had a concussion. I threw up twice and then had to get ten stitches: seven in my forehead and three under my lower lip that I bit through. *What about your lower lip that you DIDN'T bite through?*

I was scared that I would get in big trouble but Brian took charge of everything. First, he took off his t-shirt to help stop the bleeding. Then he walked me and my bike back to his house. He told his Mom (and then my Mom and Dad later) that we were out riding our bikes in the woods and he let a branch snap back, and it hit me in the face and knocked me off my bike, so it was all his fault. Mom and Dad believed it at first. But then Dad started looking at my bike and how bent the front wheel and handlebars were, and when he started asking

me questions, I couldn't lie.

Mom said "I am so disappointed in da two of you. First you do not listen when I say no jumping, and den Brian, you lie about it."

I yelled "Yeah, Brian! You lied about it!"

He got mad at me, and I got mad at him, and I told him it was all his fault, and we both got grounded and couldn't use our bikes for the rest of the summer. It all ended with us yelling something that I never would of thought we would yell: **AGH!!**

"I hate you, Brian!"

"I hate you too, Margo!"

Fourth grade started a few weeks later, and we were in the same class, and we even kept walking to and from school together, but we hated each other. I

This sentence is GREAT!

guess that we were so use to being friends that it didn't matter if we liked each other or not.

Another one that sounds different than it's spelled: "used to"

We kept on hating each other until October.

Our teacher, Miss Forbes, announced that we were having a spelling bee. As you know, I am not a very good speller. Back then, Brian wasn't, either. But guess who the last two contestants were? There we were, standing at the front of the room, staring and

I hadn't noticed!

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

glaring at each other while we waited for Miss Forbes to give us our words. Brian was first. Miss Forbes looked down at the white card in her hand, and then right at Brian.

"Believe," she said. "Believe."

Brian swallowed hard. I sighed a sigh of relief that the word was his and not mine. The "i before e" rule always confused me and it still does. I didn't know what my next word would be, but at least it wouldn't be that.

But Brian also looked confused. He took a breath.

"Believe," he repeated. "B-E-L-E-I-V-E. Believe."

I thought that was right, but Miss Forbes shook her head.

"No, Brian, I'm sorry," she said, and she looked at me. "Margo? Believe."

I knew that however he spelled it, he had the I and the E backwards, so all I had to do was flip them and I would win. I took a deep breath.

"Believe. B-E-L-I-E-V-E. Believe."

I won the spelling bee.

After school, Brian and I walked home from

school, the same way we always did. He didn't have much to say, but I sure did. I talked about my first place ribbon, and how pretty it was (purple with a bright gold sash), and how I couldn't wait to show it to Mom and Dad, and when they asked me what word I spelled to win, I'd tell them: "Believe."

"That's B-E-L-I-E-V-E," I said. "Believe. I before E, dodo!" and I gave Brian's arm a little shove.

Well, the next thing I knew, Brian shoved me back. He pushed me so hard I fell into the grass, and I jumped right back up and tackled him and punched his nose. He pushed me in the face and I grabbed his hair, and he punched me square in the mouth right where I'd gotten the stitches. I could taste blood. We each landed a couple more punches before our brothers pulled us apart, and as they walked away, we sat on the curb, bleeding and catching our breath.

"You punch hard, Margo," Brian said. "I saw stars."

"You should see stars for hitting a girl," I said.

"Well, you deserved it."

"How come? Just because you don't know how to

All of
this on
these
couple
pages is
PERFECT
Margo-
don't
change
a thing!

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

spell believe?"

"I know how to spell believe!" he said.

"Only because you heard me spell it right," I said.

"Well," he said, "the only reason you knew how to spell it right was because I spelled it wrong."

Great
dialogue
here and
throughout -
Knowing the
two of you,
I can see
this whole
scene
unfolding.
Great job!

"Was not!"

"Was too! You heard me spell it wrong and you knew that if you turned the I and E around, it'd be right and you'd win. That's the only reason you won."

I was smiling now. "Maybe."

"Maybe," he repeated. "You lie!" He sniffled.

"I just spelled it wrong on purpose anyway."

I laughed. "You did not!"

"Did too. I didn't want you to look dumb so I spelled it wrong."

I didn't know what to believe now. Part of me felt like Brian was just saying that to make me feel better. But as I looked at him sitting next to me sniffling with his bleeding nose, I felt so bad for him that I started crying too.

He put his arm around me. "I wish we were best

friends again."

"Me, too," I said, "even though you can't spell believe."

He sat up straight. "I can too spell believe!"

I looked right at him. "Spell it."

Brian closed his eyes like he was concentrating real hard. "Believe," he said. "B-E-L-E-E-E-V. Believe."

"Keep your eyes closed," I said, and I reached into my book bag.

"How come?" he said.

"Just keep your eyes closed and hold out your hand," I said, and as he held his hand out, I got my purple and gold first place ribbon and put it in his palm. He opened his eyes and looked down at it, then gave it back to me.

"Here, Margo," he said. "Congratulations."

We got up, and I gave him a Kleenex so he could wipe his bloody nose, and we walked home and told our parents (first mine, then his) the truth about what happened. Neither of us got in trouble.

The moral of the story isn't that you should always tell the truth. The moral of the story is that

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

*your best friends are always there for you, even
when you think you hate each other.*

*By the way, I never found out for sure whether
or not Brian spelled his word wrong on purpose or
not. But I know what I want to believe.*

Or is it "beleive"?

The End

*Margo, I am impressed. You started with a good story and a
good idea in your rough draft, and worked out the clanky bits
and made it SING - I am glad that you took my advice and
read it aloud (to Brian?) while you revised - the result is
something you should really be proud of.*

*Funny, fast paced and captures the feeling of being a kid
without being CUTESY.*

*Most of all, you succeed in getting your VOICE down on
paper.*

*The comments I made are so minor. This is a gem!
Congratulations!*

A

When I was little-- actually beyond: all the way through grade school right up till the day I left home for college-- I had a toy chest on the top shelf of my closet. Nothing fancy --just a red, white and yellow corrugated box

with a hinged top-- but it was probably the first thing I would have grabbed if I woke up in the middle of the night and smelled smoke. Not because of toys; I don't remember ever using it for toys (although there were baseball cards in the bottom). No; that toy chest was THE NOTE REPOSITORY: every note, letter and card that Margo (and others) passed to me from grade school through the summer after graduation.

Unlike a scrapbook, which required so much WORK, the toy chest was easy: at the end of each school day, I'd just empty out my pockets, notebooks, textbooks, school bag, whatever, and then lift the hinged lid open a crack and slip it all in. By the time I left for college, the box was so full that the top wouldn't even close, the sheaf inside nearly a foot thick, not just from notes, but from letters, postcards, birthday cards, Valentines and Christmas cards, school assignments, junk mail (don't ask), photos, receipts from shopping trips, football programs, newspaper and magazine clippings, church bulletins, comics, radio station hit surveys, complete copies of every school newspaper from seventh grade on, band sheet music and handouts, college acceptance (and rejection) letters, record store bags... it was, basically, a big looseleaf scrapbook. Anything I wanted to save that I didn't know where else to put went in the top of that box. And there it stayed, in roughly the order I stuck it in there. (In.)

Of course, since great minds think alike, Margo had her own toy chest in HER closet ("Not just 'a' toy chest, Bri; the *exact same* toy chest... that white box with the yellow and red circus design on the outside. Isn't that wild, that our parents got us the same toy chest before we even knew each other?") and she did what I did: at the end of each school day, all of her notes went in through the top of the box. Her *Brian And Margo Beat Each Other Up* essay was at the top ("I guess I must've dug it out sometime in college that I missed you or something") but the rest of it was like mine: in reverse chronological order, with the oldest items

at the bottom.*

At the bottom of *my* stack was the first note I ever got from Margo: second grade, December 1967. Mom and Dad and Danny and I went to dinner over at Margo's house, and as we were leaving, Margo slipped a construction paper envelope into my coat pocket. ("DON'T read it 'til you get home!") It was a homemade Christmas card: green construction paper cut in the shape of a pine tree, sprinkled with gold and silver stars and glitter tinsel ("Did you like the tinsel, Bri? What I did was, I put squiggles of glue on the tree and then I sprinkled glitter over it, and when it dried it looked like real tinsel!"), with Margo's writing on the back, in white chalk...



* Mostly. My thinking with the toy chest was "Out of sight, out of mind," but one of Margo's favorite phrases from high school was "Well, last night I went into my *archives* and did a little *research*..." Like the essay, a lot of notes and cards (most of them from me) were at the top of her stack.

Some of the notes have no context, and could have been written on any day... or *every* day... like this one (judging from its position near the top of my stack, probably from our senior year):

BRIAN!!!!!!
WAKE UP!!!!!!
Do you get this?
I don't get this.
I also don't get why it is so
IMPORTANT to know, except
for that it will be on one of his
"quizzles."
I also think we need to stop at
the snack bar on the way home
so you can get me ice cream! 😊
And now you can go back
to sleep! 😊 me!!!!

Funny how the notes now fit together in ways I didn't understand back then. It's like those two huge piles of papers are a physical representation of grade school and adolescence. Many of those small disparate pieces meant nothing to me as I collected them; I just knew I needed to save them. But now, looking not only at my whole stack, but at *both* stacks together, it all makes sense. Notes in one box match to replies in the other, and together they reconstruct whole dialogues from long-forgotten school days, dialogues that become part of a bigger story, the plotline of which I simply couldn't see back then because I was in the middle of it.

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

From near the bottom of Margo's stack, from me to her:

Margo-
This song IS kind of weird but I like it, don't you??
Marty's music is better than the stuff SHE plays.
Bri

And then, from near the bottom of MY stack, her reply:

Brian,
I always like Marty's records. Jill is the one who is just plain weird and mean. Plus she has a crush on
GAY DONNY OSMONT!!
who just wishes his gay brothers could sing half as good as the Beach Boys!!!
☺ Me!!

This was sixth grade, the first time either of us had any real contact with Marty Morone. Marty lived on the fringe of our neighborhood, so we both knew him, but he was always in another class, always on another Little

League team... until sixth grade, when we all had Mr. Lebo. Marty and I started out the year with our desks next to each other (somehow Margo and I always started out in assigned seats across the room from each other. It's almost like our former teachers *talked* or something...), and he seemed funny and smart, quiet, shy, if just a little too self-effacing. Nervous, like he was waiting for an insult.

I liked sitting next to Marty-- we got along well enough--but I missed sitting next to Margo, and so, two weeks into the school year, when Mr. Lebo finally decided he didn't need his seating chart anymore, "so I'll give you kids a few minutes to rearrange," I didn't even THINK of Marty: I spotted Margo across the room and starting sliding my desk toward hers. She was already moving toward me and we met in the middle, the metal sides of our desks clattering as they collided. "BAM! Bumper cars!" she chortled, and I laughed uncomfortably, looking out the corner of my eye at Mr. Lebo... but he was zoned in on his gradebook and his cup of coffee (I think if we'd had smartphones back then, he probably would have been checking *that*, too).

So once again, Margo and I were neighbors... but there are two sides to every desk, and as I sat down and settled in, I felt a tap on my left arm.

Marty.

"Mind if I sit next to you, Brian?" he said, his voice a little nervous, like we hadn't already hit it off the last nine school days, and his eyes not really meeting mine, but sort of trying to focus in on my collar.

"Yeah," I said, and Marty's face went white, like he was going to puke on my desk the way Jen Havens did in first grade.

Yeesh... the one person in the school who'd take "Yeah" to mean "Yeah, I mind, you suck, go away," and not "Yeah, fine, cool, go on ahead."

"I mean, no, no," I clarified. "No, I don't mind. Sure."

Marty's shoulders relaxed. "Sure," he repeated. "Thanks," and he slid his desk softly up against mine

--*thudclank!*-- and for the rest of the year, he was on my left and Margo was on my right.

Marty's big brother Davy later dated Christy Kelly's big sister Kathy, and was also the previous owner of the fort that Margo and I took over. The Morones were both music professors at the college --*Doctors of Music!* It sounded like a mystical title-- and he was the first kid I knew who was really into music and records. I don't mean "into music" like most kids our age (cardboard Monkees records cut from the back of the Honeycombs box); I mean "into music" like we all were later on, in junior high and high school. Margo and I each had a thumbtall stack of 45s (along with those crappy cereal box "records"), but Marty had *albums* --*Abbey Road* and *Farewell to the First Golden Era* and *Music From Big Pink*-- and while "Octopus's Garden" and "California Dreamin'" went over well enough in sixth grade music class, most of the kids we knew weren't *quite* ready for "Chest Fever." After he brought that one in, there were always a couple kids who'd roll their eyes whenever they saw that Marty had one of his Big Records.

The notes were from music class the afternoon that we moved our desks: that day, Marty brought in *Sunflower* by the Beach Boys and had Miss Kaufman play "Cool Cool Water," and as the group sang "water-water-water-water" and "oom-mow mow mow mow mow" over the spacey instrumental track, Jill Rice sat back in her seat, arms folded.

"That's just *weird*," she whined. "Your music's *weird*, Marty."

I thought Marty was gonna cry.

But when music was over and Miss Kaufman wheeled her metal cart out of the classroom, Margo unwittingly jumped in with the save.

"I *love* the Beach Boys, Marty!" she said over me. "Can I see that album?"

Marty slid the record across my desk to her.

"Wow!" Margo said as she examined the cover, front and back, and then opened the inside and scanned the

group photos in the middle, focusing first on Dennis Wilson, then on brother Brian in his Good Humor getup. She shut the cover and read the title aloud, committing it to memory --“*Sunflower*”-- before she slid it back over... then, a few moments later, out of the corner of my eye, I could see her scribbling... then I felt her tapping my right arm.

"Little records are 43, right?" she whispered.

"No... 45," I whispered back.

"Forty-five," she repeated, and she crossed out, scribbled a little more, then tapped my right arm again with a tiny, folded note.

"Give this to Marty."

Didn't even look at it... just passed it along... then, a couple seconds later, from my left, Marty tapping my arm.

"Pssst... Brian!"

Dear Marty,
I love your music. Are any of
those songs on ~~43s??~~ 45s???
Write back.

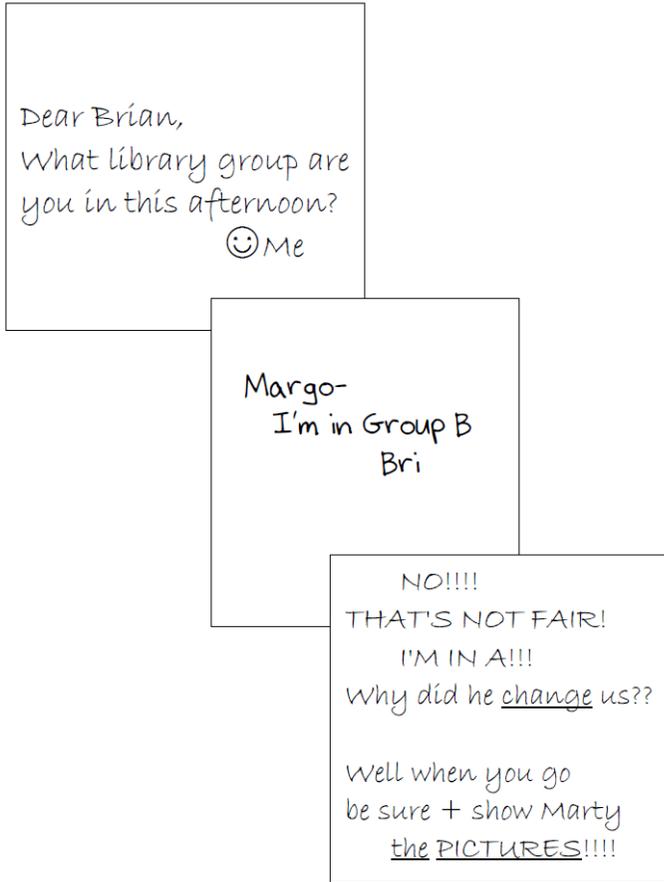
☺Margo

Dear Margo,
A couple are on 45s. I think.
I'm not sure. They weren't hits
though. Marty

Thats ok. It's the Beach Boys
so to me they are ALL hits!!!!

Funny; for as much as Marty liked Margo, you would have thought he would have kept that note and framed it, but at the end of the day, when I was getting my books together to go home, it was on the linoleum floor under his desk, so I snatched it up and stuck it in my pocket... and into the toy chest it went.

Fifteen



The pictures... yeah... like any twelve-year-old boy worth his pending membership in the fraternity of men, I'd discovered TOPLESS PHOTOS OF NATIVE GIRLS in **National Geographic**.

Unlike most twelve-year-old boys, though, I found them via Margo.

"Holy *smokes*, Bri! Take a look at *these!*" she sputtered during one library period, shoving a tattered but intact **National Geographic** in my face, and from that

library period on, we spent every half hour rifling through the Princeton Files of back issues, looking for Booby Pictures (instead of working on our assignments, which, after the fifth straight session, prompted the young, we-thought-she-was-cool librarian Miss Keer to talk to Mr. Lebo, which in turn prompted Mr. Lebo to switch Margo from group B to group A). I think Margo and I may have found every Booby Picture in every issue that **National Geographic** published between 1960 and 1971. (1960 was the cutoff, the first Princeton file on the top shelf in the section that was hidden from Miss Keer's desk. She could see 1959 and before, so no way was either of us going to go around to the other side of the shelf and try to snag any of those.)

("That's O.K.," I said. "Those ones on the other side are old anyway.")

("Yeah," Margo said. "Who wants old boobies?")

We really didn't have too much to say about those pictures except "Uh-huh-huh-huh" and "Heh-heh-heh-heh" and "He-he-he-he-he"... lots of giggling and snickering and gasping and the occasional "Wow... LOOK at those!" The one comment I remember most clearly, unfortunately, was Margo's about a picture of a young naked mother holding a naked baby in her naked arms, the tips of her naked pendulous breasts almost below her naked rib cage. "Whoa!" Margo whispered as she handed the magazine to me. "Here's some hangers!" And as I Perused The Artwork, Margo added "Mom's look like that, kind of."

I pushed that remark from my mind until later in the afternoon, when Margo and I went back to her house for a snack, and as we sat at the LeDoux's kitchen table eating fresh baked apple pie from Distelfink, Mrs. LeDoux buzzed around the kitchen counter and sink and table, picking up and putting away... dressed in a pair of cut-off denim shorts and a bust-accentuating flannel shirt, tied in a knot at the waist, exposing her belly. As she flitted from table to sink to counter to trash can to fridge to sink to table, Margo's words came back to me, and I found myself

entranced...

Did they look like that? They *kind of* looked like they *might* look like that...

I was trying not to stare ("Girls don't like that, Bri. Don't forget it.") but I felt like I had to look... finally, when Mrs. LeDoux took a breath and leaned against the counter, brushing her brown hair off her forehead as she inhaled deeply... chest *expanding*... and then, exhaling, asked me if I wanted another piece of apple pie, Margo spat out a chuckle next to me.

"Yeah, Mom," she tittered, "with *two big scoops* of ice cream!"

I wanted to kick Margo under the table, but I'd been nabbed-- that'd be bad form. I just kept my mouth shut as Mrs. LeDoux adjusted her top. "Two big scoops," she said, oblivious. "Non, I do not tink so," and she mussed my hair and kissed the top of Margo's head before she sashayed out of the kitchen.

Margo sat back, smirking. "Sorry, Bri," she said as she shovelled a forkful of pie into her mouth. "No big scoops for you."

Sixteen

So what kind do you like,
Brian? Speaking as a boy.

Hanging
or
standing?

Pointed
or
bouncy?

I don't remember if I ever answered that question, since doing so may have incriminated me, but... there was one girl who (whose) I couldn't stop thinking about. In one of the recent issues, there were pictures of a group of tribal schoolgirls, all barechested (but of course); a few of them were older than Margo and me (and therefore Fully Developed), but almost lost in the group was a girl whose eyes and smile somehow reminded me of Margo. She appeared in two pictures: in the two-page group spread, she stood among her classmates, eyes sparkling, chest flat like a boy's (like Margo's). Of course, I had to flip further back into the magazine to see if there were any *more...* and five pages later, there she was again, in profile this time, her nipples hard, like it was cold. More than "hard;" they were puffy, swollen, almost... like soon she'd be as big as some of her classmates.

I wouldn't have admitted it back then, but at age twelve, that picture made me feel the same way I used to feel when I'd see Christy walking into the pool barefoot, pulling her suit down in the back... like I felt when we stripped, spun and ran. Like I was seeing something I wanted to see, *needed* to see, but maybe *shouldn't...*

I liked that picture, but then, I pretty much liked them all. At that age, I couldn't get enough, couldn't see enough, and it didn't matter to me if they were hanging, standing, bouncy, firm, big, small... as long as I could look at them, I was fine.

I thought...

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Margo-

It is so HOT out. It's almost like summer. But I guess it IS baseball season.

I think we should go work on our fort after school.

What about you?

Bri

Dear Brian,

I think that that is a good idea. I am too hot too + I wish we lived in a CITY+ not in hick QUAKER VALLEY where the schools are not even AIR CONDITIONED. I cannot WAIT to get back outside + take my shirt off!!

I would take it off at recess but I wouldn't want to "offend da english!!!!"

☺ Me!!

"What's 'offend the English?'" I asked Margo as we biked down the block toward our fort that April after-school afternoon. We were right on schedule with our plans: bike home (done), change into real clothes (done), meet at Margo's for a snack (done), get a rake and garden stuff from her shed (done), and now, saddle up and ride to our fort.

"Oh, 'offend da English,'" Margo said in her Mom's voice. "Just... Quebec, you know? They have all this *attitude* about people who don't speak French. Mom says it mainly just to bug Dad."

We skidded to a stop at the dead-end near the entrance to our fort tunnel and let our bikes fall under us

in the shin-high straw-colored weeds.* There was a big brown puddle of muddy washoff that was blocking the overgrown mouth of our tunnel. "Guess we have to go *around*," Margo said, and I led us around the edge of the puddle, then we hiked together along the tall budding hedgerow to the barely noticeable fencebreak that marked the side door to our fort. We slid between the same fencerails that Christy and I had slipped through, under our (still intact) treehouse-- me first, then Margo-- and we inspected the damage. Same as every other spring: a carpet of leaves from the fall (the top layer loose and dry; the layers underneath matted and wet); scattered loose sticks and branches (with at least one big limb that had to be picked up and moved out of the way); and evidence of Big Kid Interloper Activity: a couple Pepsi bottles (didn't they want the deposit back?) and a foil-lined, white-and-red broasted chicken bag from Glenn's. "Trash," Margo huffed, and she kicked the bag toward the fallen archway that was once, for a few days, the entrance to Christy's room. Through the barren vines and limbs, I could still see a couple squares of moldy, dirty old shag rug under the leaves.

Wow... too bad it wasn't all twigs like this when Christy and me--

"You think Christy still comes back here, Bri?"

I took one last glance into the overgrown room. "Doesn't look like it," I said.

"Well, not in *winter*, anyway," Margo said. I don't know how I knew that she was taking her shirt off, but somehow I knew. "I wouldn't *mind* if she came back here," she continued as I stooped down to pick up a branch. "I mean, I don't *hate* her. I don't know *why* she doesn't like *me*, you know? What'd I ever do to *her*?" Her voice was a little muffled, and as I turned to face her, she had her shirt pulled up over her head, the fabric tight against her face

* It was a farmer's field, so those weeds might actually have BEEN straw, for all I know...

like a mask: dimpled and shadowed at her mouth and then bumped out at her nose and brow and chin. Her bare belly and chest were alabaster white from a winter indoors ("I hope I don't become a *gym rat* like Dad, Bri!"), the muscles in her ribcage taut and her skin just a little goosepimple from the cold. She pulled her shirt all the way up over her head and let her long honey colored hair fall down. "Free!" she exhaled, and she threw her head back slightly, flipping her sheet of hair back over her shoulders with her hands, then grabbed the rake and started sweeping the leaves from the center of our fort.

As soon as I took my t-shirt off, I wished I hadn't. The April sun may have felt hot coming through the big windows in Mr. Lebo's room (and outside at recess), but back in our fort, under cover of brush, it simply wasn't penetrating. I wanted to feel exhilarated like Margo ("Free!"), but I was just plain cold, my nipples hard like they were when I got out of the pool on an overcast day.

I watched Margo as she leaned forward with the rake. Her arms were kind of blocking a side view of her chest, but as she reached forward, I caught glimpses.... and her nipples were hard, too, but not like mine... they looked puffy, swollen... *pointed*, almost --

"What, Bri?"

I looked up at Margo's face, thinking she'd caught me staring, but she was focused on her raking. She stopped for a second and looked at *my* nipples.

"You cold?" she snickered.

"A little," I said weakly, my face turning red.

I was expecting further smartassed commentary, but Margo just looked down at the leaves and kept raking. "Yeah, me too," she said. "It's just... you know... you *gotta* take your shirt off. But yeah, I'm cold too."

"I know," I said, watching as she raked the leaves toward herself... and I thought of that picture... and that native girl's eyes... her eyes, and smile... and chest--

"You *know*?" Margo repeated, like it didn't register, but then she looked up and our eyes met, and *that* was

when it registered. Her face turned bright red and mine got hotter than hot, and we both looked down, but before I could stammer an excuse, apology, or joke, she scooped up a rakeful of leaves and flipped them at me. "You *know*," she repeated as the clump of leaves hit the cuffs of my jeans and my Keds, and she continued raking... and I kept clearing brush... and even though Margo kept her shirt off the rest of the time we were out there, I kind of felt like she was doing her best to rake with her back turned to me...

...or, maybe more accurately, with her front turned *away* from me.

Seventeen

Dear Brian,

You still have not explained to me what is archeology camp? Where did you find out about it? And will you just be there while I am in Canada or will you still be there when I get back?

😊Me!!

P.S. Just write back on this page but be subtle.
He is watching.

Dear Margo-

It is a camp where you do archaeology. Mom + Dad found out about it at church. (It's a church camp.) And it goes two weeks, the second week you are in Canada and then the week after that. So I will be up there the first week you get back.

Bri

Awww! No! I will miss you! What will I do that week? I don't mind if you are bored (OVER)

when I am gone but I do not want to be bored
waiting for you!! 😊

P.S. What does archeology have to do with
church? Do you pray that you find things?

I don't know. I guess. I hope it's not a lot of
praying and reading the bible.

Anyway, I will miss you too. But I guess the
first week you're gone I will probably do things
with Marty.

You two can go to the pool! He swims right?

I don't know.

Well he is 18 inches
(45.75 cm metric system 😊)
to your left. Why not ASK???

O.K. I did. He does.

Good. 😊

I was kidding + would NOT want you
to be bored!

But I WILL miss you!!

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

If nothing else, that dual author note explained why this, of all things, was in my box and not Margo's (or Margo's brother's):

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 0468 | QUAKER VALLEY SWIM CLUB Youth membership card |
| Name: | <u>John Paul Le Doux</u> |
| Child of: | <u>Thomas Le Doux</u> & Francios |
| VALID ONLY SUMMER 19 <u>72</u> | |
| _____ | _____ |
| PARENT'S SIGNATURE | CHILD'S SIGNATURE |

When sixth grade ended and it was time for Margo and her family to travel north for their annual summer vacation (at her Grandma LeDoux's cottage on Lake Opinicon in Ontario), I was ready in two ways. The first was that Mom and Dad had signed me up for Archaeology camp: two weeks at an actual working dig at Camp Sequanota, a Lutheran camp in the western part of the state. That started the second Sunday that Margo was gone. But even that first week wouldn't be a wash: I had Marty to do stuff with. I didn't know what that "stuff" would be, but the day before Margo left, she asked me what, if anything, I'd be doing while she was in Canada, and I said "Go to the pool. Remember?"

"Oh, yeah, that's right." The silence on the phone told me that she'd spotted a hole in my plan. I could almost picture her standing in their kitchen, biting her lower lip.

In fact, if I stood at the kitchen window, I could see her standing there, leaning against their counter.

"Does he have a card?" she said after a couple seconds.

"I don't know," I said. Come to think of it, I'd never

seen Marty or any of his brothers or his parents at the pool. "Well," I said, "we'll think of something."

Fifteen minutes after we hung up, Margo was knocking at the back door.

"Here, Bri," she said, holding out her little brother's swim club card.

"What's this?" I said as I examined it, awaiting Margo's "Doyeeeeee" as soon as the words left my lips, because I could see plainly what it was.

"What's it *look* like?" Margo said. "You said you and Marty wanted to go to the pool, right?"

Uhhhhh...

Margo tsked. "Just give it to Marty. Mom says he can have it. Jompaw never uses it. He hates swimming in pools."

I looked at the card again. There was no signature on it, but still...

"God, Margo... is Marty allowed--"

--Another TSK! and *sigh!* "Brian, Mom wouldn't *give* it to you if it wasn't O.K." She closed my fingers around it. "All right?"

It was all right with me.

"Thanks, Margo."

"No problem."

Margo left early Monday, and I didn't waste any time: right after breakfast I called Marty and asked him if he wanted to bike out to the pool with me after lunch. I guess he just figured that I had a guest card, but when we parked our bikes in the bike rack out in the pool parking lot and I handed him Jompaw's card, he nearly had an aneurysm.

"Brian, I can't use this!" he shrieked.

I tried to keep my voice calm. "Margo's Mom said it's O.K.--"

--"But it's not my card--"

--"Marty..." I lowered my voice. Maybe Marty wanted everyone at the swim club to know that it wasn't his card, but, silly me, I still sort of figured we could pull this off. "Margo's Mom said it's O.K.," I repeated quietly. "Don't say

anything, you know? Just... hand it to them at the desk and sign his name--"

--Brian, I'm not John-Paul LeDoux--"

--Yes, you *are*. All right?"

Marty thought about this for a second.

"All right," he said, and we walked to the front desk.

I don't know what Marty meant by *All right*; I just figured he meant *Fine. I'm in. Cool*.

We stepped up to the desk and gave the girl our cards and signed in, and I thought that was it...

...but from the moment we walked away from the desk, Marty was fretting, looking over his shoulder.

"Brian, is the 'D' in 'LeDoux' capitalized?"

"Yeah."

Marty "phewed."

Then, a few steps later:

"Does he put a dash between 'John' and 'Paul?'"

"I don't know."

And that was just the beginning:

"Brian, what if someone calls me Marty?"

And...

"Brian, the lifeguard keeps looking at me."

And...

"Be sure you call me John-Paul if we go up to get something to eat, Bri."

And, finally...

"You think they'll call Margo's mom and ask her about this... you know, is your son home?"

Is your son home?

"There won't be *anyone* home," I said.

Marty got the puke-on-the-desk look on his face again.

"So they'll know that John-Paul's on vacation," he said.

It was clear to me, after just 35 minutes of this, that John-Paul Martin Morone LeDoux simply could not relax and go along with the game and splash in the pool or sit in the sun, and before the first adult swim (2:00 pm) we were

back on our bikes, riding home. There it was, midday, blazing hot --prime pool weather-- and we were riding away.

On the first day of three Margo-less weeks.

It looked like it was going to be a long summer.

Eighteen

RIDEAU CANAL - A placid summer scene along the Rideau Canal in Westport, Ontario.

CONTINUED FROM FIRST CARD

which is SO sexy but you probably would not care about that! OH!

Here's some news: I am going to Y camp the week after we come back, so at least I will not be bored mope-ing around widout you. (Can you guess who's idea THAT was?)

But I will still be back on the Sun-day AFTER you get back from archeology camp. I MISS YOU!!

Mom Dad and Jompaw say Hi and I say BYE!!!! 😊 Margo!!



TO:

Brian Pressley
304 Reynolds Lane
Quaker Valley PA

17399

UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA
(USA)

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

LAKE OPINICON - One of the beautiful lakes in the scenic and historic Rideau Waterway, Ontario.

Dear Brian,

Well I am having fun up here as usual. Great to see Grandma LeDoux and go swimming-boat-ing etc etc. Hope you are having fun with Marty + at your 1st week of archeology camp. We went to MONTREAL yesterday where I got a new Beach Boys ~~45~~ 45. "You Need A Mess Of Help To Stand Alone" and the other side "Cuddle Up" by Denny
CONTINUED ON NEXT CARD



TO:

Brian Pressley
304 Reynolds Lane
Quaker Valley PA
17399
U.S.A.
UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

Margo mailed both cards together, but I didn't get the first card till the end of the following week, when Mom and Dad forwarded my mail to me at camp, so for two weeks I was wondering what was "SO sexy" that I "probably would not care about," then wondering how that message got past not one, but two sets of censors (parents and church camp).

At least I used an envelope for my response...

Camp Sequanota
June 25, 1972

Dear Margo,

Well, I am here at Archaeology Camp. I am an Arky. I left the second Sunday you were gone and will be back on Saturday.

The camp is Camp Sequanota in Somerset County. It is WAY west on the turnpike, a long drive plus an hour from the exit. I think that they put it out so far so that we have NO CHANCE OF ESCAPING!!!!!!!!!!!!

Seriously, it is fun. Not much bible reading or anything like that or any praying that we find things. It is a lot of work. It sounds like archaeology would be fun but it is mostly boring. You can't dig because you have to be careful not to disturb things and do everything layer by layer, write down where everything was and where you found it, how deep

down it was and what square it was in (they put rope out in a checkerboard and number the squares like graph paper so you can put it on a map). We don't have shovels but use little trowls like for a garden. And everything has to be cataloged with the site number (36-SO-47) and the date. Sometimes really little. And then it gets sent off to the museum in Pittsburgh.

Anyway it is almost suppertime and also I am running out of space but the best part is that now I know how to do archaeology, so maybe when I get back, we can go out to our fort and SEE WHAT WE CAN DIG UP!!! ha ha.

So get ready to do some archaeology!

I miss you and I will see you on Sunday.

Yours truly,

Bri

P.S. Thank you for the postcards!

Nineteen



The Monday morning after we both got back was Dig Day: before 8 am, Margo and I were on our bikes, pedaling down Chamberlain Road toward our fort, armed with my expertise, plus garden spades and trowels, a dustpan and brush, an old toothbrush (for fine-cleaning), and a cooler of Margo’s Mom’s sun tea (mint), to conduct our Research. We figured it didn’t matter *where* we dug: we were just ten miles from Gettysburg. Rebel soldiers had marched through, camped, drilled, bivoacked (whatever that meant) in and around town. So there had to be artifacts *everywhere*, right? We just had to uncover them.

“Maybe we’ll find a *rifle*,” Margo said as we biked out to our site.

“Or a canteen!” I said.

“Or a SKELETON!”

We threw our bikes down at the dead end and raced each other back to the side entrance of our fort. (We had too many Archaeological Implements to crawl through the tunnel.) Margo wanted to start DIGGING right away, but I had to slow her down and explain the process first: scrape (not dig; never dig) the strata (new word) of dirt carefully (always carefully), and if we found any Civil War relics, we’d take them home and catalogue them. (A Civil War relic, we sort of agreed, was any item made of bone or metal, or that

looked like it could be leather or cloth, or that was made of wood but was obviously not a stick, branch or twig, or... uhhhh... any item that was otherwise unrecognizable.)*

We started scraping while Margo's candy-apple red toot-a-loop radio played (WQGB; that close to the transmitter, it was tough to tune in anything else) and she talked about camp ("I was at Camp Thompson, way out in the mountains. Why do they always stick these things out in the middle of nowhere? I swear it's like you said, so we can't escape."), and even though it was early and we were in the shade and we had iced tea and we were only scraping, still, I was so hot and sweaty that I had to take my shirt off. I tossed it over onto the fenceraill that defined the outside wall of our fort. Margo kept scraping like she didn't notice, but I could see that her shirt was damp, too.

"Aren't you hot?" I asked.

Margo sighed. "Yeah... I guess," and she sat up straight and reached down for the tails of her t-shirt.

And that was when I made my first important discovery of the day.

It's not that I wasn't used to seeing Margo topless. Any time we were outside and it was over 58 degrees and sunny**, she'd pull off her shirt as soon as we'd ridden our bikes far enough away from her house that her mom couldn't see her. Not that Mrs. LeDoux would have minded: "I think if we had a tall enough hedge, Mom would be going around topless herself," Margo said.

Until that April after-school afternoon when Margo caught me looking at her bare chest while she raked, I

* It seemed to me at the time that we did more cataloging at archaeology camp than actual digging. Every glass chip, pottery shard, rusty metal fragment and moldy wood hunk had to have the site's PASS (Pennsylvania Archaeological Site Survey) number written on it: a stripe of white-out in an inconspicuous spot, then careful etching of the number with an indelible marker. My 36-SO-47 is probably still on dozens of artifacts in some museum drawer (or on some flea market table) out in western Pennsylvania.

** "Or 14.4444444 repeating celcius, Bri."

never thought anything of it: at ages 8, 9, 10, 11, we both looked the same up top. Unfortunately, though, when there was finally something for me to notice, I not only noticed, but Margo *noticed* me noticing. So the morning of our dig, I felt myself getting a little nervous as Margo tugged at her t-shirttails and pulled her shirt over her head to reveal...

...a black bikini top?

"Why are you wearing a bathing suit?" I said.

Margo TSK'd like she did when she gave me The Talk... except this time, her face was a little red, and she wasn't looking me in the eye. "It's not a *bathing suit*," she said. "It's a training bra."

Oh.

I stared at the wrinkly cups of black satiny fabric covering Margo's (almost) flat chest.

Oh!

"Training bra?" I said.

"Yeah," Margo continued as she tossed her shirt onto the fencerrail. It wrapped around the weathered wood, hanging limp next to mine. She took a breath. "Grandma LeDoux gave it to me in Canada. She said it means that bigger and better things are on the way." She pulled the flat elastic cups out away from her chest with her fingertips and then let them SNAP back as our eyes finally met. "Cool, huh?" she said, and I could tell that, for as red as her face was, she was also more than a little bit proud.

"Yeah," I said...

...still... *trying*... *not*... *to*... *stare*--

"You wish you had one, don't you?" Margo said.

I tsked.

"I do not!" I said.

(I kind of wished I did.)

We went back to our dig, and as we scraped and brushed and (sorry; got carried away) dug, and the radio played, I felt like there was something in the air, and it wasn't the fabric between Margo's bare chest and my eyes. No... I felt like she wanted to tell me something... like maybe she wanted me to draw her out...

Silence.

Had to say *something*...

"So what was your camp like?" I said at last.

"Ohhh, out in the middle of nowhere," Margo said, and I was about to say *Well, thanks for the info. Anything else?* but Margo giggled. "I already said that, didn't I?" She scraped at a spot, like she was onto something. "No, it was fun, mostly. Camp stuff, you know? The same old thing: all the stuff they plan, like dumb crafts and campfires with ghost stories and dumb songs, that was the stupid part. And just going out on our own, you know... swimming, playing ball, stuff like that... *that* was the fun part."

I nodded my head. "Yeah," I said, "same here." As I scraped, I thought of the dig at Camp Sequanota, kneeling in the slightly sandy, damp dirt next to Larry and Ted and John. "Except we had archaeology," I said. "That was kind of fun."

"Archaeology," Margo repeated. "I wish *we'd* had archaeology..." Scrape scrape scrape scrape. "Plus it was all *girls*. You know? I mean, they were nice and all... and it was fun talking after lights out and all. But they bailed every time I threw a curve ball. Except Tara." She looked at me like she needed to clarify. "Tara Longbaugh? Remember her?"

I nodded. From our third grade class... or was it fourth?

Margo barely took a breath. "She was there. Tara... in my cabin. We had a great cabin. It was me and Tara... and Daralee... Daralee Holbert... Jill Rice... Leanna Miller..." She looked down as she scraped. "...Christy Kelly."

Gah! The name made me both tense up and perk up.

By reflex, I glanced out at the rows of head-high corn.

"Christy?" I said, trying to sound all nonchalant.

Margo nodded. "Yeah. She was all right. Didn't say much to me. I don't know what I expected... just..." Margo sighed. "She acted *weird*, you know? Like... embarrassed or something. I mean, I don't know... I tried to be nice and all,

but--" She stopped scraping for a second, and then stuck the pointed end of the trowel down into the dirt and pried out a flat stone about as long and as wide as her thumb. It was pinkish yellow with a jagged edge. "Is this anything, you think?" she said, handing it to me.

I examined it, although I could tell I really didn't need to. "Nahhh," I said, handing it back to her. "Just a rock."

"A rock," Margo muttered. "I got a *rock*..." She tossed the stone in a pop-fly arc over the fence; it threaded the needle through the overhanging limbs and leaves and landed about thirty feet out in the corn. She put her hands on her hips and thrust her flat chest out, then sighed deep and loud, the right side of her lip curling up like Elvis. "I don't want *rocks*," she moaned. "I want *things*."

On the radio, "A Horse With No Name" was playing, and I swear to God, just as the words *I want things* left Margo's lips, America's lead singer sang...

There were plants and birds and rocks and things

"Shut up," Margo said, and she picked her trowel back up. "You know..." she continued, "it's like..." She was scraping again, but I could tell from the way she was biting her lower lip (right under where she'd curled it a few seconds before) that she wasn't thinking about archaeology. "Christy Kelly is so pretty. With that brown hair, and that smile. *When* she smiles. There's just something *nice* about her. You know?" I knew. Margo sighed. "But I don't know. All week... she was just so *quiet*. You know? Like... standing off while all the rest of us were having fun. The only time she ever *did* anything with any of us was when we went swimming. And then she kicked our butts. She's a good swimmer." Sigh. "But sometimes I'd look at her and she just looked *sad*. Sad, and, like, *angry* that she wasn't involved. When all she had to do was *get* involved. You know?" Another sigh. "Tara said maybe she's just stuck up because her dad's a senator, but I don't know. She just acts like

she's *scared* or something."

"A Horse With No Name" had faded out into the WQGB jingle, which then faded into the opening of "Love The One You're With." Margo laughed.

"What?" I said.

"Oh, just... this record. Christy... the last night, they had some dance. Like girls are going to want to dance with *girls*. And we all stood around and drank punch, but then we went back to our cabin. Well, Christy had a stack of records and this little portable record player. With batteries, you know? From Radio Shack. Not all expensive like you'd think she'd have, just... cool. So we all shined our flashlights down like it was a dancefloor, and we listened to records... and she had this song, but by some other group. Not this guy, but someone else. And it was so good. But Daralee and Leanna were, like, 'This isn't the *hit*.' And so Christy took it off." Scrape scrape scrape. "It just made me feel bad, you know? Because it was so much better than this one." She glanced over at the radio, like maybe her Tootalooop had a transmitter to Stephen Stills' house implanted in it. "Not *way* better," she said, "just... different. You know? Like... soul music. I wrote down what it was. Some brothers. Not the Jackson Five. It had an orange label." She smiled. "A forty-three..." and I smiled back. Margo sighed. "But, you know, there she was, playing a song that she liked, and they're making fun of it, Leanna and Daralee, because it wasn't 'the hit.'" Margo put her hands up in the air like she was putting pretend quotation marks around the words. "And I don't know... I just thought of how bummed out Marty Morone got last year when Jill said his music was weird. And I just felt bad for Christy." She brushed her hair back. "So I said 'Well, I think it's *better* than the hit.' And Christy just kind of looked at me."

"Like you were just saying it to make her feel better?"

"No, like she was *scared*, like I said. I don't know. I *meant* it. It's just..." She brushed her hair back and took a breath, then exhaled hard. "And then... the next morning at breakfast, there she was, standing off again. And that was

when Tara said what she said, you know, about Christy being all stuck up because of her dad. But I just remember that look. Scared. Sad. And then that afternoon we all went home. So I didn't get to talk to her about it." She laughed once. "Not that she *would* have." She pried a dirt-encrusted stick up out of the ground, examined it, and then tossed it through the fence, then sat back and put her hands on her hips. "You know what? Too... much... mint... tea..." and she mimicked punching herself in the temple as she got up and stepped back through the fallen-down archway into Christy's abandoned room... rustle... rustle... "It just made me sad," she said. "I tried to be nice and she just acted all *weird*. Did Christy... did she ever..." *WHHOOSSSSSHHHH!* "Crap!"

I laughed. "Did she ever crap?"

Margo laughed. "No, dodo... I just... eww..."

"What?" I said.

"Oh, I... *gross!*" I could hear more rustling. "You're lucky you can *aim*, Bri. I just... kinda... peed on my foot. And here I am wearing flipflops. *Gross!*" More rustling around, like she was wiping her foot on the leaves back in there. "Anyway," she said as she stepped out into our room, "did Christy ever do that to you?"

Well, *that* question certainly caught me offguard. My face got magma hot, so I knew it was bright red; meanwhile, Margo was looking right at me, but no way was I going to look right at *her*. I glanced out into the cornfield, approximately at The Spot, and laughed like I was trying to sound comfortable, which meant I sounded totally *uncomfortable*.

"Christy never peed on my foot," I said weakly.

Margo tsked. "No, dingdong. I mean, did she ever get all weird with you."

Oh.

Yeah.

Right.

Margo was laughing, shaking her head. "Christy never peed on my foot," she said, mocking me. "Why would

I think Christy peed on your foot? Unless you were back here having a *pee party* that summer." Now I was looking down at the dirt, scraping, scraping, scraping, face erupting with blush. "No," she continued as she squatted back down next to me, "I mean did she ever get all weird with you." I looked up at her and she was looking down, scraping. "But I guess that's kind of a stupid question. I mean, *you* don't see her any more than *I* do, right?"

"Just that one summer she had her room back here," I said. Pause, for maximum effect. "When we had our pee party."

Margo laughed. "'Pee party.' You're a dodo."

We scraped a little more as the radio played "Rescue Me."

"You know," Margo said, "one night after lights out we were all talking, you know, about... boys..." She took a breath, then exhaled. "Anyway... I was saying about how you were my best friend... and I was telling them about how I took my shirt off around you, and Daralee said 'Didn't you feel funny that he saw your chest?' And I said 'No. He's *Brian*. He's allowed.'" I smiled. "And Christy goes '*I'd* never let some boy see *my* chest...'"

No, I thought. *Just everything else.*

Margo continued. "...and I said, 'Brian's not 'some boy.' He's my best friend. He's like my brother, but better.' And Christy said 'Well, I wouldn't let my *brother* see my chest either.'" She looked down. "But *I* don't know... I don't feel weird when I'm with you. I just feel like it's *you*. You know?" She had stopped scraping, but I could tell she was getting at something. "Even though..." She was talking softer now. "I've *seen* you looking... that one afternoon we came out here... and then today..."

Shit.

I felt a little embarrassed. It was one thing to feel like she noticed. It was another thing to hear her acknowledge it.

"Sorry," I said.

"No, no," Margo said, sitting back a little, brushing

her hair back over her shoulders. "I mean, *I* want to look too. And I don't want you to feel funny, but... part of me feels like if I can't look at *you*... who can I *look* at? You know?" She looked up at me. "That's not weird, is it?"

Our eyes met, and I felt a little bit of that same feeling I felt on the first day of second grade, when I walked into Miss Peterson's classroom and saw Margo for the first time... except that it didn't feel like the first time.

I smiled. "I hope not," I said.

Margo smiled back. "Me too."

We scraped quietly as the song ended... song, then a jingle, and then, commercials:

This is Senator Thomas J. Kelly, with a word about Fourth of July fireworks safety...

I was about to say how cool it was that Christy's (I mean, Steve's) dad was on the radio, but Margo cut me off with a huff. "Fireworks safety," she muttered. "Ridiculous. *He's* the one who brings back all the illegal firecrackers from Maryland for Steve and Tom and them. Besides, Fourth of July was *last* week. You know?" She sat up straight. "And you know what else?"

"What?" I said.

Margo sat up straight, chest out. "This stupid thing is *hot*, and I'm flat anyway." She reached behind her back and unsnapped the clasp of her training bra, pulled it off her left shoulder, then her right shoulder, and tossed it over onto the fence. It hit our t-shirts and then fell down to the ground. "*Don't* stare," she said, and she bent over and went back to scraping.

I didn't stare... I just sat up and leaned past Margo --"What, Bri? What?"-- and snatched her bra up off the ground, and as she watched me, I stuck my left arm, then my right arm through the straps, and pulled it onto my chest.

"Don't *you* stare either," I said, and I continued scraping.

And for the rest of the morning, till we put our shirts back on and rode in for lunch, neither one of us gave the

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

other's chest a second look.

And I swear that was the last time I ever wished I could wear a bra.

Twenty

July 6, 1972

Dear Parent,

Enclosed is your child's seventh grade schedule and academic year calendar for the fall 1972 term at Quaker Valley Junior High School.

The transition from elementary school to junior high can be daunting and disorienting for even the best pupils. Earlier start time, switching classrooms for subjects, meeting students from other elementary schools, and the six-day class cycle are all significant changes that are part of the daily junior high school experience.

We hope that you and your child will attend one of the upcoming orientation sessions in early August. Information on dates, times and locations for these sessions will appear in the Quaker Valley REPORTER, the Hanover EVENING SUN, and the Gettysburg TIMES. We will also mail reminders under separate cover when the session dates are finalized.

In the meantime, we welcome your child to Quaker Valley Junior High School, and look forward to a fruitful year of learning.

Sincerely,

Dick Smiley
Principal

I couldn't even laugh at the guy's name.

Really, while Margo and I were out there scraping, the last thing on our minds was having a "fruitful year of learning." Granted, archaeology was an Advanced Scientific Discipline, but in mid-July, back in our fort, it didn't feel that way. It was just adventure, fun. School was six weeks away, light years distant*.

But somehow even the thought of the pending school year has the power to ruin an otherwise perfect summer day. That was what happened later that afternoon, when we rode back to Margo's house and tramped into her kitchen for a glass of lemonade. School was waiting for us on her kitchen table, and Mrs. LeDoux pointed to it, just in case we missed it.

"Your schedule came, Marguerite," she said.

"Schedule?"

"Of da classes," Mrs. LeDoux said. "For sevent grade."

There was an official-looking, business-sized envelope at Margo's place, the flap ragged from being torn open sans letter opener. *Quaker Valley School District*, the return address read, with PARENTS OF MARGUERITE LE DOUX 305 CHAMBERLAIN DRIVE QUAKER VALLEY PA 17399 written in blue ink on the front.

Margo picked it up warily, and before she even opened it, she looked over at me. "You think you got yours too?"

I rode my bike home through the yard to check --there it was, on our kitchen table-- and ran back to meet Margo on her patio so we could compare classes. When I got back, I barely noticed the two glasses of lemonade on the picnic table (hers already down to just ice, and mine with the first big sip missing). What I noticed was Margo sniffing, and her Dad standing behind her, petting her

* "Are you saying that light years are a measure of distance or time, Bri? I'm confused. Because they *are* distance, right?"
"Or *are* they time?"
"Never mind..."

hair, the schedule in front of them.

"It's not six *school* days a week, honey..."

"Well, what *is* it then?"

Mr. LeDoux sighed and brushed back his Beatle Bangs. "It works like this, sweetie. Say Monday is day one, right? So then Tuesday is day two, Wednesday is day three and so on, up to Friday, which is day five... then Saturday ***and*** Sunday ***off***..." He seemed to be placing unusually strong emphasis on those two words. "...which would make Monday...?"

He waited for her answer, but Margo was just staring, hypnotized by her schedule.

Meanwhile, I'd opened mine, and as soon as I looked at the letter, three phrases leapt off the page like they'd been marked with a fluorescent highlighter: *Dick Smiley*, *Earlier start time* and *The six day cycle*.

Six?

I flipped to the second page: a grid, with numbers lined up on the left hand side --PERIOD 1-9 -- and then, along the top:

DAY: ONE TWO THREE FOUR FIVE SIX

Six days?

Well, now, in addition to getting a letter from the school in mid-July, I was also gonna get sick.

Margo, too: Mr. LeDoux was still waiting for the answer to *Monday is...*

Margo sniffled. "Day one?"

Mr. LeDoux shook his head, his voice calm. "No, no, sweetie... day *six*. Then *Tuesday* is day one. It starts all over again."

Now Margo was shaking her head. "That's stupid... six days..."

"You'll get the hang of it," Mr. LeDoux said, and he kissed the top of her head and then looked at me, like he knew exactly what I thinking. "But the answer is, no, you *don't* have to go to school on the weekends," he said as our

eyes met, and he stepped up onto the stoop and pulled open the screendoor.

Tsk! "Stupid," Margo muttered as the door fell shut behind her Dad, and as I said "So we *don't* have to go to school on Saturdays?" we could hear Mr. LeDoux in the kitchen, talking to his wife. "*Stupid*, Fran... this six-day schedule crap. Why make them deal with that? As if seventh grade isn't a shock enough..."

Shock.

Great.

I sat down next to Margo and we laid our schedules out, side-by-side. "This is all so *stupid*," Margo said. "Six days. And what's 'homeroom'?"

I knew *that* one.

"Just where you go for the announcements," I said. "I think."

"Oh." She sucked an ice cube from her glass and chomped down on it. "Well," she said around the ice, "*that's* stupid, too." She wiped a line of melted-ice drool from her chin, looked down at her cubes-only glass, and then up at the opened kitchen window. "Mom?" she yelled, and from about seven feet away, behind the screen, Mrs. LeDoux called back "Quoi?"

Margo looked down at her glass. "Brian a besoin de lemonade!" and I had no idea what she said about me-- no idea why she was switching our glasses and giving me her empty-- until her mom bopped down out of the back door of the house with the cut-glass pitcher.* She refilled Margo's (now my) empty glass. "I am sorry, Brian," she said, and before I could reply, she switched Margo's and my glasses back, topped off mine, and then kissed the top of her daughter's head before she stepped back up into the kitchen.

Margo shook her head, then took a sip from her glass

* "You know, I TRIED to get her to get one of those Kool-Aid pitchers, but she says 'Dey are plastic, and dey are for Kool-Aid.' If I was a mom, *I'd* get one."

as she picked up her schedule. "Anyway," she said, "looks like our homeroom is one-twenty-seven."

I looked at the number next to HOMEROOM at the top of my page.

"No," I said. "One-seventeen--"

"--*One-seventeen?!?*" Margo snatched my schedule. "Let me see that!" She chewed her lower lip as she inspected the two sheets of paper, her eyes darting back and forth between them like a proofreader. "You think they typed it wrong?" she said at last. "Maybe they just typed it wrong..." She laid the schedules back down on her picnic table. The overhead sun was reflecting off them so that they were almost impossible to read. "But wait, Bri, wait..." Margo leaned forward. "...we match *here*..." She pointed to ENGLISH SROKA RM 24. "...and *here*..." SCIENCE MITTONG RM 263 "...and *here*..." PE DIEHL-ROCKEY GYM.

All right... so we weren't in each others' homerooms, but after that, we had five classes together... six if you counted lunch. And we would have had eight, but I had industrial arts while Margo had home-ec (it was the last year that both sexes* didn't take both classes) and we also didn't match on math. But the rest of the day, we were together, so if we could just get through homeroom and math, we'd be fine.

I wasn't sure how I liked this, but then, I wasn't sure how I liked the idea of junior high, period. In spite of the schedule, in spite of all I'd heard about it, I still wasn't sure what to expect. "It's mainly to get you ready for high school," Mom told me, but some of the changes seemed too big, too sudden. The biggest was that there was no recess. Judging from our schedules, apparently what replaced recess was one period per day of something called Study Hall.

The name sounded dreadfully serious and grown up: study hall.

Margo put it best that afternoon after we'd compared

* "Sexes," not "genders." O.K.?

notes.

“God,” she muttered. “I wish I’d flunked sixth grade.”

Twenty-one



Margo and I were so absorbed in our schedules that we didn't hear or see the girl on the bike who'd pulled up to Margo's front porch and stuck the WASHINGTON PEACHES record store bag between the screen door and front door, along with the note that was next in Margo's stack. It was in handwriting that I'd never seen, but that I'd become very familiar with between seventh grade and graduation.

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Monday 7/8/72

Dear Margo,

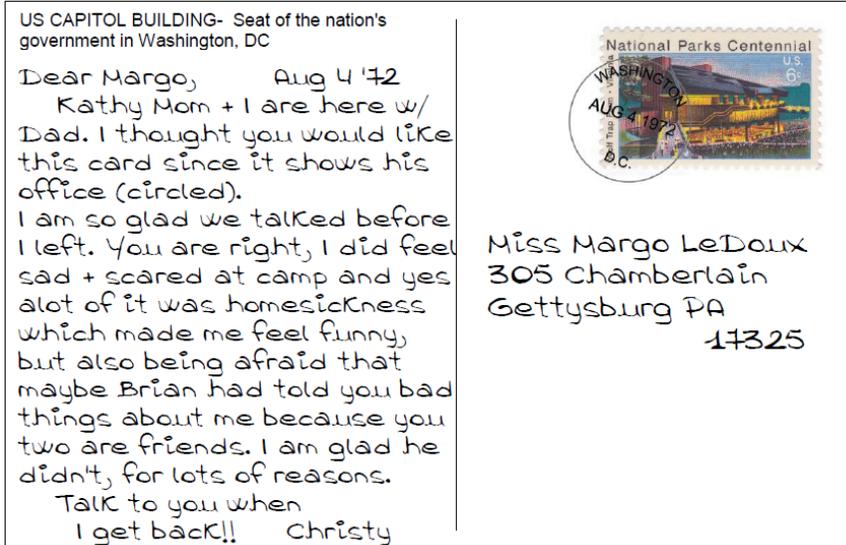
My sister Kathy and I went down to DC to see my dad this weekend and stopped at Peaches, this big record store that is the size of an A&P. Anyway, they had this record and I remembered that you liked it, so I got one for you. I hope you like it.

It was nice getting to know you at camp. I was kind of homesick so I don't know how much fun I had. But I hope you had fun and maybe I will see you again soon.

Sincerely,
Christy Kelly

There were still almost two months left in the summer (question for further discussion: if the Fourth of July is usually the fourth week of summer vacation, with seven or eight weeks still to follow, then why did July 4th always feel like the midway point, and like "it was all downhill from there"?) and I swear, Margo never mentioned Christy in more than passing... and we never really saw her at the pool... and she never tried to tag along with us the few times Margo and I did stuff with Steve... and her room in the fort was still abandoned... all of this is to say that as far as I could tell, Christy was still as distant from us as she'd ever been.

But a stack of notes in a toy chest doesn't lie... further, it has a way of making sense of what seemed, thirty-some-years before, like random, meaningless conversations.



"Brian," Margo asked me one early-August afternoon as we biked out to the pool, "if you knew something bad about someone you thought I hated, would you tell me?"

"Probably," I said. "Why?"

"Just wondering." We skidded to a stop at the corner near the school. I could taste the dust that flew up from Margo's tires. She brushed her hair back as we Looked Both Ways. "I mean," she continued, "you never *did*. So if you did, you probably would've. But you didn't, so you must not, or else you would. Like you said."

Uhhhhh....

"Yeah," I said.

I think.

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

CAPE MAY, NEW JERSEY. Vacationers enjoy a morning bike ride on the Promenade

August 20 1972

Dear Margo,

We are here at the beach WITH DAD!!!! everyone is here and I am so happy, so much fun although what would be even better would be to have a friend to talk to (or a BOY friend!!!)

I hope you are enjoying the last few days of freedom, its hard to believe when we get back that we will have to go back to school. Yuck!

I will get taffy or fudge for you here. See you soon!!

Christy



Miss Margo LeDoux
305 Chamberlain
Quaker Valley PA
17999

"Brian," Margo asked me as we played pitch and catch in her back yard one late-August twilight, "do you like taffy or fudge better?"

"Better than what?" I said as she tossed to me.

Margo *tsked!* hard as she tossed the ball back. "You know what I mean! Which one?"

The ball popped into my glove. "Fudge," I said, and I threw back.

"Me too!" Margo said.

"...but..."

Margo caught the ball. "...but..."

"Well... taffy always makes me think of the beach..." I caught her throw-- soft and easy; it barely made a sound as I pinched my mitt around it-- and then tossed the ball back.

"How come?" she said as she caught.

"Because they make it there."

Margo held the ball and blinked. "Well, they make *fudge* there, too, right?" She threw...

...hard. I caught... SMACK! It stung a little. "Yeah."

I wound up and tossed back a little harder myself.

"Well..." She caught... SMACK! "How come *fudge*

doesn't make you think of the beach?"

"Because I can get fudge anywhere."

Margo wound up and fired the ball back at me. "Well, I'd rather have fudge."

SMACK-sting...

Twenty-two

OK Brian!

Your dad says you + your mom are out school shopping (why did you wait so long? For the same reason mom + me did!! We are going now too!) So just a note to say don't forget that we have to leave EARLIER (7:15) and your bike lock and your lunch unless you are buying, which means don't forget money.

And don't forget that

THE PRINCIPLE'S NAME

is

DICK SMILEY!!!!

So see you tommorow at 7:15.

😊me!!

So on Tuesday, September 5th, 1972, Margo and I biked to our first day of classes with more than a little trepidation and fear. On the surface, it was just like every other first day of school since third grade: we were riding

our bikes together down Chamberlain Drive. But that was where the similarities ended. First, we were early... *way* early. Adjusting from summer-vacation-sleeping-in to start-of-school-year-beat-the-bell was bad enough with an 8:30 elementary school start time, but the junior high day started at 7:40... which meant Margo and I had to leave at 7:15. (O.K.... 7:20.) We were on our bikes so early that the Kellys weren't even out waiting on their corner yet.

As we biked into town, past Reynolds Elementary (which always seemed like a perfectly fine school to me), I felt not only scared and disoriented, but vaguely insulted. No wonder: looking back now, junior high was something of an affront. I'd spent seven years climbing up the grade school ladder from kindergarten to sixth grade, and then, once I finally became a big kid in the building, there I was, in seventh grade... at the *bottom* of a pecking order that wasn't even high school, but *junior* high.*

The building itself didn't make me feel any better: it was a coal-smoke-belching, two-story red brick school built in 1926... a fine structure for its time, but "its time" was 1926. The borough had long since outgrown it, and, unfortunately, like everything else old in Historic Quaker Valley, it got Preserved.

So: when the borough built a sprawling new modern building in the old school's shadow, guess which grades got the new school and which grades got stuck with the hand-me-down?

Then there was the physical corollary to No Recess: no playground. "Where are we supposed to *play*?" Margo asked the first time we biked over to inspect the grounds. The answer, apparently, was: nowhere. Instead of shooting baskets or playing punchball or kickball or football before school, we'd have to just Hang Out with the other kids until the bell rang...

* I'm still not sure what's worse: "junior high," which, like "pee wee" football, was diminutive and insulting by name, or "Middle school," which was neither here nor there.

...if we saw any other kids we wanted to hang out *with*. The first day of school, when Margo and I pulled into the bike racks, I didn't see anyone I recognized. For a small town, there sure were a lot of unfamiliar faces.

"Where *is* everybody?" Margo asked as we locked our bikes together.

"Maybe they all flunked," I said.

Margo huffed once before she repeated her late-summer mantra one last time: "Wish *I'd* flunked..." She snapped the lock shut. "Yeesh... everyone looks either grown up or scared." She brushed her hair off her face. "I guess follow the scared ones, huh?"

BRRRRRRRRRRRINNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNG!

Time to Follow The Scared Ones: Margo and I shuffled toward the nearest door, and that was when I saw my first familiar faces: Scott Perry, a few kids ahead of us, walking with... Steve Kelly?

Nahhh... Steve goes to Catholic School... couldn't be him.

We entered the building through a stairwell and immediately saw two white poster board signs on the plastered wall facing us:

100-118

←

...and...

119-130

→

My homeroom was 117, and Margo's was 127, which meant I had to go ← without her. "See ya second period," I said.

"Yeah," Margo muttered. "Second period. Tuesday. Day *one*. Why isn't it day *two*?" and she turned and went →.

As I walked with the flow toward 117, I wondered if seventh grade was too old to cry?

Twenty-three

Homeroom was fifteen minutes of cool chaos in a roomful of kids I barely knew, as Mr. Stine (a relatively calm science teacher with lacquered Dan Rather hair) gave us our seating and locker assignments, as well as the requisite First Day Of School Stack Of Shit To Take Home And Get Signed, all in a neat, red-print-on-glossy-white QUAKER VALLEY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL CARDINALS pocket folder, which I never used, because it went right into the toy chest.

On one of the inside flaps (opposite a blank grid labeled YOUR SCHEDULE) there was an Important Notice:

**VANDALISM:
EVERYONE LOSES**

Vandalism to public buildings costs everyone money. Although our students have been very cooperative about the care of school property during the day, we have been experiencing some vandalism at night and over the weekends. The school district gives notice to all youth and adults that the district will strictly enforce the provisions of Adams County Act 2632 of 1970 concerning vandalism and the destruction of school property.

The provisions of Adams County Act 2632 state, "If any person shall willfully or maliciously break into, enter, deface, or place any obscene or improper matter upon any public school building or shall damage any trees, shrubbery on any public school ground, such person shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be sentenced to pay a fine on not less than \$50 and not more than \$1,000 or undergo an imprisonment in the county jail for a period not exceeding six months, either or both, at the discretion of the court."

The school district also gives notice that any parent whose child under the age of eighteen years is found liable or is adjudged guilty by a court of a willful act resulting in theft, destruction or loss of school district property, shall be liable to the school district for reimbursement in the amount of any loss suffered by the act of vandalism.

By this announcement, the school district gives public notice of its intention to diligently and strictly enforce the provisions of this law with regard to the conviction of persons found guilty of vandalism to school property.

Board of School Directors
Quaker Valley School District

Well, that sealed it right there. Junior high was officially insulting. Less than fifteen minutes into the first day, and I was being threatened with legal action for doing something I hadn't even considered doing.

(Yet.)

This must be what the Army's like.

And, I thought as I sat there, what exactly was the *point* of homeroom? Why sit in *one* classroom for ten minutes just so we could go off to another class? Why not just *go to class*?

At least in elementary school, everything had been in the same room...

Except gym... and recess.

BRRRRRRRRRIIIINNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNG!

Well, I thought as I stepped out into the hall, it *was* cool having a locker. It looked like some of the eighth graders really got carried away decorating the insides of the doors.

(Of course, in elementary school I'd had a *desk*...)

Ah, well... check the schedule...

First period, day one...

MATH DELONG RM 127

127... Margo's homeroom.

Maybe if I hurried...

I didn't need to hurry: we were already walking toward each other, and as soon as I caught her eye, I felt safe again. She smiled gently, mirroring the expression I knew she could see in my eyes. "Special delivery, Bri!" she said, and as we passed each other, she held out her hand, pressing a tiny folded piece of paper into my palm.

Our first junior high note.

Twenty-four

Dear Brian,

Well, homeroom = pointless. But at least we got to hear Dick do the announcements + he did not sound too smiley to me!!

What is your locker no?? Mine is C147. And you will never guess who is C148.

A hint: you will c her today and you will not believe your eyes when you do. I didn't.

Have fun in math and see you in gym!! 😊me!!

P.S. I would of put this in your locker but I can't till you tell me the number!!

Math was one of Margo's best subjects, even though she complained about it and said she hated it ("That's 'cause it's a waste of my brainpower, Bri"). On the other hand, I still moved my lips while attempting simple addition and subtraction, so while Margo went off to Algebra I with Marty and the other smart kids, I was stuck in Math I, a.k.a. *You'll Be Lucky To Be Able To Balance Your Checkbook Someday Kid*.

I cut away into room 127. No teacher yet; just a few kids, strays who'd apparently just stayed in their seats from homeroom...

...including a platinum-blond-haired girl sitting in the window row, third seat back. She was looking out the

window when I came into the room, but as I took my seat and unfolded and read Margo's note, I could feel her *looking* at me. When I looked over at her, she looked up at the blackboard, but even from the side, I recognized her.

Christy!

But blonde?

You will see her today, and you will not believe your eyes when you do.

I couldn't, but in a good way: I looked... blinked... looked again and as she glanced my way, our eyes met. I smiled in spite of myself and she shifted in her seat a little bit, then looked down at her desk, shy.

(Scared?)

I blinked and looked at her again. Last time I'd seen Christy, she was a brunette. The blonde hair looked good... *she* looked good: cardinal-red turtleneck sweater and blue jeans; her straight, golden-silver hair cut so that the tips just brushed her shoulders; and *makeup*... green eye shadow, lightly applied. It was subtle and brought out her pretty green eyes, not caked-on like the blue barn paint Margo and I saw Pam Dawson wearing.

("Jeez, Bri, look!" Margo whispered when Pam passed us outside before school. "I didn't know they *made* spraypaint for eyes!")

The hair was a surprise, but more than that, *Christy* was a surprise. I certainly didn't expect to see her at school, and I wasn't really sure how I felt about it. We really hadn't seen each other more than just in passing the past few years, but every time we had, I could feel it hanging in the air between us... not just what had happened in the cornfield that summer day --what we'd done and then what *she'd* done-- but what she thought I'd said.

You hate me! You think I'm gross!

Well, I *didn't* hate her... and I certainly didn't think she was gross... and I figured I could either sit on the other side of the room and let her keep thinking that, or...

I got up so I could shift seats, and as soon as my butt lifted off the desk chair, I could feel Christy tensing up.

I stepped up the aisle and plopped down at the desk next to hers; she sat up just a little bit and kind of looked down, but then she smiled over at me, shy, and I smiled back, and we said soft "Hi"s to each other.

Finally, I turned a little in my seat to face her. She was inspecting her nails, anticipating my line.

"I didn't recognize you at first," I said.

Christy shifted self-consciously in her seat. She still wasn't facing me. "Yeah," she said, running her hand back through her hair, "it's actually... it's more my natural color. I was dying darker because..." She swallowed. "Swimming. You know? Because the pool... the water? It was making it green... well, *tinting* it, kind of... you know?" She laughed. "Not the water itself, you know... the chlorine *in* the pool. In the water." She looked down at her hands. "So I got this done... you know, last week... maybe? It's just... it's easier to take care of." She looked at me. "You know?"

Well, I didn't, but I nodded my head like I knew, even though I'd never noticed (or heard Margo say) that chlorine made my (or her) hair green...

...and besides, even if it did, wouldn't *blonde* hair get more green than auburn?

Ah, well...

"Wouldn't want green hair," I said.

"No," Christy said. "No."

Silence.

I looked down at the names carved in the oak top of my desk.

RONNIE 67 TIM ED JOANIE 1962 VITO.

(Vito? There were Vitos in Quaker Valley?)

"How was your summer?" Christy said.

"Good," I said. "Too short."

"Anyway," Christy said, and she brushed her hair back again and sat back, sighing softly.

Again: silence... nervous silence. I could feel other kids shuffling into the room as we sat there.

Well, *this conversation is gonna go down in history...*

"I thought you guys went to Father Louis," I said

after a few moments.

Christy sighed again. “Not anymore,” she said, and that *sigh* told me that she wasn’t really sure how she liked the idea. “No, Mom and Dad... they have us go to public school after sixth grade, you know?” She ran her fingers back through her hair. “So at least no more uniforms.”

“Uniforms?”

“Yeah, Brian... *you* know.”

I didn’t. “What do you mean?” I said.

“Well, we all had to wear uniforms to school.”

“You did?” I was trying to picture Christy in a uniform, like a soldier or a mailman.

“Yeah. Catholic school, you wear uniforms.”

“What, like...”

“...like... they were just... you know... tartan skirts and white blouses. *You* know.”

“The boys wear skirts too?”

Christy giggled --“Tee-hee”-- as she reached across and slapped my arm. “The boys wear skirts, too,” Christy repeated. “No, they wear *kilts*. God. ‘Boys too.’ Spazz...”

I smiled as I looked down, blushing. “Well, *I* don’t know...” I said.

I’d mean, I’d already heard that they made you take swimming lessons naked at Catholic School... who knows *what* they made the boys wear?

If anything.

“No, they wear slacks and dress shirts,” Christy said.

I thought of all those times I’d seen Christy and her brothers and sisters waiting for the bus, all dressed up even on a hot morning, and how I’d thought, like Margo said, that it was “just Katie making them wear expensive clothes to show off.”

But uniforms... now it makes sense...

Christy turned to face me, and I kind of felt like she was warming up to me. She ran her hand back through her hair again. “Your friend Margo’s in my homeroom,” she said.

“Really?”

"Yeah... her locker's right next to mine. She--"

--BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRINNNNNNNNNNNNNNGGGGG!

Whatever Christy wanted to say about My Friend Margo, it'd have to wait. We both turned to face front as Mr. DeLong, a tall, slender man with droopy almond shell eyes and a blonde combover, stepped into the room from the doorway next to the chalkboard... cup of coffee in his right hand, rollbook and seating chart in his left.* His very presence, combined with our opening day jitters, brought us to order. "O.K.," he said, glancing down at his seating chart, and next thing I knew, I was being moved two seats in toward the center of the room and Christy was moving forward three seats, so that was it for our conversation.

At least we'd *had* a conversation, though, and when the bell rang at the end of class and we got up to trudge off to our next class, Christy got up and then hung by Mr. DeLong's desk, looking down...

...waiting for me?

I smiled and we walked toward the door, side by side. "So what do you have next?" I said.

"Art, then gym," Christy said as we stepped out into the hallway. "You?"

"Gym, then study hall," I said.

"Yeah, I have gym after art..." she said.

Our eyes met for just a flash before she looked down, smiling, and I felt a mini-flutter as we started down the hall, toward the down stairwell, shooting sideways glances at each other as we walked.

Maybe it was just the hair, but Christy somehow looked different than she had a couple summers before. Not like a little girl... more like...

A woman?

I glanced at her flat chest quick.

* Margo and I always wondered what was back in those rooms behind the chalkboards: a workroom, a lounge... a portal to an alternate universe? Finally, one day that I was sick, Margo peeked into the room behind the chalkboard in Mr. Getz's (science) room. "It's just some messy *office*, Bri. Dark. Kinda creepy. I'm sorry I looked."

No, not a woman... still a girl.

"Everyone looks either grown-up or scared." Christy looked a little bit of both.

Had to say something... the stairwell was coming up quick...

"I like your hair," I blurted out.

Christy smiled. "Awww... thank you, Brian," she said, and she touched my arm lightly. "Off to art. See ya!"

"See ya," I said.

Well, I thought as I went into the down stairwell, conscious of the spot Christy'd touched, that was a nice new beginning.

And then I got to gym.

Twenty-five

Of course we'd had gym class in elementary school, but it was *fun*: Mr. Durham was the teacher, and we played punchball and baseball and flag football and smear-the-queer and had three-legged races... and who knew, maybe we were gonna do all of that stuff in junior high, too... but when I stepped into the musty gray locker room and saw Coach Rockey, the teacher, I sort of had the feeling that this was gonna be anything but fun.

Coach Rockey still holds my award for Best Gym Teacher Name Ever*. He was compact, muscular, square-jawed, with neatly combed blonde hair parted to the side and heavy black glasses held on his head with an elastic band, and he wore grey sweatpants and a plain white t-shirt with --can't forget this (unfortunately)-- a silver whistle hanging around his neck, which, by the end of that first gym class, I wanted to shove down his throat... except then it would have tweeted every time he breathed... which,

* He holds a few others, but I'll wait for the All-Sports Banquet to announce those.

come to think of it, it seemed like it did anyway.

In keeping with the military theme of the day, we gathered in the boys' locker room and got a quick Orientation Drill before we changed:

"TWEEEEEEEEEEEEET! GYM CLOTHES: I see SOME of you have gym clothes. If you DON'T have them, you will need to GET them. The uniform IS... RED Q.V. P.E. shorts, a PLAIN white t-shirt, WHITE athletic socks, sneakers. Repeat: a PLAIN white t-shirt. NO PRINTING! If you do NOT have gym clothes, have MOMMY go get them for you tonight or tomorrow, but you MUST HAVE them before the next class! Gym shorts are sold DOWNTOWN at Sheaffer Brothers Sporting Goods! Now, LOCKERS! You will be assigned a LOCKER! You will leave your school clothes IN this locker during class! Do NOT --repeat: DO NOT-- leave your gym clothes IN your locker till the next class. Take your smelly sweaty shorts socks and shirts home so Mommy can clean them..."

I apologize for the use of italics and caps; it's just that I don't know that a normal font can convey **HOW FUCKING IRRITATING I FOUND THIS MAN.**

Anyway, after receiving our orders for our nine-month mission, we marched, single file, out into the big gymnasium, boys only (there was a partition across the room at center court; I figured that the girls were on the other side, wondering where *we* were) and lined up, alphabetically by last name, in six rows of five boys each, where Coach Rockey (it was COACH Rockey, not MISTER Rockey) called us to order (TWEEEEEEEEEEEEET!) and then barked out our roll call of last names ("PERRY! PRESSLEY!") one by one, to which we responded "Here!" if we were.

No idea what we were supposed to say if we *weren't* there.

Even though we didn't really do anything in that class except a few jumping jacks, squat thrusts, pushups, and situps, we still had to --TWEEEEET!-- GET A SOAPY SHOWER.

As I washed off with the hairy, gelatinous bar of Ivory soap that I found floating (or, rather, dissolving) in the soap dish, and then dried myself off (as best I could) with my threadbare PROP Q V J H S ATH DEPT white towel, I thought *What was wrong with just having recess?**

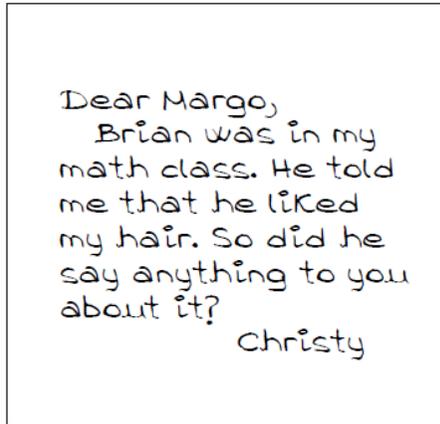
BRRRRRRRIIIIIINNNNNNNNNNNNNNG!

Lunch!

TWEEEEEEEEET!

I tossed my towel into the hamper by the door as Coach Rockey stood there, reciting his loud reminder as we filed out into the hall: *"TOWELS in the hamper! GYM clothes, NEXT class! If you don't HAVE them, GET them! SHEAFFER Brothers, DOWNtown, men... TELL your Mommies! TOWELS in the hamper! GYM clothes, NEXT class..."*

Twenty-six



Dear Margo,
Brian was in my
math class. He told
me that he liked
my hair. So did he
say anything to you
about it?
Christy

After gym, I had study hall (even though there was nothing to study yet) in 117. Nice: my locker was right outside the door, so when the bell rang, I ditched my binder and math book, grabbed my lunch, and darted around the

* Not to belabor the point, but I still don't get the whole *No recess after elementary school* thing. When you're 12, 13, 14, 15 years old, you NEED recess more than ever to burn off all that excess rampant hormonal energy, don't you? I need it NOW and I'm almost 55.

corner to meet Margo. She had gym second period, too, but as I'd suspected, the girls were on the other side of the partition ("God, I hope they put us together next time"), and we talked about our morning classes as we walked down to the cafeteria. "So, guess who's in my homeroom, Bri?" she said, like it would take me forever to guess.

"Christy Kelly," I said.

Margo froze, mouth agape like I was Kreskin. "How'd you know?" she said.

"She's in my math class," I said.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"D'you see her hair?" Margo said, and then she laughed at how stupid her question was.

"No, she had a bonnet on," I said.

"Shut up!" Margo tittered, and she blushed just a little. "So... what'd you think of it?"

"I liked it," I said. "I really didn't recognize her at first, though."

"Me either," Margo said. She shook her head. "Guess she just wanted to be blonde again."

"She told me that the pool water makes her hair green."

Margo laughed a single HUH! "Well, *that's* crap!"

"What do you mean?" I asked...

...but Margo was digging into her change purse for dimes for milk, acting like she didn't hear me... but smiling... and on a day that was full of so many Firsts That I Didn't Realize Were Firsts, there was another one:

Margo's first non-answer answer.

Twenty-seven

So what are we suppose to do in STUDY hall when we don't have anything to STUDY???

Pass notes and get each other in trouble!! 😊

I doubt that we will get in trouble. This old guy is more sleepy then Droopy Dog.

So in answer to your question posed earlier, Brian told me that he liked your hair but that he did not RECOGNIZE you at first.

Didn't recognize me, in a good or a bad way???

Well, seeing that he came over + sat next + talked to you I suppose that means in a good way.

I know but he wasn't talking to me for so long, then I called him a spazz today.

He is a spazz Christy!! 😊

I just keep wondering if maybe hes still mad at me. You keep saying that but why was he mad at you to begin with??

Just over something dumb that happened when we were little, that's all.

Christy as one who has been Brian's friend for six years + who P's him off all the time he does NOT hold grudges.

And I in fact have never heard him say that he did not like you + further will atest that we both thought that you did not like us!!! So maybe it was you ~~making a big~~

~~deal a bigger deal something more~~ just feeling more upset about it then he was. Because trust me, if he would of been mad at you he would of DEFINETELY told me + he never did!!!

I guess but I know I definitely made him mad.

How??? Why?? Over what???

I will tell you sometime, not now.

Suit your self.

OH!! One thing quick before the bell: did you ride your bike to school???

No, Tommy + Kath dropped me + Stevie off + they are picking us up.

Well do you + Steve want to bike in w/ Brian + me tomorrow? We can spin by for you.

O.K. sure if you don't mind.

CHRISTY WE LIKE YOU AND WE DO NOT MIND!!!

Just tell your "little" brother to stifle and not stare and we will be fine!!!

Ha ha, I will take care of him, don't you worry.

So see you tomorrow am!!! 😊

Of course, I wasn't *in* that study hall, not that I would have been privy to that note anyway... and after school, it was just Margo and me, no sign (or mention) of Christy... so I figured that everything between Christy and Margo was status quo; i.e., they weren't getting along.

The next morning, when Margo and I biked down Chamberlain Road toward school, I spotted Steve and Christy on their bikes at the entrance to Buford Circle. I expected the usual stare-glare, but when we got closer and Margo called out "Hey, guys! Hey, Christy!" Christy smiled back.

"Good morning, Margo!" she sang out, and then, as she pulled herself up onto her bike seat, she looked at me. "Hi, Brian!"

I said "Hi" as Margo smiled back at me, and the two

of them biked a few yards ahead of Steve and me, chatting and laughing while they pedaled. When we got to the first stop sign, Steve and I skidded to a stop, but Margo and Christy just rode right through the intersection. Steve looked over at me, and I could feel the question in his eyes, because it was the same thing I was wondering myself.

When did *they* become friends?

Twenty-eight

Of course, there was some light fallout for the next few weeks (at first, both their takes on The Crisis Years was, "Well, it was *all her...*") but by Halloween, Margo and Christy were best girlfriends, all unsightly residue washed away (or at least snowed over). "She's really the only girl I like, Bri," Margo told me. "I can't *believe* we used to *hate* each other. And I mean, *God*, I knew her family was *big*, but I didn't know it was *that* big. She has eight brothers and sisters. Her Mom had triplets, Bri! Triplets!"

I remembered when the triplets were born a couple years before. Easy names to remember: Peter, Paul and Mary, after the Saints and singers both. I'd always had kind of a hard time keeping track of the rest of Christy's brothers and sisters, but Margo had the whole list down by the third week of seventh grade. She gave me an Actuarial Recitation one Friday that we walked together (without Christy) to the college to meet her Dad and get a ride home:

"Christy is the third oldest. She has a big sister, Kathy... she's two years older... she's a freshman... Mary Kathleen Kelly." I remembered the red labelmaker tape on the back of that GE radio in Christy's "room" (MKK). "And you know Marty Morone's big brother Davy? That's Kathy's girlfriend --I mean, *boyfriend*." I knew this, but I didn't dare interrupt. "So there's Kathy, but then Tommy is above them both... he's a senior... Tom the fourth... Christy's Dad is Tom the *third*. So they're the two oldest, and then there's

Christy..." Margo touched my arm. "...whose *real first name* is *Rebecca!* Rebecca Christine Kelly. Betcha didn't know *that!*"

"I knew that," I said.

Margo eyed me. "How?"

"Kathy calls her that."

"Oh, yeah," Margo said. She laughed. "Pff! Rebecca! I call her that and she gets all pissed off at me and stuff. O.K.," she continued, "so... there's Kath, then Tom... no... *Tom*, then *Kath*... then--" She tittered as she said "--*Rebecca*... then Stevie... who is less than a year younger than Christy... I mean the *bare minimum*..."

I had no idea what that meant, but Margo kept going.

"...and then there's John, whom you well know from his dealings with Jompaw and Danny... then there's the triplets-- Peter, Paul and Mary. And *are* they named after the singers? We may never know." She took a breath. "Then finally... Elizabeth. Betsy. *She's* the baby. Toddler. Two. *Almost*... on Thanksgiving Day she'll be two." She came up for air and then *phewed*. "Eight brothers and sisters! Man. I have *one* and I go nuts."

"Me, too," I said. It didn't used to be that way, but now that I was in seventh grade and I had to be ready and out of the house earlier than Danny, it seemed like we got in each other's ways a lot more than we used to. Somehow, since I'd started junior high, Danny was more like a little brother than ever.

Margo, meanwhile, was having a hard time with Jompaw... probably worse than I was with Danny, because Margo was a girl.

"*No* privacy, Bri," she told me. "He's somehow forgotten what KNOCK means. In *two* languages."

"How can Christy stand *eight* brothers and sisters?" I said.

"She actually says it's not that bad... that basically it's like there are two groups: her and Kath and Tom and Steve are the big kids, and then there's the triplets and

Betsy, and she said that John just kind of goes back and forth between groups.” She suddenly got a tired, half-scared look on her face. “I just can’t see how her Mom had *nine babies*, you know?”

A lot of people couldn’t. I remember hearing Mom and Dad speak in colloquialisms and hushed awe about Mrs. Kelly’s late deliveries, as Mom put it, and Margo also told me that her parents talked about it, although Mrs. LeDoux wasn’t exactly what you’d call hushed, nor did she speak in colloquialisms.

“So...” Margo started one frosty fall morning while we stood at the corner waiting for Christy and Steve on our bikes, “last night? I was doing my algebra homework out in the dining room, and Mom and Dad were in the kitchen? And I could hear them kind of talking about something, but they were doing dishes and they had the water going, so I couldn’t hear it all. But then the water shuts off and Mom goes ‘Or have nine babies like Katie Kelly.’ And Dad goes ‘About time for her to have another one, isn’t it?’” Margo started laughing. “And Mom... Mom goes--” and she broke into her mom’s Quebecois accent “--‘Non, I tink she had her vagina sewn shut.’ Well, I *laughed out loud* and Mom poked her head through the door and she was *bright red* in the *face*. Just all lookin’ down and stuff, you know... tryin’ not to laugh. So she goes... she goes--” and Margo impersonated her Mom trying to scold her and not laugh at the same time “--‘Marguerite, is not funny!’ And I go ‘God, Mom, it is too.’ And we both just started laughin’ like crazy, and then she said, ‘Marguerite, tell no one diss.’” She hit my arm. Hard. “Pretty funny, huh?” And then, as we spotted Christy and Steve coming down the hill from their house, “*Don’t* tell Christy!”

I remember that punch in the arm because we had gym later that morning (it wasn’t enough to go have recess like we did in elementary school; we now had to --*tweeeeeeeet!*-- **BE FIT!!**) and we were taking the President’s Physical Fitness Test, which seemed kind of a sham to me; as Marty Morone said, “You think *Nixon* can do

ten pull-ups?"

Anyway, there I was, hanging for dear life from the pull-up bar, my left biceps still sore from where Margo'd nailed it on our morning walk, and Scott Perry saw the bruise and said, "God, who hit you, Bri?" and I said, "Margo," and he just laughed, like it was incomprehensible that a girl's punch could actually create a bruise.

Scott certainly knew what it felt like to be hit by Margo... just not in the arm. We didn't know it at the time*, but Scott was the first boy to give Margo a FROM YOUR SECRET ADMIRER valentine, in fifth grade (Margo said "I knew it wasn't *you* because you can't keep a secret. But when I started seeing Scotty later, I went back into my archives and dug out all my old Valentines to see what he wrote on them, and lo and behold, I noticed that the one from fifth grade was missing. There was, however, this secret admirer card. And the handwriting matched. So voila!"). But fifth grade seemed like years before, especially when I looked at Scott Version 7GR. All the way through elementary school, Scott had been stick-thin, wiry and small, but at the end of sixth grade, he started to get tall, and over the summer, he *finished*: by the first day of seventh grade, he was six feet tall, easily... gangly and a little gawky, like a baby giraffe, but still a good-looking kid: thin lips, deep, dark eyes, a long face, and (as Margo famously said to Christy one day after school), "Scotty's Mom's a Dental Hygienist, so not only does he have dreamy eyes, but straight white teeth and minty-fresh breath!"

And, like Tom LeDoux and Marty Morone, Beatle hair: a mop of reddish-brown hair which Scott swept in a part to the left, and which he always seemed to be *fighting*... first with his fingers, then with a comb, and finally with a backwards *jerk* of his head... which worked almost as well as a comb most of the time.

If I'd had any sort of latent non-best-friend interest

* But then, that's the whole point of this book, right? We didn't really know ANYTHING at the time...

in Margo myself, her smiling and blushing and saying “Hi” all soft and shy to Scott as they passed each other in the hall might have made me really, really jealous.

It’s a good thing I wasn’t interested.

Anyway, Margo’d noticed Scott, and Scott definitely had his Dreamy Eyes on Margo, but, like most boys (Steve Kelly, for instance), Scott saw Margo and me palling around together and kept his distance.

But that didn’t mean he didn’t look...

One of the first times I caught him looking was the day of the fitness test. After gym and study hall, I met Margo for lunch, and while I snagged our seats, she got in the ala carte line. I started into my Lebanon Bologna With Cooper Sharp On White and watched as she slowly made her way up to the cashier: sixth in line... fifth... fourth...

And there, almost directly across from her, in the hot meal line, was Scott Perry, paralleling her forward movement: fourth... third... second... I watched as he leaned his head and shoulders out around the kid in front of him (he was friggin’ six feet tall: why he had to lean to see *anything* was beyond me) and, since I had a bead on Margo, too, I knew exactly who he was looking at.

It gave me a feeling in the center of my chest and behind my eyes like I was hungry, or nervous...

...or angry?

The two of them inched forward in the line and met at the cashier’s (in the logic unique to schools, there was one cashier for two lines: in the middle, where the two lines met), and Scott, being a gentleman, nodded to Margo to step up in front of him and pay for her food first.

As the cashier rang up Margo’s meal and Scott stood there waiting, he continued to check out my best friend as slyly as he could...

...except...

...as he stood there, that shock of brown hair slipped down his brow... lower and lower and lower... over his forehead, his eyebrows, down into his eyes.

Scott couldn’t see because of his bangs, but his

hands were full of tray... and since he couldn't brush his hair back with his fingers, he tried to flip his hair back out of his eyes with a *jerk* of his head...

...only what he flipped was his tray. The hot meal of the day (Turkey in gravy with Mash Potatos and Savory stuffing, Butter succotash and Apple Sauce) leapt up onto the front of his tan cableknit sweater. Scott's silverware clattered to the concrete cafeteria floor, and his opened carton of milk spilled down onto the cashier.

Silence for a second, and then laughter from the few people who'd seen the whole thing, including me... and Margo, who stifled herself and stepped toward Scott to help. When their eyes met, he was so horrified that he dropped his tray on the metal counter and ran out of the caf to the boys' room.

"God, Bri," Margo said when she sat down across from me, "did you see that?"

"Yeah," I chuckled as I took my carton of milk off her tray. "Pretty funny, huh?"

"I guess," Margo said. She took a bite of her sandwich, her bangs falling over her brow. "Do you think he saw me laugh at him?" she said as she chewed.

Nothing against Scott Perry, but I kind of hoped so.

"I don't know," I said.

Margo sighed. "God, I feel like such a *jerk*." She took a sip of her milk and I ate the last bite of my sandwich.

I chewed gingerly... like I was being watched...

Finally...

"Brian?"

"What?"

"Could you please run to the bathroom and check on him?"

I laughed. " *Check on him?--*"

"--I *feel* bad." She reached across and touched my bare arm. "Please?" I noticed the Red Delicious polish on her fingernails as she tap-tapped my forearm twice, then pulled her hand back. " *Come* on, Bri," she said. " *You* know him. Please?"

“I don’t really *know* him, Margo...”

Margo just took a bite of her sandwich and looked at me, chewing once, twice, big-eyed.

Sigh...

I took a swig of milk and pushed my chair out.

Margo sat up. “Thanks, Bri!” she said as I got up from my seat.

Oh, sure. No problem.

I maneuvered my way through my classmates, down the narrow aisle between the crowded tables, taking note of the time (11:05. Why did we eat lunch so early?), and then stepped out to the boys’ room in the lobby right outside the cafeteria and stuck my head in the door.

“Scott?” I said.

Scott... ott... ot.. t...

I opened the door the rest of the way and stepped inside. The sound of the door shutting behind me echoed off the tile walls and floors as I scanned the stalls...

No feet visible. And the window was shut, so he hadn’t climbed out.

Maybe he went to the office, or the nurse, but he wasn’t in that bathroom.

I opened the door to go back out to the caf, and as I did, I heard the distinct sound of a sniffle from one of the stalls... and then the toilet paper roll thumping as whoever was in there tore off a few sheets to blow his nose --SNIFFFFFFF!

But no feet visible.

I let the door shut behind me and fought my way back down the aisle to take my seat across from Margo.

“Well?” she said, straightening up a little.

I sat down and opened my baggie of carrot sticks, and looked straight at the wall behind Margo.

“I didn’t see anybody in there,” I said.

Twenty-nine

Dear Margo,

Yes, Scott Perry is in my homeroom and in math class with me and in gym. But I don't really know him. Still I did try talking to him and asked him a couple questions. He's best friends with this girl Annie Peirce (Pierce?) who moved in next door to him. But I can't tell if they're "friends" the way Steve Kelly and Cindy Woltjen are friends, or the way you and me are.

But I can try and find out.

I didn't tell him you wanted to know so don't worry.

See you in english...

Bri

You do that Brian + there is a metal in it for you!

What metal? Gold? Aluminum? Copper? Tin?

A metal! Like you put on somebody's chest.
And maybe if you're lucky I can get Christy
to pin it on you.

First, it's "medal" and second, what is it with
you and Christy?

First, she is my friend and second,
she likes you.

Do you like her????

Yeah, she's nice.

But do you LIKE her?????

I said she's nice.

That is a given Brian

BUT DO YOU LIKE HER?????

Good work keeping this hidden. Maybe next time
she'll give us detention.

Brian she is cool and even though she hollered
they do not give DETENTION for passing notes
so calm down!!

And thank you for your detective work with Scott Perry. That is valuable information about Annie.

And in exchange I will not tell Christy what you said about her - PROMISE!!!!

So see you after home ec. (medal shop for you!!)

me!! 😊

Thirty

It seems now that most of junior high revolved around the word *like*. Not as an empty conversational space filler; that would, like, come later and stuff. No; in seventh and eighth grades, we were using the word constantly in its truest meaning, most often in variations on the following question:

Does NAME OR PRONOUN

like NAME OR PRONOUN ?

Usually the second blank was filled with the pronoun *me*.

Some of it was simple: like, I liked Margo, and I knew Margo liked me. That, I never questioned. And that was a clue to happiness that I ignored and dismissed for far too long (like: twenty-five more years). We both did.

More often than not, though, *like* was used as a function in complex word problems.

Examples:

Christy liked me, and I liked her, and when I was

with her, I felt like we liked each other, but when we got alone, I wondered if she liked me and she wondered if I liked her.

I liked Marty, and Marty liked me, but sometimes I wondered if Marty thought *anyone* liked him. Marty liked Margo, but didn't think Margo liked him. ("She likes Scott. She doesn't like me.") And Margo liked Scott, and Scott liked Margo, but after he dumped his tray on the cashier (Mrs. Weaner, another unfortunate central Pennsylvania name that I swear I'm not making up), like Marty, he thought *nobody* liked him.

And so on and so on and, like, so on.

Of course, given all of the shit that happens to you between ages 11 and 14, who could blame us? It was more than just the physical fact of those changes; it was the way those changes made us feel.

Take Scott Perry, for instance. By seventh grade, he'd already broken the six-foot barrier. Meanwhile, Marty and I were still barely five feet tall. Scott was no smarter, funnier or cooler than I was; in fact, as Margo would remind me repeatedly once we got to high school, "he's kind of a dillweed." Still, in seventh grade, all of a sudden, he was a half-a-head taller, so physically, I had to look up at him any time we talked.

Maybe that was why I left him alone in that bathroom: nothing against Scott, but hearing my best friend and a girl I "liked" gush about how a boy my age who was suddenly ten inches taller than me had "dreamy eyes" not only made me jealous; it made me feel inferior.

Like I was, in a real, measurable way.

Some kids handled it O.K., or appeared to handle it O.K., but most of the kids I knew felt like me: what are we supposed to *do* here? Like Christy, who had her eyes on me since well before we took our run back in the cornfield; looking back now, I felt the same way. But the way she dealt with what happened between us was to push it all the way to its worst possible conclusion --*You hate me! You think I'm gross!*-- and, in spite of direct and circumstantial

evidence to the contrary, that was where a part of her still stood.

Or "stood still."

Hi Margo + "good morning"!!

Sorry I did not walk to school w/ you + Brian, but Tommy + Kath offered Stevie + me a ride and how could I pass that up in 15 degree weather? We looked for you to pick you up but did not see you.

Speaking of Kath I wanted to talk to you about our plans for tomorrow night. I do not know if we should go to the dance after school. Because if we want to ride the bus to the game that leaves at 5:30, and if we want to ride w/Kath + Davy then we need to be ready to go when they are.

Either way I don't think we can do both.

Kath does not mind us riding along with them and she says Davy doesn't mind but I know him, he will get bugged if we're not right on time so I do not want to make him late.

So I think we should skip the dance.

Write back 1st pd and hope you enjoy algebra.

xoxoxo

love you!!

christy 😊

Hi back Christy!

Yes I am in algebra and my straps need
ajusting!!! 😊

You would not of seen us walking to school as
we took our cold morning shortcut.

But onto other matters. I can not beleive you!!
We can do both and we have to go to the dance!!!

I have inside information that someone you
really like will be there. Or lets just say that I
am working on it 😊

So do you want all my work to be for knot??

Besides which (oops! I just got called on. I need
to make it look more like I am taking notes and
not writing them!!) we can do both!! The dance
goes from 3-5 and we prob will not stay for all
of it. And that is plenty of time to get home get
supper + make ourselves pretty for the game.

But we need to go to the dance for lots of
reasons.

Write back!!! xoxoxoxo me!! 😊

P.S. Why is Davy taking Kathy to a bask-
etball game on valentines??? If it was me +
Brian I would understand but not with a
OVER!!!

boyfriend!! If that is Davys idea of romance then no wonder they keep breaking up!!
Dad is a coach and he wouldn't even do that (although he + mom met at a game) (but not on Valentines)

Your mom + dad met at a basketball game??

Yep! He was playing for Carleton + she was in the stands behind the hoop + he kept missing free throws because he couldn't keep his eyes off her. Which they figured out and then kept fouling him on purpose!

But that is not the subject! What about the dance????

I do not think we should go.

CHRISTY!!! ITS VALENTINES!!!!

MARGO, IT MIGHT BE TOMMYS LAST GAME!!!

But we can do both!!!

I just do not want to rush + do not want to make them late!!

Christy we will not rush and we will not make them late!!!

What is it really?

I don't know, I just do not want to go.

I know what it is and let me put it bluntly:

HE LIKES YOU!!

OK. I am in the library now + will not be disturbed.

Christy I know that it is Tommy's last game + you do not want to miss it + that Davy gets a bug up his ~~as~~ butt about us tagging along but certain oppertunities only come along but once a year.

Brian likes you. He is going. And you like him!! And it is VALENTINES!!!

Also: Scott might go + I want to be there just in case + I do NOT want to go alone!!! So you have to go!!!

I just do not get you. You have been together w/the two of us, walk to + from school with us, sit with us at yunch + Brian is ALWAYS nice to you, jokes w/ you etc etc etc.

You two seem to like each other and act right when the 3 of us are together.

So why do you always act like you don't when you're not??

You said we "seem to like each other". Are you SURE he likes me??

The answer was yes, yes, yes, yes, for Christ's sake, YES. I liked Christy... and I told Margo... and it was in the school paper gossip column at least twice that year (BP LIKES CK)... but when Valentine's day came, I was paralyzed.

O.K.... maybe not *paralyzed*: I bought a card to stick in Christy's locker, but I suffered over the inscription. I LIKE YOU FOR CRYIN' OUT LOUD ALL RIGHT??? might have been a start.

But it would have to have been followed with SO, DO YOU LIKE ME?

And part of me was afraid of what the answer might be. I was short, I had zits... I was stuck in Math I with the dummies (one of whom, I kept forgetting, was Christy).

What was to like?

So I took the chicken's way out.

Thirty-one

Margo if it's not too private, how did Brian sign your valentine??

"Your best friend Brian." Why?

Well he put "Your friend Brian" on mine.

It is a pretty card, I like it, but I just wondered.

Well what did you sign on his?

"Your friend Christy."

O.K. See?

Did he say he liked my card??

Yes he did and again I garentee you that he will be at the dance after school. He was going to go to Marty's to play records which I told him he could do ANY day, but as I told you, certain other oppertunities only come but once a year if you know what I mean, and it would behoof him to go.

As it would you.

So again: PROMISE you will go to the dance. Aside from this all w/ Brian I do NOT want to go to the dance alone.

I promise, Kath is going to the mall with Davy after school and they are not leaving for the game till 6, so we will have plenty of time. So yes I will go.

So there we were, the three of us (with supporting cast), at the Valentine's Dance... milling around the gym, drinking punch... watching everybody else dance (of *course* it was "everybody else"). Standing there, I sort of understood why Scott ran out of the cafeteria.

Actually, that was what Margo and Christy did-- a few times-- but, judging by the way they were both giggling, I don't think they were embarrassed or hiding... in fact, when they came back the fourth time, they both looked pretty determined and serious. I couldn't figure out what was going on, but when Christy stepped away from Margo and me (just as "Betcha By Golly Wow" started playing), I found out. Margo leaned in close and pressed her lips to my ear. "It's a *mushy one*, Bri," she whispered.

"So?" I said.

Margo's whisper got louder, and I could feel her hot breath in my inner ear as she nudged my arm in time to her words. "So?!" she repeated. "So *ask-yay Isty-cray to ANCE-day!*"

I just stood there, watching Christy get more red punch.

Betcha by golly wow... you're the one that I've been waiting for... forever...

Oh-nay.

So how was the basketball game last night?

We LOST. How do you THINK it was???

And not to change subjects Brian but the big question last night and this morning is:

WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK CHRISTY TO DANCE???

I talked her into going to the dance because you would be there! She skipped going to the mall to come to the dance and you just stood there drinking punch thru every slow song! Why did you chicken out???

SHE LIKES YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I know. I like her too. I just felt shy.

Shy!!!! Does a bird get shy of a worm???

I told her it was because you didn't like the music they played which was true enough. But still!!!!

Were her feelings hurt?

Take and pass back next period! --Bri

Brian I thought at first that her feelings were hurt.

But when I asked she said it was ok. She said at least you did not dance with anyone else. So no I do not think she took it personally.

So you are just lucky you are as big a chicken with every other girl as you are with her! If you would of asked someone else, there may of been dísasterus connsequenses.

As for the basketball game, like I said, WE LOST.

To Fannett Medal. What kind of hick school is THAT??

Now my other question is, how was Count Basey??
I looked him up in the encyclopedia last night.
He's jazz, right?

Yeah, big band.

His band was great. Really really LOUD.

How could JAZZ be loud?

It's a big band, Margo. 18 musicians.

Anyway it was fantastic and afterwards, Marty's dad took us backstage and we got autographs!

Really???

Yeah! I got Count Basie's and a couple other guys in the band who I didn't know.

Well, if they are in the encyclopedia then they have to be worth something! Wow! Congratulations!

Now on another note, I have a question: did you notice that my coat smelled like smoke this AM??

No, not any more than normal.

Haw haw. That's mighty funny. Bri. Better send that one to the mini page.

Why do you want to know if you smelled like smoke?

I will tell you about it at yunch - if I try and write it now it will take too long + besides she is already looking at us!

O.K.

Dear Margo,

I am in art class.

To continue what we were talking about in the locker room, I thought Brian didn't ask me to dance because he thought that I didn't write enough on his Valentine. But I can understand him feeling shy, that is sweet.

I feel shy but also scared to be around him for reasons I can't explain, when you are there it's OK but when I get alone it's really hard. Maybe someday I will talk to you about it.

That is great that he went to the concert with Marty. Marty is a nice guy too, I wonder why he didn't go to the dance. Scott wasn't there either I noticed.

Anyway except for losing the game, last night was fun. I have so much fun with you, laughing etc etc.

And I didn't get to answer before the bell but Kath covered for me so there was no "trouble" when we got home. I know that if mom suspected something she would not react the way your mom did.

I need to work on my drawing so talk to you after school.

xoxoxox

love you!!

christy 😊

Thirty-two

Brian,

Do you know how many times the Beatles sing "Na Na Na" at the end of "Hey Jude"?

No, Marty. It has to be a lot though.

The record is 8 minutes long and that's over half of it.

No, its 7:11 on the 45 and 7:05 on the album.

Anyways the answer is 13½ times!!

Really?

Yeah! I counted them last night.

Well, I knew it was a lot.

Yeah, the 45 has 13½. I didn't count the ones on the album version.

The last na na na fades out in the middle. Dad says they probably sang even more after it fades out.

I'd love to hear that. Maybe its on a bootleg!

I wonder if anyone else ever counted them.

Hey Margo!

Not much... just going to go over to Marty's after school. How come?

Bri

Marty's??? What are you gonna do there??

Count na na na's??

Anyway that is good becuz Christy + me are going off to do girl stuff apres school.

Hope you don't mind-

knew you wouldn't -

thanks!!! 😊me!!

As winter turned to spring and seventh grade wore on (and on... and on...), Margo and Christy paired off and went their own way after school more and more often, and most of the time, Margo said the same thing: "You don't mind, do you, Bri? I mean, we're just gonna do *girl things*..."

Actually, though, no, I didn't mind. I had Marty. On those afternoons that Margo and Christy went and did their own thing, Marty and I went off and did ours, which usually meant tromping over to the college snack bar for ice cream (or whatever we could afford), and then downstairs to the college bookstore or a few blocks downtown to browse records at the record store or Murphy's (which had a great \$1.99 bin). Whether we bought anything or not, more often than not, we'd end up at his house, listening to music.

The Morones lived in one side of a duplex near the

college. Of course I knew that his parents were music professors (*Doctors Of Music!* It sounded less like a degree than it did a mystical appointment!), but the first time I stepped into their house, I felt like gravity had been replaced by the pull of music, a natural force that permeated their house in myriad forms: from the lyre-shaped bootscraper on the porch, to the antique pump organ in the foyer (and it worked! And we were allowed to *play* it!), from the doorbell that played "Ode To Joy" to the stained glass window above the organ showing Handel at work...

...and that was just the foyer! Step into the big, bright living room, and you could barely see the couch and coffee table because of the black baby grand that sat right in the middle of the floor, top closed and piled with sheet music, papers, and records (we'll get to the records in a moment); then, spin a hundred-eighty degrees and you'd see the music room --no door separating it from the living room-- with a vibraphone, a Ludwig trap set, a few practice stands, a microphone on a stand, and, most impressive to me, more records than I'd ever seen in one place: the inside wall was lined, floor to ceiling, with albums in various pre-digital formats... 12-inch Lps, 10-inch Lps, reel-to-reel tapes, seven-inch boxed sets ("Now why in the hell would anyone buy RIGOLETTO on 45s, Brian? I don't know. I did! HA!"), and, at the very bottom, books of 78-rpm records. Most of the records were jazz (Dr. Morone taught a jazz studies course, directed the jazz band, and had a jazz show on the college radio station every Sunday morning), although there was a lot of country and bluegrass and folk and blues and classical and, yes, rock and roll, thrown in for good measure... and none of it segregated: BACH, I noticed, was on the top shelf right next to BACHMAN TURNER OVERDRIVE.

When Dr. Morone was home, he was just as likely to play one as the other... and play it LOUD, on a stereo system with (he proudly showed me) six speakers in the living room, two in the music room, two smaller ones in the

kitchen, "and I'm working on the bedroom and the upstairs bathroom." Always loud: "You ever *hear* a live band, Brian?" Dr. Morone shouted one after-school afternoon that he walked in while Marty and I were playing Beatles 45s. "You think the Beatles mess around with *pianissimo*?" and he turned *up* "Don't Let Me Down," then bopped out to the kitchen as the speakers shook.

"He gets a little carried away," Marty apologized, and he turned it back down a notch.

Not that I minded. Truthfully, I met Dr. Morone just in time. I'd started exploring music on my own, via parentally-sanctioned piano lessons, and they were worse than school: drill and scales and fingering exercises and dumb songs. Miss Queen, my teacher, was patient, kindly and scatterbrained (kind of like Edith Bunker), but she had a creaky colostomy bag that always seemed most active during quiet passages.

So...

...I'd be sitting there, trying to get the music out, concentrating on what finger went where and a million other things, and, from next to me on the bench, I'd hear a light *Pffffffttttt*... and then I'd spend the rest of the lesson trying not to laugh.

This went on for two years, all the while with Mom and Dad telling me to "just stick with it and give it a chance," until finally, one *Pfffftttt*-filled session where I kept botching "Greensleeves" and biting the inside of my lip to keep from bursting out laughing, I went home and told Mom and Dad that, really, I'd stuck with it long enough.

I didn't know how I could learn to play the piano the way I wanted to, but lessons weren't the way.

That was what I liked about Marty's dad. He seemed to know a way that had nothing to do with lessons... that went directly to the music itself. First, he opened me up to all that Weird Stuff that his son brought to music class --the Band, the Byrds, the Doors, Jimi Hendrix-- and before long, he was going into his stacks for jazz: first, Duke and Satch and Ella; then his favorites ("Indulge me"): Miles

Davis, Frank Sinatra ("Greatest jazz singer ever, Brian!"), Mary Lou Williams... then his favorite pairings: Johnny Hodges and Wild Bill Davis, Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli, and, one clear bright spring afternoon, Tommy Duncan and Bob Wills.

"It all fits together, Brian," he said as Tommy sang "I Had Someone Else (Before I Had You)" from an old sixteen-inch transcription disc. "Don't make boundaries. Music's music."

Of course, being a Doctor of Music, Marty's dad had a patient to diagnose, and when he asked me if I played any instruments, I told him (sheepishly) that I'd taken piano for a while, but I'd given it up because I just didn't care for the lessons, the drill, the (pffffffttttt) exercises.

"Well," he said, "all of that has its place... although sometimes it can kind of dampen your enthusiasm." He twirled a drumstick in his fingers. "It sounds like your enthusiasm needs to dry out, Brian."

He was right. Hearing his music and talking to him about it made me feel the same excitement and joy I felt when I used to sit down on the piano bench next to my Grandma Pressley. "How about a little 'Winchester Cathedral?'" she'd ask me, and next thing I knew, her stout fingers were gliding effortlessly over the keys, and the song was coming out of the piano through her hands, happy and raucous and fun. No sheet music; she just PLAYED.

How could I do that?

Thirty-three

Brian-

Softball tonight + I am nervous.

First game that I will pitch.

If you would of ever told me that I would of been nervous for softball I would of told you you were crazy!!

I don't know how I will play without you as my catcher. I wish you could dress up as a girl and play with me.

Anyway when your game is over come over to the softball field which is right on the other side of the pavillion from yours.

And good luck catching Andy Clifton tonight. Let me know if he can find the plate without stepping on it going from the bench to the mound. 😊 me!!

SOFTBALL

Adams Youth League

Kennie's Market 6, Pizza House 4 --Lora Shambaugh hit two homers to lead Kennie's (1-1) to a 6-4 win over Pizza House Tuesday night. Tara Longbaugh had two hits for Pizza House (0-2) while losing pitcher Margo Le Doux scored two runs and had two RBIs.

for Kennie's (2-1).

Sheaffer Brothers. 9, Pizza House 4 - - Dawn Guise had four hits and scored three runs as Sheaffer Brothers defeated Pizza House 9-4. Debby Trostle also had two hits and two runs for Sheaffer Brothers (2-2). Losing pitcher Margo LeDoux and Liz Stocker each had two RBIs and two runs scored for Pizza House (1-3).

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Well Brian,

I won't be hitting the record store with you today after school since as I am sure you heard I have

DETENTION!!!!

And on the one hand it felt good to tell Jill off at that moment but on the other it sucks and I would like to know if you have any theories as to why Mr. Getz could neither hear nor see Jill ragging me yet when I pop off at her I'm the one who gets in trouble??????

So anyway have fun and
call me tonight to let me know
what if any records are new today.
me

Margo looked a little surprised when she saw me outside the building that afternoon after detention. "Awwww... you waited? Thanks, Bri," she said, but actually, I hadn't been waiting that whole hour. Of course, as her best friend, I couldn't let Margo walk home alone... but I also didn't want to sit out there like a dork in front of the school for an hour, either... so I walked downtown to the record store without her and then came back. No good new releases to report. "Ah, well... that saves us a *trip* anyway," she said, and we started off toward Pizza House, "where maybe I can get us slices for me being on their team."

(We didn't, but, as Margo said, "We get free team pois anytime we win, so it's worth a try.")

I figured Margo'd need to vent, and we weren't more than five steps away from the front door of the school when

she started. "Can't believe I was the only one who got detention," she said as we tromped out to Fairground Street. "I mean, what about Jill? How come the person who *starts* it gets off scot-free?"

"What'd she say?" I asked.

Margo shook her head. "Ohhhhh..." She took a breath and screwed on her nasal Jill Rice voice. "I saw your name in the sports page, Margo. I thought your *real first name* was 'Marguerite,' not '*Losing pitcher.*'" She brushed her hair back. "So..." I looked over at her and she was smirking. "I said, maybe a little louder than I *should* have, 'Yeah... and I didn't know *your* real first name was 'Bitch.'" Which of course set Mr. Getz's cuss word radar right off." She huffed and put her hands on her hips as we stopped at the corner to cross. "And *now* I get to look forward to telling Mom and Dad I had detention. So thanks a *lot*, Jill!"

"What are you gonna tell them?" I said.

Margo looked at me, puzzled. "What do you mean, 'what am I gonna tell them?' What I just told you." Her voice picked up rhythm. "That I called Jill... The Bitch... a bitch!"

The light was turning yellow the other way and the coast was clear, which meant if we wanted to get more than halfway across before the DON'T WALK started flashing, we had to start crossing immediately. We hit the pavement -- unintentionally in step, I noticed: left, right, left, right-- our feet landing in the middle of the dappled spots of sunlight and shade almost like we were playing an impromptu game of hopscotch. It was a lovely April afternoon; except for the dark cloud over Margo, we were surrounded by sunlight and new green leaves. We stepped together up onto the curb just as the green WALK changed to the red DON'T WALK.

"I just... it sucks, Bri. You know?" I nodded my head. "I mean, what did I do?"

I laughed. "Called Jill a bitch."

Margo tsked. "I know *that*, but... I mean... what did I ever do to her?" Same thing she used to say about Christy. "You know? I mean, really... what's up *her*--" She stopped

herself, like she'd already exceeded her swearword allowance for the afternoon. "...butt? You know?" She shifted into her Jill voice again. "I thought your real first name was Marguerite, not Losing Pitcher." She sniffled lightly. "I mean, what does *she* care if I stunk it up on the mound? You know?" Her voice was wavering just a little. "At least I *play*. *She* doesn't even *play*..."

Ironically, just as she said that, just as I noticed the moisture of tears in her voice, and just as I thought *You know... if this was third grade, I'd put my arm around her so she could get it out*, I also noticed that she'd sped up her pace so that she was walking about a step-and-a-half ahead of me. I caught up with her at the corner, and as I started to reach for her arm, the light changed and she stepped off the curb. "We oughta go to Murphy's," she said. "You know? Sometimes..." *Sniff!* "...sometimes *they* get new records first."

Oh, well, I thought as I walked a step and a half behind her down the block to the department store.

Guess we're not in third grade anymore.

Thirty-four

Dear Margo,

I am sorry I did not call back last night, mom + me were at Grams in Fairfield + did not get home til 11:00.

No I do not think that you are a bad person for getting detention. Tommy gets detention all the time (ok, not ALL the time, but you know) + Kath has also gotten it too. As mom says, sometimes even good people have bad luck, just look at the Kennedys. So don't feel bad.

I agree with you about Jill + do not know what her prob is.

But get this, while I was at my locker yest PM Scott Perry walked by w/Annie and said HI and a few steps later down the hall ran right into Jill at her locker!!! She dropped all her books + stuff. He said "Sorry" but I swear to G-- he went out of his way to run INTO her!!

Anyway I thought you would find that INTERESTING about Scott!!!!

xoxoxo

love you!!

christy 😊

SOFTBALL

Adams Youth League

Travelodge 3, Pizza House 2 - -
Cindy Whitcomb's two-out double in the bottom of the sixth gave Travelodge a come-from-behind win over Pizza House (1-3) on Thursday. Pitcher Margo LeDoux and second baseman Megan James had two hits each for Pizza House.

ADAMS SOFTBALL

**NO-HITTER PROPELS
PIZZA HOUSE TO WIN**

Margo LeDoux pitched a no-hitter and Liz Stocker and Tara Longbaugh both went 3-3 as Pizza House blanked Biglerville Glass 5-0 in Adams County Youth League Softball Thursday night.

LeDoux also had two hits and scored twice for Pizza House (3-3).

Amy Schmidt and Annie Pierce both had strong defensive games for Gettysburg Glass (4-2).

Dear Margo,

I liked being your catcher last night. That was my best game ever. Thank you for telling Coach Hopkins to switch me. I always wanted to play catcher and just think, my first game as catcher and you threw a no hitter!

Liz and me are going to DQ after school. Would you like to come along??

Your friend,

Tara

Summer usually brought certainty with it. For five summers, it'd been Margo and me: playing ball, riding downtown to shop or just play on the battlefield, going to the pool, hanging out on her porch or down in her

basement (or ours, depending on whose parents were sick of seeing us at the moment) watching TV.

But at the end of seventh grade, I felt like the only things I knew for certain were that I'd be going to archaeology camp around the same time that Margo's family was heading north to Lake Opinicon, and that we'd be in eighth grade come autumn. (In spite of Margo's fears, getting an hour of detention for calling Jill Rice a bitch didn't mean that Margo'd get held back.)

The rest of it seemed to be up in the air, though. Margo and I seemed to be going our separate ways. She had Christy and all of her softball friends; I'd gotten to know Marty.

Would I even *see* Margo? Not that I didn't like Marty...

...but he wasn't Margo.

I wished she was into archaeology.

Tues nite 9 pm

Dear Brian -

OK, well the car is all packed and first thing tommorrow we are off to Lake Oppinn-
icon for two weeks of summer fun.

I will miss you!

I will send you a post card and if you
want to write me one send it here:

Margo LeDoux
c/o Mrs. Albert LeDoux
3 Chaffeys Locks Rd
Elgin Ontario K0G 1E0*
Canada

* that's K zero G

And remember we come home on the 9th so if you
mail it after the 4th of July I might not get it
before we leave.

So I will see you when I get back and I will
miss you my freind!!!

me!!! 😊

P.S. I know you will no doubt be busy getting
ready for archeology camp but before you go
why not consider checking in on Christy??

Just as my freind. It would be nice of you to
check up on her and say Hi. Gentlemanly,
and we all agree that you are a gentleman.

P.S.S. OH! If any new Beach Boys singles
come out while I am gone could you please get
it for me? The last one I got is "Sail On Sail-
er" which I liked (though the other side was
better- Denny!) so if the next one is good
maybe I'll think about buying the album.
Which they look like scarey hippies on the
back of but it does have an extra 45 in it.

I'll pay you back when I get home. Thanks! 😊

Camp Sequanota
July 2, 1973

Dear Margo,

Well, I am here at archaeology camp and even though I have only been here a few days, already it is a LOT different than it was last year. First of all, I know what we are going to do. I'm actually one of the "big kids" although there are a couple kids older than me. Ted and John from last year are back. They are a year older than me (about to start ninth grade) but get along with me like they are the same age, which is cool.

Ted has an 8-track player and he has that new Beach Boys album (Holland). It's ok but like he said (like you said too) nothing like their old stuff. Part of the tape is a children's story with music. Weird but I like it. Anyway, two of the three best songs are the ones on the 43 so maybe you should save your money.

Having lots of fun cooking out and doing things here in addition to our dig. Last night Ted and John made a fire under the pavilion that was

so hot that there was sap dripping out of the boards in the roof!

Scraping a lot, though we haven't found anything interesting yet. But we are taking a field trip to the University of Pittsburgh tomorrow to the museum. So we'll get to see where all our work goes.

There is a dance on the Friday night before we leave but I don't think I will go.

Anyway, I miss you and am looking forward to seeing you and having the rest of the summer with you when I get back.

I did not see Christy before I left. If you see her tell her I said hi.

Yours truly,
Brian

P.S. O.K. I just read this and it's BORING and it doesn't say what I want to tell you, and I have time and paper so I will write more.

I didn't see Christy before I left because I was just so nervous to see her without you. I did

not even go to the pool because I was afraid I might see her there. I know you'd probably say "Jeez, don't be nervous. It's just Christy!" but I am. And it's not because I don't like her. It's because I do. Is that dumb?

I also am nervous because there is a girl I really like here at camp, and part of me wants to go to the dance next Friday and ask her to dance with me, and part of me just wants to come back to my cabin that night and zip my sleeping bag all the way up over my head and hide. I wish you were here to talk to.

And Ted and John SMOKE. I don't think it's any big deal. I mean, I don't think they're BAD because of it. But get this. This afternoon they snuck off behind the cabin to have a smoke, and I went along, not to smoke but just to talk to them. Anyway I had been thinking that maybe I would ask them if I could try one. Well, today as they smoked, Ted said "Brian, don't even TRY one of these. You'll never quit." Without me asking. So they must have known that I was thinking about it.

I like them because they're funny and we have fun the way you and I do, but also because they're older but they don't treat me like a little kid. But they still look out for me, like with the smoking.

Anyway, now I have written what I really wanted to write and I can go mail this.

It is almost supper and Ted, John and Larry want me to help with the stove fire so I'm going to say BYE till next weekend. See you then!

Bri

Thirty-five

305 Chamberlain Dr
etc etc etc etc etc
July 6, 1973

Dear Brian,

I got your letter when I got back and first of all I said HI to Christy for you. She says HI back. She is not in town now. She is down in DC with her mom and Kathy, seeing her dad. Did you know they have an apartment in Georgetown? She invited me down sometime later this summer, which I will take her up on, if I can save some allowance.

Anyway I was going to give you a hard time about not wanting to see her the first week I was gone but on Monday when I got back from Canada I was suppose to meet CK at the pool, but that wasn't till 4 and so I decided to ride out by myself early. Well, Scott was there and I could not bring myself to go up to him and say HI. I felt so shy and freaked out when I saw him there (with his mom) that I had to run to the bathroom and pee (Do boys do that when they get nervous? Dogs do. Anyway.) And Brian I like Scott as you well know (maybe too well, and I am sorry) but I was so nervous when I saw him that I ended up leaving before Christy got there. And then she called me when she and Kathy got there. "I came, where are you?" And I told her what happened and I expected her to say

"Why didn't you just say HI and go put your towel down next to him? His mom was there." But she just said "It's not easy, is it?" And she's right, it is not. So I am sorry for giving you a hard time about Christy but I still hope that you follow your heart and go ask the girl you like at camp to dance with you. You are a sweet guy Brian and I know many girls (aside from Christy) who would love to have you dance with them. ~~know~~ So think of that when you go to the dance and are feeling shy. That maybe she is shy too and wants you to ask her but can't say. Like alot of girls, Christy among them.

Brian it is raining here and not only did my softball game get washed out but the Orioles game on the radio is in a rain delay. I am looking out my back window through the rain at your house, thinking of you. And the thing you wrote me about the two "big kids" at your camp smoking and telling you not to ever start reminded me of something that happened this spring with Christy and me that I know I never got to tell you. And now that we are in a rain delay 😊 I will tell you.

Remember the night you went to see Count Basesy with Marty and his dad? Well that night was the QVHS basketball playoff against Fannett Medal

High, and Christy and me went with Kathy and Davy (who are broken up AGAIN, but don't despair: it's a long summer). Do you remember how the next day at school I asked you if I smelled like smoke? Well now I will tell you why.

Like I said, we tagged along w/ Kath + Davy. Just to get a ride, and once we got to the gym we went our seperate ways. And with about a minute to go in the first quarter Christy + me had to go use the little girls room, so we abandon our prime seats (up at the top on the end.) (Sucked. We could not see through the basket.) (Still, that was where mom was sitting when she met dad, so they must be lucky seats.) (Except we lost, so maybe not.) (Anyway) Christy + me leave the game to go hit the head and I go into my stall + when I look down at the toilet paper thing, low and behold there is a full pack of CIGGARETTES just sitting there!!! Open + with a couple missing but full mostly. And with matches stuck in the selafane wrapper.

So I go "Christy!!" And she goes "What?" And I was kind of afraid to even touch them so I jiggled the TP roll a little and they fell down to the ground. "Look!!" Because she was in the stall right next to mine. Well she goes "When did you start smoking??" And I go "I don't smoke, Rebecca, someone left them here!" Well I see her hand reach down (which I tried to

kick but missed) and she grabs them and goes "They're real." And I go "Doyyeee, no, they're candy ones."

Well then there is silence and I know what she's thinking, except I am afraid to do it, but she is Catholic so I know she will. And sure enough she goes "You wanna try one?" and I go "You first" and she goes "I'm afraid. What if we get hooked and then we get cancer?" And I said "Christy you don't get cancer from trying just one cigarette!" "But you can get hooked from just one. That's what happened to Davy and now he can't stop." Like your friends at camp said.

So while we're talking someone comes in the bathroom and then another, and that takes two minutes up so we can both sit there and think about it. I wasn't sure what to do but as soon as the coast was clear I could hear seafane crinkling in the stall next to me and I go "What are you doing?" "I'm going to try one." And I said "Not alone!" So she hands the pack to me under the stall and I take it and take out one- they were skinny and one end had the leafs and the other had a filter inside it. Virginia Slims, which are suppose to be lady's cigarettes. So I go "Christy, they're vagina Slims" and that gets us laughing like crazy, and of course at that point someone else comes in, which of course makes us try to stifle, which just

makes us laugh harder.

So after a few minutes whoever it was who came in leaves and Christy goes "Are you ready?" "Yeah." "OK, here goes" and I can hear her lighting the match - ffffft!- and then she reaches them under the stall and hands them to me. Well I could not get a match lit! I must of wasted five matches. Meanwhile Christy has her ciggarrette lit already, so I feel like a retard. She's going "What's going on?" and I said "I can't get the match lit! You're not smoking yet are you?" and she says "No, I'm waiting for you, but hurry, mine's starting to go out." So I try again and finally the match lights, and just as I'm thinking "OK, this should be easy, I've seen them do this on TV" Christy goes "Just put it in your mouth and suck!"

Well I laughed so hard I blew the match out! We both start laughing again, and now she needs the matches back because hers went out. So she gets hers lit + then hands the matches back to me + I tried a SEVENTH time and low and behold, it lit right up, so I quick held it up to the end of the cig + it lights just as Christy says "What are you doing?"

"I have it in my mouth and I'm sucking!" Both of us laughing hard again.

Well of course now I can taste the smoke and I go "Are you smoking yet?" And she goes "No, I'm wait-

ing for you." And I go "Well I am already, it's not that bad." And she goes "You mean you breathed it all the way in?" And I said "In my mouth." "No, that's not smoking. You have to inhale." "Inhale?" "Kath says you have to take it all the way down in your lungs." "Who is Kath, the smoking expert?" Still laughing, both of us.

And now once again someone has come in the bathroom (with very nice alligator boots!!!) and so we wait. I'm thinking it has to be near halftime, although we can still hear crowd noises and the buzzer. So she leaves but in that time I have been looking at the end of this burning cigarette, smelling it and with the taste in my mouth + I am having second thoughts. But Christy goes "O.K., you ready?" And I go "On three" and we count 1... 2... 3!!! and I close my eyes and breath it in my lungs and Brian, it was like PURE FIRE!!! It was like breathing in smoke at a campfire you can't turn away from, like when the wind shifts and you get a faceful, except instead of covering your face you just breath it in deeper. It burned all the way down my throat and into my chest and I coughed so hard I spit the cigarette out! So I'm there sitting on the throne, gagging, and meanwhile I heard nothing from the next stall (Christy coughed at the start but then nothing) and I

thought maybe she was asfixiated so I said "Christy, are you OK?" Coughing while I am asking. And she goes "I'm fine." Well we step out of the stalls and she has the thing stuck in her mouth, puffing away like nothing's wrong, and I go "You're not breathing it in!" and she goes "Yes I am" and she takes a big puff to prove it, then exhales, and I could tell she wasn't faking it because when she breathed in her chest got big and the end of the cigarette got all glowy red.

She looked all cool - I hate to say it but in spite of what they say in health class, she did look glamerus with that platinum hair of hers and the cigarette in her fingers. Like an old movie star. Jane Mansfeild or Marilyn Monroe or someone.

So now I am thinking "I have to try this again" but since I dropped mine on the floor I took hers (she had on cherry lipstick which was all over the filter end) and took a puff and breathed it into my lungs. Brian it was worse then the first try, except this time Christy is standing there watching me, so of course I am thinking "I'm gonna hold it, I'm gonna hold it."

Well I held it maybe 2 seconds before I coughed + doubled over. I swear I was coughing so hard I thought I was gonna puke. It was almost the dry heeves.

So Christy helps me to the sink and I cup my

hands and drink some water and that helped some, but I'm still burning and I've got that taste in my mouth.

So I calm down a little and Christy + me straighten ourselves up and make ourselves pretty (er 😊), and I am still coughing but Christy seems fine (I swear she had tried it before but I asked + she said no, it was her first time) and I said "I need a coke!"

Except now it is halftime and so everyone is lined up at the concession stand - including Scott Perry with his "best friend" Annie Pierce who said Hi and who I swear smelled it on me a mile away. So we are standing in line trying not to cough but coughing anyways, feeling like everyone smells it and is looking at us. So I get a large coke and Brian, that was the best coke I ever had - so cool, so refreshing. (That sounds like a commercial!!)

So that soothed my throat except when I finished it, my throat dried right back out + it burned almost worse than before. And it did nothing for my lungs. I couldn't stop coughing and I had three cokes, which brought on its own trouble, because then I couldn't stop peeing!!!

They don't tell you THAT in health class when they cover smoking, but they should. Smoking cigarettes can lead to cancer, heart disease, emphysema,

and peeing too much!! 😊

So we get our cokes and go back out to the stands, and I am so dry and my throat is so sore I need another, and another, so by the end of the game I am all loopy from the sugar and caffeine, and plus have made three more trips to the head. I'm thinking "My first, my last, my only cigarette."

Anyway, the buzzer sounds, the game ends, we lose, and the two of us go to meet Kath + Davy and as soon as Kath sees us she smells it. So I'm thinking "If she smells it, Dad + Mom will definitely smell it." But Kath says "Just tell them Davy smokes and he was breathing it on you in the car on the ride back." So that sounds like a plan. (+ Christy said maybe that was why she didn't gag like me, because she's gone out with those two before + she is use to it. Although I still wonder if she tried it before and is just afraid to say. Catholic guilt, you know?)

Well Kath + Davy drop me off + as soon as I go in the house Mom gets a look on her face like -get ready- she smelled smoke, hahaha!! Well before she can ask what I was doing, I start going on about the game and all and Kath and her little car with Davy Morone in the front seat smoking cigarettes and blowing the smoke back over the seat in Christy's and my faces. And I think she bought it.

But then I was sitting at the dining room table doing my algebra and I kept clearing my throat and coughing, and finally Mom comes in from the kitchen with a little glass of that lemon and honey she makes for a sore throat. And she goes en Français "The thing I always wonder about smoking is why someone would want to do that to themselves on purpose: not the cancer, but the smell + the coughing + the sore throat." And I said "Ouais" and our eyes met, and I think she knew what I was up to. But she didn't lecture me. She just kissed my smelly hair and left me the lemon + honey and that fixed me back up.

Mostly.

And so that's the story of Christy + me trying ciggarettes, which I thought of because of what your two freinds there said. I kept asking you if we smelled like smoke the next day because even after taking a shower + brushing my teeth I could smell it + taste it on myself. It was worse then the taste that lingers after you puke. I swear four months later I can still taste it a little in the back corners of my mouth.

Christy by the way said that if I never do it again then neither will she. She is a good freind like that, like you. In all the way or out, but never leaves me hanging on my own out to dry.

And that is why I agree with your friends at camp.

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Don't even try it. It's not worth it. You aren't missing anything unless you enjoy coughing.

So that's that, and I am sorry that this note went on so long but this is what I would of told you if I'd TOLD you. And writing it made me miss you less!

So now it is time for bed. And the Orioles game has been rescheduled as part of a doubleheader the next time they play the Indians in August. So maybe we can talk my dad or your dad into taking us to see it.

So again I miss you and can't wait to see you when you get back. Go to that dance and ask that girl to dance. You will not regret it. Do it for Christy (and me).

See you Sunday (or if you don't get back too late, Saturday).

xoxoxox me!! 😊

Thirty-six

Some things were so big back then... and yet you'd have to be a skilled social archaeologist to unearth them in either Margo's or my toy chest.

Like *the girl at camp* and what that phrase meant to me.

On the first night of camp, I noticed a blonde girl in line in front of me in the cafeteria at dinner. Probably one of the skinniest girls I'd ever seen. Tall, like Scott Perry, slender and lean... not flat-chested (I looked a few times; there was definitely something there)... blonde, like Christy, as in: her hair looked like it had been some other color, but she changed it. (I knew this, but I didn't know how I knew it, until later in high school, when Margo said "Kunte Kinte, Bri? Check the *roots*?") Pine green eyes behind oval-shaped brown tortoise shell glasses that, amazingly, didn't hide her eyes (or look drawn on), but seemed to accentuate her eyes and her prettiness. Thin lips and a narrow nose... clear skin (a biggie at age 13). When she walked, she moved like she had a gyroscope keeping her level and balanced... like she could have hiked all the way up the hill back to the arky cabins with a stack of dishes atop her head and not worried about breaking one (although if she had, we would have just cleaned up the shards, painted little 36-SO-47s on them, and sent them off to the museum).

Poised.

I didn't say anything to her in that line other than "Hi;" she was standing with a friend (a short, rotund --relatively speaking-- black haired girl), talking to her, so I really didn't want to butt in; besides, I was with Ted and John. She wasn't an arky, so I didn't see her regularly... but over the next few days, I ran into her a couple of times (in line at the pool concession stand --she looked even skinnier in a bathing suit-- at the mail shed, at the campfire) and

each time, I felt totally tongue-tied --couldn't even stammer a HI-- and then, as I walked away, felt like she was watching me.

On the first Friday night, there was a talent show, and even though I didn't have the guts to get up and perform, I still felt like I was On. While we all sat there suffering through Dave Rowllis' tuneless, voice-cracking rendition of "Sounds of Silence" (HELLO DARKNESS MY OLD FRIENNNNNNNNNND! I'VE COME TO TALK WITH YOU AGAINNNNNNNNNNNNNN! *Not* what Art and Paul had in mind), Ted elbowed me. He'd already said "God, this sucks," so I wondered what was next.

"Bri!" he whispered. "That skinny blonde's got her eye on you."

I looked out the corner of my eye, and she looked down, so yeah, she must have.

But even feeling that I was being watched, even with Ted elbowing me and then him and John needling me all the way back up the hill to our cabins ("Brian's got a girrrrrrrl-friennnnnnnd!") no way did I want to go to that dance.

Why not? *Because I couldn't stop thinking about Christy!* The girl I couldn't ask to dance on Valentine's... the girl I couldn't admit that I "liked" (never mind "loved;" just *liked*) any time Margo grilled me... the girl I couldn't bring myself to call or visit when Margo left town, much less be alone with outside of math class... the girl I couldn't make move number one on... now here I was, two hundred miles away, thinking about her constantly while I dug (scraped), seeing her face when I shut my eyes at night, wondering what she was up to (was she in DC? Going to the pool?), wondering should I send her a postcard (I didn't know her address, but if I sent it to "Christy Kelly, Buford Circle"... I mean, there was only one Kelly on Buford Circle, right? She'd get it)... one time I passed the payphone and thought about calling, but I didn't know her number, didn't have enough change on me... thinking of her pretty smile and her platinum blonde hair and that red sweater she wore,

and her lawn-green eyes...

Your friend, Brian.

Great.

(Well, *she'd* written *Your friend, Christy.*)

But then mail call came on the second Wednesday of camp, and when I saw the thick lavender envelope with *LeDoux 305 Chamberlain Quaker Valley PA 17399* in the return address, I didn't even wait to take it back to my cabin: I ripped it open and sat on a picnic table bench right outside the mail shed, reading... and as I read, I kind of felt like I was being *watched*... and I looked up just in time to see a tall skinny blonde girl and her short black-haired friend open the screendoor of the shed to go in and see if they'd gotten any mail.

I was almost all the way through Margo's rendition of "Smokin' In The Girls' Room" when I heard the shed's screendoor creak open and then slap shut. I glanced over the edge of the page toward the door, and there she was: That Blonde... striking a pose on one leg, leaning against the red-toned barnboard wall next to the doorjamb, her long right leg bent, foot behind her butt.

I was laughing out loud at Margo's line "Smoking can lead to cancer, heart disease, emphazema, and peeing too much!!" and That Blonde said "Good letter?"

I looked up and nodded, a little embarrassed. "Yeah... from my best friend."

She brushed her bangs back off her forehead. "He must be a funny writer."

"Yeah, yeah," I said, shuffling back through the pages absentmindedly, and my eyes caught Margo's signature on the last page.

xoxoxoxoxoxoxo ???

Hugs and kisses?

From *Margo*?!

I folded the letter over itself, like all of those hugs and kisses were little butterflies that were going to flutter off the page and give me away. "Yeah, we... we make each other laugh..." I stammered, and I looked up at her, and

somehow my next line seemed automatic. "I'm Brian."

She smiled. "Brian," she repeated. "I'm Jean."

"Jean," I repeated. I liked the name.

O.K. So her name's Jean. Good. That was easy. Real good. Her name's Jean. Jean.

Do you want to say it again, or use it in a sentence?

"What program are you in?" I asked.

"Biology," Jean said. "And you're an arky."

I smiled. "How'd you know?"

Jean brushed her bangs back again. "Because I barely ever see you anywhere. You guys all keep to yourselves up there in your *dig*..."

I noticed a slightly snotty emphasis on the last word, but she was right. The rest of the programs were housed in cabins down at the center of the camp, but the arkys were back in the woods, up the hill about 400 yards, right next to the homestead site.

"Well," I said, "they usually keep chains around our ankles, you know... but if we find anything good, they let us come down in the afternoon."

"Really?" Jean said, wide-eyed, like a part of her actually believed this.

I laughed, the way Christy laughed when I asked her if the guys wore skirts to Catholic School. "No!" I said.

Jean *phewed*. "I was gonna *say*..."

I noticed all this... and I wondered if she could tell I was kidding, and it instantly made me like her a little less. But then just as fast as that feeling flashed over me, she looked down at her knee and, with a single question, neutralized that thought:

"So... you think they'll unchain you for the dance Friday?"

My face got warm. (Or warmer; I was sitting in direct sunlight, no cap.)

I was also suddenly conscious of Margo's letter (xoxoxoxoxo) in my lap.

"If we find anything good," I said, tapping the letter against my thigh, and as I said it, Jean's black-haired

friend came out, too-big care package cradled in her arms, and almost ran into Jean.

"Hi!" she giggled, and then she looked at me. "Hi," she repeated to me, surprised and a little more serious, and she smiled wide and big.

"Hi," I said. I realized that I kind of liked her, too... though I hadn't really noticed her before... just in relation to Jean...

"This is Ginny," Jean said. "Ginny... Brian."

Ginny held out her hand, trying to keep her grip on her care package. "Nice to meet you, Brian," she said, and we shook hands. Her grip was solid. I liked that.

For a second we were still, silent, like we'd missed a cue, or perhaps like we'd started veering off-script and gotten lost in improv... but Jean got us back on track. As Ginny looked at the leg of the bench under me, Jean brushed her bangs back one more time and put her right foot down.

"Well, I hope you find something good on Friday, Brian," she said. "It'd be nice if they let you come down." She looked at Ginny. "Let's go eat your cookies," she said.

Ginny smiled at me. "Nice meeting you, Brian," she said again, smiling, and she and Jean tramped around the corner of the mail shed, off to Wherever.

Well, now I was *really* confused. Jean seemed to like me... and I liked her... or was it that I liked that she liked me... but Ginny... I mean, sure, she was shorter than me... and still had a lot of baby fat... black hair... definitely not my type... so why did I feel like I liked her almost as much as (more than?) I liked Jean...

As if that wasn't enough... 200-some miles away, there was Christy saying HI to me via Margo's xoxoxoxo letter.

You're a sweet guy. I read that line a few times.

Do it for Christy (and me). Not sure what *that* meant... or what exactly she'd started to write and then crossed out (I noticed these things)...

Whatever it all meant...

...Friday night after we finished supper and (spoiler metaphor alert!) let the coals in the stove die out, Ted and John asked me if I was going to go to the dance. I took a last look at my sleeping bag and said "Yeah, sure, why not?" trying to act all cool and nonchalant... like, you know: *Just another Friday night at a canvas-walled cabin up in the middle of the woods by an archaeological dig at a Lutheran summer camp... we're done digging... and Lights Out isn't till ten... not much else to do... might as well tramp on down to the main camp and see what's happening.*

(Hey... at least there'll be free snacks!)

The dance (like the talent show... and dinner... and Sunday morning services) was in a converted barn at the center of camp. Like all (both) junior high dances I'd been to, too-loud music, which Ted started singing along to as soon as we came in the door. "Little Willywilly won't... GO HOME! But you can't make *Willy* go, *Willy* won't go!" Low lights, so you couldn't really tell who was who unless you were right next to them...

...or unless they were tall and skinny and standing with a shorter, relatively rotund friend in a small group of girls under the red glow of an EXIT sign.

Ted hit my arm lightly. "There's your blonde, Bri."

My blonde.

(Gulp!)

Just as I was thinking I should maybe just grab myself a coke and leave, "Little Willy" faded and "Betcha By Golly Wow" started.

Ask-yay er-hay to ANCE-day.

Do it for Christy and me!

Time for a snap decision... I turned from the snack table and crossed the empty dancefloor (*Holy shit. If I ask her to dance, we'll be the ONLY TWO OUT THERE!!*) over to the small group of girls by the door. Jean was standing with her back to me, but Ginny was facing me. She'd spotted me over by the snack table (I'd spotted her, too), and as I reached out to tap Jean on the shoulder, Ginny's eyes met mine... and as Jean turned to face me, saw me and smiled,

I suddenly felt bad about what I was going to ask her. The words got caught in my dry throat (but no time for a Coke!); still, I got them out:

"Do you want to dance?"

Jean smiled. "Yeah," she said softly, and I took her hand and led her out onto the floor. Out of the one corner of my eye, I could see two other couples coming out (Phew!), and as Jean dissolved into my arms, her chin resting on my shoulder and her arms wrapped loosely around my waist, I saw, out of the other corner of my eye, a short, slightly-rotund girl step quickly out the door under the EXIT sign and into the July night.

Sigh, Jean exhaled warm on my neck.

Yeah, I thought as I looked at the EXIT sign and the doorway underneath.

Sigh.

* * *

"So where'd Ginny go?" I asked Jean as we stood sipping from bottles of Coke, recovering from our dance.

Jean huffed. "Oh, *who knows?*" she said, rolling her eyes, and she took a sip of her Coke. "So... you're from near Gettysburg?"

From that moment, and for years after that, and even a little bit to this day, the phrase *the girl at camp* always made me feel a little heartsick, like maybe I'd tapped the wrong girl on the shoulder.

Try finding THAT in those toy chests.

III.

"Oh, nothing... nothing..."

YOUR RECEIPT
Thank you for shopping

CASHIER # 2
7-10-73 9:13am

| | |
|------------------|------|
| GROCERY | .89 |
| GROCERY | .89 |
| GROCERY | .59 |
| GROCERY | .59 |
| PRODUCE | .27 |
| PRODUCE | .31 |
| COSMETIC | 2.29 |
| GROCERY | .89 |
| GROCERY | .69 |
| MEAT | 2.27 |
| MEAT | 2.49 |
| MEAT | 1.87 |
| DAIRY | .85 |
| DAIRY | .85 |
| GROCERY | 2.11 |
| DAIRY | .99 |
| DAIRY | .59 |
| BAKERY | .35 |
| CANDY | .15 |
| PRODUCE TARE | .64 |
| .65 lbs @ .99/lb | |

Good morning Brian!
I cannot beleive that 2 wks
at church camp did not
buy you a free pass this
Sunday but never mind.
When you get back from
church + you change out
of your church clothes +
have yunch, come on over.
We can do lots of things
but what I want to do most
is talk to you about camp
+ vacation + go see the
Battle of the planet of the
apes which is the \$1 dollar
matinee at 2 downtown.

Although if you want to
go swim we could do that
too or watch the Philllies or
Orioles in my basement.
All of which you will not-
ice are COOL activities in
cool places. I am not feeling
so hot today and the last
thing I want to do is be in
the sun (although if we go
swim we can sit in the
shade) I don't know if I
want to be around the
house though so a MOVIE
would be best, hint hint! 😊
So just come over when
you are ready so we can
go do something 😊me!!

Thirty-seven

I got back too late on Saturday to see Margo, and unfortunately, two weeks at church camp did *not* earn me a free pass, so on Sunday morning at 10 am, there I was, sitting in a pew, dressed in a "light cotton" blazer, white shirt, and clip-on tie (perfect outfit for 90 degree weather), sitting tight between my parents, sweat rolling down between my shoulder blades and from my armpits down the insides of my arms.

"Wish they'd crack open a stained-glass window..." Dad whispered to me midway through the sermon.

Still, for as hot and as humid as it was, I didn't take a shower when I got home. I'd already taken one *before* church. From this point on, the day was about doing something that would make me need another one... even though, judging from Margo's note, we were probably going to do Something Cool.

So: no shower.

When I went over to meet Margo after Sunday lunch so we could go to the movie, she looked a little *different* to me. Not a *lot* different; just a little... nothing I could really put a finger on... maybe it was just the tan. In the summer, Margo's skin got dark tanned and her hair light, almost platinum like Christy's. Plus a detail I suddenly remembered when she opened her back door: "Up at the lake," she told me a few summers before, "we skinnydip! So no tanlines!"

Skinnydipping... didn't really *want* to think about that... so of course when I saw how dark her skin was, what was the first thing I thought of?

(Did they even *have* topless native girls in Canada?)

Margo brushed her hair out of her face. "Hey, Bri... wait... wait just a sec," and she ducked back inside. "Dad?" she yelled. "My *allowance*..." and a few seconds later she was coming back out the door, five dollars in her tanned

hand. "Late *again*," she said. "I'm *supposed* to get it on Saturday after Mom and me clean. He always makes me *ask* for it." And she zipped open her purse (!) and then caught my eye. "What?" she tittered.

I felt like Margo could see herself and the bevy of Topless Native Girls frolicking on my mental movie screen... but, fortunately, I had an out:

"When did you start carrying a purse?" I said.

Margo stuffed her money down into the neat red leather pouch. "Since Grandma got it for me in Kingston. Tres chic, huh?" and she pulled out a pack of Juicy Fruit. "Gum?" I took a stick and she unwrapped one for herself, and we walked downtown to the theater for the matinee.

I told Margo about Jean ("So you asked her to dance? Yay! Good work, Bri!") and Ginny ("Awwww... she wanted you to ask *her*. Well, what can you do about *that*?") and she told me about Canada ("No skinny dippin' anymore. Aside from Jompaw, there is now a family from New York in the cottage next door. Who *stare* like Steve Kelly."), and by 1:45 we were buying our tickets, the only two people in line. "Don't people know this might be the last one?" I said as I held the door open for Margo.

"It's like mom says, Bri," Margo said. "People don't care about art."

As soon as we stepped inside, I knew we'd made the right choice. After the moist church service, and the sticky walk downtown, the dark, air-conditioned theater felt like a walk-in freezer... better than the pool. We followed my Seat Selection Formula (middle of the theater, width of the screen back) and we picked our seats, but as Margo reached for her purse so she could give me money toward popcorn (I always bought the tickets; she always bought the snacks), she got a sick look on her face.

"Yeesh..." she said.

"What?"

"What's that *smell*?" She screwed her nose up funny as she checked the air.

"What smell?"

Margo zipped open her purse. "Come on... *you* smell it. You don't smell that?" I shook my head no. "It's *gamey*... like a zoo." She handed me two dollars. "What, do they pump monkey odor into the theater to make the movie more real?" Margo always called the apes in the *Planet of the Apes* movies "monkeys."

I took her money. "I don't smell anything," I said.

"Well, you must be... smell-blind," she said as she zipped her purse shut, and then she slouched down in her seat, knees up on the seatback in front of her.

I walked back to the lobby to get us our cokes and corn (making sure they buttered and salted Margo's popcorn halfway up, then buttered and salted it again when it was all the way full), and when I got back ("Did they butter and salt it halfway up and then butter and salt it again when it was all the way full?"), she was settled in her seat.

"Can't believe you don't *smell* that," she said as the lights went down and the movie started, but all I could smell was the sweet buttered popcorn in my lap.

As the previews rolled, I could hear Margo munching away next to me, and just as I was about to say "Jeez, it *sounds* like a zoo," she leaned over, right up against me, and sniffed.

"Ewwwww..." she said as she sat back.

"Ewwwww what?" I said.

"It's *you*." She shrunk back into the far corner of her seat.

"What do you mean, 'it's me?'"

"I mean--" and Margo pinched her nostrils shut with her fingers and sang "BEEEEEEEEEE-OHHHHHHHHH!"

I laughed. "Shut up."

"Brian, I'm serious... *you smell!*" She shriveled back into her corner. "*Battle... for the Planet... of the Brians!*"

I laughed. "It is *not* me..."

The movie started, and as I leaned forward to pick my coke off the floor, I caught a whiff of something that smelled like someone had peed into a cup of chicken broth.

I sat back... very subtly bent my head down... lifted my left arm... inhaled... and...

Margo, God bless her, didn't say another word about it the whole rest of the movie. I was braced for insults, questions, wisecracks --maybe even a lecture-- but she was silent all the way through the closing credits, right up until we started out of the theater.

"No, Bri," she said as we started walking into the breeze. "Me in front."

We walked up Dartmouth Street toward home, but she detoured across the street to Holbert's Apothecary. "Wait here," she said as she opened the front door, and I sat on the stoop in the heat, sweat dripping down my face, my back... every part of me sticky and damp.

O.K.... so maybe I shouldn't have skipped the shower.

Less than two minutes later, Margo came back out, a small brown paper bag in her hand. "Did you even *take* a shower today?" she said as she removed a wax pack of baseball cards and some Juicy Fruit from the bag.

"I thought we were gonna go swim..."

--Pff! 'Swim.' O.K." She handed the bag to me. "Here. Use this."

I was kind of afraid to open the bag. What if it was Snakes In A Can ("BOY-YOY-YOY-YOY-YOING!")?

Nope... no springloaded snakes... just a wax pack of baseball cards... and... an opened-front cardboard package with a bottle in it.

Right Guard. Extra Dry Roll-on.

I looked up at Margo. "You really think I need this?"

Margo tsked. "Brian, seriously... you smell like... chicken soup that somebody peed in."

I laughed. "I do not--"

--Brian!" Margo put her hand on my wrist and looked me in the eye, and I noticed she was wearing eye shadow: lightly applied turquoise powder that flashed when she blinked.

"Use it," she said softly. "Trust me."

I nodded. "O.K."

She let go of my wrist. "Now let's go home so I can hose you off..."

Thirty-eight

Brian, 11:30
Margo called while you + dad
were out. She said she still
feels a little sick but if you
want to go to the pool she'll
go with you.

Mom

Our Monday afternoon at the pool started out pretty much the same way as all of our other pool afternoons, except for Margo complaining that she felt "icky" ("I guess it's the humidity, huh?"). But no way would we let a little Ickiness keep us from swimming. We rode our bikes out together and at 12:59, we were standing at the entrance to the breezeway with the half-dozen or so other Diehard Swimmers when Mr. Shank (one of the pool managers and the high school swimming coach) rolled up the heavy wooden garage door to let us in.

Sign in... walk (don't run) across the concrete macadam to the far end of the pool, near the diving boards, and toss our towels and stuff down in the narrow strip of lawn adjacent to the boards (the better to hop right into line and reserve our places before the end of the adult swims).

The lifeguard blew the whistle and Margo and I ran off our respective diving boards. And about twenty minutes later, we found out why she felt Icky.

When Margo and I did the diving boards, we'd position ourselves in the two side-by-side lines so that we could go off the ends at the same time. Sometimes this meant a little jockeying for position with the kids behind us ("No, it's O.K.... *you go first*") but it was worth it: we'd count down and then run off the ends, screaming and making faces at each other as we fell feetfirst to the water... and every so often, in a maneuver that predated the Apollo-Soyuz mission by three years, we'd touch bottom, swim toward each other, and shake hands underwater before we surfaced.

That Sunday afternoon, on what became our last dive, we counted down --"1... 2... 3!" --and then leapt simultaneously, breaking the surface and swimming toward each other underwater to meet in the middle. Margo's cheeks were puffed out, and when our hands met, she let loose a stream of bubbles from her mouth. But as I shook her hand, I looked past her face and had to look a second time.

There was a small, faint, but discernable pink cloud of blood trailing from her crotch.

We surfaced together and as Margo brushed the mat of hair off her face (she never wore a swim cap), I said, "Margo, you're bleeding."

She looked at me, puzzled. "What?"

The chlorinated water was running down my face into my mouth. "I *said*, 'You're *bleeding*,'" I repeated, but at the same time I said it, Andy Clifton, the fatso waiting on Margo's board ("God, it almost bends down to the water when he's on it. I swear he's gonna break it"), yelled "Hurry up, lovebirds!"

"Ahhh, shut up, Shamu," Margo snapped, and she turned and swam over to her ladder as I swam to mine. I walked (not ran!) around the end of the pool on the concrete to meet her as she was walking back to the diving board for

the next round. She got into line and started counting the kids in front of her to make sure we'd go off together.

"What, Bri?" she said. "What'd you say in the pool?"

"I said, 'You're bleeding.'"

Margo got a scared look on her face. "Bleeding? Where?" She lifted up her left (pitching) arm to inspect for cuts, but I pointed to her left leg. She gasped as she spotted the thin trickle of bloody pool water running down the inside of her thigh, across her knee and down her shin and ankle, onto the concrete.

"*Shit*, Brian!" she whispered. "My period!"

Her period?

I knew what a period *was* (we'd had the *Girls Leave The Room And Boys Stay Right Here* talk in Mr. Lebo's class two years before) but even so... I mean, it's one thing to be told *Women bleed from their uterus during their periods* and another thing entirely to see my best friend standing before me in her swimsuit with blood running down her leg.

"Your period? Here?" I said.

Margo tsked. "Yes. *Here. Now.*"

Before I could say anything else stupid, she was off across the macadam to the front desk. As "The Night Chicago Died" played on the pool PA, I stood at a safe distance, arms wrapped tight across my chest, watching Margo talk to Karin, the desk attendant. A few seconds later the two of them walked over to the women's locker room.

"Could It Be I'm Falling In Love"... still no Margo...

Karin came out and walked coolly back to the front desk, not even looking over at me...

*Three songs in a row on your all-hit music station...
98YCR!*

Finally, as the piano arpeggios of "Colour My World" rang across the pool grounds, Margo emerged from the locker room, her towel wrapped around her waist like a sarong. She looked flushed but relieved, and as she walked toward me, smiling, laughing at herself, she looked like the same old Margo... same old, but different somehow... like the tan... but more...

She sang along in a whispered voice as she walked toward me: *As time goes on... I re-al-iiiiize... just what you meeeeean... to-oooo meeee...* "This one's a great one," she said. "I keep forgetting to buy it." She came to a stop right in front of me, took a breath and then exhaled, her shoulders dropping. "Wow. My period. That was why the bleeding. And feeling all icky."

"Are you O.K.?"

She laughed lightly. "Yeah, just... surprised. I mean, I wasn't ready for *that*. I thought it'd come at home. I mean, Christy--" She stopped herself, like she was about to give too much information.

"Christy what?" I said.

"Oh, nothing... nothing..."

We started walking back toward the diving board, although I had the feeling we were done diving. "Karin's a sweetie," Margo said. "She's on the swim team with Kathy Kelly. Anyway... she gave me a tampon and helped me rinse the blood out of my suit." She laughed and shook her head, looking around, blushing lightly. "Or I could just go ask Karin for the microphone." She sighed. "Anyway... I'm glad you saw it-- *caught* it, I mean. *You* know..." She brushed a strand of hair off her face. "God..."

Silence. We stood there at the corner of the pool as Andy and the kids splashed behind us. I felt like an actor who'd forgotten his next line, as the music played from the speaker above us.

Color my worrrrrld with hope

Of loving you...

"Brian," Margo said as she looked across the pool, "you think we could maybe just go sit in the shade and stuff?" Her voice got quick. "I'm O.K.... it's just..." She looked back at me and her shoulders dropped again. "I don't think I'm ready to get back in the pool just yet." Our eyes met and she forced a smile. "You know?"

I didn't, but I did. I nodded my head.

"Yeah, we can go sit."

Margo smiled even bigger and touched my right arm.

"Thanks, Bri," she said, and we walked back to our towels.

And, at least for one of us anyway, thus began puberty.

Thirty-nine

Sitting in the shade while Margo had her first period was not really what either of us had in mind for the afternoon, and around two o'clock, we decided that we'd had enough. Or, rather, Margo decided that *she'd* had enough. "Maybe we can just go down to my basement and play Monopoly or something," she said, and while that didn't sound like a *great* idea, still, she was having her period, so maybe that was best.

Of course, if she was having her period, maybe the best thing would be for her to skip Monopoly and just go home and take a nap... I could find something to do on my own for the rest of the afternoon.

But then how would she get home? I mean, we'd ridden our bikes to the pool, and she was *bleeding* down there where she had to sit. Should she even *ride* her bike? And would walking be any better? I mean, she was BLEEDING DOWN THERE... like Margo always said, "Blood's never good, Bri." But especially not Down There.

How much would she bleed? How long? Could she, you know, ***bleed to death from her period?***

(And this is going to happen every month??!!)

I took a breath.

"Monopoly's cool," I said, trying to sound calm, and I started to roll up my towel...

...but then, down by the pool, coming out of the women's locker room, I saw two girls: a tall, reddish-brown-haired girl about Karin's age, followed by a shorter, platinum-haired girl around Margo's and my age.

Kathy Kelly.

And Christy.

Must... roll towel... faster... losing... strength--

"Christy! Kath!" Margo shouted, and she waved, and as the screendoor shut behind Kathy, she scanned the grounds, then spotted Margo and waved back, smiling. Christy, though, saw us (me?) and froze in her tracks, like she wanted to turn around and just hide in a stall in the locker room for the rest of the afternoon, listening to the old ladies talk while they changed and showered. But Kathy said something to her, and the two of them started tromping toward us across the macadam, Christy a step behind Kathy, like her big sister was leading her against her will on an invisible leash.

"God, I'm glad they're here," Margo said as she sat back.

"Yeah," I flatlined, hoping Margo'd hear my word and not my tone.

TSK! "Christy *likes* you, Brian," Margo said. "She *always* asks about you. She's just..." Sigh. "She's *shy*. That's all." She brushed her hair back. "But just act normal. You know? Like you do with me. Just act normal."

(As Margo herself said a couple years later, "*Nothing* guarantees that you will act like a retard *more* than someone telling you 'Just act normal.'")

"Hey, Margo!" Kathy called when they got within ten steps of our towels, and then she caught my eye and grinned big. "Heyyyyyy Briiiiiannnnnnn," she sang, and she shot a glance back at Christy, who just looked down.

"Hey guys," Christy said softly, looking at neither of us.

"You two are early," Margo said.

"Well," Kathy said, tossing her beach bag onto the grass, "I wanted to wait and come out later, but *Rebecca* here--"

Christy tsked. "Kath..."

Kathy continued. "...wanted to come out early and see if anyone was here yet," and on the word *anyone*, she shot me a quick smirking glance. "But it's not just *anyone*...

reflecting off her platinum blonde hair--

"Your *hair* is so *light*, Margo," Kathy said, reaching out to touch Margo's hair. "Wow!" she said, and then she smirked at her sister. "It's almost the *exact same color* as yours, Chris..."

Christy blushed. "Kath..." she said.

Kathy picked up her towel and spread it on the grass. "*You're* the one who wanted to go back to blonde..."

And Christy did something that I never thought I'd hear her do: mock her sister. "*You're* the one who wanted to go back to blonde," she repeated in the same nasal whine I hated Steve for, and then she TSK'd. "Are we gonna get in?"

Kathy looked at me as she replied to Christy. "Don't you wanna visit?"

"Yeah," Margo said. "What's the rush, woman?" She also glanced at me, for just a flash. "Do we *smell*?"

Haw haw.

(Note to self: check pits later, just in case.)

Christy's shoulders dropped. "Sorry, Margo," she said, "it's just... I'm hot... I wanna get in the water." She looked at Margo. "You gettin' in?"

"We *were* in," Margo said. "I kind of... don't wanna swim."

"How come?" Christy said.

"Oh, just..." She looked at me sideways. "I feel icky."

"Icky?"

Margo nodded. "Yeah... you know how you felt when..." She glanced at me again.

This was tricky. Margo had to let Christy know, but in a way that made Christy think that I *didn't* know... even though *I* was the one who'd seen the blood.

She took a breath and looked back at Christy. "When... you know... you were visiting your dad?"

Christy's eyes got wide. "Really? Today?"

Margo nodded. "First time."

(So... Christy apparently had her first period when she was visiting her Dad in DC.)

Margo glanced at me again, then back at Christy. "So

actually... we were just gonna ride home..."

Kathy cut right through the subtext. "You want some Midol, Margo? I have some in my locker." She reached a hand down to help Margo up. "Come on, honey," she said.

Margo looked at Christy, then me, a little nervous. "You think it's O.K.?"

Christy nodded. "Better than--" She looked at me and cut herself off. "... feeling all icky. You know?"

Kathy was still holding out her hand. "Midol'll fix you up," she said. "It's in my locker. Come on."

Christy took a breath. "You want me to go get it--?"

--No, *you* stay here and visit," Kathy said, and before Christy could argue, Kathy and Margo were walking across the lawn to the locker room.

So.

There we were.

Christy and me.

Visiting.

Forty

On the radio, "Betcha By Golly Wow" was playing. One song, so many affiliations: I thought of my dance with Jean, and how all of the good feelings of my curiosity at her interest, then dancing with her, swaying close, all that, seemed to be wiped out by the memory of her rolling her eyes and the sight of Ginny fleeing the dance floor... and then I remembered Margo at the Valentine's dance, pushing me to *ask-yay Isty-chray to ance-day--*

"This song is so *old*," Christy said.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm kind of sick of it."

"Me, too."

Direct expression of adolescent emotion. Gotta love it.

Christy stepped over to the other side of Margo's towel-- as far away from me as possible without actually

going to the *other* side of the tree trunk. She shook her towel out, trying to get it to lay flat on the grass, but it just flumped to the ground in a wrinkled mess. She sighed and knelt down to smooth it out. "So how was camp?" she said, not really looking at me... almost like she was asking someone else.

"Fun," I said. "I mean, it was church camp, so..."

"Yeah," Christy said. She finished smoothing out her towel and sat down facing me, legs straight out and toes pointed my way. "Margo said it was for archaeology?" she asked, still looking down.

I nodded. "Yeah. Yeah."

"That sounds interesting."

Interesting. She's impressed.

(I think.)

Christy picked up her t-shirt and folded it into a neat square on her lap while she talked. "Margo... Margo said you met a girl there..."

I thought of Jean. "Kind of," I said.

Christy blinked and looked up. "Kind of?"

I nodded. "Yeah... I thought I liked her at first... and we danced..."

"...Margo told me."

Had to figure she had.

I took a breath and continued. "But..."

Christy was looking at me. "...but...?"

"...I don't know." I thought of Jean rolling her eyes when I asked about Ginny. "I don't really think I liked her, even though she liked me."

"But you danced with her, right?"

"Yeah... but that was before..."

"...before..." Christy ran her fingers back through her hair. "Before what?"

"I don't know..."

I didn't quite know how to explain it. It's not really that Jean *did* anything. Just rolled her eyes... just acted like herself. And I didn't like who she was. That wasn't her fault, though.

Christy, meanwhile, was waiting for an answer. She seemed like she was opening up a little. Less shy than when Margo and Kathy were standing there, and somehow looking less like a little girl, too. "Well... what did she do?" Christy said, sitting forward a little. "Did..." She giggled.

"What?" I tittered back.

Christy lowered her voice. "Did she pee on your foot?" she said softly, and she looked back up, and for the first time in a while (since the hallway on the first day of school, really) our eyes met, and I felt something I didn't expect, right in the middle of my chest:

Flutter.

I felt like looking down, but for some reason, I wanted Christy to see it, and she didn't look down either, like she needed to see it. Just a second, and then I had to get shy again. "No," I said softly, "she didn't pee on my foot."

Now Christy looked down at her wiggling toes, smiling gently. "Good," she said.

Meanwhile, at the other side of the pool, Margo and Kathy were coming out of the locker room, talking, Margo with a dixie cup in her left hand, right hand closed around whatever pills Kathy'd given her. They walked over to the pool's edge and Kathy dove in, but Margo continued around the end of the pool and up through the grass, back to our towels.

Christy had her head turned to watch Margo come back through the grass. She took a breath. "Brian?"

"Yeah?"

"I just..." She took another breath. Her voice was wavering a little. "I wondered... did that make you mad at me?"

"Did *what* make me mad at you?"

"When... you know... when that happened... a few years back." She ran her fingers back through her hair. "In the cornfield."

Oh. The cornfield.

Well, that was simple enough to answer:

"No."

Christy's eyebrows shot up and she laughed a single surprised laugh. "Really?"

"No," I repeated. I felt like Christy needed me to elaborate. "It was an accident," I said. "Why would it make me mad?"

Christy looked down, like she was both relieved and embarrassed. "I don't know... I just..." She looked back up. "You mean it didn't make you mad?"

"No," I said. "Why?"

Christy looked confused, like she was trying not to cry by acting cool. "Oh, I don't know... I just... I thought..." She took a breath and then stood up just as Margo came back under the shade. "I'm sorry, Margo," she said, sniffing, turning away from both of us. "I gotta... I gotta go swim!" and she took short quick steps down through the grass to the pool, reaching up a couple times to wipe her nose as she walked.

Margo followed Christy with her eyes as she popped the two pills in her mouth and took a sip of water to swallow them. "God, Bri," she said, "what'd you *say*, anyway?"

"That I wasn't mad at her," I said. I figured this would mean nothing to Margo, even though it was the truth.

Instead, Margo laughed a surprised laugh.

"Really?"

I nodded my head. "Yeah. She asked if I was mad at her, and I said no."

Margo took another sip of water. "Wow," she said, and she smiled. "Good work, Bri. Wow," and she laid back on her towel.

Good work? Why?

"What do you mean?" I said.

Margo just looked down, smiling.

"Oh... nothing. Nothing."

Nothing, I thought as I watched Christy wipe her nose one last time before she dove into the lap lane.

Lately, it was *always* nothing.

Forty-one

Mon nite 6:45

Hi Margo-

I just wanted to drop off this card + present to say that I was sorry I ran off on you like that at the pool earlier today, that must have looked really rude + I hope I didn't hurt your feelings.

I just felt all emotional when Brian + me were talking, I don't know what came over me, I guess I felt more than anything STUPID like I had wasted five years thinking he was mad at me when he really wasn't. Just kept telling myself even when he was nice to me that it was because you were just telling him to be + just kept thinking when you said he wasn't mad that you were just saying that. But when I said "Are you still mad?" he really didn't seem to know what I was talking about, like you told me.

It made me realize lots of things, one that he is the nice guy I always thought and that you keep saying he is, but also two that I should listen to you + trust your friendship. But I just felt so

stupid at that moment and didn't want to cry in front of you + Brian, and like Kath says, if you cry in the pool, no one can tell!!

And then when I got out you two had gone, I felt bad because I know you had your period today, your first one. I don't know if your mom made a big deal out of yours (mine did + it sort of made me feel weird) and I do NOT want to make you feel weird, but anyway I got you this eye shadow at Holberts, I hope you like it, it should go with your pretty blue eyes but NOT look like BARN PAINT.

I hope you forgive me for acting that way + that we talk when you get back from wherever you are. You are my friend + I did NOT want to hurt your feelings + I am sorry if I did. Call me + let me know everything is OK.

xoxoxo

love you
christy

P.S. What did Brian say about me running off??

P.P.S. I just came over to drop this off for you + you are not home, plus no cars, so I guess you went out for supper or something.

I am on your back porch at your picnic table, Brian is in his back yard with his dad + Keeps looking over. He just yelled over + said you went out with your family, which is what I figured.

Wish he would come over here + talk but I guess he's shy, I understand becu2 I would go over there + talk to him except I feel shy esp with his dad there. Gotta tell you THAT history someday!! Or PRE-history!! 😊

Plus I need to tell you the big reason why I feel so shy with Brian (and him with me). I just didn't yet because I did not want to embarrass him, plus I kinda thought since you two talk about everything that you already knew. But apparently not.

So when we talk I promise I will tell you. It's more embarrassing to ME, probably.

Talk soon + I will be a good friend
+ call YOU later!! xoxoxo

love you!!!



christy 😊

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Tuesday morning, when Margo and I did our weekly walk downtown to the record store to see the new releases, I noticed that she was wearing different color eye shadow than she was when we'd walked to the movie... and I kind of felt like she'd noticed me noticing, so I just said....

"I like your eye shadow."

"Really?" Margo looked surprised and a little embarrassed.

I could have stopped there, but I kept going. "Yeah," I said. "It's..."

I swallowed, like maybe I shouldn't say what I was

about to say. But guys were *supposed* to notice things like this, right? And I'd noticed... and, as I was reminded by the sticky tacky antiperspirant under my arms, Margo and I told each other everything.

And Margo was waiting... so...

"...it's pretty," I said.

Margo's shoulders relaxed. "Awww... thanks, bud," she said softly. "Yeah, Christy... Christy gave it to me."

"Yeah," I said, "I saw her sitting on your porch last night."

We walked a few steps, and I could feel Margo thinking. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her biting the corner of her lower lip.

Finally...

"Christy didn't *tell* you to say that to me, did she?"

"No, we didn't talk," I said. "I just noticed."

"O.K.." She touched my arm and giggled. "Well, I like your deodorant."

Now what? Walking downtown, windowshopping... we'd done this a million times before, and yet this time felt different.

Part of me wanted to hold her hand, like we always used to.

When was the last time THAT happened? Third grade? Fourth? When we were still little enough to be different-sex best friends without anyone making a big deal out of it?

("Anyone." Like... us?)

We'd crossed the square and as we passed the shoe store, Margo stopped and pointed to a pair of L.L. Bean boots with rubber toes and leather uppers. "Whoa, *those* are nice," she said, touching my arm with her left hand while pointing with her right. "Dad has a pair of those in Canada he mucks around in. I always loved those." She looked at me. "Do you like those?"

Well... not that I cared one way or another about boots, but...

"Yeah," I said. "They're nice."

"Yeah," Margo nodded, and she stepped away. "You and *Christy* ever go out, you might *need* 'em..."

"What?" I said.

"Oh, nothing... nothing..." and she turned to browse the record store window, wide shit-eatin' smirk on her face.

I think that may have been one of the only times that I actually knew exactly what "nothing" was.

Forty-two

In a lot of ways, eighth grade makes me think of an exchange from one of the "newsreel" episodes of *M*A*S*H*, where the reporter asks the characters what memories they'd take home from Korea... and when they get to Charles, his response is clipped and succinct:

"No memories! I blot it out as it happens!"

Really, in so many more ways than I cared to remember, eighth grade was just more of the same shit from seventh grade: awkwardness, too much homework, no recess, crummy cafeteria food... *everyone else is cooler than me-us... TWEEEEEEET!! ...does she like me... is he mad at me... Oh, nothing, nothing.*

It was fun trying to decipher some of the notes from Margo's box, though...

Margo,
So Brian says he
doesn't yet??
I know Stevie does--
he leaves his mess all
over the bathroom!
Drives Kath + me nuts.
And yea, I think
Scott does too!!! 😊
xoxo cK

I'm pretty sure that one was about shaving... although it could have been about masturbation, for all I know. I'm thinking shaving, though, because that was one of the first things I noticed on the first day of eighth grade: Steve and Scott were both in my homeroom, and they were both clean-shaven. Steve had had a light 'stache on his upper lip toward the end of seventh grade; I remembered it distinctly, but one summer night, Margo went over to Christy's and Steve answered the door, and "sheez Louise, Bri, I always complain about *him* staring, but I mean, I could *not* stop *looking* at that *caterpillar* on his upper lip..." And Margo, of course, told Christy, and Christy must've told Steve, because the next time I saw him --first day of school-- it was gone.

And when I said HI to Scott that same day (still eye-level with his chin), I noticed stubble where once there had been fuzz.

And I remembered telling Margo at the pool that, no, I hadn't started shaving yet.

So: *Brian says he doesn't yet. I know Stevie does. And yea I think Scott does too.*

Write 36-SO-47 on it and send it off to the university museum.

Margo-

Was that TARA LONGBAUGH with the hair out by Brian's locker?? I barely recognized her!!

And did you see Daralee Holbert??

C.K.

Yes to both Christy, and re Daralee:

VA-VA-VA-VA-VOOM!!! MAMMA!!!

Ha ha ha, you are a weirdo!!! 😊

You think that BRIAN noticed???

If he is healthy then I am sure he did + as mom says, at least he is not noticing GUYS!!!

Jill said "Daralee sure stuffed a lot of tissues in there." You think they are real? They grew fast.

Well you know her dad's store does sell Harrisburg Dairies, THE MILK THAT GROWS 'EM!!!

Ha ha!!!

Wish she'd share, there is certainly enough to split 3 ways.

In answer to Christy's question, yes, I noticed them (meaning Tara and Daralee), and Them (meaning Daralee's).

Homeroom on the first day of eighth grade was like the Easter Parade, and it started with my first look in three months at Tara Longbaugh. Tara was Margo's catcher in softball, and she'd always been wiry and short. Christy noticed the cascading mane of wavy maple-blond hair, but believe me, it was more than just the hair. In the three short summer months since seventh grade, Tara's *skinny and little* had been transformed into *leggy and lithe*. She'd

become a tall blonde goddess. Margo always says that "if we'd been allowed in our yearbooks back then, Tara would've definitely been voted *hottest*." That definition of *hot* wasn't in our vocabularies back then, but on that first day of school, that was Tara: from the blonde tresses down to the faded blue jeans that fell loose on her hips. Margo started calling her Tara Fawcett-Majors ("After the Six Million Dollar Man's wife!") and, really, the name fit.

As Tara slouched in her seat that morning in homeroom (one seat ahead of mine, two seats to the left), I watched (O.K.: *stared*) as those loose jeans crept down and her white blouse rode up... not only could I see *actual midriff skin*, but the white waistband and soft baby blue flannel fabric of her panties.

In school.

Staring.

Girls don't like that, Bri. Don't forget it.

I came to just in time. Tara sat up and looked back over her shoulder at me, smiling shyly. "Hey, Brian," she said, fingers back through her luxuriant hair. "How's Margo?"

Who?

I blushed. "Good."

"Good," Tara repeated, and then she looked toward the door, where Daralee was making her entrance, and I swear, *Tara's* jaw dropped.

Daralee had always been petite and perky ("Like Little Orphan Annie or Little Debbie," Margo said), and, like Scott and Steve and Tara and so many others (except me), she changed between seventh and eighth grades. Unfortunately for her, though, most of those changes were concentrated in two spots under her sweater. Daralee, we all noticed on first (and second and third) glance, had *tits*. Not just *any* tits, mind you, but *big* tits. As she crossed the front of the classroom that morning, her face was bright red and she looked down, stepping gingerly, like she didn't want to jiggle or jostle the merchandise.

God knows how long she had to psych herself up for

that walk (for ALL the walks that schoolday), but that morning, I wasn't thinking any of that. I just wanted to look... but I knew I shouldn't... and I didn't want to get caught... but I had to *see*... I mean, I could *tell* Daralee felt self-conscious... and I didn't want to make her feel worse... but I *had* to look... (just a peek)... but what if she caught me... but *God, look at the SIZE of those!*

Then, as she crossed the front of the room, I started tensing up.

Oh my God... what if she sits next to me and starts talking?

"How was your summer, Brian?"

"Oh, fantitstic- I mean, fantastic."

I tapped my pencil on my desktop, looked at Daralee's chest, then up quick to her face, then beyond her at the blank blackboard, trying not to look, looking away, staring, looking away --lather, rinse, repeat-- while I debated it in my head with Margo:

Brian, don't stare. Girls don't like that.

But did you see those--

--Girls don't like that, Bri. Don't forget it.

But... but... her chest... melons... hooters--

*--**GIRLS DON'T LIKE THAT, BRIAN!!***

(But... but...)

I knew I wasn't the only *guy* either looking or trying *not* to look, but as Daralee inched back the aisle to her desk (two rows over. Phew!) and I glanced over at Tara to distract myself, and saw *her eyes* still locked in, I didn't feel quite so guilty.

So girls stared, too. O.K.

Margo drove this point home the next afternoon when we walked (sans Christy) to the college to hitch a ride home with her Dad.

"God, Bri, you know what?" she said. "I know this sounds weird, but... Daralee Holbert's in my gym class, right? You know... va-va-va-voom?" I nodded. "Anyway, her locker's right across from mine? and she was *talking* to me? while we were dressing? after we got our showers and

stuff?" She took a breath. "Anyway... I could *not* stop staring at her *boobs*. I mean, you think they look big when she's *dressed*? Naked they are *HUGE*."

Naked they are huge. Now there was a thought.

I panted like a dog. "Really?" I said.

Margo hit my arm. "Cut it out, Bri!" She seemed genuinely troubled. "I felt like a real weirdo. Staring..."

I thought of Tara. "Well, join the club."

"Well of course *you* stare. You're a boy. You know?" She bit her lip. "You don't think I'm a dyke, do you?"

"A dyke?"

That was a new word to me, or rather a new use of an old word.

"A dyke, Bri," Margo said. "You know... a lesbo."

"Lesbo?"

God... all *sorts* of new words being bandied about here.

Margo sighed impatiently. "Lesbo, Bri. Lesbian?"

I was lost. "What's a lesbian?"

"They like girls."

"Well," I said, "I like girls. Does that mean *I'm* a lesbian?"

"No..." Margo said. "A lesbian is a *girl* who likes other girls."

I considered this.

"*Likes... you mean...?*"

"...yeah." Margo shuddered. "Ewwwww, huh?"

Well, not really, I thought.

Margo had spent the last two summers playing softball in a summer league with Coach Hopkins from the high school, and she was in the company of a lot of tomboys and tough girls... and she'd been hearing the words "butch" and "dyke" more and more lately... so when she noticed herself noticing Daralee's double-Ds, she spun into a week-long tizzy.

"I mean, Brian," she yammered on the way home one afternoon, "dykes don't just play sports. They like other girls, too. I don't like girls, but I *am* a jock, right? But jocky

girls don't *have* to be dykes, right? I mean, just because I like sports doesn't mean I have to like *girls*, right?"

"Margo..." She was bugging me.

"I mean, Brian... I was just *looking*... it's not like I wanted to *kiss* her and stuff. You know? God. Yuck!"

Margo reached her peace with the Dyke Issue after gym class the following Monday.

"Daralee was right across from me and I didn't even hardly notice," she told me. "What I *did* notice, though, was that Tara and Christy and the other girls were staring at them, too, and then I caught Daralee looking at *me*. So I guess everybody just kind of needs to check everybody else out, huh?"

God, no. Please, no.

Forty-three

So Brian!

I take it you have looked at the club list.

So which one are you picking?

I have already been told by the way that baseball club is "boys only" so if you want to do that then go ahead and be a traïter!!

☺me!!

I won't do baseball without you.

Thanks Brí! ☺ So which one are you picking??

I don't know. Marty says he's going to do debate club and he wants me to do that.

Debate sounds boring.

I know but at least I'd get to see Marty last period and do something with him. If I don't do that, then maybe newspaper or A.V.

Newspaper might be fun. It is not one that I have considered + maybe I will do that if you will.

And maybe some other people might want to also. ☺

But just some free advice: don't do AV!!!! Do you REALLY want to end up pushing a cart up + down around the halls all day like Andy Clifton!!

Stuff like that can go on your permanint record!!!! ☺

Yeah woman so about clubs: Brian said he might do debate with Marty which sounds kind of boring if you ask me, or even AV, which sounds even worse.

AV?? You mean he wants to be one of those cart guys???

That is what I said and I am hoping he heeds his best freinds advice!

Anyway I am trying to talk him into doing newspaper with us so we shall see.

Thanks Margo.

You know you could say something about newspaper to him too.

That's a good idea, maybe I will.

You will not. I know you. You are still SHY in spite of him washing his foot clean several years ago.

Hey, what is that thing on Mrs. M's chin??

That's a mole!!!

No, that wasn't there yesterday. It's a piece of candy bar or something.

Well I wish she'd wipe it off. I can already barely concentrate in this boring class + the last thing I need is to be distracted by baby ruth on her chin!

Clubs met last period on days three and six, and Marty had already asked me if I was going to sign up for debate. "We'll have fun," he said when they handed out the forms. "Trust me."

It was that "Trust me" that made me not want to trust him.

Anyway, ever since he'd mentioned it, I'd felt like he was gearing up for a hard sell, and the day before the forms were due, in gym, he asked me if I wanted to walk downtown to the record store with him after school. "They just released all of the Beatles' old singles on Apple Records," he said, "and I want to get a couple of them," which made no sense, since Marty'd already told me --several times-- about how Davy "just gave me all of his old Beatles 45s" when Davy upgraded to albums.

"I thought you had all those," I said.

Marty stuck his head in his locker. "Yeah, but those... those are on *Capitol*," he stammered. "I want them on *Apple*."

"Why?"

Marty shut his locker door and the blush had *almost* vanished from his face. "Because... you know... the labels are cooler."

Labels.

Sure. Whatever.

Anyway, I was primed for an after-school walk downtown with Marty. It'd be like vacationing at a timeshare: Marty'd do his hard sell for debate, and then, once his presentation was concluded, we'd browse records and go for ice cream. I liked Marty and I wasn't really looking forward to telling him *No, I'm not doing debate, no way...* but I was pretty sure, as I stood at my locker trying to figure out what books I'd need for homework that night (or, rather, what homework I could put off till study hall the next day), that I was going to do newspaper with Margo.

Any doubts I had about that decision were erased when I heard Margo's "Hey, Bri!" from down the hall. I looked up and there she was, 20 feet away and fast approaching... and a half-step behind her, just like with Kathy at the pool, there was Christy, in blue jeans and a red turtleneck.

"Hey guys," I said, and they stopped in their tracks, like I'd caught them about to hurl water balloons at me.

"Hey, Bri," Margo said again.

I smirked at her repeat. "Echo... echo... echo..." I said, looking back into my locker.

"Shut up!" Margo tittered.

I didn't mean to bury my head in my locker, but I was still trying to map out my study plan (or slack-off plan). Did I want to take home my reading (*Lord Of The Flies*, about which I remember NOTHING) and do my math the next day in study hall... or do my math that night and read in study hall... or take home *both* that night (fat chance!)... or save both for study hall (not a good idea)...

As I pondered this, I could feel that I was being watched... watched, and whispered about... and just as I was about to say *Yes?*--

"--I *can't!*"

"Christy!"

Giggle... stifle... snort...

"Hey, Bri," Margo said a third time, her voice a'titter, "don't... don't forget your reading for Engrish," then, a little more serious, over her shoulder. "Do you guys have any *math*, Christy?"

"Uhhhhh...."

Margo sputtered a laugh. "What do you mean, 'uhhhhhhh.' You have your math *book*, woman."

Christy cleared her throat. "Yeah, but he might... he might've already *done* his."

Margo sighed. "Did you do your math homework yet, Bri?" she asked, her voice impatient.

I shook my head no. I'd made my decision. "I'm doing it in study hall tomorrow," I said, grabbing my paperback of *Lord of the Flies*, and as I bent over to stick the book in my bookbag, I heard the SLAP! of a hand on blue jeans, then Christy shrieking "Margo!" and Margo whispering "Come on..." as she *pushed* Christy toward me, till Christy was standing about a foot behind my right shoulder.

I tensed up... no way could I look right at her, but I could see her out of the corner of my eye, and I could smell her perfume (Honeysuckle! Like our fort!).

Christy took a breath.

"Brian?" she said, her voice just a little wobbly and nervous, and then she swallowed and exhaled a Wrigley's Spearmint breath. "Is that your locker?"

Margo sighed hard. "Christy..."

"Margo..."

Margo shifted into a Dumbass Voice. "Is that your locker?" she said, and then she chuckled "No, it's *Dick Smiley's*, Christy. Doyeeeeee..."

I laughed out of reflex, and then realized that my laugh might make Christy feel bad, but when I heard Christy laugh and say "Shut up, Margo..." I relaxed.

"Come on," Margo whispered again and then she sighed. "*What... club--*"

"Brian, what--" Christy said quickly, before she could pull the words back, and then she swallowed and took a breath. "What club are you doing?" she asked, a little calmer.

Hmmmmmm....

Maybe *this* was the hard sell.

"I don't know," I said. "Marty wants me to do debate..." I finally looked back at the two of them. Christy had her binder and books pulled in tight to her red-sweatered chest, and she looked down as soon as I turned my head; behind her, Margo was eyeing me, waiting. My eyes went from Margo back to Christy. "Or... maybe newspaper."

Christy exhaled, her voice soft. "Newspaper," she repeated. "I think you should do that. That's what Margo and me are doing." She looked up and her face was almost as red as her sweater. "Just... don't do A.V.," she giggled, and she spun and retreated to the water fountain ten steps down the hall.

Margo stepped in close as I looked in my locker. "You heard it, Bri," she whispered. "Debate?--" and she dropped her chin to her chest and let out an exaggerated snore "--or..." and she gestured back toward Christy, who was bending over the white ceramic fountain, blue jeans tight against her legs and butt. Christy's chest may have been flat, but she was getting fuller and rounder in other places.

I stared for just a second and then looked back at Margo's face. "Or... *the cart*," she said, patting my arm. "It's up to you," and she spun and stepped away, snagging Christy by the beltloop and pulling her down the hall past Marty, who was coming toward me.

"What are *they* laughing at?" Marty said as I saw Christy look back over her shoulder at us (me?) one last time before the two of them disappeared into the stairwell, their voices getting louder and echoing indistinctly as they walked down the concrete steps.

As for Marty's hard sell... as we checked out at the record store (I bought one of the new Apple copies of "I Want To Hold Your Hand" and Marty didn't buy anything: "No, I... I have all these on Capitol...") Marty asked me what club I was doing, and I told him newspaper, and he just said "Oh! That sounds fun. Maybe I'll do *that*."

And, true to form, he signed up for band.

But at least he wasn't pushing a cart.

Forty-four

| |
|---|
| PRESS PASS |
| This card certifies that <u>Brian Pressley</u> |
| is a staff member of the Quaker Valley Junior High School |
| News and is thereby accorded all rights and privileges |
| thereunto. |
| <u>1973-74</u> |
| Year |

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
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| News and is thereby accorded all rights and privileges | |
| thereunto. | |
| <u>1973-74</u> | <u>Mrs. I. Uscher</u> |
| Year | Faculty Advisor |

LeDoux (who ended up sitting right next to each other), but those of us lower in the alphabet were stranded. "You can sit together if you're working on a byline," Mrs. Uscher told us, not really explaining what a byline *was...* but Margo must have figured it out, because next class, she stood at the front of the room talking to Mrs. Uscher, who glanced at me, nodding Germanically*, and next thing I knew, Margo was sitting down next to me, opening her notebook. "O.K.," she said, brushing her hair back. "You're helping me write my record review, and then we're writing *jokes*."

That was great, I thought... but then as Margo and I "worked," I spotted Christy sitting alone across the room...

Forty-five

After school, Marty and I walked over to his house. Davy not only had both of the Beatles albums I wanted to review (*The Beatles 1962-1966* and *1967-1970*); he also had a boxed set, of dubious legality, called *The Beatles Alpha to Omega*. So while Marty played side one of *1962-1966*, I wrote down all of the titles from all of the albums in my notebook (it took up almost four pages)** and then sat as we listened to side two of *1967-1970*, just vaguely aware that Dr. Morone had made his entrance, until...

"Drums!"

Marty and I both looked up at him. "What, dad?" Marty said, but his dad was stepping toward me.

* "You know, I told Mom about the seating chart 'cause I kinda wanted to vent, except Grandma Trudeau is visiting, and so *she's* sitting there when I come in, and as soon as I say it she goes 'Well, what do you expect from da Hun? Dey are all about order, order, order... keeping da masses in dere places.' And that gets *Mom* goin': 'Mudder, diss is eight grade club, not deportation to Drancy.' Well, then they start *batting that* around. So much for venting."

** I thought about putting those lists in here, but one, they're in my notebook, which wasn't in my toy chest, and two, how much documentary shit do you need to SEE in this chapter, anyway??

"Drums!" he repeated. "Your hands have been going the whole time you've been sitting here, Brian."

I hadn't noticed it, but yeah, he was right.

I suddenly felt hyperconscious of my hands, and I was about to apologize, say something like *I didn't mean for them to...* but Dr. Morone reached over and snatched a pair of nylon-tipped, lightweight Remo drumsticks from the endtable. (That's the kind of house it was: drumsticks on the endtable.) He held out the sticks to me, butt ends first. "Did you ever think about playing drums?"

Well, I hadn't... but...

I took the sticks from him, feeling their weight in my hands. They were light, balanced, like they were made for me to hold. I tapped a few alternating taps on my bare leg and Dr. Morone bent down. "Now that's *matched* grip," he said, "but the left hand, you want to hold more like a pencil, with the tip going down between your two middle fingers..." I adjusted my left hand grip and hit my leg a couple times. "Looser, though," Dr. Morone said, and I tapped again, loosely, so that the butt end of the stick felt almost out of control, but my fingers around the middle kept it in check.

Dr. Morone smiled. "Yeah.... *drums*," he said, like it all made sense to him... and truthfully, it kind of made sense to me, too...

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

NEWS POLL

Question:

=====

What is your favorite radio station?

Results:

=====

| | | | |
|------------------|--------|---------------|----|
| 98 YCR | 53 | WCHA | 3 |
| Starview 92 | 30 1/2 | WMAL | 3 |
| WQBC | 19 | WFIL | 2 |
| WGET | 11 | WCHA | 2 |
| College station. | 7 1/2 | WCMB | 2 |
| WHVR | 6 | WIP | 2 |
| WBAL | 5 | WHYL | 1 |
| WHP | 3 | No favorite.. | 10 |
| WITF | 3 | | |

COMMENTS:

=====

"I like the college station except when they play weird stuff like jazz." --Jenny Howard

"I used to listen to WABC when I lived in New Jersey but you can't get that station in Gettysburg." --Mike Slusher

"I don't have one favorite station. I like to tune around until I find songs that I like." --Margo LeDoux

"I like listening to Ron Drake." --Annie Pierce

"I like 98YCR because they play all hits." --Jill Rice

"Starview 92 plays good album rock songs." --Darrell Hampton

"The college radio station plays alot of songs that you don't hear on other radio stations but the DJs aren't very good, except for Dr. Morone on Sundays." --Brian Pressley

"I like 98 YCR, especially listening to American top 40." --Daralle Holbert

"It's kind of a tie because I listen to both starview and the college radio station." --Marty Morone

"Ron Drake in the morning is funny and puts me in a good mood all day." --Scott Perry

The NEWS POLL was conducted by Christine Kelly

MUSIC REVIEWS

"The Beach Boys"

The Beach Boys are one of the top groups in rock music history. They had their first hit in 1962. Ever since then, they have had many top ten hits and even three number one hits and they are famous all over the world. Today they are making a comeback as an album rock group and in concerts.

There are two new Beach Boys albums out in the stores right now. At least, they both look new, but the songs in them are both new and old. They are both double albums.

The first one, "High Water," is actually two different records. The first record was called "Good Vibrations" and has hits on it like "Good Vibrations," "Heroes and Villains," "Dance Dance Dance" and "409." The other record in "High Water" is a live album that was called "Wow Great Concept." It also has a lot of hits on it, like "I Get Around," "Fun Fun Fun," "Little Deuce Coupe" and "The Monster Mash." These songs sound like the original hits, but they are from a concert in the '60s.

The second album is called "The Beach Boys In Concert" and it is a new album taped from Beach Boys shows in 1972 and 1973. There are a lot of hits on this album too, but they do not sound like the original records. They sound new, because the Beach Boys are a different group than they were back in the 1960s. Their voices have changed and they play their instruments more soulfully. This album has a lot of the same hits that are on "High Water" but they sound more modern, like they would if you went to see a Beach Boys show today.

"High Water" costs less and if you want to have an album that sounds like the hits that you hear on the radio, then that is the one you should buy. But if you like the more modern Beach Boys sound in records like "Sail On Sailor" and "Darlin" along with new versions of their hit songs, then you should buy "The Beach Boys In Concert." Or you can do what I did and save your money and just buy both of them! Either way, if you like the Beach Boys, you will be getting your money's worth!

--Margo LeDoux

"The Beatles"

There are three different Beatles greatest hits albums available right now. Two of them are official records released by the group on their own record (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

"The Beatles" (continued)

company. These are "The Beatles 1962-1966" (the "red album") and "The Beatles 1967-1970" (the "blue album"). But there is also another greatest hits album called "The Beatles Alpha to Omega." Most people have probably seen commercials for this album, because it was sold only on TV.

The red album and the blue album contain almost all of the group's biggest hits and also have the words to the songs inside. They are nicer looking albums too. One thing that is fun about these albums is the cover pictures. They show the Beatles in the same pose, but taken eight years apart. It's hard to believe that the Beatles changed their appearance so much in just eight years.

Some people like the early Beatles better than the later Beatles, and another thing that is nice about the red and blue albums is that you can pick which one you like better without getting a lot of songs you don't like and won't play much. But if you have enough money and you decide to get both of them, you will have almost all of the major hits that the Beatles made when they were together.

"Alpha to Omega" is different because it not only has records from all of the phases of the Beatles' career, but it also has some of the records that they made after they broke up, like "Uncle Albert" and "Imagine." It does not have all of the hits like the red and blue albums, but it does have a lot of good songs on it that weren't hits, like "I Saw Her Standing There" and "Roll Over Beethoven." It has more songs than the red and blue albums combined and it also costs less.

For those reasons, I would say that you should buy "Alpha To Omega" instead of the red and blue albums, but there are two problems with that advice. One problem is that "Alpha to Omega" is an illegal album that was released without the group's permission. The Beatles decided to release the red and blue albums because too many people were buying the illegal records. They won a lawsuit and ordered the makers of "Alpha to Omega" to stop selling their album and destroy any unsold copies. So while "Alpha to Omega" is a very good album, it is also very hard to find a copy of it.

I hate to say that an illegal record is better, but it is. If the only Beatles greatest hits records you can find are the red and blue albums, you won't be disappointed. After all, they are the Beatles! But if you find a copy of "Alpha to Omega," buy it. I won't tell anybody if you do!
--Brian Pressley

GOSSIP COLUMN

by Anonymous

GK likes TC ... RL has a crush on DLS and wants everyone to know! ... PT wants to hold RN's hand ... TL can't make up her mind between SP and SK ... DH has a collection of notes from GG in her locker! ... NU wants to sing Stevie Wonder songs to JR ... PS likes RN ... AR thinks PD is a cutie pie ... AN would spoon YW ... CN wishes it was Valentine's now so he could give flowers to LB (we say why wait??) ... CK likes BP ... LS likes JPL ... LB can't wait till summer so he can see TG in a swimsuit! ... SJ hates calc! ... CR finally took a shower after gym ... NK and MR are just friends ... MM has a crush on ML ... JT likes TP ... DJ wants to study math with TD ... MFL would just like to forget about calc altogether ... GB likes NL ... JS misses PB ... EP wants to snuggle with TL ... VA is so frustrated!!! ... CH likes FR ... SP and AP are fooling nobody!! ... KA thinks HG is a sweetheart ... LA likes LC ... WS wants to go camping with SH ... MS likes JR ... RF wants to make beautiful music together with JJ ... JG like BC ... SB likes WT ... PL wants TN to go away! Jealous! ... PW really likes MM ... JK wants to buy DH pizza ... CC likes AP ... SN likes AL ...
(Submit gossip to the gossip column by the first Monday of each month, in the box in Mrs. Uscher's room, rm. 216.)

RIDDLES

Q. Why are there so many Smiths in the phone book?

A. Because they all have phones.

Q. What lies at the bottom of the ocean and twitches?

A. A nervous wreck.

Q. What kind of coffee was served on the Titanic?

A. Sanka

Q. What do you call a fly without wings?

A. A walk.

Q. What is a zebra?

A. 26 sizes larger than an A bra.

--Brian Pressley and Margo LeDoux

THE NEWS is published on the first Friday of every month. Faculty advisor: Mrs. Uscher.

Well I guess from the comments you can tell who the half was. 😊

And it took him forever to decide what to do!! I kept saying "Marty, just say you like both, we'll put down a half vote for each" but he kept going "no" and going back + forth.

He's cute but he's so nervous, I wonder how come? Davy is not like that.

What I want to know is who the one person is who said WHY?, that's country!!!!

Maybe my mom? She likes country.

She does?

Oh, yeah! Did you ask her?

Well I didn't, that was one of the ones that Kath got. She wanted to help so she asked a bunch of people at the high school. That was how Darrell Hampton got in there.

I was wondering how you got a football star like him to be in your survey, esp since he is in 10th grade.

Yea, he is in Kath's spanish class, so she asked him, that is how!!

Just checkin'!!!! 😊

So did you notice that that dum dum Jill typed two words wrong in my article??

No, what words??

She typed "Little deuce COUPLE" + "Wow Great CONCEPT" instead of "coupe" + "concert."

I cannot even spell and I get those right.

*No other words spelled wrong anywhere else by the way.
You think she did it on purpose???
You know, I would not put it past her except for that I do
not think that she is bright enough to be that delliberite. I
think she did it unconsciencely.
Why didn't they fix it?
Mrs. U said that it is typed on a ditto which she says you
cannot change once it is typed. But Brian said you can
fix mistakes on ditto's with a razor blade, which Mrs. U
should have plenty of since she prob. shaves!!!!
Ha ha ha!!!*

Forty-six

The club period after the paper came out was our brainstorming period for the next issue... except Margo was out sick. When Mrs. Uscher said "I hate to assign a story to Margo if she's not here," Christy said "She'll probably want to do another record review," and that was good enough for Mrs. Uscher: she wrote RECORD REVIEW - MARGO on the blackboard. "If she wants to change," Mrs. Uscher said, "that's no problem." She exhaled, hands on hips, the short yellow stick of chalk between her index and middle fingers like a cigarette. "So..." she said. "Any other ideas for this next issue?"

There wasn't much up there...

"...anyone...?"

Did I want to do another record review?

Christy was seated in front of me two rows and over two seats... she was looking down at her desk, flipping her pencil.

Her dad's in congress... why doesn't someone write about that--

"Brian?"

(Had I raised my hand?)

I shifted a little in my seat and my face felt warm as I looked at the blackboard. "Well..." ahem... uh... gulp... swallow... exhale... "Christy... Christy's dad's a senator... in Washington." My eyes met Mrs. Uscher's. "That'd be a good story."

Mrs. Uscher nodded as she turned to the blackboard.

"Yes," she said, "that'd be a *great* story..."

SENATOR KELLY - BRIAN

(*Wait a minute! I didn't say I wanted to write it!*)

Mrs. Uscher turned just as Christy put her hand up.

"Yes?" she said.

I was awaiting Christy's bailout --*Do we have to write an article about my dad?* or *You know, he's pretty busy with Watergate right now* or something-- but instead she put her hand down, hands together on the desktop in front of her, and her voice was quiet, but the words loud and clear:

"I could... I could help Brian write it... you know... help him, like... you know... with the research and stuff..."

Mrs. Uscher smiled. "Thank you, Christy," she said, and she turned back to the board to write "+ CHRISTY" next to my name, then stepped back to look at the list of assignments. "This is shaping up to be quite an issue," she said, nodding her head.

I looked at the board. Yeah. Quite an issue. Especially when, the next day, we were getting dressed for gym and Marty said "Brian, someone wrote 'BRIAN PLUS CHRISTY' on the board in Mrs. Uscher's room."

I got bright red for what must have been... ohhhh, I don't know... the 697th time that month. Not a great thing, turning beet red while you're getting undressed for gym (who could really tell *why* you were blushing?), but fortunately, I could grab my t-shirt and pull it on over my face. "That... that was Mrs. Uscher," I said through the cotton. "In news... newspaper."

After gym, I cruised past Mrs. Uscher's room to see it for myself and maybe, if the door was unlocked, erase it,

but when I looked in the door, someone had already beaten me to it... kind of. Christy's name was gone, smeared away with a single top-to-bottom swipe... my name was still there, though, and, a few inches above it, another name remained: MARGO.

So:

REVIEW MARGO

BRIAN

I could live with that, I supposed.

So what's this you were saying about Brian + you writing an article??

Yea, we're going to do an article about my dad.

Are you sure??

Ha ha, yes, I'm sure. Mrs. U wrote it on the board and we are going to write it for the next issue of the paper. It was actually Brian's idea.

Really?

Yea, except I don't think he really wanted to write it himself, he just said it was a good idea and Mrs. U kind of volunteered him. I felt bad for him so I said I'd help him. I mean he is my dad.

Why don't you just write it without Brian?

No, that'd be kind of weird.

Well I just wonder if you are ready for the alternative.

What do you mean?

Well, I know how you two get when you're around each other and I guess I just wonder if you are ready to do this.

Think about it more + write back in history! -- me

Ha ha, OK Margo, but nothing really to think about. It's in club so it's not like I need to meet him at home. I figured what we could do is me interview daddy + then Brian can write it as an article.

And I know I get nervous around him + I am a little scared but you keep saying there's nothing to be nervous about, also like Kath said, maybe the only way to get less shy is to step out + see if there is anything to be shy about.

I just was thinking about how every time we talk or anything how sweet + funny he is, he's always that way, so maybe it's like you keep saying after all (Kath too), what's to be scared of?

So I think it will be fun. I hope!!!!

See ya in english!!

xoxoxo

love you!!

P.S. I don't want you to feel left out. Do you want to help Brian + me write it?

christy 😊

No, I'm doing a record review but thanks.

Forty-seven

On the next newspaper day (day four)(or was it day two?) (Friday... day *three*) we took our normal seats, which meant I was in kind of the back of the room and Margo and Christy were a couple rows over in front of me... and they didn't seem to have much to say to each other... and when the bell rang Mrs. Uscher said "O.K. We have two weeks, four more meetings, before our deadlines, so we'll want to get some real work done today." She looked back at me. "Those of you who are working on something with someone else, pair up... those of you who aren't, get busy," and I know that everybody thought that Mrs. Uscher was kind of a humorless woman, but there was something kind of Moe Howard-ish in the way she said "Get busy!" and Margo must have heard it too, because we both laughed single laughs at the same time. Mrs. Uscher smiled, like she got that we got it. She brushed her blonde hair off her face. "If you need help with anything," she said, a little more gently, "just ask..." and she looked at Margo and Christy. "...and you don't have to stay glued to your seats the whole time. This is a club, not a class. We need to get work done, but it

should be fun, too."

("Well, that killed it right there, Bri. *Saying* it should be fun.")

I didn't know whether I should get up and sit with Christy, or if Christy should get up and sit with me... but as people started shifting in their seats and getting up, I saw that Christy wasn't moving, so I got up and stepped up to where she and Margo were sitting. "You ready?" I said, but before Christy could answer, Margo answered from next to her. "Brian, we're gonna write jokes again this issue, right?" She looked up at me and Christy looked down.

I looked over at Christy. "Yeah, sure... we can."

Margo picked up her notebook and purse. "Good," she said, smiling, like that was all she needed to hear, and she got up and started up the aisle.

Christy sat up a little bit. "Where are you going, Margo?"

Margo stopped at the front of the aisle and looked back at us... not at the two of us, but kind of at the space between us. "Library. I want to do research." She looked at me, and as our eyes met I felt like I wanted to get a bead on what was bugging her, but I couldn't. For a second she looked like she was going to say something, but then she turned to face the desk --"Mrs. Uscher...?"-- and the two of them started talking.

Christy sighed as I sat down to her left in Margo's old seat (still warm). "What?" I said.

"Oh, just..." Christy lowered her voice. "I thought we were all going to work *together* on stuff," she said. "I mean, you and me are, but..." Meanwhile, up at the front of the room, Mrs. Uscher was writing out a library pass for Margo. Christy shook her head. "What *research* do you need to do for a record review?"

"I don't know," I said as I watched Margo step out the door, not looking at Christy or me (or Christy *and* me) as she shut the door behind her. "Maybe look up stuff about the singers in the encyclopedia?"

"I *guess*," Christy said, opening her notebook to a

blank page. "Anyway..."

Anyway...

There I was, in Margo's still-warm seat, sitting closer to Christy than I'd been since... well, since we ran in the cornfield and the tractor was coming and I put my arm around her and we'll just forget about the next part, O.K.? It wasn't a coincidence that I thought of that day: Christy's favorite perfume was honeysuckle, and sitting next to her, I could smell it... it reminded me of the fort and summer... specifically, of *that* summer: of being back in the fort with Christy while she worked on her room... wondering what she was up to, what she was thinking.

I still didn't know exactly what Christy was thinking, but she shifted in her seat a little bit as she started writing at the top of the blank notebook page in front of her. "So what do we want to ask Daddy?" She brushed a strand of hair back behind her left ear. "I mean, what do you want *me* to ask him?" She looked over at me. "Unless *you* want to interview him. I mean, you *could*... I just figured, you know, he's my *dad*..."

"No," I said, "we can do what you said: you ask him the questions, and I write it up into an article."

Christy nodded quickly. "I think that works best, because, you know, he's my dad, and you're such a good writer." She'd written INTERVIEWING DAD in the open space at the top of the page and then "1)" underneath it on the top line. "So: questions..."

Well, the first one seemed obvious to me: how does it feel to be a U.S. Senator?

"...not," Christy continued, "'how does it feel to be a U.S. senator?' Mom says people ask him that all the time." She shifted into a pretty good impression of her mom's semi-brogue. "You'll need to come up with better ones than *that*, Christine." She looked at me semi-serious. "That was your first question, wasn't it?"

I laughed and my face felt a little warm. Too late to lie and try to look smarter than I really was. "Kind of," I said.

Christy touched my arm lightly, once, twice, and I felt a mini flutter in my chest as soon as her fingertips made contact with my skin. "Sorry," she tittered, "it's just... Mom said that that one drives him nuts. But he can't say, 'cause it's usually kids who ask it, but... yeah. So..." She pulled her hand back and out the corner of my eye, I could see a little more red than normal coloring *her* cheeks, too.

I shifted a little in my seat... not really pulling away from her... more opening myself up to her just a little. "How about the Kennedys?" I said. "Like, did he know Bobby or John F. Kennedy?"

Christy nodded. "He did," she said as she wrote KENNEDYS next to 1), "and he loves talking about them. Good one, Bri."

Good one, Bri.

(Had she ever called me "Bri" before?)

(And what research did Margo have to do for a record review?)

Forty-eight

"Just... I wanted to look up some people in the encyclopedia. Or books. Which there aren't any. Just about Elvis... and the Beatles. And everybody already *knows* about *them*."

We were in the record store after school, flipping through the cutout bins. A few weeks earlier, Margo figured out that while the new releases came in on Tuesday ("but most of the time they're *slow* and they don't get them out till Wednesday"), the new bargain bin albums came in on Thursday ("which usually means they go out on Friday"), so if we wanted to get our pick of the cheap albums, Friday was (usually) the day. So there we were: I had about three dollars on me, and Margo had about four, "so depending on what we find, we might be able to get two each."

Margo'd already asked me if we were "still going to

write our jokes column" (twice) so that was out of the way, and we'd just talked and joked around same as normal walking downtown... but still... she'd gone to the library last period, and if I didn't know better, I would've sworn she was jealous. It's weird: I felt like I didn't know how to ask, felt like I couldn't just say "Margo, are you jealous of Christy? Is that why you went to the library?" even though that's exactly the approach that Margo would have taken if the situation was reversed. Why couldn't I do that?

Somehow I knew The Subject would come up, though, and as I flipped through the D-E-Fs (*Pass The Chicken And Listen* by the Everly Brothers... *Electric Flag... Four Seasons Second Gold Vault of Hits...*), Margo finally asked. "So how'd it go with Christy?" she said, no discernable edge or unusual tints on the words or name. "Did you guys write the article?"

"No," I said. "We just wrote down what questions she's going to ask her dad. She's going down there to see him this weekend."

"Oh, yeah... that's right... her and Kath." Margo paused on an album, but then kept flipping. "She asked me if I wanted to come along, but I don't know... I just... didn't feel like asking Mom and Dad."

"You think they would've said no?"

"No, I just..." Sigh. "I don't know..."

I kind of wanted to pursue this, but I was distracted by the last album in D-E-F: *Black Magic Woman* by Fleetwood Mac. \$3.99 for a double album. "Margo!" I said, and I held up the cover.

She squinted at the title. "'Got a black magic woman!'" she sang (in perfect pitch). "I thought *Santana* did that song."

I read the back cover. "It says here Fleetwood Mac did the original."

Margo was still flipping. "I wonder why theirs wasn't a hit," she said and then she stopped and pulled out a copy of Ringo Starr's *Sentimental Journey*. "Hey! Look, Bri! Ringo!" She held up the cover so I could take a look, and

then flipped it over and read down the back cover. "I don't know any of the songs... but it *is* Ringo." She set it aside. "Maybe... I mean, that kind of puts us close to the limit. 'Cause you have three, right? Three bucks?" I nodded, and she stuck the Ringo album back in the rack and then continued flipping further in toward the center of the alphabet.

Meanwhile, I was into the start of the G-H-Is now: the Hollies... Gerry and the Pacemakers... the Idle Race... cut-cornered albums by bands that rode the Beatles' coattails into the states... stuff that now I wish I could go back in a time machine and snag for \$1.99 each. Even though I was flipping through the records, I glanced over at Margo. She was biting her lower lip, which meant that the words were ready to come out of her mouth, and I didn't even need to ask.

"Brian," she said, "did Christy say anything about me going to the library?"

"She just... she wondered what research you had to do for a record review," I said.

"Just... like I said. I wanted to find facts for my story. It's about Motown. And there were just a bunch of articles in magazines the library doesn't get." She examined a copy of *Kinda Kinks*. "Mainly though I just wanted to be alone."

"Alone? How come?"

"Just... you know..."

I didn't know, and I started to say "No, I don't, actually," but I only got the first word out before she sighed hard and held up a copy of *Jan and Dean Golden Hits Volume Three*. "I *hate* when they do this. These aren't Jan and Dean hits. They're *other* people's hits. Mom has that double album of Jan and Dean, which has *everything*, and none of these songs are on there. What a ripoff!" and she stuffed the album back down into the rack. Flip flip flip... "She asked me if I wanted to help you guys with the article about her dad," Margo continued, and for a second I thought *she* was Margo's mom, but apparently we were back to Christy, "but I didn't want to interfere..."

"Interfere?"

"Yeah... you know..." and out the corner of my eye, I could see her smiling faintly.

O.K....

Flip flip flip flip... Margo was into the rest of the G-H-Is at the bottom of the next row. "So Christy actually *talked* to you?"

"Yeah, we got a lot done."

"I didn't think she would. Talk, you know. She gets so nervous..."

"No, it was fine," I said. I thought of sitting next to her while we were making up our list of questions, and how it felt a little scary, but nice, too. About the smell of her perfume, and how, one time, I looked over at her while she was bending over her desk and caught just a sweet microsecond's glimpse of the lacy top edge of her bra, and her round chest... and there, to look at her, you'd swear she had nothing going on underneath those blouses. I felt a little tingly just thinking about it. "Actually," I said, trying to clear my circuits, "once we're there talking it's all right. It's more thinking about it that makes me nervous." I was at the end of my section. "But we got about 15 questions that she's gonna ask her dad."

Margo sighed lightly. "See, now *that* I don't get..."

"What?" I said.

"Why she even has to *ask* him anything. You know?" She sighed again. "I mean, if I was writing an article about *my* dad, I wouldn't even have to *ask* him any questions. I've heard him and mom talk so much that I could *guess* what the answers are. It's like Christy doesn't even *know* her dad, you know? Just knows that he *is* her dad." She huffed a sad laugh. "One of her questions oughta be 'Do you know how much it *sucks* that you're a senator?' But she'd never--" and before I could respond or even think about *that* statement, Margo gasped --"Whoa!"-- and then pulled out the next to last album in her section of G-H-Is. "The Isley Brothers, Brian!" and she pulled out a copy of *Brother, Brother, Brother*. "And another one..." and she pulled out a

copy of *Givin' It Back* and read the titles on the back. "Love The One You're With'... you know... it's like... none of the songs are theirs, but I bet they're all better than the hits. Their songs always are." She stuck a copy of both albums atop the rack as I glanced at the stickers on the front covers: \$2.99 each. I had three dollars; she had four. If she got both of those, that'd be six bucks, which meant I wouldn't be able to get *Black Magic Woman*. It never even occurred to me that I wouldn't be lending Margo as much money as she needed to buy both. Why wouldn't I?

Still, there was the formality to attend to. "I might need to borrow a couple bucks from you, Brian," she said, opening her purse. "Is that O.K.?" I nodded as I stuffed *Black Magic Woman* back into the rack, and she touched my right arm in the same spot that Christy'd tapped. "Thanks, Bri," she said, and she looked down at her albums. "Three bucks each!" she said. "Why are they so *cheap*," a question I'd heard every time she found something in the bargain bin, and of course, I didn't know the answer, but from behind the counter, a little further down next to the register, an adult male voice said "Overstock."

Margo and I looked at the man: a slightly-out-of-date hippie, greying hair pulled back in a ponytail, black leather vest and a white cotton dress shirt with a bolo tie. He was marking a list on a clipboard, and he barely looked up. "They're overstocks, mainly."

Margo blinked. "What's 'overstocks'?"

"'Overstock' means that the record company thought that something would be a bigger hit than it turned out to be, and they made too many, and when the record stores return the unsold copies, that's an overstock. It's the opposite of when we sell out. That's understock. Understock is not enough... overstock is too many." He took a sip of coffee (I think) and set the cup on the glass countertop with a CLINK! as he looked at Margo. "Now stuff like those Isley Brothers albums... they switched labels, so all of the old albums were discontinued. That's why *those*

are so cheap."

Margo looked at the albums she'd picked out. "But there's nothing wrong with them, right? I mean, they're not, like, *defects* or something."

The man shook his head. "No, no... we're... we're not allowed to do that... although Sam Goody--" He stopped himself. "They're mainly just overstocks or discontinued titles. You can find some pretty good stuff in there."

Margo nodded. "Yeah," she said. I could feel her wheels turning, but the last thing I expected was for her to reach into her purse. "You know," she said, taking out her press pass, "I'm with the school paper..."

Forty-nine

Dear Margo,

Well even tho I will prob talk to you in the hall or in homeroom, still I wanted to say thank you for the Isley Brothers album!! I don't have it, neither does Kath. It is SO great!! And you got it for FREE with your press pass???? Looks like I need to do a story about the record store sometime too! 😊

So funny what you wrote in your card about "want some free records little girl??" hahaha. But yea, that guy can be a little creepy + it is NOT just you, Kath said she always makes sure she does not go in there alone, always w/me or Tommy or Davy or someone. Funny how we go to all those stores in DC + never think twice but here's this guy in our hometown who makes us crawl. So you never know. But nice of him to give you + Brian each an album.

Anyway the weekend was fun, I guess we have newspaper again on Wed (day 6?) + we will talk plenty before then but working on the article with Brian was fun + I can't wait to work more on it. I asked daddy questions, wrote down his answers + now Brian can write it! Haha! Kath says I gave him the hardest part but I didn't mean to, I just felt bad that he got "volunteered."

Hey, and next time we have club DONT RUN OUT OF THE ROOM TO DO "RESEARCH" ok?? Even if you are not writing the same thing as we are it is more fun when you are there. Brian + me both missed you on Friday!!! Besides if you don't run out, then there won't be anything to feel guilty about!! 😊

Anyway have a good morning and see you in gym then study hall!!!

xoxoxo

love you!!!

christy 😊

THE LIFE OF A US SENATOR

Thomas J. Kelly III is one of two U.S. Senators from the state of Pennsylvania. He is currently serving his second term in the senate, and has been on TV a lot recently because of the Watergate hearings.

Senator Kelly, a member of the Democratic party, first became interested in politics in the late 1950s, when he was working as a building contractor in Adams County.

"I saw some things that I really thought needed to be changed. I was originally going to run for state senate, but my parents said 'Why don't you go all the way and run for US Senate?' I lost my first election in 1960, but then I ran again in 1966 and won."

Senator Kelly did not know President John Kennedy, but knew his brother, Bobby.

"He was the kind of person who made you feel like you were one of his oldest, closest friends from the moment you met him. I worked for him on his presidential campaign and the day he died was one of the saddest days of my life. I miss him very much."

Most of Senator Kelly's job in Washington involves, in his words, "giving the citizens of Pennsylvania a voice in Washington. No matter what I do, what meetings or hearings I have to attend, that is my goal. So a lot of my time is spent on the phone and reading letters to make sure that whatever I do is in the best interests of the people of Pennsylvania."

A lot of Senator Kelly's job right now involves the Watergate hearings and finding a solution to the energy crisis.

"Watergate is like a mystery that we are trying to solve," he said, "and the people who have the answers are not being very cooperative. The energy crisis is very complicated because it combines so many different difficult areas: foreign policy, environmental concerns, the economy. Neither of these problems has an easy solution, but part of the fun of being a senator is trying to find one."

Senator Kelly said that the hardest part of his job is being away from his family.

"It takes a lot of time and energy. It is really a full time job. Even when the senate is not in session there is work to be done."

"I miss a lot of basketball games and swim meets, but I try to make it home as often as I can. It is hard, though. I miss my family very much, so I really enjoy the time that we have together."

--Brian Pressley and Christy Kelly

CHEAP RECORDS

Many of you have probably seen or even bought albums from the bargain bin at local record stores or department stores. But did you ever wonder where those records come from, or why they cost so little compared to other records, or even if there was something wrong with them?

According to Mr. Tim Platt, the owner of Valley Records in downtown Quaker Valley, the albums in the bargain bin are called "cut outs." They are less expensive than most new records for one of two reasons. Either they are records that the record company made too many of, and that record stores returned to the record companies unsold, or they are records that the record company discontinued.

These records are called "cut outs" because usually when they are returned by the stores, one of the corners of the record cover is cut out or maybe they just punch a hole in the cover.

Mr. Platt said that "Aside from the cut in the cover, these are the same as other records we sell. There is nothing wrong with them. They aren't defective records that customers returned. We aren't allowed to resell defective records."

My experience with the bargain bin albums has been a real good one. I bought many albums by my favorite group (the Beach Boys) a few years ago for 99 cents each and they all play great. Then on the day I decided to write this article, I bought two albums by the Isley Brothers for \$2.99 each and again there was nothing wrong with them.

"Those are cheap because the Isley Brothers changed record companies," Mr. Platt said. "A lot of times when a performer changes record companies, their old record company will discontinue their albums to flood the market with cheap records so that record buyers will get confused and not buy the group's new music. It's not a very nice practice, but I guess that's business."

It may not be a very nice practice, but when it's a recession and you need to make every cent count, it is sure nice to know that there is someplace where you can buy cheap albums. It is also really nice to know that there is nothing wrong with them, and that they are as good as all the other records in the store.

Maybe they are even better, because after all, they cost less!!

--Margo F. LeDoux

The paper came out on Friday... but Thursday, I'd had a drum lesson with Dr. Morone, and we talked about the Halloween parade the previous weekend, and how few drummers the junior high band had, and I didn't really think that I was good enough at drums yet to join the band... and besides, I was in newspaper. Maybe in ninth grade...

"Well, in high school, Brian, band isn't a club; it's a

class. And you need to audition. Might do you good to get even a half year's experience under your belt. I know you've only been at it for a couple months, but you had that piano experience, so you can read. Hell, they'll probably just stick you on cymbals anyway... but at least you'll be in the band, getting experience playing in a group, finding out whether you like it or not. If you get in now, you could probably march in the Christmas parade."

So the Friday that the paper came out, day three, instead of sitting in newspaper last period and basking in the glow of our publication (the article about Christy's dad PLUS jokes!), I was marching down to the bandroom with a pass from Mrs. Uscher and a letter of recommendation from Dr. Morone. "Brian is a private student of mine. He is a beginning but solid rudimentary drummer. Since he has taken piano lessons, he is also a good sightreader and has no trouble memorizing pieces. He also would like to be in the high school band next fall. Since I think it would be helpful for him to get experience before his audition, and since I know your band needs drummers, I recommend him, and I am hoping you will be able to find a place for him."

Or words to that effect.

I didn't expect to stay there that afternoon and actually play; I figured I'd talk to Mr. Harris (the director) and we'd work something out, and then I'd be back up in 216 with Margo and Christy and everybody, poring over the paper and gloating over our stories (no reason to hide, since there was nothing in the gossip column; but on the other hand, all of the possible pairings were in the bylines: "Brian Pressley and Christy Kelly" and "Margo LeDoux and Brian Pressley"), but instead Mr. Harris took a quick look at the letter while everyone took their instruments out of the cases (Marty was hanging close by, unpacking his cornet) and nodded his head. "Brian," he said, and he pushed up his glasses and then reached out a sweaty hand. "Good to have you on board, Brian. You can grab a pair of cymbals. We're rehearsing inside today. Todd will show you what's what."

And we shook hands, and just like that, I was a drummer.

Fifty

You mean you're really not on the paper anymore???
That's no fun!!!

It kind of surprised me too, but Marty's dad said that if I want to be in band next fall, then I should get some experience this year.

Did you tell him you're on newspaper????

This sucks!!! I mean it's good for you because you're in band now and I get to yell at you in the parades 😊 but I liked us all being together in newspaper!!!

Did you tell Christy yet?

I didn't say anything to her yet because I was hoping to change your mind.

I don't think I'm changing my mind. I'm only playing cymbals but it is fun. And like Dr. Morone said if I want to be in band next year, I need to audition, so the experience will help me and if I don't like it, then I know. I didn't say anything to Christy and I feel really bad about not being in newspaper anymore. I'm sorry. It's alright. I don't blame you. You have to do what you have to do.

I guess I can break the news to Christy although Friday she kept asking where you were, wondering about you. I didn't know anymore then she OVER

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

did.

It just happened so fast and I knew you were taking lessons but I didn't know you'd end up being ~~a traitor~~ in band so soon.

I wish you could of just had one more time in newspaper with us.

Anyway keep and write more and if you change your mind before day 6 and decide to switch back to newspaper we will not hold it against you!!! 😊

xoxoxo me!!

Hmmm... what was that word you scratched out?? I can barely read it...

Unless it's really bad I probably won't be switching back. Sorry.

It did happen really fast and I didn't expect to be in band so soon but I liked it on Friday.

And I'll miss newspaper but you and Christy are still together there so that's good.

Marty is in band but he plays trumpet so I won't really see him or get to talk to him or anything.

It's too bad you and Christy don't play instruments so you could try out for band.

See you in gym! --Bri

Thanks, Margo, I just got all upset because we just did that article together + it came out so good, and just as I was thinking we could maybe write another one there he goes + joins band.

I thought maybe I did something wrong + he didn't like me after all.

No, Christy, he still likes you and him joining band has nothing to do with you (or me). He just started playing drums and Marty's dad (whose fault this actually is!) said he should be in band to get experience for next year.

I think he is playing symbols which isn't actually drums but kind of.

I wish we played instruments, then we could join band.

You play piano.

Haha, there you go, marching piano!

Shut up!! 😊

I do not have a musical bone in my body but Brian use to play piano too + now he's a drummer (symbolist) so who knows? Maybe you can find some other instrument to play and get in for next fall. Kath is in it so why not??

Hi Margo,

Yes, according to Liz there will be a softball club this spring. Of course in Jan + Feb it will be just practices + practice games (skins against shirts???) but then once springtime is here we will be playing clubs from other schools. Since softball will be a varsity sport in high school. And yes it will be fast pitch. Anyway we are going to sign up and I know you are in newspaper but maybe you can switch clubs after Christmas, I hope so.

Tara

Thanks Tara and I might just do that, seeing as everyone is abandoning ship on me here in newspaper. Brian joined band and now Christy is saying she is joining band too. She kept saying that she didn't play an instrument (just piano) but she talked to her sister and

also to the band director and apparently she can play some instrument called grock. Which is also known as xylaphone. Anyway so now SHE will be in band which of course will give her a leg up for bus rides to football games next fall with Brian but which leaves me alone in newspaper. So I will prob join softball club since I like that more then stupid writing anyway.

Are you and Liz still going xmas shopping downtown tommorrow? I would like to go too. Christy is going to DC to see her dad so I will not feel guilty going without her. (What is Liz's deal with her anyway? Liz always says its nothing but anytime I say Christy might come she backs out. Is it something with Paul + Kathy? Because I know they went out for awhile but that was awhile ago. --me!!

I don't know what it is but that wouldn't make sense. Christy seems like a sweetheart to me. I will ask Liz. But she (CK) should still come when we do stuff anyway. Running out of space--shopping tomorrow= yes!! I will call u tonite! See ya! ♥ TL

I'm sorry, Christy, sorry!!!. I would of asked you along on Saturday but I thought you told me you guys were going down to DC to see your dad and do xmas shopping!! Sorry!!!!

xoxoxo me

P.S. I really love your pretty sweater today woman!

Thanks Margo, it's Kath's. She was going to wear it today then changed her mind at the last minute and then when I grabbed it she said "Wait I changed my mind" but I just ran to the bathroom and closed the door like I didn't hear her till I knew she was gone!!

And no prob about Sat, I can't remember what I told you about when we would be going to DC, I can hardly keep track myself anymore. That may have been the original plan, ever since mom had the triplets it seems like plans change every 10 minutes. Anyway since we didn't go to DC we decided to go shopping in beautiful downtown Gettysburg, haha!!!

Hard to believe that in less than a month Kath will have her permit and will be able to drive us places (once she gets her license). It would have been nice to drive to Hanover to the mall but we will be able to do that next summer!!

I am going to be pretty busy here the next few months, swim practices start tomorrow and then of course meets all winter, I am starting band after Christmas and that means practicing for that. But supposedly it gets even busier in high school. Can't believe we will be "up there" in less than a year.

I am sorry we won't be in newspaper together anymore but softball club sounds good for you + that will be more fun esp once spring starts.

I know that if there was a swimming club I would go out for that.

But we have to write one more article for the paper before we "go our separate ways."

I'll write more later, I'm in study hall and need to get this math done.

xoxoxoxo
love you!!
christy

Hi again, Margo,

Well I said I would write more later but I did not think it would be three weeks later, haha. But I stuck this note in my purse + forgot about it, and now here I am at home at Christmas and I have just one question: what sweater was that, haha??

Anyway figured as long as I was at home with nothing to do I might as well finish this note!!

Miss seeing you over Christmas, I bet Quebec is pretty and it will be nice to see your mom's family for the holiday!

I am in a good mood, feeling happy because all our family is together which doesn't happen a lot even though as Kath says you can tell there's "stuff in the air" with mom + dad (she walked in on a BIG "discussion" last night). Still nice to have supper as a family and open all our gifts together and do all the family things together here at home instead of just mom and us, or some of us at the place in Georgetown, or some of us at Gram's in Fairfield, etc etc etc.

Already told you about my gifts on the phone, the biggie was "Band on the Run" which Kath + me have been playing nonstop since I opened it. Great album, even Kath (who likes John better) says that it's a great album. She got the Ringo album which is good too and she really wanted but it's not as good as Band On The Run. Or it's good, just not in the same way. Band on the Run came with a poster which was a nice plus except you've seen our room, where are we going to put another poster?? So we'll see.

I have not seen Brian, I wonder how his Christmas was. His Christmas card was so pretty, you're right, I should have given him one. But like I told you I made the mistake of thinking about it out loud around mom, and she said "I sent Brian's family a card from all of us." Kath said what you said: "If I'd been there I would have screamed MOM ITS NOT THE SAME!!!" Well next time I will know to scream it myself.

Kath + Davy are broken up again, this time though she says it's her, not him. Same thing she went through with Paul. Guess I can tell you + trust you to keep a secret since you are my best friend, Davy keeps pushing Kath to "go all the way" and Kath does not want to (not yet anyway). She said she + Paul did and then her monthly visitor was late, that scared the crap out of her and she does NOT ever want to go through that again. "Next thing I know I'll be married with nine babies like mom."

So even though she says it breaks her heart (kind of) to not see him over the holidays "he needs to cool off." So they're broken up.

Gave me some insights into her and Paul, like I had no idea that had happened and they had gone that far. That was all the way (pardon the pun) back in 8th grade for her, I guess I was in 6th then. Of course she didn't say, how would I have known or understood back then??

Makes me think about how important it is to me to wait and I know this sounds like really getting ahead of myself, but I am glad that Brian is not the kind of guy who would do something like that. Davy though seems the opposite of his brothers, just loud and pushy and I can see how he'd be like that. And you know Liz, supposedly Paul is even more mouthy and bossy. "Big feelin'" is how Kath describes him. I can see that.

Anyway there I thought they just broke up because he took a couple of her albums but that was

after the fact that she stopped seeing him that he didn't return them. "And my Penn State swimming sweatshirt" which I have seen Liz wearing at school but didn't know it was Kath's.

Having the whole family here really gets the two of us talking, it was fun, Christmas eve and also Christmas night we went to bed late anyway but then we were all hyper and

Kath just came in the room and read that last page over my shoulder. "Don't tell anyone that about Paul!!" and she grabbed the letter but then when she saw it was you she calmed down. "Never mind. Margo's cool " So you're approved!!! I knew you would be, Kath likes you.

Anyway what I was writing was that the last three nights we have turned out the light and talked prob for two hours after. Guess 'cause we have so much to talk about with Daddy being home, also we know we can SLEEP IN (at least we could this week, Monday swim practices start, yuck!) Christmas night Kath said "So you think that Mom will have child number ten in late September?" And I'm so slow, I said "How come?" "Chris, I know you know all the birthdays, but think back nine months from them." She's right, after Stevie the babies were all born nine months after congressional recesses or holidays.

I told her I never thought of it but I guess what it is is that I just never think of mom and dad doing that. (doing "IT") But like she says, here we are, we're proof, haha.

Anyway I am tired and Kath wants to listen to records so we're going to have a fight, haha!! I'll finish this tomorrow + then drop it in your mailbox so you get it when you get back. More later!

So, do you have anything to add to this???

Haha, give me two months!

Isn't that so funny that I kept sticking this in my purse and forgetting about it?

So how was your first softball club?

It sucked, Christy. We couldn't go outside because it's freezing and we couldn't use the gym because the wrestling mats are down. So we just sat around talking. I know it's only the first one but I hope we can do something and don't have to wait till it's nice out to have fun or else I'm going to just switch back to newspaper.

How was your first band?

Not bad, it was fun playing but I barely got to see Brian. I don't get it, I play glock which is bells, like a xylophone, and you'd think that would be drums but it's a woodwind so I sit with the flutes!

Well that's retarded.

So when does Kath get her license?

As soon as she can. Her b-day is in one week and she gets her permit then. She can drive with Davy (he already has his license) but will not be able to drive on her own till she passes her test, which I think is six months.

Well now it is my turn to keep this letter!!!

Reading what you wrote again and just thinking, it sounds like you and Kathy have fun. I like having my own room (with Jompaw in the house I NEED my own room) but sometimes really wish I had a sister like you who I could share a room with and talk to. Brian and me use to be close like that but I don't know. He is still my best friend but as I

have found out from getting to know you Liz + Tara it's different having a girlfreind and it must be really different having a sister.

I wish you and me were sisters.

I'd say come to Canada with us next time but as I told you already, I would want to spare you the family drama. Yeej. I think that will probably be our last Quebec Christmas.

Anyway I need to start paying attention in here. Even though when I write it looks like I am taking notes, if I write too much then she will catch on, so that's all for now.

Keep and write back next summer, why don'tcha?

xoxoxoxo love you! me!!

Thanks Margo but I decided I'd only keep it till Groundhog day, hahaha!!

Hey!! Kath and me are riding to Hanover Mall after school so we can try on swimsuits. Wanna come??

Swimsuits??? It's February woman!!!

Well they're out now. Think about it and let me know at my locker. xoxoxo love you too!! christy

Happy day 5, Christy!!

Did you end up getting a swimsuit last nite?

No. Kath was trying to talk me into a bikini but I could never wear that at the pool. "Brian would love this, Chris." I don't know if I could wear one of those in front of him or everyone else, I tried it on and I couldn't even come out of the dressing room, I felt naked in it compared to a tank. It was so little fabric, you could ball it up and hold it in your hand.

Besides all that Mom would never allow it. Kath said "But mom's not here and how often does she go to the pool?" But I don't know, it was just too much. Or too LITTLE.

Valentine's in 2 weeks. Let's talk!! xoxoxo ck

Fifty-one

Which brings me to Valentine's Day, eighth grade edition. First there was the Special Valentine's Day Issue of the paper, with the Valentine's Gossip. *CK has a wicked crush on BP* was the first item in the second column. I liked that. No real surprises the rest of the way: *MM likes ML... SP thinks ML is sweet... ML likes BP... BP + CK... same "gossip"* I'd been reading since the first day of seventh grade.

I bought Margo a card and signed it "Love, your best friend, Brian". I bought Christy one too, but I agonized over how I should sign it: I actually took out a piece of paper and laid it over the bottom inside of the card to practice the signature:

Yours truly,

Brian

Well. That certainly sounded sincere.
"Sincere"... well, what about...

Sincerely,

Brian

That was even worse. What was I... a bank?

How about...

Your friend,

Brian

That one really made me think. Was I Christy's "friend"? Well, we were friendly... and she was Margo's friend, so Margo insisted that meant she was MY friend, too... so why didn't signing it "Your friend" feel right, either?

I finally decided that if ever there was a time to write what I needed to write, it was in this card. After all, I'd written it in Margo's card... and didn't Christy make me flutter?

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

So Brian!

Christy got her valentine + opened it in homeroom + blushed real red. So what did you write in it anyway??

😊 me!!

I didn't really write anything.

No, I mean how did you sign it???

Love Brian.

Awwwww! That is what did it I bet. Anyway I am happy for you + hope she decides to go to the dance tonight + not swimming like she usually does. She said she'd be there and I am holding her to that!!

Good. I got her card although I am not sure why she signed it "Your secret admirer."

Because she is SHY that OVER!!!

is why, same as Scotty and the other secret admirer card I got not signing theirs.

You got two secret admirer cards too?

Yes I did, and I know that the one is from Scotty but the other one is a mystery. You too huh?

Yeah. Any ideas who the one other than Christy might be.

Could be anyone Bri - I don't know. Didn't you say Karen Harner seems to like you?? Maybe her.

What about my other one???

Marty I bet. I'll ask.

You do that Bri and tell him THANKS!

And you tell Karen thanks too!!

I will, Bri. 😊

So did Brian say he liked my card??

I think so.

What do you mean?

Well he was not sure it was from you. Why did you sign it YOUR SECRET ADMIRER??

I didn't, I signed it "Love Christy".

Well he said he got one signed "Your secret admirer" + since the writing did not match Scotty's we assumed that it was from you.

But I did not see the card itself.

So it looks like you have competition!!!

Yeah, you, probably!

Christy, he is my FREIND ONLY!!! OK???

He said he figured it was from you. But it wasn't??

No, I swear, I signed his. I was real nervous about it but I did it. I put it in his locker.

Are you sure it was his locker??

Yes, C104, right??

No, C114.

Oh no!!!!!! I thought you said 104??

Whose locker is that??

Not sure but they got a valentine from you!!!

*O.K., Christy! I put a note in C104 that stated my best friend put a valentine in their locker by accident + could they just put it in C114.
So hopefully that will fix all.
And next we need to find out who his other secret admirer is. I will get to work on it.
Other secret admirer? You mean he has two???
Well he thought the one was you.
That's right. But is there another?? I'm confused.*

Fifty-two

Just like in seventh grade, the Valentine's Dance was held in the gym, right after school... or at least I think it was. I didn't go.

I knew that the second SECRET ADMIRER card wasn't from Christy; I recognized the handwriting on it. It was the same as on the SECRET ADMIRER card I'd gotten the year before, and I knew *that* one wasn't from Christy. I kind of wished it *had* been; a secret admirer card would have been better than none at all. But it wasn't; I knew it; so instead of going and maybe trying to figure out who it *was* from... no dance.

Instead, Marty and I sloshed through the slushy cold February afternoon to the college snack bar, where I had a big, self-pitying double-dip bowl of peanut butter swirl ice cream, and then walked over to the humanities building to meet my dad at his office for a ride home. He looked surprised when he saw me --"Thought there was a dance today, Brian"-- and I told him yeah, there was, but, well, you know, I didn't get a card from Christy, so...

"No card from Christy?" He pursed his lips in

sympathy. "Could have danced with Margo," he said after a little bit.

Yeah, right. That would have been like dropping a SECRET ADMIRER card with slightly disguised handwriting in her locker.

Fifty-three

Brian I am sorry about the snaffoo with Christy's card. She insists I said 104 but I am sure I said 114. Several times. She needs to get her ears cleaned out. Anyway we didn't have any fun without you for what its worth. --me!!

Thanks Margo.

What I don't get is that 104 is Scott Perry's locker.

He knows me and he got that card first thing yesterday. Why didn't he just give it to me?

I mean it said "To Brian" on the front, not "TO OCCUPANT" or "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN." He knew it was for me. That bugs me.

Well did he open it???

No.

Well there is that. And who knows Bri, maybe he did not get it till the end of the day. But it was in your locker first thing this AM.

Yeah, AFTER I skipped the dance.

Well at least you had Rakestraws ice cream!! Even if it was peanut butter. I like the raspberry myself.

Well, skip the next dance with me then.

You treat and I am there!!! 😊

Margo-

Will you + Brian still be going to the pool this summer??

Christy

I don't see why not. But why are you thinking about this now?? It is March and just SNOWED!!

I was just wondering. I never got to see you there last summer except a couple times unless I went early without Kath. It just would be nice to see you there, that's all.

Well, we always go early so if you want to see us there then that is when you need to go.

Why can't you two go later?

We have to eat supper, Christy. Brian's mom throws a fit if supper doesn't go off right at 5:30. And if we go after we have to wait an hour so that's \neq right there.

Besides remember what happened last summer that one time we met you with Kathy??

I know but I feel different now. It's like being closer to Brian in newspaper those few weeks, I realized that there's nothing to get upset about.

That is good Christy but what I am talking a- (OVER)

bout is that Kathy kind of gives you a hard time with him and do you want that?

Keep and give back in history!!! xoxo 😊!!!

Well Kath + me do swim together, but maybe on those days that she guards at the CC I can just ride out early with you two.

Just was wondering, with snow on the ground and being sick of winter + school + swim season just ended it is nice to think of summer + swimming outdoors again + being in my bathing suit in the sunshine.

Speaking of bathing suits did you ever get one??

Just the tank suit I swam in this winter which I already feel like I am outgrowing. Kath kept bugging me to get the bikini but like I said it made me feel half naked.

Well, seeing as Brian has already seen you all the way naked why would half naked bother you??? 😊

Margo you know why, we are not in third grade anymore.

This is true + maybe between now and the first day of summer you need to think about that!! I have seen your bod while dressing + you would look great in a bikini.

Not like a peeled potato with cloth napkins over her boobs and waist like I probably would.

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Margo, don't be hard on yourself, you would look great in a bikini. You underrate yourself. Kath was saying that you are one of the most naturally pretty girls she's ever seen and I agree. Maybe you don't see yourself that way but you are and that's one reason I wanted us to go look at swimsuits together, we could help each other out. Not that I want us to "match" just to help each other out.

Well thanks for the compliment but if you think you are going to talk ME into a bikini then forget it!!!

I wouldn't, I could not wear one myself, aside from how exposed I felt the other part of it is that there is no way I could swim in a bikini. Need to wear a tank suit or I will end up skinny dipping!

Which might not necessarily be a bad thing woman! 😊

Ha ha ha ha!!!

What chap did she just say for Tues??

I didn't hear. Ask Tara.

Tara says 9.

Pizza House 5, Charley Weaver's 1

-- Margo LeDoux pitched a one-hitter and hit a home run to lead Pizza House (6-1) to a 5-1 win over Charley Weaver's on Thursday night. Miss LeDoux struck out ten batters and walked only one for her fourth win of the spring. Liz Stocker added two hits and two RBI for Pizza House, while Candy Myers doubled and scored a run for Charley Weaver's (3-4).

Pizza House 4, Sheaffer Bros. 0

-- Margo LeDoux pitched her second straight no-hitter of the spring as Pizza House blanked Sheaffer Brothers 4-0 Tuesday night in Adams County Youth Softball play. Miss LeDoux also had four hits, including two doubles and a triple, and scored three of the four runs for Pizza House (9-1). Stacy Beck pitched the entire game for Sheaffer Brothers (6-4).

SOFTBALL

**Adams County Youth League
Championship Game**

Pizza House 8, Sheaffer Bros. 1

-- Margo LeDoux pitched a two-hitter and hit two home runs to lead Pizza House to an 8-1 win in the championship game of the Adams County Youth Softball League on Thursday night.

"The exciting thing is that softball becomes a varsity sport at Quaker Valley High School next year, and Margo will be a freshman." Coach Linda Hopkins said. "She is definitely a good enough pitcher to start all four years."

Losing pitcher Stacy Beck tripled and scored Sheaffer Brothers only run. Tara Longbaugh and Mandy Rogers each had two hits and scored twice for Pizza House (12-1).

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

May 15, 1974

Dear Brian,

This letter is to inform you that you have passed the audition for the Quaker Valley High School Marching Band. Congratulations!

Since band is a class in high school, please make sure, when you and your guidance counselor make your schedule for next fall, that you choose BAND: BRASS AND PERCUSSION as an elective.

Sectional practices usually begin in late July, with full band practices beginning in early August. A detailed schedule will be mailed to you sometime between now and the beginning of July.

Again, congratulations on passing the audition and welcome to the band. If you or your parents have any questions between now and the start of practices, don't hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Greg Sonntag
Band Director
Quaker Valley High School

Fifty-four

The last week of school (the Friday before Memorial Day) there was an end-of-the-year dance in the gym. Margo had been bugging me about it for weeks, so I figured she'd also been bugging Christy about it for weeks. This time, I told myself, there would be no oh-nay. This time, I was going to do it. I was going to ask Christy to dance. The thing with the Valentine had been a Snaffoo. She liked me; I liked her... our cards to each other both said "Love..."

After school I met Margo at her locker ("I guess Christy's meeting us there, Bri")... and when the first slow song played ("How Can You Mend A Broken Heart?"), I danced with Tara Longbaugh... and while you'd think my being a half head shorter than her would have been annoying, my face was right in her luscious hair the whole time... then, a few songs later, when "Wild Horses" (by the Flying Burrito Brothers; as Margo would say, "Not the hit, but better") played, I asked Annie Pierce to dance... a long record (over six minutes), and as Annie and I swayed out there, I looked over toward the exit and saw a blonde-haired girl standing silhouetted against the rectangle of light from the door, under the red and white EXIT sign... watching us, kind of nervous, maybe even longingly... and I don't know... I guess I thought of Jean and Ginny... and while I really didn't feel totally comfortable asking her (in fact, the idea made me feel scared and a little weird, tell you the truth), still, I told myself *O.K.... the next slow song is HERS...* and a couple songs later, when "Surfer Girl" by the Beach Boys started playing and she was standing next to me by the snack table, I said "Come on!" and she laughed and said "Come on' what?" And I said "Let's dance." And she said, "Yeah, sure, *after* you ask two other girls... I can see where *I* stand in line..." and I grabbed her hand and said "DANCE!" and we both started laughing, but stepped out onto the floor anyway, both of us giggling. Why was I giggling? Why

was *she* giggling? What was so funny? I don't know, but it was: I laughed, then she laughed, then I laughed at her laughing, and she had to put her forehead on my shoulder to calm herself down... for a few seconds... then I heard her snort a laugh and I said "What?"

"I don't know... just..." She sighed as the record played.

*Do you love me?
Do you, surfer girl?*

She moved her head down to my armpit and inhaled deep. "Thanks for wearing deodorant, bud," she tittered.

"No problem," I said.

*I have watched you on the shore
Standing by the ocean's roar...*

She lifted her head up so her face was sort of next to mine, but not cheek-to-cheek. "You still... you know... you still using that Right Guard I got you?" she asked.

"No, no... I used that up last summer."

"I guess so... the way *you* sweat." Sigh. "I'm wearing Secret. Which is *Mom's* deodorant." Her voice was wavering, nervous. "Christy got me using Tickle, but I ran out. Mom's is all sticky. I hate that."

"Me, too," I said. "It's all..."

"...sticky..."

"Yeah." Somehow the deodorant talk was calming me down. "But either that or smell like Dr. Zaius."

"I don't think Dr. Zaius smells, Bri. Urko probably does..."

And the Beach Boys sang:

*We could ride the surf together
While our love would grow...*

Now what? There we were, swaying and rotating

slowly, almost in time to the 6:8 pulse (not really a waltz, so we didn't have to do *steps*), holding each other close, but not *too* close. Margo had her face close to mine, and I could feel stray hairs brushing against my cheek... she was warm, and I didn't want to press *too* close, pull her *too* near. Had to make sure that there was a little space between us. I especially didn't want to press my groin against her and let her feel what my body was thinking... although she had her chest pressed against my rib cage... and I don't know... I guess I'd never let myself notice Margo's chest... although she *did* wear big sweaters and sweatshirts to school most of the time, so it was kind of hard to tell exactly what was going on under there. But mainly, I didn't really want to *know*...

But now, holding her the way I was, dancing, with the middle of her chest against my side, I could *feel* what was going on under there.

Meanwhile, I had my hand in the small of her back, and *that* felt awkward. Move my hand down and I'd be going from lower back to upper ass (not a good thing)... but when I tried to slide it *up*, I felt bra strap underneath her blouse...

Maybe best to just not do anything with my hands at all, I thought, and as I did, Margo patted the middle of my back gently.

*So I say from me to you
I will make your dreams come true...*

Not much song left... off the dancefloor, in the dim light, I could see Tara Longbaugh and Liz Stocker talking... watching us...

*We're not alone. Everyone can see us.
The record was coming to a close:*

*Do you love me?
Do you, surfer
Girl, surfer girl, my little surfer girl*

Little one, ahhhhh-ahhhhh...

What if Margo was my girlfriend?

Well, she's a girl... and she's my friend...

Gulp.

I felt like I wanted the record to go on forever, and at the same time, couldn't hear it fade out soon enough.

And just as I was thinking that, Margo put her lips close to my ear. I could feel her breath on my neck, right under my ear, warm and sweet, and it gave me a little chill... a shiver, right in the same spot that I felt the flutters for Christy, and that *deja vu* on the first day Margo and I met, and so many days since then.

Was she going to kiss me?

I could feel her taking a breath, and then she put her lips right to my ear.

"So," she whispered, "who's it gonna be *next*, huh? Christy might still show."

Christy.

Oh.

Yeah.

"Where *is* she?" I asked. One reason I came to the dance was that I thought she'd be there. Besides that, talking about her made me feel safe, in a way... like Margo and I were retreating to neutral ground.

"Ohhhhh... *swim* practice. She *said*." The song had faded almost all the way out, and Margo pulled away. "I love that song, Brian. Thank you." And just as I thought she might lean in and kiss me on the cheek (or should I do that?), she took my right arm by the wrist and pulled me off the floor, over to where Liz and Tara were waiting, watching.

"Oooo... Brian and Margo, dancin'..." Liz sang, her green eyes lighting up.

I couldn't really see Margo's face, but I could hear the blush in her voice. "You want him next, Liz? He wore deodorant."

Liz brushed back her red hair. "Deodorant. What a

gentleman!" She looked back at Margo, shaking her head.

"What?" Margo giggled.

Liz smiled. "Just... you two--"

--"What *about* us?" Margo said.

"Ohhhh, just... you were so sweet out there--"

--TSK! Margo cut her off again. "'Sweet.' That wasn't a *real* dance. I mean, we were laughing most of the way through it." She brushed her bangs out of her eyes. "God..."

Tara glanced at me. "It *looked* like a real dance."

"Well..." Margo caught my eye, and I'm sure she picked up the feeling and the thought that was radiating from my chest, out through my eyes:

What do you mean, it wasn't a real dance?

I laughed (as with the dance, what else was there to do?), and again, Margo giggled "What?"

"Nothing, nothing..." I said.

Liz laughed. "That's *her* line, Brian..."

Margo punched my arm. "Yeah... don't go stealing my line, Bri." She eyed the punchbowl. "I'm *thirsty*. Are you thirsty? Here..." and she dipped the clear plastic ladle into the bowl of red whatever-drink-it-was and filled up a waxpaper cup for herself, then me. We took simultaneous sips. "Daralee's over there, Bri," she said.

"So?"

"So... maybe you can ask *her* next..."

Liz cut in. "Margo, why are you always trying to set him up with other people--"

Another loud TSK! as Margo looked down. "I'm not *always* trying to set him up with other people..."

Liz continued. "Christy... Daralee... She looked left at Ms. Longbaugh. "Tara--"

--"I wasn't 'setting him up' with Tara." Margo looked at Tara. "Was I trying to set him up with you? It was just a *dance*." She took a sip of her punch. "I just think it'd be sweet if he danced with Daralee..." I took a sip of punch. "... even though he'd never get close enough to her face to smooch her..."

I coughed and spit up a little punch as I laughed,

and now Margo was on a roll. "Got you to sneeze punch!" she laughed, and she shot down the rest of her own. "Come on," she said, grabbing my wrist again.

"What?" I said.

Margo pulled. "Just... come on! Daralee's just *standing* there..."

"Margo..." I really didn't want to.

"Brian, it's a *fast* song. No pressure!"

("Brown Sugar" by the Rolling Stones. It still amazes me that it got past the junior high censors.)

"Margo..." I protested again...

...but she pulled and I followed, and next thing I knew, there I was out on the floor again, dancing (if that's what you call it) with Daralee Holbert. It was kind of fun. She was cute. She jiggled a little bit. We got to the *I said Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! WOOO!* part of the song, both of us laughing, throwing our arms up together on the WOOs. Fun.

So was *that* a real dance?

The DJ wasted no time: "Brown Sugar" cross-faded right into "We're An American Band," and I caught Daralee's eye, and we both smiled: I wasn't going anywhere... neither was she. We both kept moving...

...and that was when I felt the fingers tapping my shoulder.

Margo.

"Brian!" she shouted in my ear. "Me and Liz and Tara are gonna walk to Pizza House for poi."

Pizza!

Well, I was kind of enjoying dancing... but if they were going for pizza...

I looked at Daralee, like she figured I'd be leaving now... awaited Margo's *Wanna come along?...* she might even say *You and Daralee comin'?*

Instead, Margo just patted my arm.

"See ya!" she yelled.

And before I could think to react, she was slipping out the door of the gym with Tara and Liz... out through

that bright rectangle of light under the white and red EXIT sign.

Deja vu.

Kind of.

IV.

"You don't think she is..."



Fifty-five

It wasn't a real dance.

Why not?

Dancing with Annie... *that* felt like it wasn't a real dance. I'd been distracted half the record, watching Margo standing on the sidelines, telling myself I'd ask her to dance (and, yeah, wishing Annie was Christy).

Tara... now *that* felt like a real dance. Ever since that day in math, where I saw her blouse creep up and her jeans inch down, I'd wanted to put my hands right on those curves of her waist... and as we danced, for a few moments, that's what I did, while I breathed in the wildflower scent of her hair. I felt drunk afterwards.

("That was just the punch, Bri. I saw Coach Rockey taste it... then *Dick Smiley* came in and took that bowl away. Dad said they probably finished it in the workroom.")

And Daralee... those two fast songs... fun. I kind of wished I'd danced fast with a couple other girls. And I felt so proud of myself: I only looked at her bouncing boobs twice. (All right... four times.) (Or was it five?) It just felt like dancing should feel: joyous, happy, fun... both of us moving, smiling, throwing our hands in the air while we shouted along with the end of the record. Yeah, *that* was a real dance.

And then "Surfer Girl."

It wasn't a real dance. I mean, we were laughing most of the way through it.

God!

So: it wasn't a real dance because we laughed?

Daralee and I laughed... but then Daralee and I didn't talk about deodorant. Maybe that was it.

I found myself doing what it looked like Margo was doing: talking myself into things being no different than they'd ever been.

We're best friends. How does one dance change that?

"Do you love me

Do you, surfer girl?"

She ran out. Margo ran out. We were laughing and talking about *Planet Of The Apes* and deodorant and all that... same as ever (sort of)...

...and we calmed down for a few seconds...

...and then she was asking me who else I was going to dance with.

Does she really like me? She said it wasn't a real dance... she kept pushing me to dance with other girls.

Of course she likes me. She's looking out for me. She's Margo. She loves me.

I mean, "she's my best friend."

And I'm hers.

Same as ever.

Right?

Fifty-six

When Margo called later that evening, she led off with "Brian, how come you didn't come along for poi?"

I laughed.

Why didn't I come along?

The answer was simple enough:

"You said 'See ya' and then ran out while I was dancing with Daralee Holbert."

If there hadn't been silence on the line for a second after I said that, maybe Margo would have said *Yeah, I guess... you got me.*

Instead: silence... then a weak "You could've come along."

I laughed another *Ha!* "Margo, you ran out!--"

"--Brian--"

"--I thought you guys didn't want me to come along."

"Brian..." Sigh, then silence... then: "Of *course* I wanted you to come along. It's just... I... we wanted to get going. And you were dancing with Daralee." Another sigh. "Brian, *I'm* sorry..."

"It's all right," I said.

I looked out the window above the sink, toward the back of Margo's house. Through their kitchen window, I could see her standing with her back to our house, in the doorway to their downstairs hallway, leaning against the doorjamb with her right side (shoulder and hip) against the wall, and her legs crossed, out at an angle...

White t-shirt, blue shorts...

Tight blue *short shorts*.

Right as I noticed that, she reached behind herself with her left hand and pulled her shorts down her butt a little.

"Brian," she said, and she turned like she wanted to face our house and see *me*, "*I'm* sorry," she repeated. "I didn't mean to run out on you." Her voice picked up its pace. "Look, look: we... let's *do* something tomorrow. O.K.? Just... come on over and we can watch the Game of the Week. The Reds or Dodgers or Yankees against... whomever."

"O.K.," I said.

So... Saturday afternoon after lunch, I tromped through our joined back yards, and Mrs. LeDoux was on their patio, weeding her beds of pansies.

"She is not home, Brian," she said.

Not home?

"I do not know where she went," she continued. "I tink... maybe downtown. But her bicycle is not here."

Shit. I'd kind of been looking forward to sitting in her basement and eating pretzels and chips and watching the ballgame...

...same as normal.

Ah, well, I thought as I walked back home, it was a three-day weekend. We still had Sunday and (after the Memorial Day parade) Monday... then just two days of

school, and it'd be summer.

So... Sunday.

This time, though, instead of walking over there, I called first.

"She is out wid Christy Kelly. I tink... dey went down to da flea market."

Flea market! I hopped on my bike and pedaled downtown to the flea market in the old mill building on 4th Street. Found some great records (*18 Yellow Roses And Eleven Other Winners*, *Roll Out The Red Carpet For Buck Owens And The Buckaroos*, Sinatra's *Love Is The Thing*) and (shhhhh) a small stack of vintage *Playboys* (the dealer didn't even flinch when I paid. That would never have happened at the news center, or at Holbert's)...

No Christy or Margo, though.

O.K. We missed each other again. No biggie, right?

(Right?)

Fifty-seven

Monday morning was Memorial Day, the last parade of the school year, and as the band milled around, warming up, I spotted Christy talking to Jill Rice. I inched over through my bandmates to say "Hi," and Jill and Christy both said "Hi" back.

"Happy Memorial Day," I said, trying to be polite, but Jill just TSK'ed.

"Memorial Day's not 'happy,' Brian!"

Yeesh!

"Well, then *Maudlin* Memorial Day," I said, and Christy laughed.

Score!

I subtly turned to face Christy. "So, what all'd you and Margo find at the flea market?"

Christy looked at me like I was speaking Hindu. "Flea market?"

"Yeah. Her mom said that's where you two went yesterday."

Christy shook her head *no*. "I haven't seen Margo all weekend. I thought she was out doing stuff with *you*."

I shook my head. "Nope. I haven't seen her since..."

Should I mention the dance?

"...Friday," I said.

"When you *danced* with her," Jill said, and she eyed Christy to see if this little bit of information had connected with the target. Christy just rolled her eyes.

"I *know*... to 'Surfer Girl,'" Christy said. "Stevie told me." She brushed her platinum bangs back, and just when I was wondering if The Dance bothered her or if she was just trying to look nonchalant to bug Jill, she looked down, then off to her left. "Stevie danced with Margo, too," she said, like somehow her brother dancing with Margo negated *me* dancing with Margo.

I thought of Margo and I in the treehouse a couple summers before --"He bugs me too. Always staring. Take a picture."-- and I smiled... and as soon as I did, Christy said "What, Bri?"

I looked down. "Oh, nothing, just--"

Jill interrupted me (not that that I was going to actually *respond* to Christy). "Brian was all *over* the place," she continued as Christy looked the other way, like she kind of wanted to crack Jill's front teeth with her mallet. "Him and *Liz*, him and *Tara*--" and she shook her smallish boobs "--him and *Daralee*." She looked at Christy. "He might've even danced with *you*, Christy."

"Or *you*," I said to Jill, and I felt a little bad as soon as I said it...

...but just a little: Christy looked down and smiled.

I shifted a little, turning my body even more toward Christy. "So you haven't seen her?" I said, trying to backtrack to the subject at hand.

"Nope," Christy said. "She said she wanted to do something this weekend, and I tried calling her a couple times, but she wasn't around, so I just figured you and her

were... you know..." She looked at me.

I looked down as I shook my head *no* again. "She told her mom she was out with you."

Christy laughed a single surprised laugh. "Well, *that's* weird."

Jill laughed again, the subtext being *Well, Margo's weird*. Christy, meanwhile, was squinting in the bright morning light. "Wonder where she is..." Christy said.

"Probably out with the *softball dykes*," Jill said.

But Christy was ignoring her. She also shifted slightly so that she was facing me, and she put her left hand over her brow, glock mallet in her hand. "I'm sorry I couldn't come to the dance," she said. "I just... we had swim practice. Which we found out later was *optional*, so..." She wiped a little line of sweat from the side of her face, and I noticed her eye shadow: light green, like her eyes. "So you gonna go to the pool Thursday?"

"We'll probably go," I said, and I realized as soon as I said it that I'd used the Corporate Brian And Margo "We." Christy must have thought I was using the Royal We, though. She just looked down.

"I hope so, Brian," she said softly.

I could barely see her face under the brim of her band hat, but I could tell that her smile had suddenly gotten very wide. And that was when I felt it again, right in the center of my chest: Flutter--

--***TWEEEEEEET!!!! TWEEEEEEET!!***

For a second, I thought Coach Rockey had arrived to conduct pre-parade calisthenics, but it was just our call to fall in. I touched Christy's arm. "See ya in math tomorrow," I said, and Christy rolled her eyes, like she wanted to say something but couldn't think of anything funny or clever or cute.

We fell into formation, and as we marched down Fairground Street, around the square and down Park Street toward the ceremony at Bent Run Memorial Cemetery, I kept an eye opened for Margo. There were a few spots where she and I always used to watch parades, but as we passed

them, I didn't spot her in the crowd. Unless she was back a few people deep, or I just missed her (it's kind of hard to spot people in a crowd along a parade route when you're supposed to keep facing front), she wasn't there.

As we marched, I played almost on autopilot while I thought things through.

Jill seemed a little snippy... par for the course.

Christy looked great... same as always.

She made me flutter without even looking at me.

How was it that I could feel that way for Christy and Margo both?

Was it the same feeling? Margo and I were best friends... there was that. But there was something more with Christy.

O.K.... maybe not something "more," but something else. There always had been.

"I hope so, Brian."

Maybe I should just meet Christy at the pool and forget about Margo.

"Well, that's weird."

Margo seems to be avoiding me and Christy both.

I don't want to say I was willing to take the same tack, but as the band marched toward the cemetery and I scanned the faces of the parade-goers, there was more than a small part of me that was glad --relieved, even -- that I didn't see Margo's face in the crowd.

Fifty-eight

So where were you all weekend, Bri??

Me?? Where were you??

I was out doing stuff with Liz + Tara, mainly. Sat we went in to Gettysburg for the day. Then Sun Coach Hopkins from the HS got together a softball game + we played there. And Monday the parade which I saw you in and we yelled (at Christy too) but you did not look. But she did.

Did you get to say hi to Christy at the parade??

Yeah, we talked a little bit.

Did you tell her we danced??

She already knew. Steve told her.

Yeah, I guess he would of. And probably me dancing with him too. Ewwwww!!!

Why eww??

** Next to you!!*

Brian, Christy is my best friend. Would you want me dancing with Danny??*

Anyway, Mom said you came by a couple times. Did she tell you where I was??

She said you said you were out with Christy.

She is FLAKEY. I said "I'm going out with Tara + Liz."

The names of which are the same in english as in french.

I don't know why she thought I said CK but I didn't.

Talk later- she is looking- don't know why she is on the next to last day of school all of a sudden becoming the NOTE POLICE but we will talk later. --me!!

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

So I heard you and Brian danced at the dance Friday.

Yes we did and why is everybody making such a big deal out of it!! We are just freinds!! Scotty danced w/ Annie + NO ONE is making a big deal of that nor of Brian dancing w/ Annie, or Tara, or Daralee, or me w/ your brother. Just about me + Brian like that is all that happened. 2 best freinds dancing together. Big whoop!! I'm not making a big deal out of it, I think it's sweet he would ask you. I wish I had gone and he'd danced with me.

Well, think of that next time you have a "mandetory" swim practice.

IT'S SPELLED MANDATORY!!!!!! WOULD YOU START LOOKING AT A DICTIONARY???

Ha ha! Good idea. "Could I borrow the dictionary, Mrs. McAdoo? I need to look up a word for this NOTE I'm passing with Christy."

Ha ha ha!!!

Do you still want to go to the pool tomorrow?

Yeah, you??

I do but like I said, Kath guards at the CC tomorrow and I do not know when she will be off. Hate to run off without her.

Did you get a new swimsuit yet?

Not yet. Mom and me are going tonight. You?

Back in Feb remember?

What color???

Red tank for meets and green tank for the pool.
I was thinking of getting a red one but I would hate us
to match. That would be gay!!!

Ha ha, is that what "they" do, match??

I don't know. You're the one whos been to Mr. Henrys.

You tell me!

Ha ha ha!!!

OH HAY!! You want me to go along with to help
you try on tonight??

I'd say yes but mom + me are going to do that and
then go for supper together. She wants to take me out to
celebrate the end of school. Plus I know her: if you come
along, she'll think I brought you along to overrule her.

Well, do yee, of course you would be!! 😊

Ha! Yeah! Anyway I will ask her + call if she says Yes.
Oh and hay back! Wanna go to DQ or Glenn's or some-
thing like that after school? I'm sure I can talk Brian
into a cone or something!!

O.K.!!

OH! Did Brian say he was disappointed I was
not at the dance Fri???

I don't remember. He asked a couple times where you are
so I guess. I don't know.

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL!! THREE PERIODS TO GO!!!

xoxoxo me!!! 😊

Fifty-nine

At 2:40, the bell rang and it was all over: tenth period was over, the school day was over, the school *year* was over. And not just *any* school year: *eighth grade* was over. Which meant (it hit me as I unlocked my locker one last time) *junior high was over!!* No more decrepit hand-me-down building... no more toilets that clogged on just one piece of toilet paper... no more microlayer of coal dust coating everything within two yards of a vent or an opened window... no more kibble-sized chunks of plaster crackling and falling from the ceilings and walls... no more rusty lockers with dented doors that you either couldn't get open once they were closed or close all the way once you got them open... no more day twos falling on Fridays... no more Dick Smiley or Coach Rockey or any of the other supporting characters in the cast. We were *done* with it! Now, technically, we were in high school! Now we were...

...uh... freshmen.

Believe me, I really wasn't thinking that far ahead at 2:42 that afternoon. All I wanted was to get my locker cleaned out and start in on my constitutionally-mandated eleven-and-a-half weeks of summer vacation. (O.K.... so band practices started in early August. But those didn't count.) I stood in the hall while kids buzzed around me, saying "Bye" for the summer even if I barely knew them (we were all in this together!), while I sorted through papers and then took down all of the stuff I'd taped to the inside of my locker door: a picture of me and Margo at Memorial Stadium; another of me and Margo at Lake Codorus; one of me and Danny and Mom and Dad at the beach the previous summer (those three arranged in the center of the door around a COME ON DOWN! JOIN THE FUN IN THE SUN! postcard from Ocean City, NJ. It was stupid little touches like that which sometimes made a school morning

bearable); an autographed baseball card of Boog Powell (which he'd signed, simply and elegantly, "Boog"); the picture sleeve for George Harrison's "What Is Life?"; an ad (from *Rolling Stone*) for *The Beach Boys In Concert*. (Marty gave it to me; I wasn't allowed to buy *Rolling Stone*. "That's for older kids, Brian.") (Of course, I wasn't allowed to buy *Playboy* either, but that was why there was the flea market!)

O.K.... nothing left on the door but my schedule.

Should I save it for posterity?

I looked at the top of the page:

DAYS ONE TWO THREE FOUR FIVE SIX

I crumpled it up and tossed it in the trash, and then carefully slid the pictures into my binder, and then the binder down into my nearly-empty bookbag (on the one hand, amazing that my bookbag felt so *light*, but on the other hand, once you give back your books, there's hardly anything left). I flipped shut my locker door one last time, and, of course, it didn't latch, but bounced against the metal doorframe. I lifted the handle and pushed it shut more gently: the top closed but the bottom stuck out from the frame at least a half-inch.

Oh, well. That's some junior high kid's problem now.

I picked up my bookbag and started down the hall and around the corner to meet Margo, so we could go do whatever it was we were going to do with whomever we were going to go do it with.

DQ? Glenn's? QV Diner? Pizza House? Stuckey's?

Christy? Liz? Tara? Marty? Who else?

And why did I get the feeling that these people were being called in as insulation? Margo and I hadn't really seen each other one-on-one since the dance, and it was starting to scare me a little.

If it wasn't a real dance, then what was the big deal?

I came around the corner and Margo was on her haunches in front of her locker, shuffling through *her* sheaf

of papers. As soon as I saw her, I wanted to run up and hug her and scream "WE'RE DONE! IT'S SUMMER" but before I could take a breath to say anything, she just sighed.

"Don't forget your lock, Bri," she said, barely looking up, her voice flatlined.

Oh. Yeah.

I went back around the corner to my old locker (my OLD locker!) and, of course, there was my lock, hanging on the coat hook inside. I snapped it shut and dropped it into my book bag, then walked back to Margo's locker. "How'd you know I forgot it?" I said.

"'Cause we both forgot them *last* year," she said. "Remember?"

I nodded. We'd made it almost all the way home on our bikes when we realized, and I wanted to just leave them there, but Margo talked me out of it:

It's just a lock, Margo.

Yeah, but do you wanna have to get a new one? Then you either have to memorize a new combination or get one with a key, which I'll lose...

But what if the building's closed?

They don't lock the doors. Just... look, we'll go back in... if they stop us, we'll just tell them you left some spraypaint in your locker...

Margo was done sorting and pitching the stack of papers from her locker floor and was taking down her pictures: a black- and-white 8-by-10 of Dennis Wilson from *Two Lane Blacktop*, sitting on the hood of a car, sans shirt, all tough and cocky but looking a little lost, too, as befits a surfer in the desert... then a handful of Polaroids: her and Christy, her and her mom, her and her dad, her and John-Paul, her and Liz and Tara and a couple other girls from the softball team...

Could've sworn she had a couple of her and me up there.

"Schedule!" she huffed, and she yanked the page down: VT!- VT! The page came down but the tape stayed, so there were two little triangular corner tabs of paper still

stuck to the door. Margo looked down at her schedule. "You keep yours?" she said.

"Nope," I said.

"Nope," Margo repeated, and she crumpled it up and tossed it in her empty locker, then looked straight ahead, hands on her hips. "*My* lock," she said, and she dropped her lock in her bookbag and then looked up at me. "What?"

Sometimes, I've noticed, I just take a breath and blurt shit out.

"Didn't you have a picture of us at the fireworks last summer?"

Margo nodded. "Yeah... I took those down already." She looked at me. "You want it?"

"No, I just..."

"...just..."

I just thought you took them down because you felt funny about us dancing.

I expected Margo to tsk, or sigh, or do something that indicated she could read the italicized type in my head, but she just stuffed the pictures down inside her bookbag. "I have the negatives at home if you want them," she said. She looked down at her locker floor. "You still wanna go to the pool tomorrow?"

"Of course," I said, even though the last few days, I hadn't really been sure.

"Me too," Margo said, like she hadn't been too sure the last few days herself. She knelt down and grabbed one last ragged sheaf of unsorted papers from her locker floor and crammed them into her bookbag without even looking at the top page. "Although I don't know what we'll *do*. You know? I mean, we're in *high school* now. We can't really go off the dives unless we *dive*. And I always sting the top of my head." She stood up, half-talking to me, half-talking to herself as she looked into her empty locker. "I guess *Christy* could teach me to dive... *if* she comes..." She pulled shut the drawstrings on her bookbag. "Hey, along those lines..."

O.K.... here we go:

Maybe you can get in the pool with her...

"...look..." she continued. "When we meet Liz and Christy and them, just... don't mention *swimsuits*. O.K.?"

I laughed. "'Swimsuits?'--"

"--Brian..." Margo looked up the hall past me (even though there was more hall *behind* her) and lowered her voice a little. There were a few kids within hearing range, but none that either of us really knew. Still, you never knew...

Margo sighed. "Look... I need to go get a new swimsuit tonight, right? So Mom and me were gonna go to Bon Ton. And I told Liz we were goin', and she asked if *she* could come along, and I just said 'Yeah, sure,' you know?" She sighed. "Well, then *Christy* asked, but *Liz* *already* asked, so I told Christy no, it was just gonna be Mom and me. Lied. But..." She lowered her voice another notch. "I kinda wish *Christy* could go instead. You know? But Liz asked first, and I'm afraid if I tell her no, she'll get upset... but if Christy knows I'm going with *Liz* and not *her*, *her* feelings will be hurt. You know? And I like them *both*."

Seemed pretty simple to me. "Well, then just go with both of them."

Margo shook her head. "Brian, Liz and her don't get along." She sighed. "And I always thought Christy got along with *everybody*, but Kathy and Paul--" She stopped herself and lowered her voice even further. "You remember them going out?" I nodded even though I didn't. "Well, now they're *not*. So there's *that*." She shook her head. "Plus... if they *both* come, Mom'll think I'm ganging up on her."

I laughed. "'Ganging up?'--"

"--Brian, it's a *swimsuit*. You know?" Again, I didn't, really, but Margo was trying to explain. "I need *someone* along for backup... otherwise Mom might get me some... *old lady* suit. But if I go with *Liz* and Christy... God, they're liable to talk her into getting me a *bikini*."

"You'd look good in a bikini" I said, and even though I was just trying to compliment her, still, as soon as the words came out, I realized how it sounded, and I felt like I was right back out on that dance floor with her again.

But either Margo didn't take it that way, or she was just ignoring it. "Nope," she said. "No bikini." And then she paused, like my words had registered, and she was back on the dance floor with me, too. "Although thank you," she said, her cheeks getting just the lightest blush. "Christy said that too, but... no. I mean, I don't wanna be out there with everything... *hanging out*. You know? God, it'd be like... swimming in my *underwear*."

This from the girl who'd bragged about skinnydipping in Canada three summers before.

"So anyway..." Margo said, flipping her locker door shut for emphasis: SLAM! BOUNCE! Hers didn't shut the whole way either. She lifted the latch on the door and pushed it shut gently. "...ixnay on the imsuitsway, O.K.?"

I nodded. "O.K."

Margo sighed and looked me in the eye for a second, but before we could make any real connection, she looked down and touched my arm. "Good," she said. "At least I can count on *you*."

Yeah, I thought as we started down the hall. At least there's that.

Sixty

6:15

Margo--
Christy called --
said she + her sister
were going to the mall
to exchange her swim-
suit and they'd look
for you and your mom.
Dad

Thursday morning, I got up, had a late breakfast, listened to records, then had lunch. I knew that Margo'd want to leave at around 12:45 (the pool opened at 1:00), so after lunch, I climbed the hot, stuffy staircase up to my bedroom and got my new swim trunks out of my dresser.

Here's a question, I thought as I started to get undressed in front of the full-length mirror on the back of my bedroom door.

What is the deal with Margo and Christy going through such agony "trying swimsuits on?"

Margo had mentioned (and mentioned that Christy mentioned) what an ordeal it was. Why? They weren't getting tailored, like I did at Trone and Weikert last time Mom bought me a sportcoat. I mean, it was a *swimsuit*. Mom and I picked mine out at the Bon Ton in ten minutes: I saw a color I liked (red); tried one on and it was too tight; tried the next size up and it was perfect. Simple.

What was the big deal?

And then, as as I pulled on my trunks and turned to face my reflection, I found out.

That spring had been a progression of small changes in my body. None of them were that serious: I started noticing a few sprigs of wiry hair around my growing privates, in the middle of my chest and under my arms; every now and then I'd find an obnoxious blackhead or whitehead on my face (usually on the end of my nose or right in the middle of my chin, and usually first thing on a Monday morning); my shoes started feeling more and more uncomfortable as the spring progressed, and when Mom took me to get new sneakers for summer, I'd gone from a size 7 to a size 8½; every now and then I'd be talking (usually to Margo) and I'd feel like my throat had lost its grip on my voice, and my words would break and crack, like a badly bowed violin.

These changes didn't come on all at once, and since I'd been there through the whole process, I really didn't

notice them *all*. Maybe because during the school year, I usually changed in the bathroom (no full-length mirror) or in the rush and bustle of the after-gym-class locker room (where the drill was *SOAPY SHOWER!! DRY OFF!! GET DRESSED!! THERE'S THE BELL!! MOVE!! MOVE!! MOVE!! MOVE!! MOVE!!*).

That Thursday, though, all of the subtle changes from the past year were spotlighted at once in reverse image in front of me: the threadbare tuft of light brown hair in the middle of my chest, like a cheap toupee was pasted there; the bulge in my trunks (why, oh why, did I have a hard-on *now*? It was *just me!!*); the hair under my arms; the pimples and the peach fuzz and God knows what else.

O.K.

Now I get it.

Just as that thought flashed across my mind, the phone rang downstairs. A few moments later, Mom called up for me.

"Briii-an? Marrr-go!"

Sigh.

One last glance in the mirror (Jesus... now I could see why men swam in union suits at the turn of the century) and then I pulled on my Beach Boys t-shirt (my favorite shirt: sky blue with the group's logo of the Indian on horseback) and ran downstairs to the kitchen to grab the phone.

"Margo?"

"Brian?" She sounded sheepish. "You... umm... you still wanna go swim?"

So it wasn't just me.

"How come?" I said.

"I don't know. I just... I feel kinda icky."

Icky. Code word for "period."

I knew I couldn't have a period, but still, it might be my only shot, so...

"Me, too," I lied.

"Really?"

"Yeah," I said. "Icky."

I expected an *O.K.*, *let's just bag it...*

...but instead I got...

"Well, maybe it's just the humidity. You know? I mean, if you feel icky too..."

"It's not..." I lowered my voice. "It's not your period, is it?"

"No, no... no. Thank God." Sigh. "O.K. See ya in a few!"

CLICK!

I stepped into the mudroom and grabbed my clean beach towel off the top of the washer, then slipped on my sneakers (no socks), and as I looked out the back window, I saw Margo riding her bike down through our yard to meet me around the front in our driveway. At a glance, she looked the same as ever: long blonde hair whipping in her wake, towel draped around her neck. Even the same bike, I noticed as she vanished around the corner of the house. A few moments later, she was knocking at the door into the garage...

Weird: Margo was my best friend; we saw each other almost all day, every day during the school year. So it wasn't like I hadn't seen her in nine months. But it *had* been nine months since I'd seen her in a bathing suit, and when I flung the door open and saw her standing there, towel draped around her neck, in her shorts and her new swimsuit...

Margo was wearing a turquoise tank suit; the v-neck collar plunged almost to her sternum, revealing the full curves of her cleavage.

Margo has cleavage.

I'd *kind of* noticed her chest before-- when we danced close and slow to "Surfer Girl," I did my best to not press against her chest, or let her press against my crotch-- but in that swimsuit, with the ends of the towel hanging down on either side of her cleavage, it was hard to not notice. Margo looked almost as fully developed as Kathy Kelly. She wasn't a Daralee Holbert-sized va-va-va-va-voom, but she was a va-va-voom, anyway.

This would be a good time to look at her eyes, Bri.

It'd been a while since I really noticed how sparkly and blue Margo's eyes were. Even in the low light of the garage, they shimmered... the turquoise in her eyes looked like it had spilled out and bathed her body in bright blue.

It was Margo, but she looked --dare I say it-- pretty.

"Hey, bud," she said, and something in her voice sounded like she *wanted* me to dare.

Dare I dare?

I took a breath and looked down. "You ready to roll?" I said, and I stepped past her out into the garage. "Let's go."

I started working my ten-speed loose from behind Danny's beat-up gold Ross (my old bike)... but the whole time I wrassled with my bike, I could feel Margo looking at me, then looking down, looking up, looking around... meanwhile, I was looking at my bike, at the rusty pedals and the peeling handlebar tape.

"That's a new bathing suit," Margo said.

I nodded.

"Red," Margo said. "I like it."

O.K.... take a breath.

"You got a new one too?" I said.

"Yeah," she said, nodding her head. "Yeah."

I swallowed. The hot dry garage suddenly felt even more hot, more dry... but somehow I got the words out:

"It's pretty."

Margo looked down. "Awwww," she said softly, her smile tinting her words bright blue. "Thanks, bud."

I rolled my bike out of the garage, and Margo walked ahead of me and climbed back on her bike, talking as she walked. "Yeah, you know, I wanted... there was a red one I really liked... but Christy said one of hers is red... and plus, Mom... Mom said you..." She looked off to the side. "...you know... she liked this one. She said it goes with my eyes."

It was the same soft voice I recognized from the day we met.

You asked me if I speak French, and I said yes...

"It really does bring out..." I tried not to look at her

chest "... your eyes... you know?" I looked down. "I like it."

"Awww, thanks," Margo said, and I looked up, and she looked up, and our eyes met...

...and I guess I expected one of those old flutters, but what I felt instead was an echo (or maybe an aftershock) of the feeling I'd had in front of the mirror: a feeling of shared disorientation.

Like: *What's going on here?*

You too?

I took a breath, and before I could say what I was thinking, Margo said "What, Bri?"

"Well..." I brushed my hair back. My forehead was moist with sweat. "You sure you still wanna go?" I asked.

"Brian..." Margo sighed. "I'm *not*, actually, but... it's the first day of summer. You know?" She straddled her bike and stood with it balanced between her legs, twirling her towel like a lariat. "I mean, I feel *kind* of icky," she said. "But I've been inside all morning. What am I gonna do? Sit in front of the tube all afternoon? Waiting for the channel 45 movie to be over so I can watch Captain C? It's just..." She sighed, and even though the garage wasn't bugged, she lowered her voice, like she was going to tell me the real reason. "It's that whole Liz and Christy thing, you know? Last night when Mom and Liz and me pulled into the parking lot at the mall, I saw Kathy's car, and I knew it was hers because of the bumper sticker--" One of the first things Kathy did when she got her license was take a handful of bumper stickers she'd saved from the last election, including a NIXON NOW! sticker, which she cut so that it read NIXON NO! and stuck it on the back of her red beetle. "--and so the whole time I'm there trying on suits, I'm waiting for Christy and Kathy to walk up and see Liz there and the sparks to fly, you know? Which didn't happen." She sighed. "So then we're at Orange Julius on our way out, and while I was there ordering I swear to God I saw the two of them walk past us."

I thought of Kathy's standard *Heyyyyyyyyyy, Marrrrrgohhhhh* greeting. "Don't you think Kathy would've

said Hi?"

"Maybe not, if she saw Liz. I mean, what would she've said? 'Can I have Paul's sweatshirt back?'" She bit her lower lip. "I'm sure it was them, though."

"Maybe they just didn't see you," I said.

Margo nodded. "Yeah," she muttered, "maybe." Twirl twirl twirl twirl. She seemed semi-hynotized by her towel. "I mean, I would've asked Christy along, but I wanted to avoid trouble, you know? And *besides*... Liz asked first. You know? I just... I wanted to avoid trouble. Plus..." She took a breath and then stopped herself.

"What?" I said, even though I had a feeling what she was about to say, and her next three words confirmed my suspicion.

"Oh, nothing... nothing. I just... like I said, I feel kinda icky." She stopped twirling and looked up at me. "What about you? You feel O.K.?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I just..." I was stuffing my towel down into the nylon bag on the back of my bike seat. Like Margo, I had a couple million things I wanted to say, half a million of them reasons why I kind of didn't want to ride out to the pool with her. But I couldn't say any of them.

Fortunately, it was Margo. I didn't have to say. And when our eyes met, I felt a little bit of a flutter and I knew we were on the same half-million pages.

"You feel icky too?" she said softly, her mouth smiling gently, sympathetically.

I nodded. "Yeah," I said. "Icky."

And I hopped on my bike, walked it out into the sunshine, pulled the garage door down, and side by side Margo and I rode out to the pool.

Sixty-one

When in doubt, two things always brought us back to central: baseball and music. Margo hit the first one as we pedaled out of my driveway. "You know, the White Sox are coming to town this weekend, and then it's the Brewers on my birrrrrthdaaaaaayyyy... and Dad, you know... try pinning him down to *anything*... but he was kinda talking about us maybe going down on my birthday. And I don't know if he actually ordered the tickets or not, but I was like 'Thursday? No way. Doyle Alexander's pitching. I don't wanna see him and his big ears...'"

Alexander was the player the Orioles got from the Dodgers in exchange for Frank Robinson. Margo never forgave Alexander for that trade.

"...so anyway," she continued, "I told Dad to try and snag us tickets for Saturday, which, even though it's not my birthday, is McNally... or even better Sunday, which is Palmer. So Saturday or Sunday at Memorial Stadium, if you can get out of church, Bri." She pedalled a few pedals. "And maybe I can ask Christy to come..."

Part of me kind of wished Steve Kelly was there to tsk and set Margo straight again (*Chris isn't into baseball*) and part of me was thinking *And maybe Christy and I could just go on our own.*

But it was Margo's birthday. She could ask anyone along that she wanted.

Still, I kind of knew how Margo felt at the prospect of being together with both Liz and Christy, since I kind of felt that way thinking about going to Memorial Stadium with both Christy and Margo.

Sixty-two

Somehow just *seeing* the pool made me feel more relaxed. Margo and I parked our bikes, locked them together, signed in, and, unlike our inaugural day a year before, didn't go anywhere *near* the diving boards, but instead walked straight out to that same big old oak tree back in the middle of the lawn, away from the volleyball, basketball and tennis courts. Margo spread her towel out in the shade, but I put mine right in the sun so we were side by side. "What time is it, anyway?" Margo said as she sat down on her towel.

I looked at the clock hanging above the breezeway entrance. "1:10," I said. "How come?"

"Well, nobody's here..."

"They just opened," I said as I scanned the semi-empty grounds and pool.

"I know," Margo said. "It's just... Tara said she might come... Liz said *she* might come. Christy of course said *she'd* come. I'm just getting ready, you know, for... whatever..."

Silence as the radio played: "Surfin' U.S.A." There seemed to be no avoiding the Beach Boys that summer, and that was fine with us. Margo sat up a little and put her hands behind her, leaning back, her chest thrust out slightly, knees slightly bent. "Brian, did you get this album?"

"*Endless Summer?*" I said. Margo nodded, and I shook my head *no* in response. "I didn't think it was out," I said.

"It is," Margo said. "We saw it at Listening Booth last night. Unless those were *illegal*..."

Since Margo'd read my review of *The Beatles Alpha To Omega*, she always asked the same question whenever we saw an album that looked too good to be true: "You think this is legal?"

As the music played, she wiggled her toes in time to the beat. "Well," she said, "I *need* it. It's got *every song* on it." She looked at her bare feet, smiling, like her toes were wiggling under someone else's power. "I tried to win it five times... 98YCR was giving it away all weekend... and I was caller six the first time but they wanted caller eight... then the second time they wanted caller fourteen and the woman said I was caller twelve. The other times I was too late." She smiled. "My birthday's in a week..."

"So?" I said.

"So?" Margo reached her foot across the grass and kicked my thigh lightly. "So I hope I *get* it, that's all."

"I was thinking of getting it," I said. "If I do, you can borrow it."

"That'd be too cool, Brian. I mean, it's got *every song* on it." She sang along with Brian Wilson's falsetto...

*Everybody's gone surrrrr-fin'
Surfin' U.S.A....*

"You know what I always thought was cool, Bri?" she said, "is how..." She took a breath. "They're my favorite group, right? And yours, right? Well, their *leader's* named *Brian*, which is *your* name... and *you're* my best friend." She smiled. "I always liked that." She turned a little to face me, one eye on the entrance, I noticed. "Mom said she'd take us to see them if they came around again this summer."

"I thought your mom doesn't like the Beach Boys," I said.

"No, that's *Dad*," Margo said. "He says they're limp." She brushed a strand of hair back off her face, and smiled as she looked at her feet, her toes wiggling in time to the music. "I bet *Denny's* not limp..."

(To Margo, the Beach Boys consisted of Dennis Wilson on drums and vocals, with Supporting Musicians. "I had a crush on him from the moment I saw his picture in the middle of that one album Marty brought in to music

class. He was just all wooly and hunky and...
grrrrrrhhhhmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.")

We sat and listened as the guitar solo played.

"Brian," Margo said after a couple bars of Carl, "is Denny still with them?"

"I think so," I said. "Why?"

"Well, you know... on the last two albums, someone else played the drums... and then Mom was tellin' me she read this thing about how Brian Wilson just stays at home in bed now. I mean, they *are* all old men..."

Funny how, to us at age 14, the 31- and 32-year-old Beach Boys were "old men."

"Surfin' U.S.A" had faded out and the bass chord vamp to "Wendy" was echoing across the grounds. A doubleshot of Beach Boys on the first day of summer swimming...

...and of course, Margo had to sing along. "WENNNNNNNN-dy" she sang, in as shrill a voice as possible, and I joined in, making up new lyrics to the verse:

*I never thought a guy could cry
Till you made me eat your pussy pie*

...and then Margo joined back in on the refrain:

Ohhhhh, WENNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN-dyyyy

We were cracking ourselves up: Margo was laughing so hard she was wheezing, her right hand flat in the center of her chest as she gasped, and I was laughing at her laughing.

"God, Bri," Margo said, taking a breath, "you're... you're too funny." She exhaled. "I hope they have another call-in to win this weekend. I mean, I *really need* this album." She sighed. "I thought that one time would be *it*, you know? 'Cause they wanted caller fourteen, and that's how old I'm gonna be..."

"Margo, nobody ever wins those things."

"Tom Kelly won *Dark Side Of The Moon* from Starview."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Christy said he was caller nine of nine." She huffed a single laugh. "Like *he* needs free albums. He has more records than the school library." She looked down again at her wiggling toes, singing new words:

*Chriiiis-tyyyy,
I wouldn't hurt you like that,
no no no
Briiii-an
says his peter's big and fat!*

I was laughing, but I still had to reach over and slug her arm--

--OUCH! Brian! Not so *harrrrd!*" Margo also had a crush on Joe Besser, apparently.* "You are *ignorant...* I swear," she said as she rubbed her arm. "I'm telling Christy you *did* that and she won't *like* you anymore."

I smiled. "She *likes* me?"

Tsk! "You *know* she does, Bri. She just..." Margo shook her head, and then screwed on her Dumbass voice. "She *likes* me?" she repeated, tittering, and I laughed as she reached her foot across and kicked my thigh lightly. "God," she said as she withdrew her foot, "this is the best, isn't it?"

"Yeah," I said, and really, I couldn't think of much that could be any better: first summer afternoon at the pool; high blue sky; bright, sunny, and warm; the Beach Boys on the radio; Margo sitting on her towel right next to me. It almost made the previous nine months of school seem worthwhile... almost made what I'd seen when I stood in front of the mirror seem meaningless.

Margo looked toward the entrance quickly. "I know

* "'Crush.' You're a retard, Bri. Joe Besser's *wife* didn't even have a crush on Joe Besser!"

why she didn't come to the dance," she said.

Why didn't it surprise me that Margo's first mention of the dance was in reference to Christy's non-presence?

Margo brushed her hair back and looked back down at her toes. "She gets all *freaked out* when it's the three of us together. You know?" This time, I *did* know, but Margo didn't pause to let me respond. "It's weird. I remember her saying that when it was you and her in newspaper, everything was fine. And you and me are fine together. And me and her are no problem. But when it's the three of us, she gets all retarded." She glanced over at me. "You kind of do, too."

"Well, just think of how Marty got that time we all went to the snack bar," I said.

Margo nodded her head. "Retarded." She laughed a single laugh. "Maybe *those* two should get together," she said, ignoring that it was being around *her* that had made Marty act "retarded" that afternoon. She brushed her hair back. "And you know, I say the same things to her that I say to you: 'He *likes* you. Just *relax*, you know? Be normal.' Which as you know just makes matters worse." She looked at me. "That's why you didn't want to come out here today, isn't it?"

"No," I said. "Not really."

"Well, good," Margo said. "Not that you have anything to worry about. Those two always come out later anyway." And then, as she glanced toward the breezeway again, she sat up straight and her tone changed from annoyed to surprised. "Whoa!"

I looked toward the gate, and there, at the front desk, signing in, talking to Karin, was Christy.

Alone.

Sixty-three

From a distance, Christy looked the same as every other time I'd seen her at the pool-- same white terry shorts, same grey PROPERTY OF WASHINGTON SENATORS t-shirt --and I wondered if it'd be the same old scene: say HI, toss her stuff down, and go jump in the pool.

Margo, meanwhile, was giddy. "Can't believe she *came*," she said, her voice almost wavering, and then she yelled "Chriiis-tyyyy! Heyyyy woman!" and put her fingers to her lips and whistled.

Christy smiled big as she spotted her (us?) and waved back, and then started across the concrete macadam and through the grass toward our towels... and, like Daralee Holbert's stroll on the first day of school, it was a walk to remember.

O.K.... first, the outfit. Yes, she was wearing those same white terry shorts she'd worn the summer before...

...but...

...I didn't really remember the side seams being *slit* almost all the way up to her hips, revealing creamy caramel-colored tanned hips...

...and, yeah, she was wearing that same old grey PROPERTY OF WASHINGTON SENATORS t-shirt she'd been wearing out to the pool for as long as I could remember...

...or *was* it the same shirt? That old t-shirt, after all, was loose-fitting, but this one was tight... one might say *form-fitting*... and with each step Christy took toward us, I noticed how much Form there was for that shirt to fit.

I thought of that day in newspaper, when I'd caught the glimpse down her blouse... and ever since then, I'd kind of been looking for Further Evidence... but like Margo, Christy wore a lot of big sweaters and sweatshirts to school, so it was kind of hard to tell what was going on.

However, that afternoon, at the pool, in her slit-

seamed terry shorts and skin-tight t-shirt...

Va-va-va-voom.

“Chriiiisssstyyyyy!” Margo sang as Christy got closer, and then she stuck her fingers to her lips and whistled again. “Lookit those *shorts!* You did those?”

“No, Kath did.”

Well, thank you, Kathy Kelly!

Christy dropped her backpack on the grass a few feet from our towels, and just as I was wondering if she'd seen *me* the way I'd seen *her*, her face got just a little red and she smiled.

“Hi, Brian,” she said softly, sweetly.

“Hi, Christy,” I sputtered, and as soon as I said it, I had to look down.

Christy had me at a distinct disadvantage. First of all, she was suddenly, sweetly, magnificently fucking BUILT... and she was standing and I was sitting, so the Goods were all pretty much at eye level...

...but then, on top of all that, she was wearing sunglasses (mirror-lensed aviator frames), which meant she could cast her greeneyed gaze wherever she wanted, whereas I had to sneak a peek whenever I felt like she wasn't looking... and how could I tell whether she was looking or not?

Well, by the blush, of course... but her red cheeks made me feel awkward, exposed, and I knew chances were she could track *my* eyes' every move, but for a second, I didn't care. Since her blush told me that she was looking at *me* somehow, I took a free pass and shot a couple glances at her PROPERTY OF, stretched taut by the va-va-va-voom underneath.

It was hard to believe that anything could have looked better than the glimpse of that lacy bra under her blouse in newspaper, but there she was, in front of me.

Margo, meanwhile, just seemed happy to see Christy. “What got you out here so *early*, woman?” she said.

“Well,” Christy said as she shook her towel --SNAP!-- and then spread it out perpendicular to ours, half in the

shade, half in the sun, “*you* know... first day of summer... Kath has to work till five... I didn't wanna wait...”

She took her sunnies off and tossed them on her towel, then pulled the end of her t-shirt out of her shorts.

“...so I figured, you know, come out here early--”

--and she pulled her shirt over her head--

“--get a little sun--”

--and her platinum blonde hair fell loose--

“--you know--”

--and her breasts--

“--*hang out.*”

--her *breasts.*

Yes!

Hang out!

Christy may have been wearing the same old outerwear, but underneath, she'd abandoned the red tank suit.

She was wearing an orange bikini, and when she peeled off her t-shirt, my suspicions were confirmed:

Christy had developed quite a bit since that afternoon in newspaper.

Christy looked Done.

And she knew it.

And I got the uncomfortable feeling that she wanted *me* to know it.

She tossed her tiny, tight t-shirt onto her towel and then thrust her boobs out slightly as she reached down and ran her fingertips along the waistband of her terry shorts, slipping them down her hips and thighs, wiggling in place as they slid to her ankles, revealing what looked like orange nylon panties... smooth, slightly round belly with a short, neat pink appendicitis scar on the right, above the waistband. (I didn't remember *that* from our fort!) She lifted her right foot and gently *kicked* her shorts off; they flew in a shallow arc and landed in the center of her towel, next to her sunglasses... which I was glad she wasn't wearing, because now I could see her eyes, and since she wasn't looking at me...

...I didn't stare, but...

...her firm, round breasts were barely reined in by her bikini top, which she shifted as she stood in front of us-- fingertips into her left cup --shift-- then right --shift. Barely a blush.

My breath caught, and I blinked and looked down, trying to keep my gaze from locking in on Christy's chest...

Unfortunately, though, she had plenty for me to stare at besides her bikini top.

Like her bikini *bottom*: at the junction of her legs, the orange fabric looked cushy, and there were just a few stray strands of wiry auburn pubic hair peeking out at the edges.

Of course, it was a matter of public record that I'd seen Christy Down There before (reference: *Naked, Brian, Did You Ever See A Girl?*).

But this was different. *She* was different. This was not the same Christy I'd seen naked in the fort by the cornfield, nor was it the same Christy from the summer before.

No... this was an enhancement... a new model Christy.

New, and definitely improved.

Meanwhile, on the towel next to me, Margo was almost as stunned in her own way by the bikini as I was.

"You're gonna *hang out*, huh?" she said, dry and curt.

Christy paused for a second, like she sensed something in Margo's tone... but then she took a breath and looked Margo right in the eye. "Yeah," she said. "Hang out. Plus, you know... swim a little... but mainly... yeah. Hang out." And she glanced at me quick, her green eyes bright, and for the first time that afternoon, our eyes met.

Strong *flutter*.

I shifted my eyes down to Christy's feet (toenails painted orange, to match her swimsuit); meanwhile, Margo was looking down at her own toes again, and there was no smile in her voice.

"Brian's all for you hangin' out, aren't you, Bri?"

Brian blah blah blah blah-blah blah, blah blah Bri?

Margo nudged my leg with her bare right foot, but my eyes and attention were focused on Orange--

BAM! Margo kicked my leg. Hard.

"Brian!" she tittered, shaking her head, her mouth agape.

"Yeah... yeah..." I muttered, my face getting hot.

I wasn't really even sure what I was agreeing to. But if it had something to do with Christy and that bikini, I was fine with it.

I took a breath and then looked back over at Margo. She adjusted her swimsuit, tucking her cleavage a little further down into her swooping v-neck, and then looked up at Christy. "Can't *believe* you ended up gettin' the 'keener after all," she said, still shaking her head gently, like she *really* couldn't believe it, in more ways than I could possibly know.

Meanwhile, I was *trying* not to stare, but every time I looked away, it seemed, Christy would do something to pull my attention back.

Like speak. Or smile. Or blink.

Or breathe.

As in: Christy stood up straight and put her hands on her hips, right above that orange waistband... took another deep breath...

...chest *expanding*... breasts pushed *out*...

...*ohmigod*...

...sigh... exhale.

I really could not believe how little fabric Christy had on her body. I couldn't imagine that seeing her naked (again) would have been any better.

Margo, meanwhile, was in her own state of disbelief. "I just... I thought you got a green tank for the pool."

"Yeah, I did, but..." Christy knelt down to dig into her backpack. "Kath... we... I exchanged that one last night. You know? I just... I didn't like that one."

"But you said you didn't like the bikini, either."

"I didn't... not the one I tried on back then. It was

too... it was too skimpy..."

You mean there was one she tried on that was "too" skimpy?

"...but this one... you know, it's a Speedo, so, you know... it'll stay on when I swim. It's tight..."

I shifted uncomfortably on my towel as my face got hot. There are just certain words you don't want to hear when a girl in a bikini is standing five feet in front of you.

Like "skimpy." And "tight."

Christy was blushing, too, and I felt like she'd found what she was looking for, but she wanted to keep digging so she didn't have to look up. "... anyway... Kath said it'll be O.K.." She took a breath and then removed a handful of barrettes and a rubber swim cap from her bag. "Still... it's kinda like I said about the *other* one... you know?"

Margo huffed a light laugh. "I guess..."

Of course, I wasn't privy to the *I felt half naked in it* note back then, but that was the look in Christy's eyes: a little embarrassed and maybe even scared by the power of what she was wearing.

And funny: as quickly as I caught that feeling, Christy stood up straight... *deep breath... chest out...* then, as she exhaled she shook her head once so that her platinum hair went just a little wild, and she looked me in the eye. "Kinda *like* it, though..." she said, a mischievous grin on her face, and then she looked down. "I'm glad Kath talked me into it."

"Kath," Margo repeated, and the edge she put on the name made me think that maybe she was tired of hearing Christy invoke her sister's name as a reason (or excuse) for her choices. She stared right at the stray hairs in Christy's crotch. "Couldn't she talk you into any Nair?"

Christy blinked, puzzled. "What? Nair?"

Margo shook her head. "Oh, just... I'll tell you later," she said, brushing her hair back off her face, revealing a shit-eatin' smirk.

Christy didn't get it. "Nair," she repeated, shaking her head. "I *shaved* my legs..." She reached behind her

head and started pulling up her hair, sticking barrettes in it. "So, when do you go to Canada?" she said. "Before or after your birthday?"

"After," Margo said. "Two weeks."

Christy glanced at me quick. "And do you have camp, Bri?"

I shook my head. "No," I said. "I'll be around."

"Good," Christy said, smiling gently, and as our eyes met, I felt another flutter. Just a mini-flutter, but given everything else, it was too much. I couldn't stand to hold eye contact...

...so what did I do? What else: I looked right at her top...

....specifically, at the dimpled orange nylon fabric pushed out and slightly darkened by her erect nipples.

I shot my eyes back up to Christy's face just in time. "I'll be around too, Bri," she said softly.

And now it was her turn to get caught looking.

Christy stood up straight and once again adjusted those cups... left cup... right... and then, as she glanced over at me, her eyes darted down from the center of my chest to my crotch. Fast... just a glance. I'm certain it was unintentional, because as quick as she looked, she looked away, beet red...

...and that was when I became fully conscious of the enormous hard-on in my lap.

Holy shit. She saw it... or did she?

I raised my right leg to try to hide it. Thank God I hadn't decided on a Speedo, or I would've been Poking Out, like the men's underwear model in the Wards catalog the Christmas before.

("BRIAN! DID YOU SEE THE UNDERWEAR ADS IN THE CHRISTMAS CATALOG? UH HUH HUH HUH HUH...")

She *had* to have seen it... just like she knew I saw her nipples and her adjustments.

We both knew exactly what we were doing, what we were feeling, what we were thinking.

"So..." Christy said, exhaling. "You guys gonna get

in?"

"Maybe later," Margo said, and she glanced at me quick. "*Brian*'ll get in with you, though," she said.

I would?

Christy looked at me, expectant...

...inhale... chest out... wayyyy out...

"Uhhh... maybe later," I said, looking down (but not at my crotch). "I just... I need to *sit* for a little bit," I said, and Margo snorted a quick "Pff!" laugh next to me.

Did Christy get it? God, I hoped not and I hoped so. Whatever she got or didn't get, she pulled her swim cap over her tightly-barretted hair --SNAP!-- and then exhaled. "Well, I'll be in the lap lane, if you guys get in."

Pff! "Lap lane!" Margo repeated. "O.K., woman!" but Christy had already spun on the balls of her feet and broken into a semi-jog down through the lawn toward the pool.

And there we were... silence again... well, like before, not silence: "Midnight At The Oasis" was playing on the radio. I took a last look at the rear view --Christy's very round, very firm, very tight orange-bikini-clad swimmer's ass as she jogged away-- and then, conscious of my best friend --my *female* best friend-- sitting next to me, I looked down at my feet.

Yep. Just as we figured.

Came in, said HI, dropped her stuff, ran to the pool.

Same as always.

Sixty-four

As "Midnight At The Oasis" played, I felt Margo's bare foot on the outside of my upper thigh, nudging me as she sang along.

"She'll be your belly *daaaaannnn-sah! Prannnn-sah!* And *you* can be her *sheik!*" She kicked me lightly one last

time. "You wanna be Christy's *sheik*, Bri?"

I lay back on my towel and put my forearm over my eyes as I pulled my legs up to try a hands-free adjustment of my hard-on. "Her *sheik*?" I said.

"Her *sheik*," Margo repeated. "Which, if I'm not mistaken, is also the name of a rubber." She snickered. "So what'd you think of the show?"

"The show?" My voice broke as I said it. My throat was very dry.

"Uh... *yeah*... the show," Margo said, exaggerating my cracking voice, breaking those words into about seven separate notes.

I laughed. "Like your voice isn't changing."

"Sorry, Bri... it's just... it's funny, that's all." That was easy for Margo to say. Her voice had gotten huskier the last year or so, but I'd never heard it crack like mine. "I know... it isn't really," she said. "But, still... God, Bri... come on! What do you think just *happened*? You think that was for *me*?" Pff! "Maybe it *was*... who knows?" She thrust her chest out and mimicked Christy removing her t-shirt. "Ah jest wanna git some *sun*" --Margo jiggled her boobs side to side-- "yew know, *hang out*." She snorted a laugh. "So you got a nice eyeful..." She looked sideways toward the picnic area. "...as did Mr. McGill over there with his wife." Pff! "I wonder if *he* caught a glimpse of Christy's wild bush."

"Wild bush," I repeated, blushing, laughing.

"Come on, Bri... *I* saw you staring at those pubes!" She laughed once. "A little hard to miss 'em... yeesh!" She chuckled. "Well, *clearly* she is over the discomfort of being around you when I'm here. Maybe you two should start comin' out here at night. That way you can have the *lap lane* all to yourself."

We listened as the song faded out and the 98 YCR jingle led into a commercial for Hersheypark, then as I took a breath, I could feel Margo taking a breath next to me, and we both sat back as the commercial played.

Hersheypark happy! Hersheypark glad!

And Margo sang along with the next line:

*So many things to see and do!
Good times to be had.*

Funny: I hadn't really anticipated seeing Christy at the pool... and if you'd asked me when I turned to face the mirror, I might have even said that I dreaded it a little... but now that I'd seen *The Show*, I definitely wanted to see more.

*What do you think just happened?
You think that was for me?*

I was thinking about how Christy'd acted on that one day the summer before, when she came out with Kath.

By comparison, the bikini just seemed so... so... *un-Christy*.

Or was it?
*Did you ever see a girl naked?
Well, do you want to all the way?*
O.K.... maybe not.

Meanwhile, there was Margo, on her towel next to me. Sitting under the tree, the blue of that pretty tank suit and the blue of her eyes seemed to reflect and resonate with the clear blue sky above us.

On any other day, that would have been enough for me.

But that bright hot June day, I was All About Orange.

Finally, that feeling I'd always had for Christy made sense. Reality had caught up with the feeling.

I loved Margo. Margo was my best friend.
But I *wanted* Christy.
But I *loved* Margo...

I suddenly felt bad, and as I looked over at Margo, she was lying flat on her back, her right arm over her chest, covering her cleavage, lips pursed and tight.

"Margo?" I said.
"Yeah, Bri?"

I'm sorry.

"Did Christy..." I took a breath. "Did she say she was gonna..."

Gonna what?

Gonna peel her clothes off in front of me, revealing a ripe, luscious, almost-nude body that put her sister's the summer before to shame?

I took another breath.

I wasn't quite sure what to say.

Margo, though, had no problem finishing my sentence.

"...gonna come out here and do a *striptease* for us?" She sighed, looking up into the trees, biting the corner of her upper lip. "I wasn't even sure she was gonna *meet* us. I mean, you know Christy. Talk is one thing. Witness the dance, you know?" Sigh. "So yeah, she kept *saying* she was gonna come out here today, she wanted to come out, she'd be here, all that... but if history was any precedent, next thing I knew, I'd be gettin' a card from the Capital." She laughed once, a light *Huh!* "As for the *bikini*..." She took a breath and then screwed on her Christy voice, not quite as ditzbally as before. "'You *know*, I *tried* on the bikini, and *Kath* liked it, but *I* don't know... *Mom* would never let me wear one of those. I mean, how would I *swim* in it? It'd *fall off*.' Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera." Margo laughed once. "Oh, and... *and--*" Back to her Christy voice, but this time even more ditzbally than the first time: "'Ah think ah'd *die* if Brian saw me in that!'" Margo laughed another single laugh, light but at the same time dark and deep, tinged with emotions that don't even have names. "Well, you saw her. She didn't die." She huffed a final, single laugh, which sounded almost like she was saying "Yet."

"What?" I said.

"Nothing, Bri. Sorry. Sorry." And she put her forearm over her eyes and lay there, perfectly still, exhaling loud and hard, like she wanted to dissolve down through her towel into the cool summer lawn.

Meanwhile, I could see Christy down by the pool,

standing at the lifeguard stand, stretching up onto her tippy-toes while she talked to the guard (*was it a guy??*), her orange suit (what there *was* of it) seemingly reflecting the sunlight. Her bikini bottom had crept halfway up her butt and just a second after I saw her, she reached behind herself and pulled it down... left cheek, right.

Blue sky... orange sun.

Why did I suddenly wish I was back in school?

Sixty-five

The coda came (literally) the next morning. I was sleeping innocently, having a dream about Christy, and (where else) the old fort in the cornfield.

We were little, and there I was, shirt off, working on the treehouse... and just like a few summers before, Christy excused herself to "use the little girls' room"...

...but when she called out "Brian, did you ever see a girl naked?" it was in her 14-year-old voice...

...and I was older, too... older and naked...

...naked, and with the biggest hardest hard-on I'd ever sprung...

...and as I covered my front with my hands, I answered "Not all the way..."

...and Christy said "Well, do you want to all the way?"...

...and of course I said yes...

...and the brush rustled...

...and I saw a flash of bare skin...

...and when I looked up at Christy emerging from the back room of the fort, my eyes roamed from her bare feet, up her thighs and over her orange bikini bottom, bare belly, and orange bikini top to her sweet Irish face...

...and she smiled at me...

...and I smiled back...

...and she reached her left hand up to her right shoulder and slid the strap of her bikini top over the round of her shoulder and down to the top of her arm...

...and as the cup of her top peeled back to reveal her bared right nipple, I felt my groin pulsing under my hands...

...and the dream faded away...

...and as I woke up, there I was, in bed, no longer dreaming...

...lying in a warm, sticky puddle, the front of my pajama bottoms soaked.

Holy shit! I peed the bed! was my first thought.

Then I remembered our Girls Leave The Room And Boys Stay Here talk in sixth grade.

Wet dreams.

And Mom has to do the wash.

The dream was over, but the nightmare continued.

Sixty-six

I leapt out of bed, pulled off my sticky wet pajama bottoms, pulled on clean (relatively) shorts, and scrambled down the hall to the (thank God!) empty bathroom. Rinsing them in the sink with hot water wasn't the ideal solution, but it was better than the alternative. At least if I rinsed them out myself and Mom asked me why they were wet, I could tell her I spilled water on them... or milk...

...or, if they didn't rinse out all the way, glue.

I hung the bottoms over the shower curtain rod and then went back down the hall to my room and turned on the radio to try to distract myself: 98 YCR, which I seldom listened to, but, as the announcer reminded me while I got dressed, it was A BEACH BOYS ENDLESS SUMMER WEEKEND!

Call in every time you hear the Beach Boys this

weekend to win one of 98 copies of the new Beach Boys double album greatest hits collection ENDLESS SUMMER... from Capitol Records and your all-hit music station...

And the jingle singers took over:

Ninety eiiighhhhhht... YCR!

And then, what else:

"Surfer Girl."

Well, now, I *really* felt bad.

Yeah, I wanted Christy... how couldn't I? That scene at the pool had been (pardon the pun) coming for years.

But I loved Margo. She was my best friend.

It wasn't just that she'd gotten a beautiful blue bathing suit and then been upstaged by her best (girl)friend in a bright orange 'keener... or was it?

I didn't know what it was.

It was weird: for the longest time, my feelings for Margo and Christy didn't seem to make any sense. Now, I felt like my feelings made sense, but nothing else did.

Like: in spite of Margo's chill and balkiness after Christy's "show," she still seemed to be nudging Christy and me together, same as always. Almost in spite of herself.

You two could have the lap lane to yourselves.

You wanna be Christy's shiekh, Bri?

Was that what Margo wanted?

As "Surfer Girl" played, I didn't just think about our slow dance... I thought about us sitting on our towels, listening to "Surfin' U.S.A." and "Wendy."

You know what I always thought was cool, Bri? Is how... they're my favorite group, right? And yours, right? Well, their leader's named Brian, which is your name, and you're my best friend.

I always liked that.

Me, too, Margo. Me, too.

I need that album.

It's got every song on it.

I tried to win it five times

My birthday's in a week...

Meanwhile, "Surfer Girl" had faded out...

98YCR. *Who's this?*

Betty Bair.

Betty. Where are you calling from, Betty?

Hanover.

Hanover. Well, Betty, you've just won yourself a copy of the Beach Boys' ENDLESS SUMMER!

AAAAAHHHHH! WOW! I NEVER WIN! THANK YOU! I WON! I WON! I NEVER WIN!

Well, you won this time, Betty.

I know, I know... I just... I can't believe it! Thank you! Thank you!

To which the proper response would have been... what? *You're welcome?*

No:

Betty, tell everyone what station gives you the most chances of winning, all summer long!

98 YCR!

As Joni Mitchell started into "Help Me," I knew what I had to do.

First, wait for the next Beach Boys record, and then dial as fast as I could...

...and second, if I won and they asked me, on the air, which station gave me the most chances of winning all summer long, take a deep breath and say, very calmly, "Your beautiful island of easy listening... WHP!"

Sixty-six

I tried... I loved Margo... I wanted to make her feel better... I felt like I'd done something wrong, though I didn't really know *what* (didn't really know what I'd done that she hadn't encouraged!)

...but then, wasn't I the one who'd said "Margo, nobody ever wins those things?"

In other words: I struck out. Five calls, five Ks.

Each time, the line was busy... and unlike the

previous weekend, they just took the first caller, so the rest of us were screwed.

So... unless I could get to know Betty Bair from Hanover, I was out of luck.

Either that, or...

We saw it at Listening Booth.

Hey, here's a novel idea, Bri: why not *buy* it for her?

I turned off the radio and took my old cast-iron sheep bank down from my dresser top.

It was all change: a dollar-fifty-seven. Certainly not enough to get a new double album, even if it was on sale.

But... it was Friday... and Margo's birthday wasn't till the 19th --a week from Wednesday-- and I knew I'd get five dollars in allowance between now and then... so...

Six dollars and fifty-seven cents *had* to be enough to get Margo that album.

Better call the record store downtown to check, anyway.

Good thing for the clerk I wasn't the mystery shopper...

Me: Yeah, uh, hi... I need... uh, I want to get... do you... do you have *Endless Summer*--

Clerk: (*irritated, rushed monotone*) \$5.99 album, \$6.49 eight-track or cassette

CLICK!

I sat down at my desk and multiplied out the sales tax: six cents on every dollar, times six dollars...

It'd be tight. I'd have maybe a quarter left over to last me till the Saturday after Margo's birthday...

...but Margo'd get *Endless Summer*.

Sixty-seven

Saturday morning, allowance day, I got up, got dressed, had a bowl of Alpha Bits and went right to work: first the trash, then the lawn. I was on a mission. If Dad saw me *earning* my allowance before noon, maybe he'd give it to me without my asking. I'd finish the lawn, get a shower, ride my bike downtown to get the album, and still get back in time for lunch.

By 10:45, the lawn was mowed. I walked inside, all sweaty and dirty with lawn dust, shredded grass and mower exhaust.

Mom was at the kitchen sink. "You're up and busy early," she said, kissing my face in a clean spot.

"I just wanted to get done," I said. Which I did. Sort of.

"Well," Mom said as she held a clean glass under the faucet, "Daddy left your allowance on the kitchen table." She handed me the water and sighed as I bolted it. "Brian, don't gulp..." she said.

"I'm *thirsty*," I sighed back, giving her my empty glass.

Mom and I had been butting heads a lot the past year. It now seemed that I couldn't even drink a glass of water right.

I walked past the kitchen table and nonchalantly glanced at the money at my place: four one-dollar bills.

Four?

I picked them up and counted them to make sure that two of them maybe weren't stuck together.

Nope. Four.

"Mom," I said, "Dad only left four dollars."

"No," Mom said, barely looking up from the sink, "he left five. But I lent you a dollar last week, honey, remember?"

Oh, shit. That's right.

Bills.

“Mom,” I said, “can I pay you that back next week?”

Mom stopped running the water. “No, I’m sorry, Brian,” she said. “You told me just to take it out of your allowance, remember? I knew you had money in your bank, but I let you put it off because I didn’t want you to break your bank open.”

“But Mom, I need that dollar.”

“Brian, I’m sorry, but you did promise me. You have to learn to keep your promises and be responsible with your money.”

I couldn’t believe it.

A Lesson.

“But I need to get Margo a birthday gift,” I said.

“Well... isn’t four dollars enough?”

“Not for what I’m getting her.”

“Well...” Mom looked at me sympathetically, and brushed her brown hair out of her eyes with the back of her hand. “Maybe you can just get her something else--”

“--I *can’t*, Mom.”

Silence.

“Brian,” Mom said at last, “I’m sorry, but if you knew you needed that dollar--”

“--I didn’t *know* I needed it,” I said.

Mom sighed. “Don’t you have money in your bank you can use?”

“Yeah, but I’ll still be about a dollar short.”

Mom pursed her lips and her brown eyes got wide.

Now what?

I realize now that, along with blow-out diapers and cleaning up puke, this is one of the parts of the job that parents hate.

Mom turned to the sink and went back to her dishes.

“Well,” she said, turning on the water again, “I’m sorry, Brian, but you *did* borrow that from me, and you told me that I could just take it out of your allowance. You shouldn’t have promised me that if you didn’t mean it.”

I stomped my foot. “Damn it, Mom!”

Mom shut the faucet off *hard*.

“Brian! That’s enough! I don’t *ever* want to hear you use that word again. You’re not going to get your way with me by stomping and swearing like a baby. You’re 14 years old!”

“God...”

Mom turned the water back on. “And don’t take the Lord’s name in vain,” she said as she rinsed a plate. “We didn’t raise you like that!”

Well, she’d pulled out one of the Commandments. No way was I going to win now.

I stomped upstairs to the bathroom, locked the door, got undressed and hopped in the shower, fuming to myself the whole time, angry at Mom but mainly sad and panicked that I apparently wasn’t going to get Margo her album.

Why’s it so important for Mom to teach me a lesson now? I thought as I lathered up my hair.

And what’s she need that dollar for?

I scrubbed and rinsed, dried off, wrapped my towel around my waist and walked back down the hall to my bedroom. Pulled on underwear, shorts and a t-shirt, socks and sneakers, grabbed my bank, and sat down on the bed to count my money...

Oops. Deodorant. That’s right.

My sweat smells now. I need deodorant.

Back down the hall to the bathroom... slipped my shirt up to expose my armpits... rolled on some Right Guard and back to the bedroom.

O.K. Now the money.

One... two... three... four ones.

And the change...

\$2.57.

Two fifty seven?

I thought I’d counted just \$1.57 the night before.

Twice.

But there it was:

Nine quarters... that was \$2.25.

Two dimes.

Two pennies.

Two nickels.

\$2.57.

Plus four ones. I had \$6.57.

Out the corner of my eye, I could see Dad standing at the door. He had the weary look of an unwilling diplomat on his face, beads of sweat on his bald head.

“Brian,” he said, “your mother says you’re getting quite a mouth.”

I still felt a little disoriented from my miscount. “What?” I said, shuffling through those coins. “Yeah, yeah...” I said. “I’m sorry, Dad.”

“Well, maybe you ought to tell her that.”

I said nothing. What could I say?

And maybe Mom could say she’s sorry for...

For what? For lending me that dollar in the first place? For making me keep my promise to pay her back?

Like I said, no way I’d win.

“Are you and Margo going to the pool?” Dad said.

“After lunch,” I said. “I have to go downtown and get her a birthday present.”

“That’s right... that’s next week,” he said, like he suddenly remembered he’d have to go shopping himself. “Well, try and be back by lunch. Noon.”

“I will.”

He turned and went back downstairs as I counted that money one more time just to make sure...

Yep: \$6.57. Those extra quarters must have been stuck inside the bank somehow.

I stuffed the money into my pocket and followed Dad downstairs to the kitchen. He’d retreated into the garage, but Mom was in the mudroom sorting laundry. I stopped at the sink for a glass of water and as I gulped it down, I could feel her watching me from the doorway.

“Brian,” she said gently, “are you going downtown on your bike?”

“Yeah, Mom,” I said, downing the rest of my water and setting the glass on the counter.

Mom was looking at me with her wide, tired eyes, half sad. I almost said "What?" she was so quiet, but she looked down, breaking both our eye contact and the silence.

"Well, just... ride carefully, O.K.?"

I sighed.

"I *worry*," she said. "The college students drive crazy. Just... promise you'll walk your bike once you get downtown."

"I will, Mom," I said, even though I wouldn't...

...and as I walked past her, something told me to take Dad's advice and grow up.

"Sorry I mouthed off at you earlier, Mom," I said softly, and she just looked down.

"Oh, you're... just... *that age*," she said, and she kissed me on the cheek as I stepped out into the garage to get my bike.

I rode to the record store, feeling relieved that I'd done the right thing by Mom, and as I rode home with Margo's *Endless Summer* under my arm, feeling good that I'd also done the right thing by her, I was happy that I'd rattled those four quarters loose...

...and totally unaware that the way they'd "gotten stuck" in my bank was that, while I was in the shower, Mom took them from her purse, snuck in my room, and stuck them in the slot.

Sixty-eight

On Margo's fourteenth birthday (June 19th 1974), she awoke to flowers from her parents: a squat, orb-shaped milkglass vase of 28 irises on the desktop next to her bed. "That's one per year from each of us, little girl," her Dad said. "Happy birthday."

Margo loved the flowers, but when I called her to say "Happy Birthday" and ask when I could bring over her

present (“God! A *present?* **Now**, Bri!”) she whispered, “You think they got me the album too?”

I hoped not.

I ran downstairs, out the back door and across the yard to give Margo her gift. She was waiting for me on their back stoop, clad in cut-off sweatpants and a red LADY CARDINALS softball t-shirt...

...no bra...

...and as I walked toward her, her eyes were already zeroed in on the square flat package under my arm.

“Briiiiiiiian!!!” she sang, her voice hushed, wavering excitedly. “Is that what I think it is?”

I handed her the package. “Happy birthday,” I said, and before I had a chance to say anything else, Margo was tearing off the yellow tissue paper. As soon as she exposed a corner of the cover, she could see that it was *exactly* what she thought it was.

“***OHMIGOD!***” she shrieked, hopping once, and she shredded the rest of the paper, letting it drop to the patio as she hugged me hard. “I *knew* you were gettin’ it for me, Brian... I *knew* it!” She pulled away a little bit and looked down. “That’s not why I said, you know, so that you *would*, but...” She looked me in the eye and smiled, her eyes welling with tears. “Thank you *thank you thank you*, Brian! Ohhhh... you’re the *best!*” and she hugged me one more time, quick and hard. “Ohhhh! I am ***psyched!***” she said as she let me go, and she grabbed my hand and pulled me up through the doorway into her kitchen, where her Mom and Dad were sitting at the table, having coffee. “Guys! Guys! Look! Brian got me that Beach Boys album I wanted! *Endless Summer!*”

“Awwww... tres bien, Marguerite,” Mrs. LeDoux said, smiling at her, at me, at us. She had her coffee mug in her right hand and her husband’s hand in her left, and as she answered her daughter, she patted Mr. LeDoux’s hand lightly and shot him a quick sideways look, and that was when it hit me:

We are standing in front of Margo's parents, holding

hands.

I don't think that's what the look was about, though. Margo's mom took a sip of her coffee. "Brian got her da album, Thomas," she said.

"Hey, that's great, Bri... great, little girl... thanks," Mr. LeDoux said. He glanced at our joined hands (my palms were sweating profusely) and then back at his wife, sighing the sigh of a father who didn't much *feel* like running back to Listening Booth at the Hanover Mall to exchange an album.

"Ouais, Brian... merci," Mrs. LeDoux said. "You are a good friend."

Margo was beaming, bouncing giddily on her bare heels.

"Oh, yeah... isn't he the **best?**" she said, and she kissed my cheek. "**Thank** you!" she gushed, and she let go of my hand and looked down at the cover for just a second. "Oh, **man**... let's... let's go up and **listen** to it!" and on *listen* she grabbed my hand again and yanked me out of the kitchen, down the downstairs hallway and up the steps to her bedroom.

As we padded up the carpeted stairway, I could hear Margo's parents start into their then-current installment of *Teen Topics: Should Margo And Brian Be Going Up There Together At This Age?*

I didn't hear the whole thing that morning, but, from the few other times I heard it, I probably could have scripted it.

What the hell... why not?

Mr. Ledoux: Fran, do you really think that Margo and Brian should be going up there?

Mrs. LeDoux: Dey are going up to listen to music, Thomas.

Mr. LeDoux: I know, I know... it's just...

Mrs. LeDoux: Just... quoi?

Mr. LeDoux: Well, you know... it's just... they're getting to be that age...

Mrs. LeDoux: Dat age?

Mr. LeDoux: Yeah, you know... and I mean... you told me about how Margo... you know...

Mrs. LeDoux: How Margo...

Mr. LeDoux: You know. How she was all concerned that she got the right swimsuit... and them dancing... and then there they are, holding hands--

Mrs. LeDoux: --Thomas, do you not trust Brian?

PAUSE

Mr. LeDoux: I trust him, honey... it's just... you know what you've always said... about how the two of them... you know. And now... I mean, if I was Brian...

Mrs. LeDoux: And dat would be a bad ting?

LONG SILENCE

Mr. LeDoux: Fran, I'm just saying, you know... maybe in a few minutes... you know... go up. You know?

Mrs. LeDoux: Go up?

Mr. LeDoux: Yeah. Go up. *You* know.

Mrs. LeDoux: (after a beat) Non.

Mr. LeDoux: No?

Mrs. LeDoux: No, Thomas. *You* are curious, *you* go up.

Long silence

Mr. LeDoux: I just... if I was Brian...

Curtain as Margo and I hit the landing outside Margo's room at the top of the stairs.

Sixty-nine

Margo had us in her bedroom long before the curtain fell. She pulled me through the doorway and let go, tiptoeing over to her stereo stand as I sat on the edge of her unmade bed. She knelt down in front of her stereo like it was an altar, tearing the shrinkwrap off the album so aggressively that the corner of the cover bent.

"Oops," she tittered, then, "Whoa! It *folds out*," and she opened the gatefold cover. "It's *two records*, Bri! Whoa! Bitchen!"

("That's what the surfers all say, Bri. Get with it.")

She started to remove one of the discs from the sleeve and a folded glossy piece of paper fell into her lap.

"And a *poster*! Oh my God!" She unfolded the poster and got a slightly disappointed look on her face: it was a photo of two biplanes towing banners that read BEACH BOYS and ENDLESS SUMMER.

"Aww, man," she said, "I thought it'd maybe be a picture of Denny with his shirt off." She folded the poster and stuck it back in the jacket, then looked at me. "What

song you wanna hear?”

I didn't hesitate. "Don't Worry Baby." My favorite.

Margo was scanning the list of songs on the back cover. "O.K.... 'Don't Worry Baby'... let's see... side two, last song. Yeah, that's a sad one, what with the girl dying and all..."

"Girl dying? What girl dying?"

"You know..." She sang: "But she looks in my eyes/
And makes me realize/ And she's dead."

"It's not 'and she's dead...' it's 'and she said.'"

Margo blinked once. "It is?"

"Margo... how could she look in his eyes if she's dead?"

Margo laughed at herself. "Yeah... doyeeee." She carefully removed the album from its inner sleeve. The bent cover was such a shocker because Margo was always so careful with her records. Margo was one of the few people I knew who not only handled her albums by the edges and labels only, but who put the inner sleeves back into the jackets so that the opening was *up*, not out.*

Margo was about to play "Don't Worry Baby" for me when another song on the back cover caught her eye.

"Ohmigod!" she said, her voice hushed.

"What?" I said.

Margo was blushing. "You know... I don't..." She took a breath. "Can I play another one first?"

I nodded. "Sure," I said, but she'd already switched the discs on the turntable.

"Just..." She eyed the track she wanted and sighed. "I really really hope this doesn't make you feel weird, but..."

...but she's gonna play it anyway.

She took a breath and dropped the needle, and from the speakers came four ascending bass notes --bom bom

* By contrast, according to Margo, Christy had sheaves of sleeveless albums and 45s on the floor in front of her stereo, and if she stuck the inner sleeves back in the jackets at all, it was always with the opening out, so that the record could slide out easily. Other quirks ("*Mistakes*, Bri. They were *mistakes*." in Christy's and Kathy's album filing system have been duly noted in other works.

bom bom --and then a wall of wordless harmonies sung over a softly strummed electric guitar.

"Ahhhhh, ooo-ooo, ahhh..."

Margo sat frozen as the song played.

*Little surfer, little one,
Made my heart come all undone,
Do you love me?
Do you, surfer girl?*

For a moment, I wanted her to take the record off, but as she sat there whisper-singing the words, almost hugging the cover to her chest, a tear slipped out of her eye and she sniffled. "Sorry," she said, and she laughed at herself. "Thank you, Brian... I just..." She laughed and sniffled again as she turned and reached for a Kleenex. "I'm so *surprised*," she said. "Did you *win* this?"

"No," I said. "I bought it."

"Brian! This is *expensive!*"

"You *wanted* it."

"I know, but..." She looked up at me. "Thank you," she said softly.

Our eyes met for just a second, and the light breathy feeling in my chest far eclipsed any flutter I'd ever gotten from Christy or Jean or any other girl I knew.

"Happy birthday," I said.

Margo looked down and then turned back to face her stereo as *The Part That Made Us Stop Giggling* sounded forth from her speakers...

*We could ride the surf together
While our love would growwww...*

"You *know*..." She took a breath, then exhaled, still looking down. "It's not *just* that you got it for me, or that I don't have this song on any other album, which is now my favorite one... but..." She took a breath and sniffled again... exhaled.

But what?

But we danced to it. And here we are, listening to it in your bedroom.

Should've said that.

I felt a nervous energy in the bedroom, and for a second I wanted to get up off the bed and step up behind her and put my arms around her. I stiffened a little bit as that thought crossed my mind-- almost like my body was saying *Ohhhhh, no you don't, Bri!*-- and felt the gentle flutter in my heart expand to (or maybe "get overtaken by") fear, my heart pumping a little faster than before.

Margo, meanwhile, was still looking down at the cover. She had her back to me, so I couldn't see what she was thinking or feeling... and maybe that was the point. She took a breath. "I mean, it's got six songs that I don't even *have*," she said, completing her sentence at last, and she sniffled and reached for another tissue, but there was nothing sticking out of the boxtop slot. "Just a sec, Bri," she said, and she got up and ran out of the room to get more...

...even though there was another full box on the desktop next to her bed.

Maybe she just didn't notice that box, I thought as I exhaled and relaxed a little. I mean, she was definitely out there getting tissues-- I could hear her opening the closet door in the hallway, then, as the song faded out...

Do you love me?

Do you, surfer...

Girl, surfer girl,

My little surfer girl

Little onnnnnne

Ahhhhhh-ahhhhhh...

...I heard adult steps coming up the carpeted staircase, and I stiffened again.

No. You are curious, you go up.

Shit. Here I was, sitting on Margo's bed (her *unmade*

bed!) with the song that we slow-danced to playing on her stereo, five minutes after she'd hugged me twice (but she'd hugged me before) and kissed my cheek (but she'd kissed my cheek before) and we'd stood there holding hands in front of her mom and dad.

I glanced at the window quick as the last faint notes of "Surfer Girl" faded into the gentle summer morning neighborhood noises.

From the overhang outside Margo's bedroom window down to the deck is what... eight feet?

I didn't move.

Meanwhile, Mrs. LeDoux was out in the hall, saying something to Margo en Francais. Whatever it was, Margo laughed and said "I know, Mom..." ("She said she *wasn't* up there checking on us. Right, Mom!") and Mrs. LeDoux started to reply, but whatever she said got drowned out by three loud tom-tom beats and a snare drum KICK! on the stereo... then...

Catch a wave and you're sittin' on top of the worrrrrld....

I heard Margo blow her nose again out in the hallway. "You know," she called out, "Christy is gonna be so *jealous!*"

Christy.

Her name was a relief, in a way... like there was someone in the house other than us (or Margo's parents).

"Yeah?" I called back.

"Oh, yeah!" Margo called from the hall, and I heard the closet door shut. "She wanted this album *so bad*. She was the one who told me about calling in to win. She tried a bunch of times, too. That's why I thought maybe *you* did." Margo came back into the room, and I thought she might turn the song down, but instead, she stepped over and turned it *up*, her hair falling in a sheet in front of her face so I couldn't see her eyes. "She didn't even *get* any albums, except that Beatles one I gave her." She put the album down and blew her nose again. "Which sucks, because she likes music so much." She shot her damp Kleenex toward

the trashcan by the door --it hit the wall right above and caromed in. Two points!-- and then turned to her dresser and pulled her long hair behind her head. "I mean, her dad'll take her to Peaches down there when they all go down to see him," she said, like she was talking not to me, but to her reflection in her mirror, "but still, that's not on the *day*. You know? I mean, you came through on the *day*." She wrapped a gold elastic band around her pony tail. "So what'd you get *her*, anyway?"

Seventy

What'd I get Christy?

"Huh?" I said.

"Huh?" Margo mocked me. "Yeah... *you* know." She turned around to face me, and as soon as our eyes met, she could tell I *didn't* know. "Her *birthday*, Brian."

Her birthday?

"When's her birthday?"

"When *is* it?" she said. "When *was* it, you mean." She looked at me. "Yesterday," she said. "Didn't you know?"

I shook my head. "She didn't say anything."

Margo tsked. "She's not gonna *say*..."

"Well, *you* did."

"Well, that's *me*. I just... *you* know. " She looked down. "Brian, I hope you don't think..." She sighed lightly. "I wasn't saying all that about it being my birthday because I wanted you to go *buy* me this--"

--I know..."

"...it's just... *you* know... we always go do stuff on my birthday. Go out and stuff. And just... Dad was talking about going to the game, Mom is baking a cake... I just didn't want you to forget and be left out, you know? That's all." She looked down at the album cover, almost like she was thinking of giving it back. "Not so you'd go, you know..."

Meanwhile, "Catch A Wave" had faded out and for a few thoughtful seconds, the room was quiet; just the sound of a mourning dove out on the phone line at the foot of the yard. Then, from the speakers, another slow song: "The Warmth of the Sun."

"They should put the slow songs together without a fast one in between," I said.

"Huh?" Margo said, even though she heard every word I'd said, and before I repeated it, she said "No, no, Bri... you gotta... you have to break up the mood. You know?"

How true.

Margo exhaled lightly through her nostrils as she bit the corner of her lower lip... meanwhile, the music played.

"Well," she said at last, "you gotta go get her something."

I thought of the 28 cents in my pocket.

"Margo, I--"

"--Brian... don't be shy. She *likes* you. You know? I mean, how many girls give you the gift of bikini?" I laughed. "I mean, at least a *card*--"

"--Margo, I don't have any money left!"

I was expecting maybe a sigh, or an *Auwww...* Brian... *you didn't have to go spend all of your money on me*, or something like that, but instead Margo tsked sharply. "*I* have money," she said, and she stepped over to her maple secretary's desk and opened the top center drawer, slid aside a sheaf of envelopes, and rattled through a small tin of change. "Here," she said, pressing a coin into my palm.

It was a 1964 Kennedy silver half: first year they'd made them. Margo'd been holding onto it ("This is also the last year they had *silver* in them!") but now, there it was, in my hand.

"Margo," I said, "I can't --"

"--Brian... just... go get Christy a card, sweetie..."

"Margo--"

"Brian... you *like* Christy, right?"

I nodded.

"And she likes you. This has been *proven*." She put her hand on mine, so that our warm sweaty palms were facing each others', with just the cool silver half between them. "Just... *take* it, Bri."

I laughed. "Margo, I can't take your fifty-cent piece--"

--Tsk! "It's not the last one in the world. I can get more from the bank."

"But Margo--"

"--**Go... get... Christy... an... effin'... BIRTHDAY CARD!**" Margo hissed, laughing as she closed my fingers around the coin, and I laughed back. "You're *welcome*," she said as she let go of my hand.

"Thanks," I replied.

Margo leaned back, pushing the desk drawer shut with her butt. "I mean, she kinda pissed me off with that whole *strip show*... but *still*... that's no reason... you know... *you* shouldn't be punished." She stood up and clapped her hands once, like she was bringing herself into sharper focus. "Now... *flowers!*" she said, and she turned to stoop over the vase that her parents had given her.

"Aren't those your birthday flowers?--"

"--Brian," she said impatiently as she perused the petals, "I think I can spare *one iris* for you to give to your *girlfriend* for her birthday."

I laughed again. "Margo, Christy's not my girlfriend..."

"Well..." Margo said, "...you don't *think* she is..." She plucked an iris from the vaaaz "...but..."

"But what?"

I watched as Margo worked a frond of greenery loose from the arrangement. "What?" I repeated, but Margo just smiled.

"This'd be a buck downtown," she said as she turned to face me. "Mom has some of that same yellow tissue paper you wrapped my album in. We'll use that. It'll look just like you got it from a florist. Then all you have to do is get her a card." She held the flower out to me. "You can handle *that* part, right?"

I nodded as I took the flower from her. I felt nervous again, but for a different reason.

Margo could see. She patted my hand lightly. "Just... stick with me, Bri," she said. "I'll take care of you two." She leaned in and kissed my cheek lightly. "Come on," she said, and she stepped out into the hall ahead of me and ran downstairs to find me tissue paper.

As I got up from her bed and followed her down the steps to her kitchen, and the Beach Boys sang in her bedroom...

*My love's like the warmth of the sun
It won't ever die...*

...I felt disoriented, like I'd missed something.
Several somethings, in fact.

Seventy-one

You don't think she is, Bri... but...

As I biked through our neighborhood after dinner clutching Christy's iris and 69¢ Snoopy birthday card (best to be funny, I figured), I was getting more and more nervous...

...scared.

Was this a good idea?

You stick with me, Bri... I'll take care of you two.

You two?

Actually, I was trying to figure out, as I pedaled down the street, how and when Christy and I had become *You two*. Reviewing it all: O.K., so we'd seen each other naked, sure, but that was ancient history... besides, we were little kids back then, still single-digit-aged. That didn't count, did it?

And I'd gotten that belated Valentine from her in

eighth grade, signed "Love Christy"... and the one I'd given her said "Love Brian..." but then, the one I'd given Margo said "Love, Bri" ...and Margo'd given me one that said "Love, Margo"... and the one that Margo got from Christy *also* said "Love, Christy."

So what did "Love" mean, anyway?

And there were all those times that Christy and I had been in the gossip column of the school paper, in both directions ("CK + BP" and "BP LIKES CK") and various permutations thereof...

...but again, so had Margo and I... several times. Like... the first issue of seventh grade: the paper came out third period, right before lunch, and we were sitting across from each other in the cafeteria, browsing our respective copies, and since I was on the staff of the school paper, I knew what was coming in print ("Heyyyy, Brian," Jen Howard asked me the week before, "what's this 'ML likes BP,' huh? Looks like you've got a girrrrrlfriennnd... and her name starts with an 'M'... and an 'L'")... and I could tell Margo'd spotted it, not only because it was on the back page and she had the front page facing me, but because as I watched her eyes scan the column of type, they stopped and her face suddenly got bright red. "What?" I asked, like I didn't know, and Margo got all stammery.

"Ohhhh, just... big news flash here," she said. "'ML likes BP.'" She opened the paper to the sports, like the gossip column held no interest whatsoever for her, and laughed once. "I *like* you..." Face *really* red now. "...BP," she added.

"I like you too, ML," I said.

Margo answered me under the cafeteria table:

KICK!

Really, I thought as I got closer to the turn-in for Christy's house, *Margo and I are more a "you two" than Christy and I.*

I thought of Margo and I playing in our fort, walking downtown, going shopping and going to movies, watching TV in her basement, biking out to the pool...

...dancing to "Surfer Girl"... standing in front of her parents, holding hands...

Margo was the one I did things with, and more than that, she was the one I did things *for*. Without being pushed. Margo may have reminded me "My birthday's next week," but she really didn't need to... I knew already. Nobody stood there and said "You gotta get something for Margo." I just knew. I felt it.

Yet, according to Margo --the very person I was doing and feeling all of this for-- *Christy* and I were the ones who were "you two."

How did *that* happen? What did I miss?

As I rode down Early Street toward *Christy's* house, my heart was pumping faster and harder... I kept swallowing and I couldn't stop sweating... I almost turned around a couple times... almost Accidentally dropped the flower once... and when I finally came to the turn-in for Buford Circle, I thought about just riding the other way, down the block to the cornfield and Margo's and my old fort, which I hadn't even seen in two summers...

...where *Christy* and I saw each other naked.

You don't think she is, but...

Maybe, I thought as I pedaled up into Buford Circle, Margo was right. Maybe, like *Christy* all those years, she knew or could see something I didn't.

Either that, or Jen Howard was right.

I pulled my bike into the Kellys' driveway, which was up a slight slope, and let it fall onto the grass by the lamppost as I jumped off and trotted up the front walk. It was the same house they'd lived in for as long as I remembered --a big mock Tudor-- and yet, like *Christy* in the same old form-fitting shirt and slit shorts, somehow it looked different now. New.

Intimidating.

It didn't help that the neighborhood, the house, was quiet... too quiet, I thought, for a house with nine kids in it.

I stepped up onto the front porch and rang the doorbell --BING-BONG!-- and then stood waiting...

waiting... waiting...

No window in the storm door; just a screen, so I couldn't check my look (as it was) in the reflection.

My sweaty palm was making the tissue paper at the base of the stem all bunchy and wrinkly. And how was I supposed to present this to Christy? Should I hide it behind my back? Hold it at my side? Hold it straight out? And what if Christy didn't even answer the door?

Why didn't Margo go over all this with me?

(Maybe Dad would cover it in The Talk.)

No answer...

I rang the bell again --BING-BONG!-- and stepped back a step from the door.

Wait... wait... wait...

A prop plane passed overhead. Apparently, the airspace over Senator Kelly's house wasn't a no-fly zone.

Sheez, I thought, this is typical. Margo gets me all hyped up and nervous about giving Christy this flower and this card, and...

...she won't be home.

That's right.

Christy swims laps with Kathy after dinner.

I turned and started down the walk to my bike, part disappointed, but part relieved, too, because--

"Brian?"

Christy's voice. Behind and above me.

I looked up. In the window above the front porch, I could see a shadow behind the sheers.

"Hi, Christy," I said, suddenly very aware of the flower in my right hand.

"I'll be down in a sec, Brian."

Gulp.

Down in a sec, down in a sec... now what?

I ran my fingers through my hair as I stepped back up onto the porch.

What do I do? What do I say? Should I hug her? Kiss her?

Before I could decide, the inside door opened, and as

it did, I just blurted out, "Happy belated birthday" and held the flower out in front of me.

Christy was dressed in a flannel nightie (pink with red roses) and I could tell as soon as I saw her that she was sick: she looked washed-out, tired, her usually neat platinum blonde hair disheveled, sticking up and out in places. As soon as she saw the flower in my hand, though, her weary face lit up.

"Awwwww, Brian... thanks. How sweet," she whispered, her voice craggy, and she opened the screen door a crack and took the flower from me.

I started to hand the card through, but the screendoor fell shut on my wrist --"Oo! Sorry... sorry, Bri," she said, and she pushed the screendoor back open and took the card from me. "How'd you *know*?" she said as she inspected my handwritten HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHRISTY on the envelope, and then she answered her own question. "How else..."

I nodded. "She told me it was yesterday," I said. "Sorry I missed it."

"Well," Christy said, smelling the iris, "at least you did *something*." She sniffled.

I wasn't quite following this. "Well, didn't you *do* anything yesterday?"

Christy was still looking down at the iris. "Yeah. Puked. Twice. Happy birthday." She looked up at me before I could respond. "Brian," she said, her voice creaky, "this is so *pretty*. Thank you." She sighed. "I'd say come in but, you know, I wouldn't want you to catch anything. Plus... Mom'll be home soon... she took the little ones for ice cream. Seeing as we didn't have it yesterday. She said she might bring me some orange sherbet..."

"Is your Dad here?" I said.

Christy brushed her hair out of her eyes and looked down. "No, he's in Washington. Watergate."

"That sucks," I said.

"Well, it's his job, Brian," she said in a resigned voice, and she sighed and sniffled again, looking past me at

the lamppost.

Uncomfortable silence.

“God,” Christy said, like she really wanted to change the subject, “I must look... I’ve been in bed all day yesterday and today. This is the first time I’ve been downstairs. I must look like crap...”

“It’s all right,” I said.

“What,” Christy giggled, “it’s all right that I look like crap?”

“Yeah,” I said, smiling.

Christy looked down at the flower again. “This really is so sweet, Brian. Thank you, you know?” She looked back up. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” I said.

Our eyes met and my heart fluttered a little.

“Hope you feel better,” I said.

Christy smiled. “I already do, Brian,” she whispered.

“Thanks.”

Sigh.

Stand.

Stare.

Shuffle.

Uhhhhh...

“So Christy--”

“--Brian, if you--”

Laugh.

Look down.

“Sorry...” Christy said.

“No, go on...”

“No, you first... what... what...”

“Well...”

I had no idea that I was going to say what I was about to say... but somehow, as with every other moment that I rode the wave of what I felt in the center of my chest for the two girls I loved most... at that moment, on that porch, it felt right, so...

I took a breath.

“Just...”

I had to look down at my feet and at the woven rattan WELCOME mat beneath them, like there were maybe cue cards down there.

Another breath.

"I just... I know you and Kathy swim every night and all, but... some afternoon next week maybe... would you... want to meet me at the pool?"

Look up...

...just in time to see Christy's face break out in a shy, sweet smile. Her eyes were the color of the lawn and the rich green leaves catching the twilight sun out in her front yard.

"Sure, Brian," she whispered. "Sure," and we both laughed relieved, sighing laughs. "What day?"

"Wednesday?" I said, God knows why. I mean, what did I have planned Monday and Tuesday that was so important?

"O.K.," Christy said softly. "Wednesday." She held her hand up to the screen, palm facing out, and I put mine up against it, and our hands touched, just the thinnest mesh of metal separating our skin. We caught each others' eyes again, and as we did, Christy pulled her hand back, kissed the center of her palm, and pressed it back up against mine.

Wow. My breath caught.

"Thanks again, Brian," Christy said. "You made me feel almost all the way better."

"You're welcome," I said. "Happy belated birthday."

Christy let her hand fall. "Just be sure you wash your hand before you eat anything, Brian... I might still be contagious." I laughed. "Serious," Christy tittered, and then she sighed. "Hey... tell Margo hi, O.K.? I probably won't get to see her before she goes. She leaves Monday, right?"

I nodded my head. "Monday," I said.

Christy smiled and looked down. "For two weeks?"

I nodded. "Two weeks."

"Two weeks," Christy repeated, and she stepped back a little and started to shut the inside door. "I'm gonna go

read my card and look at my flower, Brian. See ya at the pool Wednesday. Three o'clock O.K.?"

"Three is good," I said.

"Three, then," she said, and then she smiled. "Good night, Brian," she said. "Thanks again for making me feel better."

"Anytime," I said. "Good night."

"Night," Christy said, and as she shut the door, I turned and walked back down the Kellys' front walk to get on my bike and ride home.

Wow. I had a date.

Brian has a girrrrrrrlfriennnnnnnnnd.

Kick!

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

Sunday nite

Dear Brian,

Well first of all I have to say I am sorry that we did not go to the game this weekend, although I should of figured we wouldn't. I'm not sure what packing mom + dad had to do that is so important. We are going to his old house which has plenty of stuff there already. I don't see what the big deal is about taking two days to pack. But that is why dad said we couldn't go, so nothing personal. "Maybe when we get back." So you know what that means. Don't hold your breath.

Anyway we ARE packed so first thing tommorow (today for you) we will be off to the lake so one I will miss you + two THANK YOU AGAIN!!!! for the album which I LOVE!! Every song is good, which I knew it would be. Even the ones I already have sound better!!

And I am glad you do not think that I told you that about wanting it so that you'd buy it for me with your last six dollars although I am glad that you did. So thank you again!!

And I am suprised you got to see Christy in person + give her that flower, given that Katie said

that she was still sick when I went over there yesterday AM. I guess when she saw it was YOU with a flower and not me there to antagonize her she felt a little better for awhile, like she told you.

Still I would of liked to of seen her one time before I left.

Although we did talk on the phone on Fri night after your visit. The subjects of which are privileged information. Although I will say that she was pleasantly suprised that you stopped by with the card + flower. She bugs me sometimes but she is my best freind next to you and I felt bad that she was sick. And also a little bad that I didn't tell you it was her birthday beforehand. But that all worked out.

Anyway I do not know if you two will see each other again (you know how she is with the pool, and besides she was talking like she was going to take another trip to DC, since her dad wasn't here on her b-day) but if you do and you get another good look at her in that bikini, be subtle and do not stare. (Esp at her pubes, which I told her to do some YARD WORK) She did not say anything about you staring but I am. Suttlety is the key here. I know for a fact that she wants you to look and notice her but you do not

want to be gross. Not that you were or that she complained, but you know. Best to air on the side of caution.

So anyway I know I have given you gram's address up there but just in case you lost it and you want to write me here it is:

Mrs. Albert LeDoux
3 Chaffeys Locks Road
Elgin, Ontario K0G 1E0
Canada

So thank you again for the great album and I will miss you and see you when I get back in two weeks!!

xoxoxoxo

me!! 😊

Whenever Margo went north the previous six summers, I always felt like vacation was on hold. Not this time, though; this time, I felt like it was going on without her.

Was that all right?

It must have been... or was it? Margo didn't mention it in her note. But she and Christy had to have talked about it. Right?

Seventy-three

It was weird: as I rode my bike out to the pool to meet Christy on Wednesday afternoon, the remaining four dollars and twenty cents of my previous weekend's allowance jingling in the inside pocket of my swim trunks, I felt scared, running through Worst Case Scenarios in my head. What if I said something stupid? What if my swim trunks ripped? What if she had her period like Margo did?

Would Kathy or Steve be there? And what about the money? Would four dollars be enough?

And what if she wore that bikini and I got a hard-on?
(*What if? Try: What will happen when?*)

And one other thing:

Brian, you know there's no telling with Christy...

What if *she* decided not to show? Margo'd said she was thinking of going to DC? What if she bagged out?

I felt the same way I felt when I was on my way to deliver the flower: like I wanted to turn around.

And *that* turned out O.K.

I kept riding.

Seventy-four

Christy was lying on her back on her towel under that same big old oak tree where we'd all converged two weeks earlier. She sat up a little and waved as I stepped out of the breezeway, and I noticed her swimsuit: a green Speedo tank. Same color as her eyes, but...

...no orange bikini.

"Hi, Brian!" she called out when I got about ten yards away.

"Hey, Christy!"

O.K. Good so far.

"How's it goin'?" I said.

"Good, good," she said, looking up at me, shading her eyes a little from the sun. "Hot."

"Yeah. Well," I said, unfurling my towel, "we can swim then."

"Yeah," Christy said. She looked past me at the clock above the breezeway entrance. "You're early," she said, and her tanned face went red a little. "Not that, you know... I was *timing* you or anything," and she sighed.

"It's all right," I said.

O.K.

She feels as awkward as I do.

Maybe more.

I pulled my shirt up over my head. "How long have you been out here?" I said.

Christy was still looking down at the grass. "Oh... just... about twenty minutes... I haven't gotten in yet." She brushed back her platinum hair and sighed again.

On the radio, Dionne was singing with the Spinners...

Ever since I met ya

Seems I can't forget ya

The thought of you

keeps running thru

the back of my mind

As the song played, I straightened my towel and shot occasional glances at Christy. (Had to be Suttle.) She had her legs pulled up and crossed at the ankles, her arms wrapped in front of her knees, and her knees pulled close to her chest, like she was trying to reveal as little as possible. She brushed her hair back and looked over at me just as the second verse started, and our eyes met as the music played...

Every time I'm near ya

I get the urge to feel ya...

Ahem!

We both looked down fast, faces burning red, and I glanced over at Christy's toes. Her nails were painted Granny Smith green: the same color they were the summer before fourth grade, when we'd gone back to my (our) (Margo's and my) (but that week, it was Christy's too) fort.

How many summers ago was that? Five?

1969... 1974... yeah... five.

Seems longer somehow--

"Did Margo leave yet?" Christy said, and then added "Brian?" nervously.

I nodded my head. "Yeah... um... Saturday... she left... Saturday."

"Saturday," Christy repeated. "Yeah. We talked a couple times, but I didn't get to see her..."

"She said Katie-- your Mom... your Mom told her you were sick."

"Well, I was those two days... but not Friday." She brushed her hair back again and looked straight down across the lawn, chin on her knees. "We talked on the phone, though."

I nodded. "She said."

"She gave me an album... *Something New* by the Beatles. It's really great. I love them." She brushed back her hair. "And she said she got that Beach Boys one... *Endless Summer*."

I nodded. "Yeah, I--"

I almost said *I got it for her*, but Christy's wording made me stop.

She said "she got it."

Not *She said "you got it for her."*

Important distinction.

Meanwhile, Christy was waiting for the end of my sentence.

"...I need to get that one," I said, like that was what I meant to say all along.

Christy nodded. "Me too," she said as my eyes drifted down to her chest. "Maybe when Kath and Tommy and me go down to Peaches..."

Peaches.

I looked up quick.

"So..." Christy said, squinting from the sun, "Margo's up there... Canada?"

"Yeah," I said. "Canada."

Christy nodded. "Yeah..."

Yep. Up there.

Canada.

Yes, sir.
The record was fading out...

*Never knew love before
Then came you
Then came you
I never knew love before
Then came you
Then came you*

I thought of Margo singing along the last time we'd been at the pool, making fun of the way Dionne's voice jumped around the notes at the end ("I **NEH**-vah knew **LUH**-uv be-**FOR**-or-or...") and I laughed to myself...

...or so I thought. Christy was looking at me, smiling, curious. "What, Brian?"

I looked down, face hot again. "Oh, nothing... just... this record..." I sighed. "It's hot, isn't it?"

Shit. Great.

We already COVERED the heat.

Christy nodded. "Supposed to be 95 today."

Another short silence.

Now what?

Maybe... a dip. Should I ask her if she wants to get in the pool?

No, no... you just got here. Sit and talk for a little bit.

Right. Talk. You see how that's going.

(Really is hot, isn't it?)

"So..." Christy said. "You wanna get in for a dip?"

"Yeah," I said. "Yeah... we can get in. It's hot..."

"Good. Cool off!" Christy hopped to her feet, leaving the ground for an instant, and as her feet came down on the grass, her boobs jiggled... just a little, but it was enough. "We can swim laps if you want..."

Maybe you two should start comin' out here at night.

That way you can have the lap lane all to yourself!

I felt myself smiling again. "Yeah, sure. "

Christy smiled and tittered a little. "Brian, what's

funny?"

I looked down. "Oh, just... Margo..."

Christy's shoulders dropped and she rolled her eyes. "Let me guess: the lap lane." She shook her head. "She is so *gross* sometimes," Christy said, but she was smiling. "When she called..." Christy stopped herself and was blushing, and she let out a laugh.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing... just... you know how she can be. Making cracks about..." Christy was blushing deep red now. She couldn't repeat what Margo'd said, but when she reached down and gently adjusted the swimsuit fabric around her crotch, I knew what she was thinking.

I told her to do some YARD WORK.

Christy drew my attention away from her crotch with one of her chest-expanding breaths, and then, as I looked her in the eye, she exhaled. "Let's go swim!" she said.

O.K.

We just stood there, like we had in the fort after we'd stripped and spun: looking at each other, like neither of us wanted to be the first one to move.

One of us had to, though, so it might as well be...

...both of us: we each took a single step, right into each other.

"Sorry..."

"No, no... it was me... sorry..."

Sigh.

Silence.

This could take all afternoon.

Christy touched my arm. "Pool's this way," she said softly, smiling, and she started down through the grass, me half a step behind, just slightly out of step, the loose change in the inside pocket of my swim trunks jingling...

"Oops!"

Christy stopped and looked back at me. "What?"

"My money," I said. "I don't wanna get it wet..."

"Yeah, you wouldn't want wet money," Christy said, smiling.

"Well," I said, "it is just coins."

Christy nodded. "I know," she said.

O.K. Great, Bri. Now you're swinging and missing at her jokes.

Anything else you wanna screw up to get this date rollin'?

But Christy just brushed back her bangs. "I'll meet you down there, sweetie..."

(Sweetie!!)

"...O.K.?"

"O.K.," I said, and I watched as she turned back toward the pool and started walking again, her green swimsuit creeping up in the back centimeter by centimeter with each step she took.

I let my eyes follow her for a second or two (or five), and then turned back to my towel and knelt down... stuffed my money *way* down inside the toe of my sneaker, then looked back down toward the pool...

Christy was standing at poolside, her back to me, on her tiptoes, stretching her arms way over her head, clasping hands and leaning left, then right, the muscles in her legs taut, and her suit creeping even further up her butt... and as I watched, she bent forward, all the way down, touching the pavement in front of her with her flat palms, the swimsuit bunched all the way up in between her round ass cheeks.

Wow.

Suttle, hell!

As I caught my breath, Christy straightened back up and reached behind her and pulled her suit down just like she used to when we'd cross paths in the breezeway --left cheek, then right-- and then dove into the pool while the butterflies fluttered in the center of my chest.

New and improved...

Seventy-five

Christy kicked my butt in the lap lane. She stopped when I got in (I slid in the chicken way: toes; then feet; then ankles, calves, hips, belly; and finally all the way in and under) and we pushed off together, but before I even got 2/3rds of the way across, she was passing me on her way *back*.

We (or I) swam about ten laps and then walked back to our towels, and as we sat down all drippy wet to dry ourselves in the sun, I felt disoriented again. I knew it was Christy: the girl with the Granny Smith toenails... the girl who'd always made me get butterflies in spite of myself... the girl I'd seen naked in the cornfield... the girl I'd been paired with six times in the gossip column of the school paper... the girl I kept saying "Next dance, next dance" about when Margo asked me if I was going to ask her to dance with me at the seventh grade Valentine's party...

Now there we were. At the pool. Me. Her.

Us.

You two.

I knew that there was more to us being together than Margo pushing me (her?) and setting me (us) up. It seemed like Margo's idea, in a way (*Well, you don't think she is, but...*), but all Margo'd done, really, was hand me the ball (or, rather, the iris). I could have dropped it. I didn't have to ask Christy to meet me at the pool. I could have cancelled.

But I was going through with it.

Something about the whole afternoon felt inevitable, in a way... especially when I thought of everything that had happened before: of how I'd felt all those times I'd seen little barefoot brunette Christy Kelly smile and blush and *Hi Brian* me, and that feeling I'd always had of Christy knowing something I didn't. It felt like Christy was already there, and she wanted me to join her. It always had.

Margo's shove was just a nudge in the direction I'd always wanted to go anyway.

Still, as we lay there on our towels listening to music and baking in the sun, I felt strangely detached, like this was all happening to someone else and I was watching it. Plus, without Margo there as a buffer (or a catalyst), we were both the same shy, self-conscious kids we'd always been... certainly a lot less daring than we'd been when Christy wore the bikini.

In some ways, it felt like we'd just met each other... weird, because I'd known Christy since kindergarten. I know I keep saying this, but *I'd already seen her naked*. How much more could you *know* a girl, anyway?

But as I lay there next to her, I just didn't know what to say to her. I wanted to say something, but I didn't want to stumble for words like I had before we got in the pool. And every word I thought of suddenly Just Seemed Stupid. Plus there she was, her wet, semi-transparent swimsuit clinging to the curves of her body... I thought of her stretching by the pool and I wanted to reach across the space between our towels and take her hand, but that seemed worse than saying something stupid.

It was the same old Christy, and yet a new Christy: she was no stranger, yet somehow she and everything around us was new, and I felt like I couldn't get my bearings--

"Brian?"

"Yeah?" I was lying on my back, and I turned my head and put my opened hand on my brow to shade my eyes. I'd had my eyes closed, so Christy and everything around her looked bleached, washed out, overly bright, like it did when I came out of the ophthalmologist's after getting drops in my eyes.

"Are you hungry?" she said.

Actually, even though all we'd done was lie there, I was, kind of. It had to be getting near four o'clock.

"Yeah," I said. "You want me to go get us something?"

Christy turned on her side, and I could see her cleavage pressing together, her nipples dimpled and hard

under the clingy green nylon.

Done.

I looked up at Christy's face quick as she rested her head on her hand. "I'd like... a hot dog," she said. "Onions mustard relish." She blinked her eyes twice. "And a Sprite, please."

"O.K.," I said as I sat up.

Good. Food. It'll give me a chance to get my bearings.

Christy sat up and reached for her backpack. "I have money..."

I felt for the bills and change in the toe of my sneaker. "No, that's O.K.... I'll buy."

Christy looked up, surprised. "You sure? Dad gave me money."

I nodded. "Yeah, I'll buy," I said, just as I caught the glimpse of twenty-dollar bill in Christy's fingers...

A twenty?

You sure you're sure, Bri?

"It's O.K.," I said, standing up.

"No, Bri, no... don't... don't spend all your money." She handed me two ones and smiled.

"Thanks," I said, folding the bills into my own. "So... hot dog... mustard onions relish?"

Christy sat back and nodded. "Mustard onions relish."

"You wanna split fries?"

Christy nodded. "Sure," she said, and she brushed her hair back. "Thanks, Brian."

Mustard onions relish, I repeated to myself as I walked barefoot up through the lawn of the pool... *mustard onions relish... mustard onions relish...*

I looked at the clock above the entrance: 4:45. Wow. It didn't seem like we'd been there almost two hours, but then there *had* been two adult swims.

I stepped up to the snack bar window and ordered a bacon cheeseburger, large fries, large Coke, hot dog and large Sprite...

...in my name... not that "Pressley" sounded any less

rock-starrish than the names Margo and I usually used when we ate at the pool.

“Tell them your name’s McCartney, Bri,” she said once, and I did, and she told them her name was Lennon, and a few minutes later, when they called us over the loudspeaker, Margo nearly peed laughing when the guy said “The Lennon and McCartney orders are ready.” It was always something like that with Margo: “Tell them you’re Laurel, Bri, and I’ll be Hardy...” “Tell them you’re Seals and I’ll be Croft...” “Tell them you’re Armstrong and I’ll be Aldrin...”

As I stood there by the snack bar window waiting for our food, I glanced back at Christy lying on her towel, and it hit me...

This is a date. I’m on my first date.

Gulp.

But as the high school guy in the snack bar blew in the microphone two puffs and deadpanned “The Pressley order is ready. Pressley. Come get your food, Elvis,” I remembered when I was Sonny and Margo was Cher and I thought, *No no no no no... Margo and I have done all this before... the pool, movies, ice cream, bike rides, pizza, yard sales, football and basketball and baseball games...*

Maybe, I thought as I swatted the flies and yellowjackets away from the condiment tray so I could fix Christy’s hot dog, *I’m making too big a deal out of this.*

The only alternative would be that I didn’t make a big *enough* deal out of doing stuff with Margo. And that wasn’t it. Right?

I almost put ketchup on Christy’s dog but caught myself just as I was about to dab the first blob, thank God (*Margo* did ketchup, onions and relish). I carried our plastic tray of food back through the yard to our towels, and Christy sat up as I got within a few yards. “I fixed your dog,” I said.

Christy smiled. “Why? Was it broken?” she said as she took the tray from me and set it in the grass between our towels. I laughed lightly at her dumb joke as she

popped a crinkle-cut fry in her mouth. “Margo’s right,” she said. “They *do* make the best crinkly fries here,” and she took another one and held it out to me, and as I bit into it, she popped another one in her mouth.

We're sharing fries...

“So she’s up in Canada now,” Christy said, leaning back a little. “Bet it’s beautiful. You ever been?”

I shook my head as I sat down across from Christy and unwrapped my burger. “No,” I said. “She always says she wants me to go along.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” I said.

“Well, why don’t you?”

I took a bite of my burger. Grilled... perfect.

“Well,” I said, trying to figure out the answer as I talked, “I don’t know... I just--”

--Wait, Bri... wait...” Christy reached out with her napkin and dabbed at the corner of my mouth. “Big time mayo.”

She touched my face.

(With a napkin, but still...)

“O.K.,” she said, sitting back and taking another bite of her dog. “O.K.... sorry... so, how come you don’t go?”

I sighed. “I don’t know. I always say she should just stay here, and she always says I should go along with her...”

“...and neither of you ever does either?”

I laughed. “Yeah.” I took a sip of my Coke. “I’d like her to stay, though, you know, ‘cause of Fourth of July... but Margo says her Dad doesn’t want to be around town when all the tourists are here.”

Christy took a big bite of her dawg, chewed it all the way, swallowed, and then spoke. “That’s silly,” she said. “I mean, the tourists are mostly in Gettysburg anyway. You know? Plus... I don’t know... I kinda *like* all the excitement on the Fourth. Maybe because Daddy is always so involved.” She took a sip of her Sprite. “What does Margo’s Mom say about it?”

"About what?" This sounds totally ridiculous, but Christy'd just taken a bite of her hot dog, and her chewing--the way her full lips were shut tight but her cheeks were just a little puffed out-- was distracting me.

That's how you know it's love.

I blinked my eyes and brought myself back to our plane as Christy nodded. "I think she just mainly likes to get back up to Canada whenever she can, you know?" I said. "I don't think it matters to her when."

Christy swallowed. "Margo's Mom is so cool," she said. "I can see where Margo gets it." She reached up and dabbed at her mouth...

...with the same napkin she'd used on me.

That was *almost* a kiss... right?

"Brian," she said as she crumpled up the napkin and set it on the towel next to her tanned leg, "is your burger perfect? This hot dog is perfect..."

"Yeah," I said, nodding my head, and just as I looked at Christy and thought *This afternoon is perfect*, Christy said...

"This whole *day* is perfect." She took a sip of her Sprite and looked at me, her green eyes sparkling happy. "Thanks again for meeting me, Brian."

I smiled. "Well, you met *me*, too," I said, and she smiled back.

If all I had to do to make Christy happy was meet her at the pool and spend almost all of my allowance on her... well, I could handle that.

Seventy-six

Eating and talking loosened us up, and after we ate, we lay on our towels, waiting out the requisite hour before we got back in the pool. No lap lane this time: instead, we got in the crowded shallow end with the rest of the kids and

for the next hour, splashed and bombed each other... I dunked Christy a few times and I let her dunk me... and I gotta say... feeling her wet body squirm in my arms, our parts unexpectedly touching each other occasionally... that felt even better than staring at her in her bikini.

There was something about the way we were playing that felt different than the way Margo and I played, even though, on the surface, it was the same thing: dunking and bombing and splashing and tickling.

Or was it?

Seventy-seven

Before we left, Christy got in the lap lane and did about twenty laps while I went off the diving board a few times, and then we dried off and dressed, and we stopped at the concession stand and I bought Christy a Nutty Buddy and myself a Creamsicle (or was it a Dreamsicle?)*, which we ate as we rode home one-handed back through the streets of our development.

"God, I had such fun, Brian, you know?" she said as we approached the turn-in for Buford Circle. "I mean, just playing in the pool... this... this probably sounds stupid, but... do you know how long it's been since I actually *played* in the pool?" We skidded our bikes to a stop at the entrance to her circle. "It's always swimming laps, you know?" Christy continued. "I mean, I love swimming, but..." Her voice got quiet. "It was nice to just *have fun* for once, you know?" She smiled. "Thanks."

"You're welcome," I said, and we both sighed, and Christy brushed her hair back and smiled at me, and I smiled at her...

It was that time. Time to say goodbye. We were just a few feet apart, standing with our bikes between our legs.

* "Or you could... look it up. Yeesh."

Now what?

"So..." I started.

"So..." Christy repeated.

I swallowed. "Do you... maybe wanna... do it again sometime?"

Christy smiled as she leaned forward on her handlebars and rolled her racer underneath her, back and forth, back and forth. "Yeah, sure," she said, nodding slowly, looking down. "Just..."

Uh-oh. "Just" what?

"...don't forget... we're goin' to the beach for two weeks starting next Sunday."

Phew!

"That's right," I said, looking down. She'd told me. "Well... maybe when you get back..."

"Maybe..." Christy brushed her hair back and then laughed. "God, what am I saying 'maybe' for, Brian. Of *course* when I get back."

And we both laughed, and Christy sighed and looked me right in the eye, smiling, and I looked back at her, smiling... we were less than two feet away from each other... and I could see that it wouldn't be too much of a lean... and I could feel my breath catching as Christy smiled, her eyes glimmering in the twilight... and while I wasn't really quite sure how to go about it, maybe if I just leaned in and closed my eyes--

"Chriiiis!" a boy's voice yelled from up the circle.

Christy stood up straight and sighed, then looked back over her shoulder, up into the circle toward her house. "What, John?" she yelled.

Christy's little brother John rode up on his bike. John looked a lot like Danny: same age, actually, with red hair and freckles, a round nose, blue eyes, and a gap between his front teeth. How he knew to ride up *right at that moment* is a mystery to me: I never was a little brother; I just *had* a little brother.

He skidded to a stop right in front of us, the knobby tires of his bike kicking a few small pebbles up onto our

legs. "Where were *you*?" he said.

"At the pool with Brian," Christy answered impatiently.

"Did Mom know?"

Christy rolled her eyes. "Yes, Mom *knew*. What do you want, anyways?"

"Well, Kath..." John swallowed and caught his breath. "Kath says she's gonna drive out to Sandoe's and get strawberries, and do you wanna come?"

"Yeah, John, I'll come." A pause as they looked at each other. "Is that all?"

"Yeah," John said.

Well... that, and I'm here to make sure that you and Brian don't try anything.

Which is what he did: he stood there on his bike, four feet away from us, waiting for his sister, hoping she'd give him something to talk about, to mock, to tell his other brothers and sisters.

Christy just stared John down.

"Well, if that's all, then *go*, John. I'll be right there."

"But we're *waiting*, Chris--"

--I *said* I'd be right there, John! God!" She tsked and sighed again as she brushed her hair back with her fingers. "Let me just say good night to Brian, O.K.?"

John finally had what he'd come for.

"Let me just say good night to Brian," John repeated in the nasal Kelly Boy Whine, and as Christy tried to reach out and smack him, he kicked down on his pedals and spun out, pedaling back up into the circle toward home, glancing back over his shoulder a couple times to see how his sister would say *good night* to me. He turned and started circling about thirty yards away from us, a vulture on a bike.

Unfortunately, it looked like the way Christy would say *good night* would be by just saying "good night."

Christy sighed. "I had fun, Brian," she said softly, her cheeks rising in a gentle smile. "Thanks again."

"You're welcome," I said. "I had fun, too."

“Good.” Christy looked down as she pulled her butt up onto the seat of her bike, one foot on the pedals, the other flat on the street. “You know,” she said, “I was a little nervous at first... but... you’re a sweetie, you know?”

And she leaned across and kissed my cheek quick and soft, and then got up on the seat of her bike.

As if on cue, John rode away in the distance.

“Good night, Brian,” Christy said, and as I said “Good night” back, she rode up into the circle to go get strawberries with her family, and I biked home, high and happy.

Breathy.

My first kiss.

No, no... Margo’s kissed my cheek before.

This was different, though. Right?

Seventy-eight

The first thing I wanted to do when I got home was *tell Margo*. She was my best friend; she'd been floating the *You and Christy* idea since about the third week of seventh grade: the first question went to Christy ("You wanna ride your bike in to school with Brian and me?") and ever since, it'd been a progression of suggestions: *Do you mind if Christy and me are friends? What do you think of Christy? Yeah, but do you like her? Did you see the gossip column this morning? Why don't you ask Christy if she wants to dance? Why are you so shy? What about Christy? What did you get her for her birthday?*

She'll be so psyched for me, I thought. I finally had done it. I asked Christy out, and she said yes, and we went out together.

Not only that, but I didn't stare. (At least she didn't catch me.)

Not only that, but I hadn't made a jackass of myself.

Not only that, but she wanted to do it again sometime.

Not only that, but she'd called me *sweetie*. (Twice!)
And finally, not only all that, but *she kissed me*.

Before a shower, before listening to records, before sitting down in the COOL basement and watching the Phillies or the Orioles, before going to bed, I had to tell Margo.

Couldn't call her... no idea what the phone number was... besides, a weeknight call to Canada? Mom would have a fit. (Dad too, probably.)

A postcard... she'd left me her Grandma's address in her going-away note... and she always said "If you send it the first week, Bri, I'll still get it before we leave."

I pulled my bike into the garage, said "Hi" to Mom and Dad on the back porch (all they knew was that I'd stayed at the pool... at least, that's all I *thought* they knew) and went straight upstairs... sat down at my desk... opened the top drawer (the stationery and envelope drawer) and took out the big stack of miscellaneous postcards I'd gathered from family trips, class trips and shopping excursions.

As I flipped through them, I wondered who I ever thought I'd send them to. The U.S. Capitol... Indian Echo Caverns... Barbara Fritchey's... the Liberty Bell... lame, lame, lame. I couldn't send any of those to Margo--

Memorial Stadium!

Home of the football Colts and the baseball Orioles, the "World's Largest Outdoor Insane Asylum" seats over 60,000 fans for events.

I shut my drawer and took out my pen. Had to write small...

MEMORIAL STADIUM, Baltimore, Maryland.

Home of the NFL Colts and baseball's Orioles.

"The world's largest outdoor insane asylum"
seats over 60,000 fans for events.

Dear Margo,

It is Wed night and I just got back from
the pool, where - you will be so proud of me-

I met Christy!!

We had dinner there (just burgers dawgs +
fries) + swam + played some, talked a lot (she
misses you too) and then - big news- we rode
our bikes back home together and
she kissed my cheek!

And I didn't even stare (much). No bikini.

Anyway I would call you if I knew the no. +
if it wasn't all the way up in Canada, and I know
she will probably tell you all of this, but I'm so
excited and happy, I had to write + tell you
myself!!

I'm glad you kept bugging me about her!
You were right!

Almost out of space-hope you're having fun
-I miss you - see you when you get back!! Bri



Miss Margo LeDoux
c/o Mrs. Albert LeDoux
3 Chaffeys Locks Road
Elgin, Ontario
K0G 1E0
Canada

It was too late to get the card down to the post office, so I took it downstairs and stuck it on the mailbox with the handful of bills Dad had already put out for the next morning, then came back up to the bathroom. I felt sticky and itchy from an afternoon of sweat and chlorine, and I wanted to scrub off...

You're a sweetie, you know?

Everything but my left cheek.

I wanted that kiss to stay on my face.

Seventy-nine

I stepped out of the shower and as I dried off, I thought I heard the phone ring downstairs. I pulled on my bathrobe and opened the bathroom door, and I wasn't two steps out into the dark upstairs hallway when I ran right into Danny.

"Danny! God, watch it!"

"Sorry, Bri," he said. "Phone. Margo."

Very funny.

I just stepped past him to my bedroom. "Shut up," I said, shaking my head. "It is *not*."

Danny looked stunned at my challenge. I'd never noticed it before, but, yeah, he *did* look like John Kelly.

No wonder he's so annoying. He's not really my brother!

"It is *too*, Brian," he tittered, following me down the hall to my room.

I might have believed him, but that titter gave him away. I had no idea what he was up to, but it had to be something.

"Brian... come *on*," he said.

I opened the top drawer of my dresser and pulled on a pair of underwear under my robe as my brother stood in the doorway watching me. "Danny... what?" I said.

"Margo's *waiting*, Brian--"

--"Danny..."

This was pissing me off. I slipped off my bathrobe and threw it at him, then grabbed a pair of shorts and pulled them on, but he hadn't moved.

"Margo's in Canada," I said.

"I *know*, Brian... she *said*." He looked at me, trying to be straightfaced. "It's *long distance*, Brian... come *on*."

He looks like he's about to give up and yell PSYCH...

...but...

...what if?

It was a leap of faith, but...

"I'm coming," I said, pulling on my t-shirt.

Danny turned and pounded down the steps and I followed him, through the downstairs hallway and back into the kitchen, wondering what awaited me. The white walls were aglow with twilight oranges and golds and other colors that only emerged from the glossy finish right before sunset. I grabbed the receiver of the phone from the opened cupboard drawer next to the rangetop as Danny stood in the doorway to the downstairs hall, waiting for me to receive the punchline.

I held the earpiece to my ear. Lightly crackling static.

"Hello?" I said, hesitantly.

"Brian!"

It *was* her!

"Margo! It's you!" I said, laughing, as Danny vanished down the downstairs hallway.

"Well, yeah, Bri. What took you so long?"

"I was getting dressed," I said.

"Yeesh... I was gonna say. This isn't cheap."

"I'm sorry," I said, leaning against the rangetop. "I just thought..." I took a breath. "How *are* you? What's up?"

"Oh, I'm doing good, Bri... just..." Her voice was softening as she spoke. "I was thinking of you, you know, and I had to call you. I've been playing your album."

"Really? You took it up there?"

"Yeah, and it just... you know..." She sounded nervous; maybe someone was right there listening. "It just makes me happy, you know, that you're my friend..."

I smiled. "Thanks, Margo. Me too."

"And, you know, then... I was playing 'Don't Worry Baby,' and, you know, thinking about you, and you telling me it wasn't 'she's dead,' and how stupid that was... and tellin' Mom about it and all... and then... then..." She took a breath. "...you know... 'Surfer Girl.'"

I knew.

Margo sighed. "Anyway... I just got to thinking about you, and I started a letter to you earlier, but then I thought

'Why don't I just call?' So I'm calling." Sigh again. "And God, Brian... you should see the light... it's all... orange and pinks and all these colors coming in off the lake."

I looked around the kitchen. "Same here," I said.

"Awwww... really?" I could feel her melting through the line. "So we're seeing the same sunset?"

I smiled. "Yeah."

A short silence on the line. "Wow," Margo said at last. "Wow." I could hear French in the background: a string of Francais with my name at the end, which meant...

"Mom says 'Hi, Brian!'"

"Bonne nuit, Mrs. LeDoux."

Margo chortled. "Pff! 'Bonne nuit?' She's not goin' to *bed*, Bri..."

"I meant 'good evening,'" I said.

"Well, that's 'bon soir.'" She was laughing hard. "Bonne nuit... jeez... *Dad* doesn't even say *that*..."

I was laughing now, too. "You said 'nuit' was 'night.'"

Margo was laughing so hard she was almost wheezing. "Just... stick to English, Bri..." She took a breath. "God... man." She sighed. "I miss you, Brian."

"I miss you, too, Margo."

"I wish..." She sighed again. "I wish you'd just come *up* here with us sometime. You know? I mean, I know I told you this, but... every night at this time, after supper... we all sit on the porch and it's like I said... the light coming off the lake... it's just beautiful. Just all these colors over the lake and they get reflected on the walls, you know?" She exhaled. "But it's like that there right now, too?"

I smiled. "Yeah."

"Wow. You gotta come up here and see it."

I nodded, even though she couldn't see me. "Yeah," I repeated.

As I looked at the orange light over the rangetop, I listened to the line static from Lake Opinicon and I felt that same old feeling I'd felt so many times before with Margo: like there was something I should have been saying next, but I'd lost my cue.

I also felt suddenly conscious of Christy's kiss on my cheek.

"So," Margo said, "what have you been doin'?"

"Just... you know... hanging around, listening to records..." I took a breath. "Went to the pool."

"Yeah? Was Christy there?"

I was pretty sure that Christy had to have told Margo that we were meeting, and why (I'd asked her to), but it kind of struck me as odd that Margo's *Was Christy there?* didn't have any of the *By the way, I already know the answer, Bri!* tone that such questions usually carried.

Anyway... only one way to answer it.

"Yeah," I said, "she was there."

"What bathing suit was she wearing? Did she wear--" Her voice dropped dramatically low "--the orange 'keener?"

"No," I said, picturing Christy lying on her side on her towel, "actually, it was just a green bathing suit."

Margo sounded surprised. "Green?"

I laughed. "Is that some sort of problem?"

"You know... actually, it *is*. See..." She took a breath. "You weren't *in* on all this, but... all spring, she was talking about bathing suits, and how Kath wanted her to get a bikini, and Christy didn't want to for all these different reasons. Right? So then she goes and gets the bikini *anyway* and says-- when I asked her-- how she exchanged the *green* one for it... and *now* we are apparently back to green! You know? It's like..." She sighed. "Well, at least she didn't wear the bikini for you... not that I'm *jealous* or anything..." I laughed again but Margo continued. "You *know?* I mean... that was a *little* unfair!"

I laughed. "'Unfair'?"

"Yeah... *you* know. I mean, there she is, all *taut* and booby... all... tan and *in shape* because she's been swimming since forever... and meanwhile there *I* am on my towel like some... *blue whale*."

I tried not to laugh this time. "Margo, you did *not* look like a blue whale."

"O.K.... then... porpoise. "

I laughed. "Margo--"

--Brian, *you* can say it. Her bod has me beat. You know?" She sighed. "Sheez... I'd have to go on the... f'n... *grapefruit diet* for a *year* to catch up with her!"

I really wasn't expecting this conversation, but I didn't mind. I put my elbows on the counter, chin in my hands, and lowered my voice a little. "Didn't I tell you you'd look great in a bikini?"

Short silence again. "You were just *sayin'* that--"

--I wasn't," I said.

A little bit more line static, and then her voice got really low. "You really think that?"

I felt a little nervous answering this question, but I *had* said it, and I *did* mean it, so...

"Yeah," I said, and I felt myself smiling. "Yeah."

"Awww... " The colors in the kitchen seemed to get a little bit brighter. "Well..." Margo lowered her voice. "...maybe someday... if you *really beg*... but don't get all excited. I said 'maybe.'"

"I can wait," I said.

"Well, don't wait *too* long, Bri... I mean, like I said, there *is* such a thing as an open invitation... but..." Her voice suddenly got louder and more annoyed. "Quoi, Mom?" she said, and then there was more French in the background. "Non." More French. "Just *wait*, O.K.? I'm on the phone with Brian!" Voice lower again. "Well then go without me! *Yeesh!*" Sigh. "*Anyway*... so... you saw Christy at the pool..."

"Yeah," I said.

"With Kath?"

"No," I said. "Just..."

I didn't know if I wanted to tell her.

Margo laughed. "What?"

"Nothing," I said. "Just..."

"She *was* wearing the bikini, and she told you to tell me she was wearing the green tank!"

"No, no!"

Margo laughed again. "Well... *what?*"

Should I tell her?

Why not? It was *her* idea. Right?

I took a breath.

"We had a date." Silence. "This afternoon. At the pool. I met her there and we swam some laps... had supper..."

"Really?"

I laughed as I spoke. "Yeah, yeah. We... we rode our bikes home and guess what?" Silence. "She kissed me!" Pause. "On the cheek."

"Kissed you?"

"Yeah!" Silence. "Isn't that great?"

If I'd been waiting for my cue a little bit earlier, Margo sounded like she'd found her script and just couldn't get into the part. She forced a laugh. "Yeah, Bri, yeah. That... that's great, yeah..." Sigh. "Great goin', Bri. It's about time. She kissed you." Sniffle. "You know... I kept... I kept *sayin'*, you know, that you two..." Her voice trailed off. "Great, Bri," she said, like she was cheering on someone who was trying to revive a corpse. "Good. That's... Hold on a second."

Sound of hand being slipped over the mouthpiece, then... silence.

I guess she's surprised, I thought.

Really surprised.

Sound of hand slipping away from the mouthpiece.

"Brian?" she said quickly. "Mom's here yammering in French for me to get off the phone. I... I'm sorry. I mean, you know... it's long distance and all..." She coughed. "Maybe if you'd *picked up* sooner, we coulda *talked*." Sigh!

"I'll call you back!" I said. "Mom and Dad won't mind--"

"--No!" She took another breath and her voice softened a little... but just a little. "No, we're... we're all goin' down to Jones Falls for ice cream anyway. Dad's... itchy to get out in the boat. They're all... *you* know."

In the background, I could hear Margo's mom speaking in French, although it didn't really sound like she

was talking to Margo. I wished I knew French so I could understand what she was saying.

"So... anyway..." Margo made her voice sound cheerful. "Glad we could talk, bud," she said.

"Margo?"

"What."

If one word can sound flat, impatient and annoyed all at the same time, that one did.

I took a breath. "I miss you," I said. I felt like I didn't know what else to say, but then I looked at the glowing orange-pink kitchen walls. "Sunset's the same as you said it is up there," I said.

Margo took a deep breath.

"Well," she said, "then I guess you don't have to come up here to see it after all."

Well.

Guess not.

Sigh from Canada. "Anyway... see you next weekend, O.K., Bri?"

Well... what should I say to that?

Lots of possibilities.

Maybe: *No, it's not O.K.*

Or perhaps: *Margo, is something wrong?*

How about this:

Margo, aren't you the one who, since October 1972, has been pushing and prodding me to go out with Christy because she's so nice and so pretty and so sweet and so funny and she really likes you and I bet you'd like her and you know it's Christmas soon, Bri, and you don't really have to give her a gift per se, but I bet if you got her a really nice card that said "Love Brian" in it she'd think that was the greatest thing in the world, and O.K., maybe you didn't come through on Christmas, but the Valentine was nice, even if you did just write "Your friend," and you know that dance is tonight after school, so maybe we can go together and you can ask some girls to dance, like maybe Tara Fawcett Majors... or Daralee... or maybe... Christy... and Brian, you know how Christy loves Paul McCartney, so maybe if

someone you knew went up and requested "My Love" or one of his mushy ones for you, you could ask her to dance to it, and if you knew it was coming, you could ask her before it started and then she'd be all surprised when it came on, like "How did you know this one was next?" I requested it for you, Bri, and I just don't see how can you stand there and not take advantage of this opportunity, so maybe you blew it at the dance, but your birthday is in less than a week and she liked the card you gave her for Valentine's and she can't figure out why you didn't ask her to dance, and do you like her, and I told her you were just shy and chickened out, and that maybe she ought to take the bull by the horns and give you a birthday card, and wasn't that sweet of her? See... I keep telling you... she really likes you, Bri, and she was asking what would she have to do to get in band, too, and I told her what you said about how it might help if she played an instrument, and about marching piano, all that, and she laughed like crazy, and then I laughed at her laughing, God, we almost peed ourselves in study hall, I had to take the paddle and run, so anyway, she's in for next fall, so maybe you can ask her to sit on the bus with you to those away football games next fall, if you know what I mean...

Yeah, sure. After you dance with two other girls. I can see where I stand in line...

What do you think just happened? You think that was for me?

I knew you were gettin' it for me... I knew it...

That's not why I said, you know, so that you would, but...

When is it? When was it, you mean? Yesterday.

At least get her a card... here... this'd cost a buck downtown... we'll get some tissue paper. Then all you have to do is get her a card.

You can handle that part, right?

You don't think she is, but...

You two stick with me. I'll take care of you.

That was you, right, Margo?

I closed my eyes to shut out the sunset, although I

had my next line down pat.

"See ya next weekend," I said, flat.

Sigh. "Sorry, Bri, it's just... you know... they wanna get goin'... and it's long distance." French in the background. "Mom says 'Bye.'"

"Bye, Mrs. LeDoux."

"Brian says 'Bye,' Mom." Pause. "O.K., so... see ya when I get back, Bri." Short pause. "Tell *Christy* I said 'Hi,'" emphasizing our mutual friend's name like Christy used to emphasize *her* and *she* and *best friend* when I'd overhear her talking about Margo.

"She says 'Hi,' too," I said.

"Yeah, yeah, good." Sigh. "Well, good night."

"Good night," I said, and I was ready for her to say "Bye" back and drag out the call a little longer, like we always did, but instead:

CLICK!

I opened my eyes to the pinks and oranges, took a breath, then stepped over to hang the phone back on the wall, walked out of the kitchen, down the hall... opened the front door, reached out to the mailbox and removed the postcard I'd written, and tromped upstairs to my room... same lovely golden light up there...

Who cares?

I opened my closet door and lifted open the lid of my old toy chest just a crack... enough to slip one more piece of Margo ephemera into it... then shut the lid and the closet, and walked down the hall to the bathroom.

I suddenly felt like I needed to wash my face.

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

OCEAN CITY NJ - Beachgoers enjoy the ocean at "America's Greatest Family Resort."

Dear Brian,
Surprise!

Brian I mainly wanted to write you + say thank you for treating me to supper at the pool and for the flower and card when I was sick. Esp for our "date." You were so sweet to treat me, just sweet period, it made me so happy and I have been thinking about it the whole time we have been down here. Kath said it's driving her Kind of nuts, haha!!

I was thinking that maybe we could go steady. I realize it's only one date and we do have a "history" that's kind of embarrassing but we know each other really well and for a long time too. And it would be

nice next fall in band to have someone to sit with on the bus to games, go to movies with etc etc etc. And I know you + Margo do some of those things too but she is my friend too and I would not be jealous of you doing things with her and probably we all could do things together too!

Anyway think about it, even if you don't want to you are still my friend!!! I am happy and alot of it is because of you so THANK YOU!! And I hope to see you when I get back.

P.S. I put this love you!!
in an envelope christy
for privacy.

P.S.S. Have you heard from Margo? When does she get back?

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

RIDEAU WATERWAY Sunset on one of the many Ontario lakes joined by the historic Rideau Canal. Photo by Harold Green.

Dear Brian -

Well it is Tues morning and I am up here at Grams at Lake Opinicon. + for some reason I miss you more then I ever did up here before. Maybe because I brought "Endless Summer" up here + have been playing it on Grams record player nonstop. (don't worry-I checked her needle + it's ok) It reminds me of you + how good a friend you are to get it for me. I keep playing your favorite song "Don't Worry Baby" + also "Surfer Girl" which reminds me of our dance, which I hope doesn't make you feel funny, but I keep thinking of that! How nice it was and how I'm sorry I kept saying it was not really a real dance. I just didn't want Liz and them to give me a hard time or to make Christy jealous but it was DEFINETELY a real dance and I hope my saying that didn't

make you feel bad or anything. What it was also was that I felt shy about us dancing but since you didn't feel shy to get me that album, I want to stop being shy with you!! Which is hard but also easy because we are already friends!!! 😊

Anyway I just wanted to write to you and tell you how much you surprised me with that + how happy I am that you are my best friend.

So THANK YOU AGAIN!!! I miss you alot and am thinking of you + I can't wait to see you next Sat!

xoxoxo love

me!! Margo 😊

P.S. Maybe I will call you this week.

P.P.S. Guess I will be putting this in an envelope even though it's more stamps!!

P.P.P.S. Playing "Surfer Girl" again! 😊

YOU DON'T THINK SHE IS

**Wanna
read
more?**

Other works by Max Harrick Shenk

My writing features the same core group of characters in a continuous storyline spanning several works and decades (1960s to present).

These works are not necessarily being published in "timeline" order.

If you want to read them in "timeline" order, here's a chronological list, with the earliest works in the storyline at the top of the list.

Works in bold type are currently in print. Works in plain italicized type are works in progress, with anticipated publication date in parentheses.

What's With Her? is a short story collection.

The following six stories in that collection come at the beginning of the timeline (late 1960s into early 1970s):

"What's With Her?" *

"Stupid Sissy Softball"

"A Note From The Author's Wife"

"Six-Fifty Seven" *

"Flip!" *

"Planet of the Brians" *

You Don't Think She Is - this novel

"My First, My Last, My Only Cigarette" - short story *

* Stories marked with an asterisk are early versions of stories pulled from
You Don't Think She Is

"Out Of Sight" - *short story*

Meeting Dennis Wilson - *novel*

"Communicate" - *short story*

Switch - *novel (coming 2016)*

The following stories from **What's With Her?**

"Standard Time"

"Anytime You Want"

"Haheheh"

An online-only novel entitled **xo bri xoxo me xoxoxo love you christy**

Several stories published on **Literotica** and other websites.

Some "short story in email" writing appears on the blog **e-pistolary** (<http://e-pistolary.blogspot.com>)

Interviews with a Porn Star - *work in progress, some of which may or may not be included in...*

Rebecca: An Oral History of a Former Porn Star - *novel (coming 2017)*

Current writing featuring the main characters (Margo, Brian, Christy, Marty, and Kathy) is presented on their Facebook character pages.

Margo: username ledoux67

Brian: username brianpressley14

Christy: username christyswims

Kathy: username mkkellyrn

Marty: username marty.morone

...and if you want to connect online...

Max Harrick Shenk

Website:

www.maxshenkwrites.com

Facebook Author page:

www.facebook.com/max.harrick.shenk.author

Amazon author page:

www.amazon.com/-/e/B00B0FZGKS

Goodreads author page:

www.goodreads.com/author/show/7110332.

Max_Harrick_Shenk

Skyrock blog:

http://mhs2664.skyrock.com/

Google Plus:

http://plus.google.com/u/0/115782056732929078312

Pinterest:

www.pinterest.com/maxshenk/

...and then there's email:

maxshenkwrites@aol.com

max@maxshenkwrites.com

***And if you do a google with my character names,
you never know what you might find.***

***I enjoy writing this stuff. Hope you enjoy reading it!
Thanks for your support!***

Max

About the author

Max Harrick Shenk grew up in Carlisle, PA,
just across the mountain from
the fictitious setting of his stories.
He earned his Master of Fine Arts
degree in creative writing from Goddard College
(where he also did a second masters, in education).
He is currently working as a children's librarian
in his hometown while plotting a return
to his adopted native state of Vermont.

You Don't Think She Is is his second novel.