Sex Talks to Girls

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In college we differentiated between the potheads and the alkies, something any young self-respecting addict or alcoholic would laugh at now. We divided ourselves up, this whole big group of kids Harper and I hung out with from our respective schools, but we were collegial about it most of the time, and we’d often get together and party across our differences. This was how I came to dance barefoot in the snow down Treno Street.

It was the heyday of drug busts, cops throwing open apartment doors, someone yelling *Raid*, kids scattering out windows, toilets flushing. It felt fresh and terrifying like Bonnie and Clyde or early Christianity. Harper and I loved our booze too much to regularly risk arrest for unsettling, mellow marijuana grown on someone’s back porch. Personally, pot took me from zero to a thousand too fast—wham. At least I could see the wall coming when I drank wine—or the facsimile of a wall with the illusion of a door. In other
words, I preferred the predictable depression of ethyl alcohol to the paranoid munchies of fragrant hemp, although I sometimes made exceptions to my own rule.

We were Catholic kids away from the altar for the first time—caught in the middle of a war in Asia we were just learning to question. We loved our bohemian lifestyle (moldy stew in the fridge, bleeding gums), our dangerous nights bolting from the College Diner, hanging out of cars on the turnpike, sleeping under the boardwalk at City Island, getting back late to campus and facing the discipline of tired nuns.

One day the whole gang was sitting in the Village Inn, which always felt like a church to me—the shiny wood, the reverence—and a peace march came snaking down North Avenue in the snow in full view through the tinted window. My first antiwar protest and there I was—blobboed.

Harper suggested the group of us go to our friend George’s place. We cut diagonally across the march, yelling and raising our fists in solidarity, to Treno Street, where George had a stash in his attic apartment. We sat around in a loose circle and passed the joint. We were protest dodgers, holed up during a snowstorm with an illegal substance and a gallon or two of burgundy for consolation and Ritz crackers for dessert. Harper and Chiclets had asthma, George was flatfooted, Jimmy was colorblind, and Bob, our unconscientious objector, had convinced the draft board he was a homosexual. All were officially pronounced 4-F.

Some might say we were losers and the girlfriends of losers. We were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old.

When I got up to leave no one saw or heard me. Santana was on full blast. Any fear of disturbing the neighbors and risking a raid had vanished, unlike the sagey smoke, which hovered in the shape of a UFO right above our heads. Harper nodded into his wineskin. Ce Ce and Juanita were pretzeled with their guys. I went down the
three flights to Treno Street in my stockinged feet and Villager skirt and sweater (both peach) to find the long-over march. I could still hear the chanting in my head. I danced a half mile to the house Harper shared with Chiclets, leaping in the middle of the street, holding my arms up to the snow, blacking out, coming to, loving the snow, loving my body, on fire for peace.

When Harper found me I was asleep on his front porch, approaching hypothermia. My vomit was violent and crimson and lasted for twelve hours. Toward morning, while I momentarily rested my head on Harper’s bathroom floor and he gently reprimanded me for smoking pot with my wine (You know you can’t handle drugs, Moll.), the police busted open the door of George’s attic apartment, rounded up the sleeping couples, and took the eight anti-warriors to jail. We all celebrated at the bar when they were released on bail the next day. To freedom! we said.