Sex Talks to Girls

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I was a terrible Wall Street wife. A big letdown for Harper, who was a star there from the moment he quit college and purchased a crisp white shirt.

First of all, I didn’t get it. My father had sold things like pizza pies, kitchen cabinets, caps and gowns, War and Peace—concrete things you could eat or wear or read, things he could talk about over martinis with my mother. Harper sold bonds—traded them, actually—bonds made out of the mysterious air of numbers and hunches and the luck of a network of people finessing deals over the phone. It started below Chambers Street in a virtual community (pre-Internet) with pretend money, huge amounts of it. It was an exclusive game for qualified boys, and in those days (as in these days), the boys were rich and getting richer. Harper hopped into the game at twenty-one and told me: I’ll be a millionaire by the time I’m thirty! More than anything, he wanted to strap me into his fantasy.
I wanted cats and parakeets. A horse. A million dogs and kids. I was a mommy from my first doll onward. I used to save earthworms after it rained when they’d be squirming on the sidewalks of Long Island to get back into the grass before the sun dried them to jerky. I made my own whole-wheat rolls and fresh yogurt and alfalfa sprouts and planned to adopt orphans from war-ravaged places and give Harper’s bonuses to charities or to random people, the way John Beresford Tipton did.

I was an activist all through high school. I could pick steel strings like Woody Guthrie. I could do the jerk, the skate, the cha cha, and the shimmy. And there I was married to The Man.

As his bonuses grew, Harper wanted a bigger house and a little foreign car he’d been pining over forever. One Christmas week he took me to the Plaza Hotel and we stood at our window high above the city and I heard a voice from my left shoulder: *All of this can be yours.*

I feel bad that I never asked him for a ride in his toy car. Not that bad. It kept breaking down anyway. It was in the shop more than it was on the road. When Harper sat in the driver’s seat (I’m getting way ahead of the story now for the sake of this last image) it looked like Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride, Harper’s head a dot on the map of Westchester.