Sex Talks to Girls

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I’d be exaggerating if I said that while Jamie and I were together I thought of our life as Hollywood, but whenever I tried to leave him he would somehow curse me with his solipsistic magic, and I’d abandon my resolve and search for the camera to document the proceedings. I sometimes had the creepy unsettling feeling that if he were a woman he’d have squeezed his menstrual blood into my tomato juice to keep me knotted to the bed sheets.

We were not your typical boy-girl flick stars. I cringed at big screen sitcoms that made my life look like a typo. *Reality is somewhere between them and us,* Jamie used to say when we’d made love and were waiting for the kids to come back from their father’s. Who was “them”? I wondered. Jamie lived in the subtleties, a teaspoon of zest, a sprig of rosemary. Reality was a hand-tied fly on a quarter-inch hook, the flick of a wrist over a trout stream. Sometimes he’d
say things like: *This is real.* And he’d point to the blue veins of my temples, which fascinated him, or a small spot he’d found at the base of my spine that held a teaspoon of Pepsi when I lay still.

There were plenty of loose theatrical threads around Jamie and me. There were my children, for one thing, shining in and out like suburban lightning bugs. I’d refused to take them to see *Cinderella* or *Grease* because I didn’t want them waiting for a prince, yet there I was, hoping my frog would turn into one. *You can’t protect your kids from Hollywood forever,* Jamie would say flatly—no panache, no regret.

I used to say that Jamie reminded me of Charles Bronson, but I might have meant Manson. There was a scary pathos about him, although not treacherous, I thought, because no one with Newman-blue eyes could be treacherous. He resembled prey himself, eyes like the martyrs in my old *Lives of the Saints*—Saint Polycarp, chum for the lions; Saint Blaise, who cured a boy found choking on a fish bone, then “lost his head after terrible torments.”

Jamie was leaning against a wall at an AA dance when I first felt myself lassoed by his infamous attitude of doom. I was still green as a postulant, trained in courtship by a priest. I said: *Do you dance fast?*

I’d polled my male friends in AA on how to find out quickly, and therefore with a minimum of pain, if someone is interested in you. Tommy C. said: *You can’t take it personally if the guy doesn’t know you from Adam’s house cat.*

My *dance fast* line jetéd above Jamie’s head. He did not bite. He stood there looking like the Hudson had dried up and schools of fish were flopping in the air. *Well,* I said, pushing my hand through fog, *do you dance slow?* This one seemed to stop him. A slight tempo-change to the eyes. I wasn’t certain of my strategy, but even then I could feel his anchor swaying in the river of my sheltered slash brazen life. It groaned prophetically and slipped snugly into place, there in the Hudson Valley, January 1984, the year, according to Orwell, we would all go under.