Sex Talks to Girls

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Jamie had been married to a woman who left him in their third year and threw their furniture into the street while he was out getting drunk with grief. He had two pedigreed Weimaraner puppies who adored him, and the three of them sat in the window of the Yonkers apartment during the tail end of a hurricane that had caused a flood (the same year Kill Brook overflowed in Ossining) and watched a Sealy Posturepedic mattress Jamie recognized as his and his suddenly-gone wife’s rafting down the hill toward the Hudson.

After that he did the series-of-women thing, flailing and falling into the inevitable disillusionment. Some of his dates had kids; one lived across the river, one in the city, one even worked on Wall Street a few buildings away from H. and H.’s office—she was the one he was breaking up with when I asked him if he danced fast and then slow.
Before me, before any of these women, before the wife and the flood and the runaway mattress, he'd been a prostitute.

People keep all kinds of things hidden. And for good reason. Jamie kept things hidden, but not the things one would expect and only those things he himself was not aware of. I asked him what he meant by prostitute—that men gave him money and he did things to them? He said yes but wouldn't say more. It was before he was clean, he said, an old life, one he'd shed more than two years before, a crispy snakeskin. He was a new man now, he said, with healthy new skin, and his eyes rose toward heaven like Saint Sebastian's. He smelled of lime and cilantro.

After our first sex in the hydrangea blossoms under the eaves of the old house, where the landlord lived beneath us and around us like windows everywhere, up the hill from the prison, down the hill from Clio's middle school and Sophie's elementary school, a quick drive to my ex-husband's new home, and for several years mid-decade, Jamie and I evolved into an unsettled, scorpionic, vaguely dramatic couple.

This was how we looked to the world:

Jamie, not tall, not short; rugged (notice hiking boots in summer); hair to shoulders with an inherited gray streak on the right side (like the Bride of Frankenstein); Paul Newman eyes that appeared elusive. He was intimidating, physically strong, quietly charismatic. The only ones brave enough to mess with Jamie were the state troopers.

I, on the other hand, appeared benign to the world at large. State troopers loved me, neglected to stop me no matter how much I violated their limits. Pink freckly female with long dark hair and hazel eyes you had to get close to in order to discern their forecasts. I was round and distinctly non-Cosmopolitan. I had been winged painfully in two divorces but was discovering intriguing pastimes while I recouped.
Pictures prove we looked appealing together, Jamie’s dark halo, my light. I knew from the way we badgered each other, contrasting sides of a clown suit, that we were fatally polarized. In photos I’m smiling and he’s not. I have no idea what he looked like grinning; I can’t remember his teeth or how he sounded when he laughed. Or if he did.

He must have.