Sex Talks to Girls
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At possibly my poorest ’80s point (as my future partner, Mars, used to say, there’s poor and then there’s po’), I gathered up my two daughters, packed a picnic, and drove to the Appalachian Trail near Bear Mountain with Jamie to celebrate Christmas. The kids and I had strung popcorn and cranberries that morning to use as bird-edible tree decorations. We’d planned which songs to sing, and we’d unanimously decided it was a better way to spend Christmas than going into debt over presents—and a hell of a lot more fun than using our ficus plant as a Douglas fir again.

But it was cold. And children don’t do well in that kind of cold, no matter how bundled. We found our spot and draped our decorations on tree branches for the sparrows and cardinals. We inhaled our sandwiches and sang “Good King Wenceslas,” who was the Duke of Bohemia, as it turns out—a fitting subject for our favorite
carol. Then it was over. Clio and Sophie wanted to go home. The birds had never shown up. The sky had turned steely. It even snowed a little, but not a pretty snow, more like sleet.

I loved straddling the trail that stretched through fourteen states and wound so close to New York City. I loved the bite of the wind and the stillness beneath the soft whining of the kids. I looked at Jamie and he was red-cheeked and so beautiful, alive that day in the arms of his favorite gods. And I looked at my children, pulled between their father’s Alfa Romeo and my old Chevy, his vital pregnant wife and my terribly ill boyfriend, and I saw that they were tired.

So I took them home.

But I like to imagine that the earth felt happy that day for the time we spent there. That the sun came out and dried the popcorn we’d heroically tried not to eat as we strung the kernels that morning, making jewelry for the sparrows.