

Curtains

There's something to be said about virgins. When I was in high school there was a group of us. We were the popular girls, the bitches. We hated everyone and sometimes each other and never had sex. No one knew, and if they did, they called us sluts anyway.

Andy was an almost-virgin. She was fucked once in the eight grade but was stoned and doesn't remember. Shawn, the fucker, smoked her out and kept trying to take her pants off. She said no for a few hours but then gave up and he slipped it in. She bled a little and left town the next day to visit her grandparents in Ohio. When she came back at the end of the summer we went to the mall, all of us, all the virgins. We bought overalls and jean skirts and Nikes. We never talked about that night.

Jen and Brooke were cheerleaders. They made the team before freshman year. This set them up for life/high school. Jen had never even kissed a guy. She'd say it's hard being cool because it's not like you can just go out and kiss someone because what if you suck and then everyone knows you suck? I'd say, Jen, what people think at this school doesn't matter anyway because they're all losers. I hadn't kissed anyone either, but I'd never tell her that. Brooke was fingered a few times and gave a blowjob once. She was the only one of us to ever have a dick in her mouth. She never told us what it was like though.

When we were sophomores we got boyfriends that went to different schools. This explained almost everything. They were big and played football. We talked about them to each other at lunch. I don't remember ever making them up; it was like they were always there. The other kids at

school would walk by, listen in on what we were saying. We always gave them something to hear.

There were a group of girls who came by our lunch table every once in a while. They were cool and rebellious and had plenty of sex. They wore Doc Martens and smoked cigarettes in the bathroom. We admired them. They were a different kind of popular. Brooke lived next door to one of them. The girl lived in a huge house with a dog and five cars parked outside. Every day the girl's mom would yell at her to change her clothes, take off that damn lipstick. Her dad owned a dry cleaning company and was always out of town. We never told anyone she was rich. I think that's why they liked us.

On a Tuesday the girls sat at our lunch table.

Brooke: What's up guys?

Girl wearing Fugazi t-shirt: Not much. We're going to the beach tomorrow for lunch if you want to come.

Andy: Why?

Girl wearing Fugazi t-shirt: Why the beach or why come?

Andy: Both.

Girl wearing black and white striped tights: To get away from this hell. We're gonna drive down the beach, past Bethune, and smoke. Just chill out.

Jen: I have a test fifth period.

Everyone else decided to go. I went, too. It's the only time we ever hung out. We snuck off the school grounds during lunch and drove away. We were in an old VW van. It was orange on the outside with paisley green curtains keeping us in. There was them and us. They seemed different, though. They took off their shirts to show their skinny white bodies in black bikini tops. There were no back seats, so we were all just sitting on the floor, scattered and low. Brooke's neighbor lit up a joint and passed it to me. She barely even hit it. I thanked her and wondered why we didn't wear bathing suits.

We were all stoned when we got to the beach. Someone

opened the door, and we followed the smoke out. Two of the bikini girls ran toward the water. I squinted, my hand raised over my eyes so I could watch. They were racing and dove right into the blue. Andy looked at me, and I told her no before she asked. Brooke gave in, and they ran with all of their clothes on. They both stopped right before the water, tilting forward and then hopping back. I knew what they were feeling, contemplating. They stayed there for a little while; then Andy pointed her toe into the water. She looked at Brooke. They slowly made their way. After each step, they stopped to look at one another to decide if they should go on. Andy shook her arms out to her side and laughed. The bikini girls waved at them to join. After a while, they did.

Brooke's neighbor sat down beside me on the warm sand. She lit up another joint, and we passed it back and forth without talking. I started laughing at the four girls in the water. I smiled for a while, and the neighbor did, too. We started talking about guys and sex and school. It's all fucking bullshit, she said. High school is such a joke and everyone is lost. They're trying not to fucking drown out there. She paused to let me speak, but I didn't know what to say. When I finally did I told her that I agreed, that everyone is acting because they're scared of who they might really be. It's like a bad movie that we'll never totally forget. She looked at me and laughed because she was making fun of her friends who aren't good swimmers. She seemed older to me, more wise. I looked at her, watched her hair blow back with the wind. She seemed so free, and I wanted that. I leaned into her, shaking, and I kissed her. I don't know why. It was soft and I immediately wished I hadn't done it. I looked back at the water and saw hands and heads and splashing. She said my name for the first time. I looked at her, and we kissed again, with tongue this time. Her mouth was warm and I wished I wasn't stoned. Her hand kept my hair from falling in my face. I loved kissing her. We stopped, and she lit the joint up

again. We passed it back and forth without talking until she said, You know, you're the first person I've ever kissed. I laughed and said, First girl, you mean. She said no.

Our friends ran back up from the beach, the four of them. They were wet and giggling and Andy rolled in the sand. Brooke told me I should have gone in and dripped water from her clothes all over me. We laughed together until we got into the van and drove back to school. I sat beside Brooke. Everyone was singing along with the radio while the sunlight blared in from the window. It was so bright I could hardly see the others. My stomach was still turning from the kiss. I couldn't believe I let myself go like that. I was embarrassed and hoped no one would ever find out. Brooke asked what my plans for the night were and I told her: I'm going to see a movie with my boyfriend. The song ended and I leaned up to close the curtain.