

A Confessional: First Crush

an essay
by Michael Descy

Fifth grade. Pre-pimples. Voice a squeak. I met her by chance and by folly. *Her*. I was having too much fun in math class; as a punishment, my teacher moved my seat next to her—a boring, well-behaved *girl*. Poor me. I looked at her skeptically, eyes wide with dread, and she smiled back at me. The brown-haired girl I didn't know wagged her finger and cooed at me, "Don't worry, I don't bite." I'm not kidding. And neither was she—that girl didn't bite me once. Once again, poor me.

Her name was Jennifer. Still is, I'm sure. Her green eyes inspired the nearest thing to lust my ten-year-old heart could muster. She still had light brown bangs that year—bangs were in back then. How I would bang my head for loving her. But who wouldn't love the one girl in class who wasn't gawky, who would be sweet to me when I was just a fat, clumsy pariah? I loved her like a bug in brandy loves a clumsy drunk. That is, though sloshing around in a warm and buzzy feeling, I was scared to death of her.

Still, she was the first and perhaps the only girl I've ever stared at—and I mean really *stared* at—from across the room without even realizing it. Our eyes would lock in homeroom and time would dissolve between us. For those ten seconds or ten minutes I was staring, Jen and I were inexplicably alone in the room together, floating above the floor. I didn't notice I was flirting—flirting!—until I noticed those green eyes of hers were staring right back at me. Flattered and frightened I would turn away, trying to look natural. As if suddenly jerking my head ninety degrees to the side looked natural.

To love is one thing, to love in secret is quite another. It takes a lot of work to be stealthy, determined, and sly enough to remain undiscovered. Unrequited love is an intrigue that thrives on its own terror, on its every roundabout scheme aimed at prolonging tension, at skirting the issue, at staying unrequited. Go up to her? No way. Talk to her? Are you crazy? Tell her how you feel? Impossible. Tell anyone else? Suicide. I put up with it because a secret is like a magic charm—holding one close keeps you invisible. I was invisible for four whole years.

She liked me too, for a little while at least. I overheard her girlfriends—the requisite popular middle school clique—squawking about it in the hall one morning. They seemed disappointed. That didn't matter to me. It only confirmed my suspicions, only underlined my feelings for her. Let's face it, middle school was a prison and I was bound to latch onto any hope before me: the newest fad, the most popular girl. I wanted her to notice me, and for a week or two in fifth grade, she did. For that, I loved her to the exclusion of all sense until high school. I can't say why and can't say that she was the only girl I liked—just the first, and that was more than enough to keep her special. Even at eleven I was sentimental.

In some ways, though, more than I wanted her, I wanted *wanting* itself. Otherwise I would have let go long before I did. We tend to forget that to want means to lack. When I love it means I want, and when I want it means I lack. Love itself, then, requires a missing piece. It doesn't work unless there's some time apart, just to sulk and turn the petals of your lips inward to try to kiss yourself.

If love's great, glittering charm is the fulfillment of fantasy, a crush's allure is the suspension of fantasy. Sure, it's selfish. Sure, it's masturbatory. A good crush is tantric emotional sex. I want my love the same way: endless and somewhat unsated. To savor the experience and not the outcome is both hedonistic and refined. Common knowledge says that love is sparked by lust and inevitably cools to companionship. But in my game that's only true after all the fantasies have been fulfilled. Leave something out. Always.

One would expect me to look back and laugh at my middle-school crush, if only to confirm that I've outgrown all this nonsense. But none of it is nonsense and I haven't outgrown any of it. Of course I no longer harbor the same feelings for Jen, but it's hard for me to absolve myself of pubescent fantasy when I still get lost in it, when it still keeps me up at night. In essence, this slice of memorabilia is as integral to me now as it was twelve years ago. I wanted to write about Jen and how I loved her once with a far-off feeling, but all I can manage is to write about how I loved—and love—to love.