The First Time

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Abstract

It was love at first sight — no, more than that, really — it was infatuation; she had me completely mesmerized from the instant I cast a glance at her. Looking up from my toes to her legs, tanned golden, the taut calves and thighs quivering slightly and then flexing firm with each step, stretching from the sand past the dimpled kneecaps and then slipping conspicuously into her white bikini—oh, those legs!...
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by Bob Slocum, Journalism Sophomore

It was love at first sight—no, more than that, really—it was infatuation; she had me completely mesmerized from the instant I cast a glance at her. Looking up from my toes to her legs, tanned golden, the taut calves and thighs quivering slightly and then flexing firm with each step, stretching from the sand past the dimpled kneecaps and then slipping conspicuously into her white bikini—oh, those legs! Climbing eagerly, across the flat, very finely-haired stomach (the silky blonde fuzz of a dark-skinned peach) to the small, firm breasts, sheathed economically by the blazing white halter top. Smooth strong shoulders and a slender neck dipping behind a round chin, pink, slightly parted lips that revealed a touch of glistening white, a slender, short nose that curved down in a perfect concave—and then I noticed that she was looking at me. Her quizzical smile broadened when I blushed, showing more dazzling teeth, and she laughed at me with her eyes, captivating emeralds that saw not only me but also how I saw her, and she tossed her head back effortlessly to shake her lively tan curls (the same color as her skin, but shinier) from her face, and then she was gone down the beach, leaving me watching her tight... her tight derriere gliding gracefully away. She was bigger than life, a goddess. I was still fascinated by her omnipotent, joyful smile even as I watched her disappear behind a beach house some two hundred yards away. She seemed so beautiful, in a pure, aesthetical way, like a painting or a song, that I felt genuinely awed by her appearance, and, suddenly and painfully, ashamed of the tightness in my crotch, of which, until she was gone, I had been only mildly aware.
Reality came back slowly, in bits and pieces, drifting into my consciousness, like the tindery timber and scrap lumber that lay at the edge of the grass behind the sand drifted onto the beach at high tide. The gritty itchiness of the drying sand on my feet and the backs of my legs, the thick, stale taste of my tongue, the briny smell of the sea, the playful shouts and splashes of the children building sand castles at the water's edge, and finally the glaring reflection of the sun searing off the rippled surface of the water. I blinked and turned to look back down the beach. There was the solitary beach house, a cement block structure built on one of the grassy hillocks behind the beach, painted (or faded) off-white, with redwood fences separating and surrounding the men's and women's entryways. Little carved wood signs designated each side—men on the north, women on the south. Farther down, a mile or more away, the beach turned to rocks and the hills to cliffs. The other way, to the north, was more beach and little else.

Here, on the sand, twenty or thirty children playing at the water's edge were being gathered up and herded across the beach by several sunburned women in flowered maillots. It was time for supper. I looked hopefully back down the beach for her, but of course she was nowhere around. Getting up and shaking the sand off my towel, I resigned myself to the fact that I'd probably never see her again. The girl of my dreams—and that's where she'd stay.

I walked off the nearly deserted beach toward my aunt's cottage, where my mother and I were staying for a few days before I started college that fall. My mother told me as I sat down to supper that we would be leaving the day after tomorrow. I had to pack everything for school. I was unsure about how I felt about going to college. I had never made friends too easily, and now I would have to make new ones. I wondered, as I had begun to often, what college kids were like. Would they be different than high school kids? Maybe I would meet a new, exciting group of people in college.

Maybe I would meet her!

That thought blurted into my mind, accidentally, like a fart in church, so embarrassingly stupid that I started to choke. My mother and aunt looked up from their supper plates at me, startled. I had been unusually quiet at that meal,
and suddenly I was choking, and laughing, too, not so much at what I was thinking but at the scene I was making. I excused myself and left the kitchen, my face burning and eyes watering.

Yet all through that evening, though I knew it was ridiculous and tried to press it out of my mind, I kept thinking of meeting her and somehow sweeping her off her feet. With the TV babbling background noise in front of me, I imagined myself charming her with clever conversation and lavish praises of her beauty. During the routine boredom of the news, I could hear an intelligent, breathtaking discussion into the wee hours, sophisticated and spontaneous talks of art, music and philosophy. As I walked into the kitchen for a drink of water before bed, I could see us strolling into a formal party, her and I, and the people would turn to statues, awestruck by her perfection and wonderous of my powers of enchantment, for she'd be clearly enchanted by me, and would never leave my side. And even as I drifted off to sleep that night I fantasized myself taking her out onto the beach in the moonlight and making love to her on the sand.

The next day, while trying to find the green olives at the grocery store, where I was getting some things for dinner, I saw her. Lithe, bouncy, padding past the end of the aisle barefoot, as silently as a cat on a lawn. She was wearing a pair of frayed, faded cutoff shorts and a light blue tube top, her tawny skin flowing out from beneath and embracing her whole body. I stood, transfixed, and watched her go by; then, forgetting the olives and the rest of my shopping list, I hurried after her, as quickly as propriety and my full hands would allow, in a kind of trance. At the end of the aisle I turned to the left and saw her standing at one of the two checkout counters, a plastic bag containing three oranges in her hand. I stood for a moment, watching her standing there with her back to me, absent-mindedly spinning the orange-bag by its top and gazing at the cover of TV Guide, and I felt so overcome by her easy assuredness and simple, outgoing manner that I determined myself to walk up to her and say something to her. It
didn't matter what; in fact, I genuinely felt that once I gained the courage to speak, whatever came out would, by the sheer inspiration of her beauty, be so fluent and captivating that she would be immediately and immeasurably impressed. I started toward her with almost gleeful resolve; purposeful, powerful—she was nearly in the palm of my hand! I closed in on her, my eyes set on her brunette locks and curvaceous silhouette set against the white counter—past the Oreos, past the crackers, past the mayonnaise and chip dip—she was nearly mine now! I was acutely aware of everything that moment; the whole world was in my sight and grasp! Past the Diet Pepsi and Seven-Up, and then I was behind her, above her, around her, and there was no stopping my quest now. I would achieve. I opened my mouth to speak . . .

. . . and then she turned around and looked at me. She was about the same height as me, maybe an inch shorter, and she looked right at me, burning right into me with those green lasers. I felt everything kind of short out and sizzle inside my head, and I was left there with my mouth open, the body ready for the conquest but the mind infiltrated and incapacitated. She could have knocked me over with a sweet puff of her breath right then.

She smiled. "Hi," she said.

"Oh, hi," I mumbled, as I skipped past her, narrowly avoiding a collision. I slunk into the next aisle, burning with savage embarrassment and the shame of cowardice. I wanted to kick myself—no, I wanted to castrate myself—for being so painfully, painfully stupid! I walked with my head low, for I was sure that people would see the word "loser" on my face, as clearly as if it had been printed in bold, black, condemning letters, if I looked up. A meaningless phrase from the obscure past—"depths of despair"—rang into my head, not greeted this time as usual by the indifference of abstraction, but by a stab of morose identification, as if it had been coined with me specifically in mind for this one occasion. I didn't want to stay in this store, and I didn't want to go back to the cottage, or back home, or to college, or anywhere else, because any place that I had been reeked suddenly of despair. I wanted something new—somewhere the despair hadn't yet found, somewhere where I could compete without having to compete,
where I could be myself without thinking about what *myself* really was and worrying if it was right. I wanted to go away from everything.

Instead, I went back and got the olives.

I walked out of the grocery store into the midmorning sunlight. It was already disgustingly hot. The sky was a scorching blue skin blemished only by the hot blister of the sun. I began to feel uncomfortably sweaty less than a block into my quarter-mile trek home. My shirt stuck to me like a too-big bite of peanut butter sticks in your mouth, choking me and making me long for a cool swim. I hated this hot weather, but when I really thought about it I hated winter, too, and I felt hopeless in the realization that that’s all there is. I shuffled off the sidewalk into the tree-filled city park, taking a short cut through the cool, gloomy shade.

She was there.

She was sitting on a green wooden bench in the center of the park, by the big cement drinking fountain, eating an orange and reading the copy of *People* magazine she had picked up at the store. I didn’t see her until it was too late to change my path, which would lead me right in front of her. I knew she would see me, and recognize me. This thought horrified me and brought back the still-hot memory of the incident in the grocery store—she surely must have known what I was doing and realized my failure! I felt nothing of that moment of sureness I had experienced only minutes before; only a certain, choking dread as I approached her slowly.

She didn’t look up from her magazine until, as I was trying to sneak past behind the water fountain and into a small clump of bushes, I tripped over a broken piece of the sidewalk and dropped my grocery sack. I knelt down amid the clatter of bouncing boxes and cans, so suddenly, acutely aware of the heat that all I could see was red—red directionless anger, the red hot flush of my face as I stared violently at the ground, not even looking at the things I was hurriedly stuffing back into my sack. I nearly broke into tears. Although I didn’t dare make even the slightest glance upward, I could feel the eyes
upon me, not just her eyes but the audience of the world, seeing through her eyes, and I could hear cruel and derisive, though, it seemed at the moment, somehow deserved, laughter roaring in my ears . . .

. . . and I could see her taut brown legs suddenly next to me, inches from me, flexing and bending in a miraculous slow motion as she knelt down beside me. "Here, let me help you," she said, and she smiled at me so warmly that all my fears and embarrassments instantly melted away, like the fog in a valley burned off by a July sunrise. "Thanks," I smiled back as she helped me pick everything up in that blissful shade beneath the calm azure sky.

All that afternoon and into the evening I had to continually convince myself that I had actually asked her to go to the drive-in movie with me that night. I marveled at my courage in doing so, and yet it wasn't really courage—I had just blurted out my question without even stopping to consider the possible consequences. She could have laughed in my face! But at the time, that never occurred to me; I had taken it for granted that she would accept, and, almost surprisingly, I had been right.

I began getting ready at about six o'clock. I was going to pick her up at eight. I took a shower and glanced in the mirror above the sink as I dried myself—God, I needed a haircut! What was I going to say to her? She seemed so exciting, so . . . wordly, that I was sure I'd bore her. The two or three dates I had had in high school were with girls nothing like this girl, and I think I had bored them. They hadn't wanted to go out with me again, and I hadn't even bothered to ask them. Oh, damn, where was the toothpaste?

I dried my hair and tried to find a place for all the unruly locks. Nothing worked quite right, and I quit when my scalp became sore from the scraping reprimands of my comb. What would I say to her? She had seemed pleased at the suggestion of a movie. Maybe she wouldn't like it, though. What would I do then? I got my best jeans and dress shirt out of the closet.

I felt confused, almost sick, like I had felt before the junior high play that I was in. My head was full, yet I could make no sense of what I was thinking. If I tried to get control of my stampeding imagination, all I could focus on was one
distressing thought, vague yet powerful, the thought that I wanted to somehow get her in the back seat or in bed. It bothered me tremendously, thinking like that. She was an angel. Yet the harder I tried to put this out of my mind, the stronger it got. I tried to picture her face in my mind, but it was blurred, like a photograph taken with the wrong shutter speed or not enough light. I could see clearly only her perfect breasts, with their small, erect nipples, and her tight shorts. She was sexy. But . . . she seemed so much more! I felt sinful for thinking that way about her.

I checked my face and my clothes in the mirror. It was only quarter after seven. My jeans were tight. I felt another rush of nervous anticipation. I had never gone all the way with a girl. She seemed so . . . accessible. That thought made me want to bite my tongue, to hit myself in the head, but still I couldn't help thinking it, over and over.

After nearly a half hour of agonizing, timeless torture in front of the TV, I got the keys from my mother and got in the car. It was an old, four-door Chevy, green, with rusting fenders and torn vinyl seats. I started it and backed carefully out of the driveway. I would still be early. I stopped and bought a package of Dentyne. It was ten before eight when I pulled up in front of her house.

It was a brick ranch house about three or four blocks from the beach. She answered the door after I had knocked twice. "Come in," she said, "I'll be ready in a minute." She went into the next room and returned momentarily with a brown leather pocketbook. "How much will the movie cost?"

"I don't know," I said, momentarily flabbergasted. "I'll pay for it. I invited you."

"Okay, thanks," she said, flashing her teeth at me. She preceded me outside. "You wanna shut the door?"

I did and followed her. She was wearing a sheer white blouse (I could see her thin bra-strap through the back of it), a pair of tight jeans, and new blue and white Nikes. Her hair seemed to be a living, breathing creature adorning her head. When she got in the car she slid right over next to me on the seat. I felt myself start to blush — she was sitting right against me! I assumed a fidgety nonchalance as I put the car in gear and started down the street.
“What movie are we going to?” she asked. Her face filled my rear-view mirror.

“Jaws,” I replied.

“Oh, that’s a good show.” I noticed that she was looking at my face with that same sort of puzzled look she had had when I first saw her on the beach. I was afraid to look back at her directly, watching her instead from the safety of the mirror.

“What, you’ve seen it already, too?” I said, feeling the warmth creeping over my face again.

“Yeah. Have you?”

“Uh huh. If you don’t want to see it again, we can do something else.”

“No, that’s okay. I’d like to see it again.”

“You sure?” I caught an unintentional tone of accusation in my voice, making my stomach knot up. I looked at her to see if she had noticed. She smiled. It was the first time I had looked at her since we had gotten in the car.

“Yeah, it’s all right. If it was good once, it’ll be good again.” She laughed a little and so did I in hurried response.

We drove the rest of the way to the drive-in in a formidable silence, her sitting comfortably next to me with her hands between her knees and me frantically racking my brain trying to think of something, anything, to say. Once or twice she raised her hand to wave at somebody. It occurred to me to ask her about those people, but I couldn’t think of an unobtrusive way of asking.

“Is this your car?” she asked, breaking the silence just as we pulled into the drive-in.

“Huh? . . . oh, no,” I interrupted as she began repeating the question, “it’s my mom’s. It’s just an old beater.” I wanted to tell her about the Trans Am I was going to buy when I got out of college. She’d be impressed if I had it now.

“It’s not a bad car. It runs pretty good.”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

I parked the car and hung the speaker on the window. There was just music playing, some easy-listening radio station. I asked her twice if she wanted some popcorn or something from the concession stand. She agreed to have some the second time. When I got back the movie was starting.
"I bought you a Coke, too," I said as I got in the car, being careful not to touch her. She sidled up against me as I gave her the cup.

"It's getting kind of cold," she said.

I reached for the ignition. "Do you want me to turn on the heater?"

She looked at me with those laughing green eyes and held her mouth slyly open for a second. "No, you don't have to," she said, snuggling a little closer.

I was still nervous, and surprised, too, by her affection, but . . . she felt so good sitting there next to me! During the first shark attack she shrieked and grabbed my arm, scaring me worse than I had been the first time I had seen the move. I put my arm around her tentatively, half expecting her to slide away, but she acted like she didn't notice. Then suddenly we were embracing, our faces pressed together, both her arms around my neck and my right arm around her shoulders, still holding the popcorn in my left hand. After what seemed like a split-second I pulled back from her, breathless.

"Gee, you're not as bashful as I thought," she said, watching me with that same curious half-smile.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I won't . . ."

"No, it's all right," she said, laughing now. "You shouldn't be sorry." She touched my arm and I trembled. "You're so nervous! Is this the first time you've ever kissed anyone?"

"No," I said slowly, "but I'm not really done . . . I mean, I haven't done it too often."

"Well, try it some more," she said, putting her arms around me again. "It's really kind of fun."

We left before the second show began. I drove through the dimly lit streets back across town. She wasn't sitting quite so close to me now, and we talked softly as I drove. I pulled up to the curb in front of her house and turned to say good-bye.

"Do you want to come in for a minute?" she asked.

I was surprised, even though it sounded natural when she said it. "Uh, yeah, sure, . . . I suppose," I said, shrugging my shoulders. Her teeth glittered in the glow from the streetlight on the corner. Her shadowy body looked soft and friendly. We sat silent for a few seconds, then she got out. I shut off the car,
jumped out, and ran to catch up with her.

"Are your parents asleep?" I asked, noticing the dark windows.

"They're not home," she said matter-of-factly.

"Oh."

It was cold and I shuddered. Even inside the house the chill remained in me. It was an odd, tight quivering in my stomach and legs, jolting me every minute or two like an electric shock and leaving me slightly breathless. We sat on the couch and she kissed me, more intensely than before, and suddenly I was overcome by the thought that I had her—the girl I had fantasized about was mine—my dream had come true! I felt such a dizzying ecstasy just then, such a feeling of achievement, and, yes, I was sure of it, even love, that I could feel myself swell in her arms. She must have felt it, too, for she suddenly took her lips from mine and whispered in my ear:

"Let's go into the bedroom."