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June 27, 2002

There you are. You and your secret friend, companions on the beach. You are eating ice cream, say, with a silver coffee spoon, say, when a real girl appears sloshing the wavelets. Or maybe you are walking the shore in a man's undershirt instead of a dress, listening to the friend nobody sees except you. Intent on words only you can hear when a real voice says Hi, want some? Useless now, the ^{invisible}phantom friends disappear.

It's like that when children fall in love with each other. On the spot, without introduction. Grown ups don't pay it much attention because they can't imagine anything more majestic to a child than their own selves and so confuse dependence with reverence. Parents can be lax or strict, timid or confident, it doesn't matter. Whether they are handing out goodies and, scared by tears, say yes to any whim, or whether they spend their days

making sure the child is correct and corrected—whatever kind they are, their place is secondary to a child's first chosen love. If such children find each other before they know their own sex, or which one of them is starving, which well fed; before they know color from no color, kin from stranger, then they have found a mix of obedience and mutiny they can never live without.

Most people never have a passion that strong. If so, they remember it with a smile, dismiss it as a crush that shriveled in and on time. It's hard to think of it any other way when real life shows up with its list of other people, its swarm of other thoughts. It's still a bit curious to me, this love business. Strange even. You never know who it will hit or if it can stay the road. One thing is true—it bears watching, if you can stand to look at it. Heed and Christine had such a one. They were the kind of children who can't take back love, or park it. When that's the case, separation cuts to the bone. And if the break up is plundered too, squeezed for a glimpse of blood shed for the child's own good, then it can ruin a mind. And if, on top of that, they are made to hate one another, it can kill a life way before it tries to live. I have to blame May for the hatred she put in them, but I have to fault Mr.

Cosey for the theft.

You could call him a good bad man, or a bad good man. Depends.
I had to stop him. Had to. [catalogue of his generosity tk]

Just as well they fought over my menus and never saw the real thing—witnessed by me, notarized by Buddy Silk's wife—leaving everything, everything to Celestial. It wasn't right. If I had been allowed to read what I signed in 1964 I might have been able to stop him then—in a nice way—from leaving everything we had worked for to the one person who would have given it away rather than live in it or on it; would have burned it to the ground rather than let it stand as a reminder of why she was not permitted to mount its steps but was the real sport of a fishing boat. Regardless of what his heart said, it wasn't right. If I had read it in 1964 instead of 1971, I would have known that what looked like laziness, like resignation or despair was vengeance, and that his hatred of the women in his house had no level. He didn't understand: he wasn't a human person to them; he was a play-acting role—a dream they thought up depending on what each one needed. People give dogs more leeway. So how could he not want payback, a way to let everybody know who ^{had} let him be Billy and who had

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not. First they disappointed him, then they defied him, then they turned his home into a barrel of quarreling she-crabs and his life's work into a joke his enemies loved to repeat. Whether what he believed was true or no, I wasn't going to let him put his family out in the street. May was sixty-one; what was she supposed to do? Spend her old age in a nut house? And Heed was forty-one. Was she supposed to go back to a family who had not spoken to her since 1947? And Christine—whatever she was into in 1971 it wasn't going to last. There wasn't but one solution. He wasn't fit to think and at eighty-one he wasn't going to get better. It took nerve and long before the undertaker knocked on the door I tore that thing up. Better for them to stay connected arguing over a menu than to learn what had become of his brain. Besides, without a will maybe they could find some way to live in the world without drawing the attention of Police Heads hunting wicked women and hard-headed, unruly children. It's hard to do but I know at least one woman who did. Who stood right under their wide hats, their dripping beards and scared them off with a shout—or was it a note?

Her scar has disappeared. I sit near her once in a while out at the

cemetery. She is disgusted by the words on his tombstone and, legs crossed, perches on its top so the folds of her red dress hide the insult: "Ideal Husband. Perfect Father." Other than that, she seems content. I like it when she sings to him. One of those raunchy tunes that used to excite everybody on the dance floor. Either she doesn't know about me or has forgiven me for my solution because she doesn't mind at all if I sit a little ways off, listening. But sometimes her voice is so full of longing for him, I can't help it. I want something back. Something just for me. So I join in. And hum.