

A Certain Boy

by Gita M. Smith

Marty Miller: In a sea of brown-eyed, gangly boys he was the opposite. He was the star pitcher for our summer camp team, our secret weapon against rival Camp B'Nai B'rith and the fiercely athletic camps Pembina and Cayooga. Every single girl, from junior to senior (and a few counselors too, I suspected), wanted to make out with Marty Miller. He was just 15 and I was 13, but his aura of unavailability and coolness gave him the stature of a movie star.

Two opportunities existed for close physical contact between boys and girls at summer camp. One was haphazard -- a few boys might make a late night "raid" on a girls' tent for a few moments of breathless kissing before the counselor shone her flashlight on them and ordered them out. It was more good-natured than dangerous since we all knew the boys would never go past necking.

Marty never joined in on those.

The other opportunity consisted of every-Friday-night dances at the Dew Drop Inn, a building with a scuffed wooden floor, jukebox, soda fountain and vast candy counter. It was a 15-minute walk from camp to the DDI, double-file along the highway facing the oncoming traffic.

The senior girls had a single goal, unstated yet universal: to be the one whom Marty Miller chose to walk with on the way home.

He slow-danced with all of us, so it was hard to discern what it was, exactly, that made him choose one girl over the rest. Was it the way her hair smelled? Was a girl sending him subtle body signals that she was "faster" than the others and might let him go further when they kissed good night in the shadows?

Did he know how drunk with attraction I became when it was my turn to dance? I held him with my left arm around his compact, muscled body, hand resting on his lower back and my right hand in his, at shoulder height.

I leaned into him, breathing in his scent -- Canoe, I think it was -- intoxicated by the boy-fumes.

All my synapses were firing simultaneously, trumping rational thought. Miraculously, I stayed vertical, and maybe that is the difference between being 13 and being 18. Had I been older, I would have known how to find us a bed.

Eventually, by a spin of some wheel of fortune or mandala, my turn came around, and Marty Miller asked to walk me back to my tent on a warm, moonless Friday night. He held my hand the whole way but never said a word. In fact, looking back I realize that we never spoke at all, that whole summer. Our brief sensory relationship required no thought or language.

Before we reached the gates of the camp, I tugged him aside from the rest of the couples who soon would be finding their own shadows in which to make out. I knew a path that led to a raspberry patch, and we stopped beside a wide tree for privacy.

We reached for each other in the darkness and I realized that Marty Miller was shaking. Or maybe it was vibrating -- like an electrical current was passing through him. He pressed me back against the tree and began kissing my neck and ears and face and mouth, all craving and no plan.

He took me there, too, past craving and into a place of such intoxication that I started to laugh. And he laughed, and we kept on standing up, kissing and clinging, making knots of our hands, welded to each other and as care-less as I would ever be again for the rest of my life.

