

# First Love

*by* DeWitt Henry

By 1957, when I got my driver's license and had the use of either Mom's Buick, or more likely, Dad's station wagon, a lot of my theater movie-going was transferred to either the Main Line Drive-in, in Devon, or the Exton, farther west, summer and winter both. Prior to that, non-movie dating had been restricted to parties. My little black books for ages 13 and 14 have me going frequently to Mrs. Hill's dances, to a swimming party, with a date to "The Barefoot Contessa," a school dance, a dinner party at Clark Colburn's, movies, then more and more parties, though there were some I would hear of beforehand, hope wretchedly to be asked to, and then come to realize that I was pointedly not to be asked.

Ann Palmer, new to Radnor, blonde, intelligent, was the first girl to really like me back, however briefly. We dated in the spring of 1955--the spring of my sister Judy's marriage, of my 8th grade, and of my brother Chuck's tour in the army--and she was partly the reason for my having my own first party that June 11 ("pick up Ann, 7:45"). We made out at these parties, and this time, dancing first in the dark, as other couples slouched or lay together along the benches Chuck had built, we lay down and stroked and kissed each other, until the first step of Mom, Dad or Jack on the stairs. After that summer apart we stopped dating and Ann started going steady with Rick Skillman. In mind and talk, boys were obsessed with the stages of getting to first (kiss), second (feel breasts), third (feel and finger vagina), and home (all the way), and girls seemed equally obsessed with limiting our progress. Ann was my first second.

From 9th grade on, I played the field without much success, dreaming, lusting, talking, but never really making out or getting romantic. Third and home would not come until my senior year, spring and summer 1959, with Kathie Ross, and love.



"We're not rich," Chuck insisted frequently. "You and Judy think we're rich, but we're not. We're not even close."

"What are we then?" I asked.

"We're well-off. Well-to-do. We're comfortable."

Well-to-do I still found awkwardly better off than most of my Main Line Philadelphia classmates, except for Billy Pew and Frank Scott, who transferred for senior year to our Radnor class from private schools, Haverford and George School. Pew's family was Sun Oil and Scott's was Scott Paper Products. Frank had his impact on Rudy Nottage, Weesy Mallinckrodt, Dave Bowman, and Pete Allen, to some extent. Weesy was one of the truly glamorous girls in the class, tall, with long blond hair. Rudy, Dave and Pete were in the Decades, along with Jim Anthony: our crooning rock quartet that actually had a recording made of "Silhouettes on the Shade" (side 1) and "Stagger Lee" (side 2), which was played by local DJ's our senior year. Frank Scott, whose older brother Chuck had known and labelled "bad" at Haverford, lived a mile down Chamounix from our house. Frank's parents went to Europe our Senior summer and he turned their house into a non-stop party, where I stopped by, with Dave Bowman, only once. Frank fancied himself an artist. He had a motorcycle and would go roaring past our house, goggles on and Weesy, with her hair streaming, hanging on in back. He got the notion to sandblast a mural onto the long, unbroken wall of his family's living room and was working on it the time I visited, having taken down paintings, and moved and covered furniture. I heard later that his parents, horrified on their return, had to have the whole room re-plastered and painted. As a bearish, bushy-bearded, sandaled, jazz-digging bohemian, he had his following. Billy Pew, who went steady with Doerte, the German exchange student in our class, had a Christmas party and I remember feeling intensely awkward--I think we all did, his public school friends. It was in a stone mansion you approached up a long drive, where you were greeted at the door by a butler, and then were introduced to his stiffly smiling parents.

Judy Stradley's father, a lawyer and horticulturist, owned his own orchard off Sproul Road, some thirty acres or so, with a tractor and horses, which he stabled in an ancient barn with a hayloft.

Marion Watson's family had a big house back in the Ithan woods.

The majority of the college-bound, wasp, dating, party-giving and -frequenting kids were from medium income families with fair-sized houses. The Michels (lawyer), Galloways (minister), Teels (schoolteacher), Colburns (insurance agent), Kricks (real estate), Beesons (lawyer), Kings (doctor), Yerkes (pharmacist) and some others were members at St. Davids or Martin's. In North Wayne, Howard Hopson, Ann Palmer, Rick Skillman, Barby Spillman: all lived in roomy Victorians. Others lived in smaller brick or stone bungalows, set among the larger houses on densely planted and tree-lined streets: Tucker Merrill, Fuvvie Bye; and still others in newer, modern houses, in developments, like Larry Arnold's, Liz Medica's, or Kathie Ross's.

Relatively poor included families living in two-family houses without yards, row-houses, or apartments, whose parents were blue-collar, and whose expectations were for trade, service, or business careers, rather than for college. This included mainly Italian kids and kids from cultivated black families; in the first instance, Joe Iacone, Franny Angelini, Jack Capelli, Paul DeSantis, Corky Cappola; in the second, Jim Anthony, Ethel and Margie Carroll, Diana Farmer, Claudette Johnson. It also included Paul Englebert, Joy Bennett, Harold Little, Neil Pine, and Dave Bowman.

Definitely poor included John Barnett, Earl Blackwell, George Holman. John's case I knew; those of others, I assumed, belonged to areas of town off-limits to me, such as Highland Avenue, towards Devon, or the black section behind St. Davids Golf Club, which Dad referred to categorically as "Henry Avenue."

I was aware, on dates, at parties, how parents looked at and placed me; where on the scale of social prospects I fit in. Mrs. Ross liked me; the Merrills liked me; the Davis's liked me. The Watsons could care.

Among our own ranks, the group that determined status was

initially one of girls: Marion Watson, Sue Shellenburg, Ellen Bleecker. They decided on the boys, then had parties. There was a sorting out. You had to have a party to get invited to parties. You had to go the parties to have a girlfriend, or so it seemed to me. Of course there were equalizers. Sex and sports, as well as other intangibles, personality, say, a sense of humor, style, or a way with cars, were factors as important as money, or more so. Football and other sports, besides creating heroes for the girls, established grounds among the guys for camaraderie; and the girls, seeing how the guys admitted and admired another guy, would start to look at him with favor. Joe Iacone, for instance, bashful, gentle, our starting fullback, was dating Marion Watson for a while.

Dave Bowman and Judy Stradley were a cross-class romance; likewise, hard-working Dick Curley and Peggy Krick.

Dave was a victim of divorce, living with his mother and sisters in what must have been a cramped and embarrassing apartment. Neil Pine was the only other classmate I knew with divorced parents; but where Neil was edgy, a bully, and later transferred to another school, Dave was our class James Dean, whom he resembled in looks, as well as in his brooding, tragic manner. His father was an ad-man and playboy in New York, with an apartment in Greenwich Village, something like that, but whatever alimony he sent barely supported them. Dave's oldest sister had graduated years before, but his next, Joan, three classes older, had been head cheerleader, outshining even Holly Melcher. They all, including his mother (who, he has told me recently, was then having an affair with our married football coach, which caused a hushed scandal), were blessed and cursed by charm and good looks. In 11th grade English, our tough-minded, middle-aged teacher, Miss Rose Ferdinand, singled out Dave and me, and we became friendly rivals in our study of Macbeth, where we puzzled and argued about the concept of amorality, as opposed to immorality. Senior year, she had us debating whether the world owed us a living; Dave thought yes, I disagreed. I know I began writing seriously, and, for that matter, drawing and painting, which was our other talent in common, nearly

as much to impress Dave as to impress Miss Ferdinand or the other kids, and I think he did likewise, both of us pushing towards some notion of the cool, a quality that was knowing, bold, and a little over our heads, and that concerned sex, love, God, and contempt for hypocrisy. But then besides art and writing, looks, a fair performance at football and track, a readiness to fight if challenged, a rapport with all kinds of kids, and a hip way of being first to catch or coin a witty expression or gesture--"Hey, g'om"--Dave also had the glamor of the Decades, where as lead singer, backed up by Pete Allen, Joe Iacone, Jim Anthony, and Rudy Nottage (also Paul Michel, sometimes, on drums), he held crowds spellbound, girls swooning. I envied him that popularity, and later his romance with Stradley, who resembled a thinner Natalie Wood.

Twelve out of 156 kids in my Radnor class were black. That included Diana Farmer, whose father was Dr. James Farmer, an official in the N.A.A.C.P, and Jim Anthony, our class president, who went steady with Claudette Johnson. It also included Earl Blackwell, slow-witted, good-natured, and sleepy, the first person brought to mind by the pop song, "Charlie Brown, he's a clown." As co-captain of the football team and center for basketball, Earl drew laughter for inevitably scratching his crotch while mumbling speeches into the pep-rally microphone. He ended up, immediately after graduation, as a sanitation worker.

Rudy Nottage was a special case. His friends were primarily white. In fifth grade, he used to walk Barby Spillman home because she lived around the corner, and partly he and I became friends because of my pursuit of her. His mother was a live-in domestic and his father the gardener for a rich family. He was one of the most popular kids in our class, respected for his humor, his generosity, and his brains. I remember the shock and outrage of everybody when Harold Little, who had been Rudy's best friend, lost his temper during a softball game in sixth grade and called him a nigger; whereupon Mr. Shock took Harold away for a long, searching talk, and afterwards Harold, who was a troubled kid, tearfully apologized, first to Rudy, then to all of us.

Rudy as a friend in sixth grade invited me to his house, which was the upstairs of the garage, a sizable outbuilding to the Victorian main house of what once had been an estate and now was a yard of three or four acres. I saw his room, though I did not meet his mother, and we mainly played outside. Then I wanted to invite him to my home, but Mom told me it would not be a good idea. Anna knew Rudy's mother from church. Mom did not directly forbid me to invite him over, but in her way, she did warn me, and I came to understand that I was not allowed to have black kids for visiting friends; that society, which meant the neighbors, frowned on it.

In high school, Rudy was class wit. He also was a starting half-back in football, from the pound teams all the way to varsity; a winning sprinter in track; and he played alto sax in Mr. Napier's twenty-piece swing band. Then he joined Dave and the others in the Decades. His yearbook entry says "...hopes for college."

At eighteen, the summer after graduation, mixed up with Scott and company, Rudy knocked up a girl from Henry Ave, and did the right thing by her, so the last I heard as I went to college, was that after his taste of the privileged class, he had been dragged under by circumstances, back into poverty, domestic life, and low horizons. I always spoke up for Rudy to Dad, as my friend, as someone I liked and admired. So it was with some satisfaction, axioms verified, that Dad sent me a local news article later on, after I had moved from college to graduate school. Rudy had walked into Avil's, the dry-cleaners, and shot the clerk there to death with a shotgun; he had been tried and sentenced for first degree murder and sent to prison. Drugs had been involved. I tried to imagine him, Rudy, fighting his domestic world, baby crying, married to a girl he did not love, hating his life and the menial job he needed to support it (he tried gardening I think), still in touch with the rich boys, who otherwise were no better or more gifted than he was, and thinking of their wild parties, and meanwhile the mid-sixties civil rights movement in the news, along with the protests against Viet Nam.

I try, but I can't imagine him. Not Rudy. Not murder. Not prison.

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Kathie Ross came to Radnor in 11th grade, transferring from Lower Merion, where she had gone for two or three years. They had lived in Puerto Rico for a while, then someplace in the South, before her father had gotten a job in Philadelphia. Her transfer to Radnor was the result of his promotion on that job, a new prosperity, and their buying a ranch house in a development off Sproul Road. But hardly had they moved, and had she started Radnor, when her father died suddenly of a heart attack. I had been aware of her before his death, but had never really known or dated her, so I never got to meet him. All along, she had been going steady with someone named "Ace" Townsend from Episcopal.

We met at Sally Yerkes' party, talked, slow-danced, drank punch or beer, and kissed. She liked me, without my trying to persuade her to, though she would put me through the ordeal of yearning, pleading, and of trying to win her from Ace, until she finally broke up with him. She was small-breasted, athletic, and wore her hair, light brown, in a page-boy. Her face was square-jawed and thin-lipped, but she was pretty in a tough way; and her tanned arms and legs were firm and beautiful. I was attracted to her combination of suburban good looks, madras shorts and all, her wit, her anger, and later, to her family pathos. She had a sister a year or so younger, Carol, and a brother four years younger, Johnnie. Mrs. Ross still had black hair, was slim, played golf, and gave and went to cocktail and bridge parties. Mr. Ross had been a Navy man at some point, and his portrait showed him in an officer's uniform. They became a family who welcomed and even seemed to me need me, as a fatherly man (I felt this), away from my family.

As for Kathie's anger: she warned me she could be a bitch, and that she was a bad sport; that when she played tennis for Lower Merion, she had thrown down her racket and walked off. That she was like that; she had no tolerance for frustration.

There was a hoody bravado about her, too, looking for kicks.

Everything sexy and raw about dancing, she loved. The wildness, the drunken bachanal. I worried about her loyalty to me in the midst of that, and would get jealous when she slow-danced or flirted with Paul Michel, even while he was going steady with Marion Watson. A picture of Kathie and him, obviously bombed and hugging at a party, found its way into one of the yearbooks.

Another time, after we were going steady, after she had told me, "I love you, 'hon," and I would feel triumphant, superior, and normal, all at once, to be driving with her as my girl, and she would automatically sit in the middle, instead, as other girls had, edging purposely away to the passenger's door, and she would put her hand on and under my thigh, possessively. After I had that sense of belonging, which I had seen and envied others finding and enjoying, but never thought I could. After our petting had taken its progress. After we had parked. After I felt her breasts, and lower. After I had asked to feel her breasts inside, and had fumblingly unhooked my first bra. After we had kissed and kissed, especially in her driveway, so it steamed up the car, and Mrs. Ross would have to blink the garage light. After I told her about Dad's alcoholism, the first I had told anyone, girl or otherwise, as a way of sharing: then she had told me, as an equal revelation, about the family gardener in Puerto Rico--she had been brought up there, where her father was stationed, I guess--who, when she was eight or so, had shown her his penis, had had her play with it, and then had taken down her pants, fondled, and lain on top of her, but she had been too small and he couldn't make it go in, so he had ejaculated outside of her. She told me this in context, partly, of talking about her bad-girl appetite for sex, and for the illicit. And shocked, I told her I wanted to kill the man, over so many years. She said her father had felt that way too. But that the experience didn't seem so bad to her, the way it did to others; that she had liked and wanted it, in a way. Musing.

I exercised to have muscles, since Kathie told me that muscles were as exciting to girls as breasts were to boys. I worked my way from twenty to fifty to seventy-five push-ups. I started wearing a tank top to school, which Mom had bought me, no less, with no



sleeves, in order to show my muscles off, and which drew frowns from some of the teachers, who had proudly marked me as college-bound and respectable. They didn't like the way Kathie and I walked, arms around each others' waists, in the halls, either. At some point, Mrs. Long took me aside and warned me not to let my reputation slip.

After sessions of heavy petting on dates, at parties and at her mother's house after school, sessions that included her letting me unhook her bra and feel her breasts and nipples, and finger her, and much dry humping, and sometimes in the steamed-up car in her driveway, her masturbating me until I came into a handkerchief: we'd actually made love for the first time, albeit by mutual accident. We had been in Dad's Ford station-wagon at the Main Line Drive In, kissing, with me sitting under her, and her straddling my lap, facing away from the movie screen, and my pants were off and my penis free and hard and instead of just rubbing it on her panties and against her vulva, I pulled her panties down under her dress (no one outside could see) and around her buttocks as much we could, and then was rubbing my penis against her wetness and hair, and then the impulse just to work it in a little way became irresistible and her motion too, so I slipped in all the way, deep inside her, hot and wet, and unimagined by any approximations, along with the awareness and elation of what we'd done, that we were fucking, and first time for both of us, and no tearing of a hymen or anything painful or bloody for her. I was able to thrust several times, enough to be really doing it--this fearful, astonishing and irreversible act--before I felt on the verge of coming and pulled out. And for then that was enough. The threshold was crossed for us. We loved each other.

Soon after that first time, early in June and after graduation, we plotted that Kathie would come over to my house when Mom was away, a certain day. I was to call her. The day, when it came, was tense and abrasive; I was restless with Mom to be gone, then called Kathie and her mother hadn't brought back their car yet, and the afternoon was passing. On the surface, we kept things innocent, she was just to come over, nothing more than that, so we could be

together and I could share my home life with her, show her the house. But there was deliberate stealth to it. Mom wasn't to know. All along there was some fear that Mom would not approve of her, on any grounds; whereas Mrs. Ross openly welcomed me. Kathie had to come before Mom came back, and the longer our plan was frustrated the more irritable, cold and impatient we became to each other on the phone. But then at last she called and was coming, though it was late. And then she arrived, parking her station-wagon right out front.

What happened then was not entirely innocent or spontaneous. I had been impressed by a scene in *Some Came Running* by James Jones, where the teenage writer sneaks his girlfriend home and makes love to her on his childhood's bed. Excitedly, I showed Kathie around. We went down to the cellar and I showed her my print shop, and this was important to me, to be showing her my most personal and private world, and I kissed her down there, against my type-cases, and then we went up to see my bedroom, where she looked over my writing desk and stuff on the walls (it was a humid, sticky afternoon, too), and after hollow preliminaries, like nothing was intended except one friend looking over another's room and books, we started kissing and making out in some awkward, semi-stoop on the floor. Then I had her blouse off, and half-lifted, half-urged her onto my bed, and had my shoes and pants off and penis free. She didn't want to take her bra off, because she was afraid of Mom coming home, something like that. And with no more sophisticated idea than to repeat and embellish on our drive-in experience, I was in her, on top of her, for real, three, five, six strokes, when I felt myself coming and pulled out, to catch most of my ejaculate in my palm. I got up and hurried to the bathroom, to wipe my hands and flush the evidence, then wash myself, and when I came back to Kathie, we did, in fact, hear Mom's car in the driveway.

Kathie groped for and pulled on panties, then bermudas, shrugged into and buttoned her blouse. Me too, my underpants, pants and shirt. Heart pounding, I felt fatalistic: just here it comes, and no escape. But Kathie hurried down the front stairs, out the

front door, and managed to drive off, just as I clambered down the back stairs to greet Mom, who came in the kitchen door with packages.

Here, I confess, memory fails, but she must have been puzzled and suspicious. "Whose car was that? Wasn't that Kathie I saw? Why couldn't she stay?" I must have lied and Mom must have let me lie. Did I say it was someone else? Judy Stradley, for instance, and that she'd just been passing and stopped to say hello, but was late getting home? Or that it was Kathie, and she'd only stopped for a minute, and was late. "Well, she should at least have stayed to say hello. Didn't you hear me coming in? I don't like that." Whatever Mom permitted me, she didn't like, but she didn't cross-examine me or force the issue, either.

A day or so afterwards, Kathie left with her family for eight weeks at their summer resort on Squirrel Island, off the coast of Maine. We'd talked about my coming up to visit. We'd also worried whether I had pulled out in time, whether any sperm had been inside, whether she might get pregnant. And for the next two weeks, hearing nothing, I wrote her everyday. I holed up in our basement playroom, where it was cool, and where, with Chuck's old typewriter, I had set out to write a novel over the summer. In my letters I kept asking, emphatically, how she was, assuming that she would know what I meant. I was living through the real possibility of disgrace, of not going to college. I prayed to God to help. To forgive me. To make it be all right. If such a small slip as that, such a natural, good, necessary thing could result in ruined lives, then where was justice? I thought of Mom and Dad, how they would react. I was too young to be married, too young to have a baby, to have life's responsibilities close down around me.

Kathie, meanwhile, promised not to mess around, but then went on to write about her high times messing around, and wanting to know about mine. "All the boys up here are either older or younger than I am...I miss you terribly....I just want you to know I could never do anything up here or any other time that I might be separated from you or that I would be afraid or ashamed to tell you

about....Last night I had a blast...I wish I could write you letters as good as you write me, but you know I'm no writer. Be assured I feel the same things you do." Finally, in early July, I sent her a telegram: "Are you okay?" and got back a special delivery letter, she was, "You haven't done anything wrong. I love you. How's that?....Everybody is kidding me about your daily letters, but I love it and they can't wait to see you...Well, just one more thing....DON'T WORRY!!"

Relief. Hosannahs. She told me later, she'd been amused at how upset I'd gotten. She hadn't even thought about it.

We continued to look forward to my visit. I poured out my heart in letters with no self-consciousness about cliches: "When I get to Squirrel Island, my love, we will lie on pine needles in the shadows of the forest floor." She wrote back: "Two more weeks and you'll be here. I'm so excited. Please let me know what day, and how you're coming."

Days, I swam, played golf, or both, then closed myself in the cool of the basement and wrote away. Besides letters, I was writing my "novel." Called "Search for Stone," where "stone" meant something fixed, true, and certain, it concerned a younger boy, whose loneliness and whose search for meaning apart from the hollow, self-congratulating world of his parents, resembled mine; it also resembled the boy's in Ray Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine*, which I'd been reading. My boy was drifting towards self-damage, if not suicide, but then I wanted him to recognize his value and to take responsibility for himself.

Mom and Dad had hedged all along about the Squirrel Island idea, and I had been embarrassed to ask, but now they flatly refused to let me go. No arguments. Why not? But I promised! Mrs. Ross thinks I'm coming! No. It's not proper, Mom said. You're too young. If you were getting married, that's the kind of thing you'd do. Mrs. Ross just isn't thinking. She's more lenient or permissive about these things than we are. Sorry.

This was their power play, as parents, and I had to write Kathie, sorry, but my parents wouldn't let me.

From then on things were never the same. A choice had been

made. When Kathie came back, in August, she had already turned her mind to the new life at Duke, a life without me, as I went on to Amherst College. We saw each other, and I wrote her in an unsent letter: "You have been losing hold day by day until you can't even accept me as a friend. I'm sorry about the sex we have shared since you have been back, for your part it was without love, for mine it was a last desperate attempt to keep some sign that you still liked me....I have found faith in something, and knowing how hard it is for me to do that, you must also know it is impossible for me to lose that faith now. I found faith in you...You have a lot of things influencing you right now, college, the freedom you want, but I think there is something for both of us that will eventually reach through all that, and that you will come back, we will come back."

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At boys-only Amherst, while other freshman sought dates from nearby Smith and Mt. Holyoke, I felt worldly and sufficient to have had my adult romance, tantamount to marriage, and to have my girl from home, whose picture I kept on my desk, and to whom I wrote constantly.

Despite her letters back, however, protesting loneliness for me and a wish to be married rather than go on with the work of college, she was dating; and in particular dating an upperclassman--as she wrote to me that September: "I finally accepted a blind date offered me by my sophomore advisor. I honestly had so much fun! Larry is 24, a Junior here, and has been in the Navy for two years." Neither Thanksgiving nor Christmas vacations worked out as reunions. She skipped Christmas at home and wrote me in January that "if Larry ever does leave you can pick up the pieces if you'll still be around, because there will be pieces." They were pinned by March, married in April, though I didn't get the news until July.

As I began my sophomore year, she was separated, living home, and I had visited her there, captivated by the baby girl, which I

helped to bathe and powder. Her mother out, baby asleep, we started to make out. Her ambivalence continued. She wrote to me at school. Larry lived in Kingston, N.C. She told him that if he came to visit at her mother's, she'd rather he slept in the guest room than with her. But then changed her mind: she wanted more than anything to go back to Larry and never leave again. "We might have married if I had for waited for you," she wrote me, "however, we too would have had some bad times and I would have left you a couple of times too." But immediately she changed again: "I don't think I know what love is."

She saw a counselor, hoping to save the marriage. I took off a special weekend in mid-October and traveled home to see her. She had just come back from Kingston, where Larry had refused to consider getting back together until hunting season closed.

This time, baby asleep, and her mother out again, we talked and drank in their living room and ended up making love on the couch. I used a condom for the first time, having learned this much from my fraternity brothers, but when we finished, the condom had slipped off inside her. A week later, she wrote to me back at Amherst, "It is my turn now to worry about being pregnant. I couldn't go back to Larry because it wouldn't be his baby (he knows that we haven't had intercourse for months). I couldn't marry you because I am not divorced. It would take me about a year to get a divorce. I couldn't go to school because I'd have another baby to take care of."

I don't recall my response. I was popular suddenly at Amherst, dating a Mt. Holyoke girl, involved in fraternity life, and absorbed by my classes, editing the college literary magazine, and my writing. If briefly I had ever thought of marrying her with Larry's baby, by now I had had second thoughts, and probably would have argued for an abortion. But soon she wrote (again) that the pregnancy had been a false alarm, and that she had learned a lesson. "'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' and that is exactly what we were doing."

We didn't write again. She and Larry reconciled and moved on in life.

Mom and Mrs. Ross would from time to time meet and talk in the supermarket or at the golf club and I heard later from Mom that Kathie had been divorced, then remarried; then, I think, divorced again.

Nine years later, our twenties spent, Kathie called me at graduate school in Cambridge. I didn't recognize her southern accent. She told me, searchingly, hopefully, that she was living with her two children in Tennessee, but I only responded with commonplaces. Nothing personal to share.

