

Myra's Lesson

by Doug Woodhouse

One day when I was six years old I got on a school bus and attended my first day of kindergarten. When I was eight, I put on a blue uniform and attended my first day of cub scouts. When I was fifteen, I kissed a girl for the first time.

I now know how to do long division. I can also read a novel and then write a report on it. I can tie a bowline with one hand, I can sew buttons back on my shirts and operate a sewing machine, I can identify both poisonous and edible plants, I can calculate both the area and circumference of a circle knowing only the radius, I can point out a dozen constellations, I can identify birds just by hearing them, I can read music and I can read Latin. If you don't believe me, my parents have turned the wall space of my old bedroom into a record of my achievements, yet among all of my framed diplomas and awards and accomplishments, there is no record that I have ever learned how to function within a relationship. Not even a certificate of merit. No honorable mention.

There's no training course available for kids in love. You can watch your parents, you can watch other kids, but for the most part it's all trial and error. After college I spent a year substitute teaching, and I was always shocked to see children holding hands and kissing. Children! Middle schoolers, barely even teenagers, barely aware of the power of creation coursing through their veins, yet their bodies are developing fast while their minds are still catching up. One day they're spending recess playing tag and the next they're making out in herds under the monkey bars.

Myra was an early bloomer, and became sexually active when she was thirteen. When I think of this, I get a mental image of a Myra who looks pretty much like the Myra I know, only a little shorter. Maybe some braces. I imagine her the way I remember other kids my age when I was thirteen. But when I see an actual thirteen year old, live and in the flesh, all I see is a child. Thirteen year old kids seem to have gotten younger since I was that age, and I'm amazed

that some of their parents let them out of the house dressed the way they are. Do you hear me? Do you hear this stuff I'm saying? I'm turning into an old man. Pretty soon I'll be complaining about their music, and before long they'll be playing Smashing Pumpkins in elevators and grocery stores.

I've taken to stretching out in the backseat when it's Myra's turn to drive. My head is on the passenger side, and from this angle I have a good view of Myra's breasts. Well, actually just her right breast, but it's been holding my attention for the last 50 miles. It's frustrating, I want to look at something else, but there's really nothing else to draw my attention away. Her tank top is tight and from the bra strap I recognize the bra. Most girls seem to have a built in radar that tells them when someone is checking them out, and Myra's is either blasting full tilt or is offline. Maybe her guard is down, maybe she doesn't care, or maybe she just doesn't know what to say. Or maybe she enjoys it. I try to go back to my Sudoku book, but the highway is too bumpy for a book and just the right amount of bumpy for a boob.

No one ever taught me how to break up with a girl you don't want to date anymore. No one ever taught me how to tell if a girl wants to kiss you, or wants you to kiss her. I was never taught how to initiate sex or how to identify a fake orgasm. I've never read a book on how to live with your girlfriend, and even though one probably exists I probably never will. It's all been trial and error, and I'm still pretty shaky at almost all of it. To some extent girls still give me those queasy butterflies, and no matter how cool and collected I am with friends, once I take an interest in a girl I become a stammering idiot. It amazes me that I ever manage to get myself into relationships to begin with. But the sun goes up, the sun goes down, and the miles are disappearing beneath us. Seven years ago I may have graduated with honors from high school, but today my teacher is Myra, and today I'm learning how to conduct myself properly in a car with my ex-girlfriend. We hit another bumpy patch. Let's just say I'm still learning.

