

FIRST CRUSH

Minter Krotzer

MY FIRST CRUSH WAS ON Caldwell Huckabee, the minister's son. Caldwell was the youngest in a family of football players. He had red hair, freckles, and a football player's body. I wasn't the only girl who had a crush on Caldwell. During recess Eve Lindsay would taunt Caldwell in the sandbox, flirtingly throwing lumps of sand into his lap. I wasn't as aggressive. In fact, I could hardly bring myself to even say anything to Caldwell. One day I decided to have my mother ask Caldwell's mother if he could come over to play after school. Perhaps he would like me if we spent some time alone. I hid in the other room as I listened to my mother talking to Mrs. Huckabee. After some time of checking with Caldwell, she told my mother that Caldwell couldn't come over to play on Thursday—that he had to go to one of his brother's football games. I remember the sinking in the chest, the feeling of disappointment when I heard that he couldn't come over. But the doubt that he would come over was there from the beginning, along with the desire, as if the desire could only exist with the doubt. This was the beginning of many spurned crushes. I longed to know what made a girl the kind of girl boys liked.

FIRST POMANDER

Minter Krotzer

IT'S CHRISTMAS EVE on Camp Street and my father is downstairs at the kitchen table—a long wooden table that his father built growing up in Tennessee. My mother is upstairs wrapping our presents.

“What are you doing?” I ask my father. He’s been there for hours. An orange sits in front of him and a neat pile of cloves.

“I’m making a POMANDER ball,” he answers, focused on the orange. “You put it in your drawer to make your clothes smell good. It’s like a sachet.” He picks a clove from the pile and sticks it into the orange. “It’s my Christmas present for your mother.”

I notice that only a quarter of the orange is done. “Isn’t it going to take you forever?” I ask.

“We’ll see,” he replies, picking up another clove and sticking it into the orange. A small bubble of orange juice squirts out. I sit quietly for a moment, smelling the scent of orange and clove.

“Won’t it rot eventually?” I inquire.

“The cloves preserve the skin of the orange, which remains intact. You can have a pomander forever.” He squints more closely at the orange and pushes his reading glasses on more tightly.

The next morning I see the pomander hanging from the tree, almost unnoticeable with all of our presents around. When I look at it closely I am amazed by all of the cloves. There is a neat order to their pattern—a sign of Papa’s being an architect, just like the way he always eats an ear of corn row by row or piles artichoke leaves in circles around his plate.

My mother is impressed with the pomander and for years she keeps it in her underwear drawer. Eventually some of the cloves fall out, leaving traces of brown powder that were once the orange.

FIRST RECESSION

Minter Krotzer

"HAVEN'T YOU HEARD the news?" my father screamed impatiently to the caller from New Haven. "Louisiana is in a recession. We're ALL broke here."

There was a pause as he listened to the person on the other end of the line. He was standing by the desk in the hallway and I was getting ready to go to the park for a run. I was home from college for the summer and took every opportunity I could to get out of the house. I had been looking for a job and hadn't found anything.

"Didn't you hear what I said? I can't give any stocks or money. The oil business has gone bust. There is no money down here."

It didn't seem that different from before, I thought to myself, my parents had always been broke.

There was another pause as he listened. He rolled his eyes at me in aggravation.

"Sir," he continued in a louder voice, "you haven't heard what I've been saying. I AM BROKE!"

Finally the caller seemed to get the message.

Papa hung up the phone and turned to me: "Imagine that, those people at Yale have no idea what it's like down here." And he walked out of the room.