

Gratitude 1969

James King

Her name was the same as my mother's but I tried not to think about that when I felt her hand and a jolt of hot electricity fired my blood and shot it to two places, one of which was my face. Would my cheeks set her hair on fire?

How incredible that just a few hours earlier she laughed at my sarcastic jokes as we wrote Prayers of the Faithful for the eighth-grade guitar Mass at St. Rose. How amazing that she invited me into her house and told me her parents were out and her older sister was upstairs on the phone with her *boyfriend* and would be there for *hours*.

She said *boyfriend* like it was a promise. Her *hours* sounded like a dare.

We were halfway through *Love, American Style* before I finally, finally put my arm on the back of the couch behind her, careful not to let it touch her because I didn't want her to think that I was thinking what I was, in fact, thinking but still she had asked me over knowing that her parents were going out and her sister was upstairs for hours and why shouldn't I do this I was in eighth grade for god's sake and my arm was starting to hurt when it happened:

She reached up, took my hand, and intertwined her fingers with mine and with her other hand gently stroked the top of my hand as we watched the show or, more accurately, she watched the show and I wished Murph and Cleary and Kennedy could see this and then I wondered if she had done this before with other *boyfriends* but as she leaned against me and I felt her breathing and I smelled her hair all I could do was think whoever you are, St. Rose, whatever you are patron saint of, St. Rose... thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

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