

PATTY

around the latter grades of elementary school
she had a crush on me,
but i wasn't interested in her.
no, it wasn't that i had a string of girlfriends --
i didn't have any, in fact, and i badly needed
at least one -- it was just that
i didn't find her attractive.
she had bad skin,
and since i had bad skin myself,
it was out of the question that i fall for her.
i was in love with exactly those three girls
that every other boy in the class was also after,
and who no doubt made fun of me behind my back.

i wasn't deliberately cruel to patty,
but i never allowed myself to be paired off with her,
and once she accidentally overheard me
making it clear to some teasing friends
that i was not to be associated with her
in the juvenile gossip channels,
and her feelings were obviously hurt.

patty was, incidentally, the most intelligent girl
in the class, but i'd learned from previous experience
that there is nothing less sexy at that age than brains,
which is why i was wearing myself out
the year 'round with sports.

then we went to different high schools
and i didn't see much of her
until she held a graduation swim party
at her parents' country club.
her skin and hair were still a little oily,
but a routine of swimming, tennis and golf
had shaped her body magnificently.
the tan and vitamin d weren't doing her skin
any harm either.

i guess none of us had ever realized
exactly how wealthy her parents were.
i guess it wouldn't have mattered to me at least,
devourer of the idealism of our civics texts.
i could tolerate every human diversity
as long as it wasn't dermatological.

i should have been smart enough to realize, though,
that she was about to be transformed
into a highly desirable woman,
a witty, good-natured, highly-educated person,
that any man would be proud to be married to,
or even merely seen with.

she would, of course, become a classic beauty,
possessed of a physical perfection
that money can, indeed, buy and preserve.

i bet she's sitting right now
at the window of some woody mansion,
watching the sunset behind the 18th fairway,
as she sips a 200-year-old cognac,
pauses in her reading of derrida,
her body still taut from sports and spas,
her skin the sweetness of bailey's irish cream,
as she ponders her good fortune
in having, so many years ago,
been spurned by yours truly
mr. typical all-american male adolescent asshole.

SOME WOMEN STILL LIKE MEN TO LIKE EACH OTHER

i.

a girl once said to me, "i knew
you weren't gay as soon as i noticed
that you weren't afraid to hug your friends.

ii.

and last night a girl said, "lee has your books
all over our apartment. he really cares for you."

AN UNDERRATED CONDITIONED RESPONSE

he says, "after we made love
she kept asking me if i didn't feel guilty,
what with a wife and kids at home.
so i asked her if she didn't feel guilty
deceiving her fiance."

so, just for the sake of saying something,
i say, "it's a shame guilt has to enter into it."

but he corrects me: "no, it isn't.
this girl is beautiful
but she hasn't read anything
and she hasn't been anywhere
and she hasn't had an interesting thought
or experience in her life.
if it weren't for guilt,
we wouldn't have a thing to talk about."