

Indian Summer

The boy watched the girl run her hand across the top of the high summer grass. The two stood out of the hot sun under the shade of a black oak, and the tall stalks she bent aside smelled of straw and the potential of fire.

A boy still, he knew, though he'd appropriated some aspects of manhood. Her body moved under her light summer clothes, and he knew what it looked like and felt like without them. Choosing where he went and when, he did so under his own power and resources, mostly. The boy was still a son though, lived with a family, and those things came with some bindings still.

Yet he'd stretched and flexed so much that the ropes were loose now, and the man trying to raise him without the benefit of DNA's forbearance was too late to re-tension them.

Freedom tasted will not be denied in the heart of the young and ignorant. He was learning what that might cost even then, but only down deep where there wasn't enough light to see it yet. For now there was her and she was the only thing that mattered.

The heat pressed down on the earth, and the smell of late-summer hard-pan and oak bark were released into the air. The sub-division where she lived was no longer visible as they'd moved out into the acres and acres of undeveloped land behind it. It was a playground for dirt-bikes, keg parties, and sex pretty much anywhere, whether it was in a car or on an old blanket, and it stretched as far as the eye could see.

He looked at the face he told himself he knew, but perhaps did not. There was always an element of unease at the back of everything with her. He asked a question to fill the silence.

“What do you want to do?”

She looked up at him, and smiled a smile that held many things. There were those he wanted to see, like attraction and sex, but there were other things, too. Things a man might have understood.

“I don’t know. I’d ask you back, but that I *do* know.” She responded.

The boy shrugged, and a light blush suffused with mild guilt accompanied it. He wondered if maybe that was intentional, but not enough to make any difference to him.

She crossed the few feet between them and put her arms around his neck. Her hair was the color of wheat, and there was a blue-eyed asymmetry to her face. She smelled like cinnamon gum, hair conditioner, and something abstractly primal.

They kissed, and that opiate bloom did its work. She then took him by the hand, and they moved out of the shade.

Migrating further out among the oaks and scrub Manzanita that would decades later become big-box stores, strip malls, and more houses, she led him along. To him, it felt like a pinnacle, a high place to inhabit for as long as possible. They exchanged words, and smiles, and finally that thing he always wanted that she occasionally granted.

He should have recognized their end in the ending of that thing. A man might have, but he didn’t. A man might have seen just another hurried ascension, and a slow drift back to earth, rather than a portent or promise of future heights.

Very much like all that undeveloped land bound up in pre-realized potential, it was beyond the ken of a boy. He couldn’t know what the emotional real estate was worth, or would be.

Until life taught him, that is.