

## High School

#1

My father wouldn't let me go out for the football team until I weighed 165 pounds. We both knew I would never weigh that much. Dad had a knee that looked like it had been stitched with a sewing machine from playing football. He wouldn't listen when I tried to tell him about Vic Chaltagne. Vic was my size - a little bigger -- and had been a starter for three years. They put him at halfback and ran plays that gave him room. He broke away about once a game and sprinted past the stands with everybody on both teams chasing him and all the spectators going nuts.

After the games, Vic would come out of the locker room wearing a tie with his letter sweater. His hair would be combed wet from the shower; he would smell of Aqua Velva. Some days he'd be cut or bruised. Carol Marino would be there waiting for her guy and run to kiss him. She'd walk with him to his car, holding his arm as though she was deeply honored. She'd sit pressed up against him and check her hair and makeup in the rear view mirror, then put her hand on the back of his neck as they drove away.

In the last game of the season, Vic took the opening kickoff of the second half and ran it full speed into a tackler coming downfield. They cracked together so loud it echoed off the pink brick high school in the distance. There was one huge gasp and then everybody was quiet. Vic lay still as though he'd been shot. You could see he was unconscious. The first movement was the players and coaches running out from the bench to where he lay. We all stood up to see. We stared at the crowd around him and nobody spoke. Then one of the cheerleaders, Patty Levenson, started to cry, then the others started crying. They held each other and sobbed on each other's shoulders. A couple of senior girls with serious faces made their way through the crowd

to comfort Vic's girlfriend, Carol. She was very pale. She hugged herself and nodded her head when they spoke to her.

The officials herded the players back to the bench. Now you could see Vic's legs. They stuck out from the group of coaches and officials who were kneeling beside him. You could see the tight, padded gold pants that went just below his knees. You could see his calves and his specially low-cut shoes. His legs didn't move at all. Coach Boler was holding Vic's gold helmet in his hand. He motioned toward the sidelines, and the team manager, Sparky Hempel, ran onto the field carrying a rolled-up stretcher.

The people in the stands were talking quietly now. I heard some juniors say the guy who hit Vic better watch it after the game. Yeah sure. Mostly, people talked about Vic. he was an honor student who hoped to go to Notre Dame next year. He was the man of the house with his father dead. He gave all the money from his job at the Sunoco to his mom. That was the kind of young man he was. But he was tough too. They couldn't stop him with a hard tackle. He'd be all right, we were sure he'd be all right. They lifted him up on the stretcher and came toward the sidelines. We started to applaud.

A woman with grey hair followed Mr. Hennepin, the school principal, through the crowd and onto the field to meet the stretcher. Someone said it was Vic's mother. We heard that he was conscious but didn't recognize her. He didn't know his own mom! We clapped harder. "Let him be OK," I prayed and clapped and clapped, till my hands were raw.

#2

I was the class poet. My turtleneck came up inside my hair. I wore black bluejeans, old sneakers without socks and a black beret tilted on the side of my head. Most of the guys were still trying to look like Elvis. I thought he was a sentimental hick. The Beatles were just coming in then. I thought they were ridiculous, and the Rolling

Stones were fags. I preferred thin paperbacks of modern poetry--for instance, "a coney island of the mind" by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. I wrote poems without capital letters in hourglass and triangular shapes on the page.

Janet Lopinski sat next to me in study hall. She was cute in a way, except she put on too much makeup and her hair was all teased up. But she was actually nice. I think she just hung out with the dumb kids because no one else paid any attention to her. We used to pass notes back and forth. I'd satirize the teachers, and she'd get hysterical laughing. We almost got detention a couple times, but we could be serious too. One day she asked if she could see one of my poems, and I said OK, so next day I brought in the one by Dylan Thomas that goes: "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower drives my green age..." written in my handwriting. It was a joke. I wanted to see how long before she figured it out.

She read it through slowly once and then again. She turned to me. Her eyes were shiny. She whispered, "I don't understand it, but it's beautiful. Don't worry, you're going to be famous some day."

### #3

I was sure I'd get some the day I hiked up to King Philip's Cave with Laurie Peterson. She was supposed to be horny from not seeing Mike Santulli, her boyfriend who graduated last year and went in the service. She wasn't a slut or anything, but you could just tell she'd put out if she liked a guy. I figured the woods would be a good place, especially since old Mike probably never took her anywhere but the back seat of his GTO. Ha.

When I asked her to go, she couldn't get over it. "Climb the mountain? On foot?" she kept asking and rolling her eyes. But she finally said OK. About halfway up the trail we took a break, and Laurie handed me her lighter while she fished around in her bag for her Kools. "Light me before I have a nicotine fit," she said and put her hand on

mine that held the lighter. She was looking up at me through the smoke, and I almost made my move, but I couldn't figure out how to kiss her with a butt in her mouth. Later she stopped and took off her sweater. She had a T shirt on underneath, of course, but I got turned-on just watching her pull it over her head. What really got me was how casual she was about it. Like after she had tied the sweater around her waist, she turned and asked, "Aren't you hot?"

Finally, we got to the cave, and I spread out the blanket I'd brought. It wasn't a real cave but a depression in the cliff where you could sit and look down on the river and the town.

"King Philip's Indian name was Metacomet," I told her. "He was a Great Sachem of the Wampanoags. In 1675 he led a bunch of his own braves, plus Narragansetts and Nipmucks, to attack the settlers who lived down there. They burned the town while King Philip watched from right here," I said -- and kissed her. It was pretty good, but she pulled back.

"Where do you learn this stuff?" she asked.

"I read about it," I answered and started kissing her again. She let me put my hand under her T shirt, and I felt her through her bra awhile before going for bare tit. It was pretty amazing there for awhile. I tried to undo her bra in the back, and it wouldn't go. I knew you couldn't just pop it free, so I tried pulling the hooks apart, pushing them together and up and down, and nothing worked. I could tell from the way Laurie had stopped kissing with her tongue that she wasn't exactly thrilled. Then I must have yanked too hard, because she squawked inside my mouth. When we came up for air, she yelled, "Goddamn you!" right in my face. I rolled off her.

She sat up and got a Kool and lit it and smoked awhile, way over on the other side of the blanket.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"OK, King Philip," she said. "Don't worry about it."

#4

We had the senior picnic at Camp Massasoit out in the town forest. It was wild, a couple guys had turned the trunks of their cars into travelling bars. They had everything--scotch, bourbon, gin, vodka--you name it. I had brought my own fifth of Canadian Club that I got in New York. I planned to get really bombed. Our so-called senior committee had the day planned into activities, games and food, of course, but no one paid attention.

By mid afternoon everyone was shitfaced. Bobby Cronkite was sitting bare-assed in the pond cheering for some guys who were trying to throw Debbie Cagen off a bridge into the water. She was drunk and said she wanted to go skinny dipping. Sue Ann Kessler was trying to stop them, of course. She said Debbie didn't know what she was saying. Meanwhile, Paul McCormack and Dino DeSantis were duking it out in the parking lot, no one knew why. A bunch of guys finally broke it up. Dino had a split lip and one eye was closing. McCormack started to puke. He said it was from a sucker punch in the stomach. Sam Jorgensen was passed out under a picnic table. The woods were full of couples making out. The really serious ones were breaking into the camper's cabins and barricading the doors. Vicki Kozlowski, who had been voted Most Peppy the day before, was propped against a tree sobbing that she wanted to kill herself. It was great.

I was drunk too, of course. I loved it. I kept going from group to group and someone would always say, "Hey, look who's here," and say my name, and I'd flop down like we were best friends our whole lives. I kept slugging at my C.C., then I lost it and went around asking if anyone saw my booze, and they'd say no, but have some of theirs, so I did. I was falling down, going around, but I didn't feel it. Then I slept someplace awhile. Then I was staggering through the parking lot and Eric Wilson pulled up in his custom Ford pickup, and I climbed up on the warm hood and fell asleep as the engine ticked and cooled and it got dark. Later they told

me Eric came back and started up the truck and gunned it and gunned it and everybody stood around laughing and screaming, "Wake up! Wake up!" but I just smiled.