

## In the Tent

I have a memory I can't find a place for. We weren't kids playing doctor, but nobody did anything they didn't want to either. It was me and a kid named Ian, who I knew for a week when he came to Concord over the summer through the Fresh Air Fund, a program that sent inner city kids to live in the countryside with a rich family. He was from New York City, the Bronx. When he arrived he was amazed by what I had, batting gloves in particular, and walked through the house touching everything. He was bigger than me and the first black kid I'd been friends with. I was nine, he was ten. At that age we were friends automatically.

One week together. We took walkie-talkies downtown, running around Concord Provisions playing hide and seek until Stacey Rusticana made us leave before we broke something. Ian came to my baseball practices and my boys treated him like anyone else.

Mom bought balsa wood airplanes that we took to the sledding hill, climbing to the top through the golden grass of late July, wound the propellers, and sent them over the hill into the trees. I wanted to get them home intact because mom

had bought them, and it broke my heart to break anything she'd bought, or worse, to not like it. The saddest feeling was when she bought me something that was a bad version of what she knew I wanted, like a Wiffleball bat made out of nerf. Wasn't it the same, she wondered? No. That made me want to cry.

We put the planes on the bed in my room when we got back and kept talking about everything. He asked me if I ever jacked off, we compared our first pubes, and I didn't know what jacking off was and describing it made him really excited so he jumped on the bed and broke the plane.

'It wasn't me,' he said, 'I jumped *next* to the plane, like this.'

He jumped again to show me where he had really landed. I agreed maybe it was broken already even though I'd heard it crunch.

Out in the yard the grass was cool. We lay on our stomachs while he tried to explain the music he liked, R&B, but he couldn't. We ran inside to find a stereo. He pulled the tent out from under the workbench and wanted to set it up.

Mom put the poles together and the three of us got the fabric stretched over them. The inside was yellow. Ian and I spent the afternoon pretending we were defending the tent from invaders. That night we asked to sleep in the tent.

We lay on our backs in our sleeping bags talking. There was never any break to our talking. He said he would lick my dick if I licked his. I said ok and he said I would go first. I unzipped my sleeping bag and he put his head under it and made a fast, frightened lapping motion. I felt his tongue cause a swooping in my gut like an airplane falling in turbulence. I wondered how anyone could withstand that swooping long enough to get a handjob.

I put my head in his sleeping bag and smelled sweat. I was disgusted and licked my fingers and grazed them against his dick, which had straightened and lay above his stomach.

‘That was your hand, I’m not stupid,’ he said, angry for the first time, which didn’t make any sense, so I put my head under again and licked his dick which repelled me. It was too warm, alive in its own right, this was the true center of the boy, and it was hidden and secret and frightening to encounter.

I went in my sleeping bag and looked at the tent flap over my head hoping no one outside could see in.

The next morning we went frog hunting on the mudbanks of the river, where there were long pathways like a maze through the cattails and grape vines. When

we went in for grilled cheese at lunch mom didn't treat me any different but I worried she knew what we'd done in the tent.

After lunch we went in the tent to defend it from invaders again, and he showed me his pubes, fully grown.

'You're way behind on puberty,' he said. I didn't have pubes. 'Will you suck my dick,' he said.

He lay on his back on the side I'd slept on last night, on my sleeping bag. I checked the tent flap while he pulled down his pants, and then took the end of his dick in my mouth, felt the heat, and sat up again.

'Come on that was only a second,' he said.

I put my head down and this time he pressed the back of my head when I started to come up so that I had to push myself up by the arms.

'Don't press my head down like that I don't like it,' I said.

'I'll do you now if you want.'

I wanted to go outside and do something else. I wasn't sure why we were doing this at all.

I lay back and pulled my pants down and he put two fingers on the end of my dick, which was against my stomach and straight, and then the swoop forced me to push his hand away. When he mouthed it the swoop was bearable. He did two quick bobs, up and down, up and down, and lay back down again. I knew it

was unfair for me to do him longer than him to do me, so I asked him to use his whole hand, the palm, and rub it around. I loved that.

I did that to him but he wanted a blowjob again. I did it again, wanting to go outside.

We went to baseball practice together. It was maybe the fourth day of his week in Concord. On the walk from the car to the players we had a moment alone and I said I couldn't wait to get back to the tent and give each other minute-long blowjobs.

That night we tried going for longer than a few seconds but neither of us could do more than two quick bobs.

'Sorry if I unload in your mouth,' he said.

'What's that mean?'

'Squirt.'

'You can do that?'

'You can't?'

'Not yet. I don't think so. Maybe.'

I pressed my face as far down as I could but was bored now.

'Can I fuck you in the ass,' he said, 'I've been tested for aids.'

He was so hungry for it he sounded absolutely desperate. I didn't know what aids were or what relation it had to this, but I said I had been tested too, so I kneeled on all fours, both of us completely naked, and he kneeled behind me, and pressed his dick against my ass. As it pressed I rolled away and said no.

'Come on it didn't even go in,' he said.

'No, I don't want to.'

'Ok do me.'

He flopped down like a pig. He was losing his self-control. This hunger was eating at him. I'd never seen it before. He had to have this, he had to have it more than anything in the world. It made no sense, where did it come from, this hunger, what was it? Something had possessed him.

I kneeled behind him, aware this was the last thing I was going to do, I wasn't enjoying it anymore. I looked down. His palms were pressed against the tent floor, like he was praying, and I could his asshole. No way. Disgusting. I sat down away from him and said I didn't want to.

'C'mon. Go.'

'What if I just rub my hand there, like this,' I said, massaging his balls the way I liked it.

‘That’s not as good,’ he complained. He was close to tears now. I wondered where he learned all this stuff from, so I asked him, and he said magazines, and family.

Getting dressed, going outside, the world looked very different. Mom seemed kinder, and I didn’t talk to Ian when she was around. It was important, innately known, that this was a secret, and had to be always, from everyone, between me and Ian forever.

At the end of the week I said goodbye to him as he boarded the bus taking him back to New York City and was glad to see him go. Mom and dad hugged him and I was sure they had to know, and then the three of us walked home together. They asked if we’d gotten along but didn’t want to keep talking about him. When we got home I went up to my room to be alone.