

A Likeable Pest of a Man

Whatever he does requires explanation or apology. When he gets in touch, he's generous, witty, seemingly spontaneous: it's hard not to be glad to hear his voice, like cricket legs, the scraping bow that sings. But you know what's coming. Who can't pick up on a repeating pattern, fleur-de-lis in a blouse, impossible to match in sewing class, seventh grade, the year a boy pushed you down the hill by the parking lot, over and over, your skirt flying, books crashing, grass-stained, you humiliated, late to class because you picked them up, alone, the bell ringing in your ears? Anyway, he apologizes, late, and he means it, and the promise, the hand extended to help you up, wavers in air as long as it takes you to lower your wrist into his palm, the weight steadying you both, mostly him, since your walk did not lilt before he noticed and the hill did not draw you down until he shoved and you'd be fine, really, thanks, if mornings dawned in dogwood and you only knew his name because someone mentioned him once, funny kid, big ears, always sticking his tongue out, twitching if you glanced too long at his ankles or forehead or flickering repentant grin or notes scribbled in the margins of the dated history textbook, he misheard most of the teacher's words or maybe just couldn't spell.