

QUITE SUDDENLY. ALL AT
ONCE. FINALLY. AT LAST.

You are both lying there not sleeping and breathing much too fast. And maybe you are whispering to each other, your heads close together. Maybe your foreheads are touching. Or maybe not. At any rate, you surely are whispering because your parents' bedroom is right on the other side of yours. You can hear your father snoring. You can also hear the TV in the family room and you know your mother is still awake, smoking and watching Johnny Carson. You are whispering because you don't want to get caught awake, thinking the thoughts you are thinking.

Then, you don't know how it happens, but suddenly the sides of your mouths are touching. Maybe you both turned toward each other too quickly. It's hard to say. But, at any rate, you are kissing. Quite suddenly. All at once. Finally. At last.

You whisper to the girl to crawl on top of you, the better to kiss her hard and not crush her thin bird bones. She grinds her nylon underwear against your cotton ones. You slide a finger under the leg elastic, but she pushes your hand away and says "no." You feel her coarse, straight pubic hair, so different from your own before she puts you in your place. Without warning, though, she pulls off her shirt. You take yours off, too, and then there is that delicious moment when her fabulous, fecund breasts first touch yours. It stops your breath. Nipple to nipple. Roundness to roundness. It is a scene you will both like to play over and over in the years to come.

She says, "How do you know what you're doing?"

You want to say, *Duh! I was born to do this.* Instead you say, *I don't know.*

She asks again.

You answer the same way, and also add, *I just do.* You sort of shrug, but she is on top of you, so it's hard to do.

She whispers urgently, "Have you done this before?"

You tell her the truth: *No.*

You try again to get underneath her thick, woven nylon underwear. No lingerie, these. They feel like a bathing suit that been snagged against the rough plaster of a public

pool. Or a Speedo that's been covered in salt water and left to dry in the sun. But once inside, you can feel she's interested.

"Don't," she says.

It's okay, you say. And this time she doesn't stop you.

You continue this way all night long. Finally around 4:00 a.m. she falls asleep. At 5:00 you rise and slip from the bed, take your car and drive all over your suddenly-very-small town looking for someone—anyone—to tell your secret to. Your heart is singing, but your head is in a vice grip, the pressure of non-conformity threatening to crush your skull.

There is no one to tell. You are alone in your deviance.

Before anyone else in your family awakens, you come home and slip back into bed. But she is awake and worried.

"Where were you?" she asks. Her voice sounds young and panicky.

Driving around, you say. You are crying a little.

"I was afraid you were going to tell me I had to go home and I was trying to figure out what I was going to say to my parents when I showed up."

I was afraid you were going to wake up and hate me for making you gay.

She pulls you to her and you finally sleep. When you wake near noon, only the two of you are home. And so you begin again for the first time.

LETTER TO A YOUNG BUTCH

I have a picture of you, two of them actually, when you are 16 years old. In the first photo, you are with Niki, Pip, and Suzie. You are touring with a group of musicians and singers, performing gigs across the US and Canada. The oldest in the group is only 22 (you call him a semi-professional authority figure), but somehow your parents still let you go even though they must, *must*, have the lack of real adult supervision, which is why you are posing for this photo, on your way across the country in one of two converted school buses painted with flat, white house paint, and full of duffle bags, instruments, sound equipment, food,