

First Kiss With Cumberbund

My dress was a watery blue-green raw silk with raised streaks of thread, and I could smell the rye and ginger on his breath, and though I was only 13, I had breasts, was the first (but only the third to get my period because Katherine and Sally was before me), and I remember exactly how I'd taken the long cumberbund of that sexy dress (a wholesale sample from *Junior Miss*, Max Guttman's company, something his fat daughters couldn't wear) and wound it so tightly that my waist was (I swear) only one inch bigger that night than Scarlett O'Hara's and my long page boy hair sleek as Mother's sealskin coat, and I used my key to unlock the side door to the house and we were in the hallway by my mother's gardening sink when he—Charles was/is his name, yes, I do remember—reached for me, and I knew what was coming, yet I was still conscious of his father waiting at the curb in a pinging Olds 88 and of the bass blare of my dad's black-and-white TV two rooms away while Charles and I stood there hardly breathing, and here's what I was thinking: that this was just like a book called *Seventeenth Summer* where the girl whose name I've long forgotten—Marnie or Angie or Laurie—said the boy's lips tasted of ripe strawberries, and that now I'd never have to be sweet-sixteen-and-never-been-kissed (and I didn't know, I didn't have a clue, that someday I'd have a 13 year old daughter and then years later a 13 year old granddaughter and be aware that each was unbelievably fragile though then I felt strong and eager), and his cheek though he was only 14 was rough already, his voice husky, and he was so close that even if I wanted to keep my eyes open to see what was about to happen I didn't because it was all too murky except for the faint arrows of his father's headlights, and I 'I like to tell you I remember how his lips tasted, how his arms felt around my tiny waist, and how grown-up I was, but all I can truly remember is

my silky dress, my hair (yes, me, me. . .), and the rich musky smell in that hall by my mother's cutting sink, her silver pitchers of red roses not yet arranged and able to occupy a deeply gracious place in the world, and that this kiss was only the beginning the first notch on my cumberbund.