

## HE SAID THAT

by Coleman Hough

“You’re not my type – I like petite brunettes,” he said to me as if he were just now noticing I was neither of the two. We were in a noisy bar. I made him repeat it. What? I mean maybe I misheard him. When we first met, I thought he had said “you’re really beautiful” and it wasn’t until after I had blushed and said, “thank you” that he leaned in closer and repeated his question, “Does beer make you full?”

The brush off line – fault line – the crack –the tear – the fissure. I started a collection:

This one guy invited me to spend Christmas with his family.

HE

My mother is going to fall madly in love with you and say to me why can’t you meet a woman like that and marry her?

SHE

Why can’t you?

HE

Oh

His face falls. He stammers.

HE

I like you, but not in that way. I like Asian women – African American.

I am taken by surprise and my eyes get all wet.

HE

Your eyes are so beautiful. Caca Fois. It is a certain kind of green – it means the color of goose shit.

My collection grew and grew:

“I like you too much.”

“I’m in love with your mind.”

“I want to shave all the hair off your body.”

“I want to be celibate for a year.”

“It’s a smell thing.”

“I just don’t want to throw you around the room.”

“I hate my wife. I wish she was dead. You want a beer?”

“You’re misreading signals, sweetie.” My mother has a way of stating the obvious in a painfully fresh tone. One sing songy phrase and she sums up the problem, washing her hands of any early influence over the situation – offering no remedies, only empty platitudes like “Your day will come.”

But maybe my day had already come.

Jimmy Babcock was the first boy I ever loved. In first grade, I chased him down at recess, pinned him against the wall, and kissed him hard on the mouth – the way I had seen my parents kiss after my sister and I had gone to bed.

Mrs. Caldwell, my first grade teacher, a missionary from Africa, told me my heart was black with sin. “Momma, what’s lust?” I asked during bath time. She responded quickly – “luster? lustrous?” She scrubbed my back doing figure 8’s with the wash cloth. “It means light a very bright light a very very - “ “no , LUST. Mrs. Caldwell told me my heart was full of lust. She made me stand in front of the class holding a black heart.” My mother finished bathing me briskly. And it seemed like the very next day I was the new girl in another school.

By fourth grade, I loved Steve Maloney. I knew what lust meant. He sat on my right and hit me in rapid punches on my shoulder, his fist clenched – third finger slightly higher and bent - protruding. It was painful but I liked it. I liked his intensity – his concentration on me, well my shoulder.

" Maybe you're meant to walk this path alone," my mother chirps -  
twenty years later - she and my sister are propped up in bed  
together. My father does a crossword puzzle across the room. I have  
just told them a recent break up story - I am standing teary near the  
window. "Do you watch the news? - read the paper?" My sister asks  
me this and continues, "You haven't had your legs blown off or your  
tongue cut out. You have a nice life."