

DAVID SAPP

## AT SEVENTEEN

WHEN WE WERE SEVENTEEN, she confided in me (announced, really) that she possessed a single ovary, the twin a tragic disappearance—an infant abducted by wolves, a species succumbing to natural selection. This news seemed to be my test—a disclaimer pertaining to any expectation of offspring, as if her asymmetry might ruin my infatuation and I might hold her differently due to prejudice or pity. At seventeen, I did not comprehend its relevance, though her mysterious elements floated in a distant sea just beneath her skin. In love, two arms and two legs offer plenty of affection.

At seventeen, for me, only for me, she posed nearly nude in her panties with the tiny pink bow, reclining like an Ingres odalisque or a Renoir, as she was rather pear-shaped. Contrary to her slight, mischievous smile, her pert, little breasts (two), her nipples (two), and her pointing, wagging fingers admonished my gaze: lewd or adoring. I swear it was the latter, though desire (or the thrill of being desired) was my anticipation.

At seventeen, we aimed at a cliché, impersonating the bohemian, playing at our scenario of artist and model. She played Venus or Madonna on occasion, drawn on paper and replicated on canvas. Too naïve, we were astonished by the lesson—a shift of focus from eros to aesthetics. We fooled around (eventually, tenderly), but line, shade, and likeness were our symmetrical passions. And in this revelation, at seventeen, we expressed a synchronous imprinting and inscribed an enduring image in art and intimacy.

When we were twenty, she called out of the blue. I was home from art school, and she had stayed behind in our home town, creating arrangements for William's Flower Shop. In her trailer, she talked of softball games on warm summer evenings, nursing classes, and the loneliness of living alone. Once more she opened her robe for me, only for me.

I last saw her in a newspaper picture announcing her marriage to a nice fellow from Fredericktown. She later conceived three or four kids with him, and I was happy to hear that her single ovary seemed to manage just fine.