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Sean Johnson

## WHAT WE KNEW

*The Long Hot Boil*, a horror flick about global warming, made Wayne Knutson pee his pants on a field trip in the seventh grade, and we laughed at his expense. We knew that if Becky Kingsley called you “dweeb” in phys. ed., she really meant, *Kiss me ardently by the soda machine between fifth and sixth periods, lover boy*. In junior high school I flunked geography twice, unable to press a grimy finger to the map and say “Sicily,” “Beijing,” “Kalamazoo.” *Big whoop*, I thought, peddling home on my blue Schwinn with baseball cards pinned in the spokes, pausing occasionally to chuck rocks into swimming pools.

Life was the thin stretch of rope we funambulated on. Large quantities of Pixy Stix and a bad case of ADD added up to weekly counseling sessions with Mrs. Schlozenheimer, school nurse and lunch lady. “Eat more greens, less Ju Ju Bees” she’d say, depositing

a multivitamin in my palm with one hand, stroking her fine blond mustache with the other, looking pensive. Puberty hit us like a barrage of spit wads, and our voices cracked in unison. We knew the incriminating evidence of report cards: *A* for *awful*, *D* for *damn fine work*—as the world spun round like a lopsided basketball on some enormous finger, leaving us dizzy.

Days lurched past like tired elephants. We longed for pale blue summer days, sweaty palms and grass stains. We longed for Becky Kingsley in a two piece, or even a one piece. But geography had me lost. I kept waiting for someone to point to the map and say, “You are here,” lines of longitude and latitude wrapping me up like a safety belt. Did we know the Pathway to Enlightenment? We knew a shortcut to 7-Eleven, and seven ways to conjugate the verb *esperar*—to wait. We knew enough math to realize the *X* of desire rarely equaled the *F* of reality. Like equations, we waited for a solution. Mrs. Schlozenheimer shoveled more coleslaw onto our trays,

her thin purple hairnet holding things in place.