

Below is a picture of my parents, probably around 1980. They were nothing like the Hullings couple in my story. But I had friends whose parents were like the Hullings, and I was and am endlessly fascinated by people like them. This story sat around for a long time. I wrote it years ago in Virginia, trying to get at the largely still mysterious (to me) exchange of power that can happen with young girls coming of age. I also wanted to look at the way we mythologize people, whether they are our friends' mothers or best friends or our love interests. But I couldn't get the story quite right for a long time, not until I moved down to Houston and spent a hot, sweaty summer here, staring out the dirty window, wishing for a beach or a boardwalk. Then it came to me—how Beth and Mrs. Hulling had to confront each other. I guess I owe a lot to the relentless heat down here, and also to my parents, for being nothing like the Hullings.

—*Aja Gabel*

