

## Dexterity

Excerpt:

On a Saturday in spring when Ramona was sixteen, she stood with her friends in the bright new heat and watched Ed King move away from her toward Luther Sherrill's pickup truck, sitting fueled and ready in the gas station's driveway. Ed was shirtless. The sun whitened his always pale flesh to a ghostly translucence. But as Ramona watched him, the slide of his shoulder blades, mean as angled implements as they pushed against his skin; as she watched his long, skinny body moving with an anomalously feminine grace toward the pickup, she saw Ed as anything but spectral. She saw him as sensual life itself.

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As he reached for the handle of the passenger door the pickup came to life, its motor exploding richly. From where she stood in the doorway of the station, Ramona heard Luther Sherrill shout, "Let's move it, King. Let's go." He raced the pickup's motor. Old blue smoke plumed from the exhaust and made a brief low sky. But Ed was in no hurry; he knew the moment's pace was his to make. He placed his can of beer on the roof of the truck and turned to speak to her and when he faced her again she saw his slanted smile, the thing in the world she needed most to receive. She stepped toward him. The sun was full and lambent on her face and as she squinted into it she heard him say, with a fine, theatrical threat in his voice, "You stay right there, you hear me? I'm comin' back for you and you better be right there."

"Oh, yeah?" she shouted back. She drew on her cigarette and threw it down on the driveway. "What makes you think I will?" Her voice was low and rich, noticeably so for a girl so small and young. She ground her cigarette into the asphalt as she gave him an extravagant glare. "Who the fuck you think you're talkin' to?" She was his match theatrically, and the source of her energy was the thrill of being owned.