

on fjords and fourteen-year-olds | Jessie Morrison

Jax and I are sitting on the carpeted floor of Katie's bedroom, leaning against the side of her bed. Katie's mom is at work, and we have to be out of the house by five. Jax has a little mole on his neck and shiny hair that hangs over his eyebrows in lanky curtains.

"Hey," he says, unfolding his legs and standing up. "I've got a song you've got to hear."

He walks over to Katie's CD tower and trails a finger down the titles.

"You heard of the Allman Brothers?"

I hadn't.

"Oh yeah," I say, too quickly. "I love them."

"Yeah," he says. "I'm really into classic rock."

I smile up at him, wide-eyed and available, as instructed by *YM* magazine.

Katie is downstairs with Jax's friend T.J. She was thinking about letting him go to third, and I'm wondering if he is unbuttoning her pants right now. Up here on the second floor, Jax has opened the window and lit some incense. We've had a bunch of wine coolers, and he has pot in a tiny Ziplock baggie, like a sandwich bag for one of my old Barbies.

"You smoke?" he asks.

I'm the same age as he is, fourteen, so why do I feel so naïve? For just a moment, I wish I was still in eighth grade. I'm scared, and I think about my parents.

"Sure," I finally say.

I watch him roll the pot into a thin paper joint. He lights one end and passes it to me.

Our eyes are closed, and our shoulders are touching.

"Listen to that slide guitar," says Jax. "This is so much better than that conformist commercialist Top 40 crap."

I wonder, where did all this knowledge come from?

"Do you like school?" He asks.

Actually, I do. I get good grades and I'm in the honors track.

"Eh, it's okay." General ennui: usually a failsafe response.

"I can't wait until I'm sixteen so I can drop out."

Drop out! What will his parents say? Does he even *have* parents?

"I don't buy into the hierarchical fascism of high school. Teachers telling you what to read, how to dress, what to believe. Let me ask you something: what's two plus two?"

I hesitate. "Four?"

Jax exhales in exasperation, so that the escaping air blows his hair straight out from his forehead.

"Maybe. But maybe not. Everything we've ever learned is just something a teacher told us. How do we know they're right?"

"Well—I don't know. I mean, some things are just true. Like math stuff, and science. Facts."

Jax shrugs. "I don't believe in facts," he says, his eyes obscured by that curtain of hair.

"What are you going to do when you drop out?" I ask.

"Who knows? Follow a band. Move to Norway. Do you know it's one of the most prosperous countries in the world? Norwegians use the Scandinavian Welfare Model, and everyone has health care. They also have one of the most environmentally aware societies in the world."

"And fjords."

He looks at me, thunderstruck.

"Yes," he says slowly. "And fjords."

He touches my cheek and moves in, slowly. I don't know what other first kisses are like, but I think mine, with this boy who is so wise and soft-lipped, rates high.

Soon, his urgent fingers creep under the bottom of my shirt. Why do I think of my parents? "Come on," he hisses, his breath hot. But how do I tell him I'm not ready without sounding like some hopeless rube? Downstairs, Katie, with her clothes from Lincoln Park boutiques, with her eyeliner and her Louis Vuitton handbags, is probably shirtless, and T.J. is unhooking her lacy Victoria's Secret bra—the type of undergarment that my mother would never even *consider* letting me wear—while I'm here trying to wrestle the bottom of my shirt away from Jax's grasping hands and goddammit, I'm not ready.

A fjord is a long, narrow inlet carved out of a mountain by a glacier. The glacier makes its cuts by pressing and pressing, keeping that pressure on until even the mountain gives, and ancient stones that seem impervious get worn to nothing.

But I'm only fourteen, and fjords are as old as the world. They've given into the push, but I don't have to.

So I push him off me and leave the room.