

## The Prairie Light Review

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Volume 17

Number 1 *HERE IT IS IN BLACK AND WHITE...*

Article 10

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Fall 12-1-1996

### Men's Club

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#### Recommended Citation

McGrath, David (1996) "Men's Club," *The Prairie Light Review*: Vol. 17 : No. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol17/iss1/10>

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## **Men's Club**

By David McGrath

I was thirteen and infatuated with Debbie Strong. Her father was a dentist which seemed reason enough to me for her glistening smile, her flawless skin, and her ever-changing array of stylish clothes.

At thirteen I hadn't begun dating, and Debbie wasn't exactly my girlfriend. On warm, portentous evenings toward the end of the school year, I would put on clean socks, comb my hair, and then ride the two miles to the park on my bicycle. Once there, I'd lean the bike against the baseball backstop and saunter over to the water fountain, where I would stand for minutes, sometimes hours, but with careful, crafted, seeming purposelessness. And then she would appear.

There would be that awkward first moment, for I was painfully, almost clinically shy. But she'd take over the conversation as I looked at the grass, scuffing a place in the turf with my shoe, every so often stealing a glance at her diamond smile glistening in June's setting sun. And then she'd ask me for a ride.

This is what I waited for, was something I could do. She would sit sideways on the crossbar, facing forward, giving me relief from her intensity (or was it my intensity?). Both of my arms would be around her, but not quite touching her, with my hands gripping the handlebars. And I would peddle around the park, taking seriously the responsibility of my precious cargo, as she'd wave at other girls she knew, while my face and my senses were filled with the fragrance of her soft, brown hair, and my juvenile mind addled by her ease and her inscrutability.

On one of these evenings I saw my best friend Tom, as Debbie and I cycled past the water fountain on our first revolution, and he waved hello and looked surprised. I first supposed it was because I had not told him about my after-supper rendezvous; but at school the next day, talking with him, I learned that it was because he had been there on his bicycle, for the same circuitous journeys of romance which he had thought he himself had shared exclusively with Debbie.

In quick, schoolboy fashion, our "manly" loyalties taking precedence, Debbie was dissected and dismissed, psychoanalyzed and castigated as one who was interested in neither one of us, but only in the affirmation of her femininity and allure, which our attentions seemed to provide (all of this discussed in schoolboy language, of course).

We swore to each other that we'd never succumb to her glittering wiles again. I kept my oath, though I ached to break it. And to this day, I have my suspicions about Tom.