The first time I saw it, she was swinging over the woodchips and fresh fallen leaves on the grade school playground. A girl, of course it had to be a girl, with pale legs and blonde braids falling in defeated pigtails down her back. Just then she could be blameless like no boisterous boy could have still been, she could be just hiccupping giggles and a smile bared wide so it showed her gums vibrant like watermelon bubblicious.

And then one night packed into a student section sweltering in an Indian Summer, she led us in our cheers, with her arms up, and I saw how dark her underarms seemed, and I knew then I hadn’t seen what I thought I’d seen. I must have been mistaken, it wasn’t her that could hold on to what she’d had before.

Then after I graduated, I moved to LA, and it was seventy something Christmas Eve and the day before Thanksgiving and it was everywhere, like you might have it too, stainless in the gaze of the strangers with long blonde hair and natural tans and high heels on the sidewalk day after day without missing a step.

But those were confusing times. You could talk for hours, date for months before she’d let you see it. But it was there, even if it came into conversation in a blank stare. Then she would seem as immaculately vacant as a pornstar’s bleached asshole. Plastic and peroxide can be beguiling that way, but I attribute it more to practice than a particularly good brand of concealer.

And then I was living on the Upper West Side, trying to walk past a Strawberry Fields Memorial encased in ice without slipping on the irony, and I met her. She wore a scarf in a Central Park waiting for a thaw, and talked about Descartes and Vermeer and thought Final Fantasy VIII’s visuals could never top VII’s storyline.

And she made me laugh one time, poking me in the side as we were waiting in a bodega, silently letting me in on the argument two old Puerto Rican men were having about “wee holes” that made them sound like competitive pedophiles instead of retiree’s playing Wii Golf.

And we went home, maybe the third time out in the overstuffed armchair by the window was up in my climbing warmth of March to it, taxi’s hitting the same potholes over and over.

And she was a wonderful something Christmas Eve and the day before Thanksgiving and it was everywhere, like you might have it too, stainless in the gaze of the strangers with long blonde hair and natural tans and high heels on the sidewalk day after day without missing a step.

I sighed and she asked why one to have no rotten spots no matter how good it is. Like maybe she had been holding something she had before she met me.

“But no-one’s perfect. That’s human,” she said.

“I know. I mean, intellectually, I know. I mean to the myth, sometimes, I guess. To the perfect stranger still, once you get her.”

The window was up in my armchair by the window was up in my climbing warmth of March to it, taxi’s hitting the same potholes over and over.

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stranger

swinging over the woodchips

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ers, with her arms up, and I saw

then I hadn't seen what

one to have no rotten spots no matter how deep the worm burrowed.

Like maybe she had been holding onto something all this time,

“But no-one’s perfect. That’s like the oldest adage there is.”

“I know. I mean, intellectually, I know. But it’s nice to hold on
to the myth, sometimes, I guess. That somewhere they’re still there, the
perfect stranger still, once you get to know them.”

The window was up in my apartment and the air had the clean
climbing warmth of March to it, even in the city, even with the rows of
taxi’s hitting the same potholes over and over down the block.

And she was a wonderful stillness in my arms.

“Wait,” she said, turning her head back so the breath of her

words was at my lips,

“... You thought it was you, didn’t you?”