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Forum

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The Virgin Mary Syndrome

by Robert J. O'Connell

“Boys are bad, girls are good” I heard this mantra said thousands of times by both black and blue nuns during my school days. Some how I came to believe them. All through high school I knew I was bad because of all of the lustful musings I had during class. Most of the time I had to keep my Geography book on my lap so that sister and the rest of the class could not see my excitement. Of course most of the boys kept their books there too. My class was relatively small, thirty three individuals, only eleven of which were of the female persuasion. I loved and lusted after them all. Looking back on it, I know that the class contained the expected distribution of conventional female charm, but it didn't matter to me, as I found some attribute to admire in each of them. One had wonderful cheek bones, another great hair, another was very pretty, and still another had a great figure. Although I have to say it was sometimes hard to tell in the school uniform they were all required to wear. But blue jumpers and white blouses still do it for me.

Through the years of school I never approached any of them, convinced as I was that it would be wrong to try to impose my badness on their goodness. This Virgin Mary complex remained very strong for many years. It was a great surprise to me many years latter to discover that some good girls just wanted to have fun too. Further, most of the things I imagined doing with them were not new and horrible inventions of mine but had been done over and over again by humans, perhaps even by our own parents. I guess this is why I was required to take all the kids to the Grand Movie House for the double feature each Saturday afternoon. And if we stopped on the way home to go swimming for a few hours at the Burnett Park pool, no one was in trouble. And the family continued to grow.

Many years latter I was asked by Claire, one of the girls that had been in my class, now grown with her own family, why I never asked any of them out. I was shocked to learn that my qualification in this area had ever been discussed by them. But I explained that my reticence was do to several factors in addition to my badness there was the little matter of poverty, no car, and unbearable shyness. She was kind enough to accept this and then crushed me with the statement that Eileen, the girl at the top of my list, had always wanted to go out with me. I had three sisters so I did feel quite comfortable in a group of several girls, but when we were one-on-one I fell in to extreme protective mode mostly because of these other feelings. Every female of a certain age, not related to me was viewed this way automatically.

I did get to second base once though. Mary LaRosa was the daughter of one of the widows in our Project. She was stunning, like her mother and sister and quite healthy. Because of this she was routinely teased about wearing falsies by both the girls and guys in our group. I did not do this, as I had analyzed the physics of the situation over many hours of observation and knew when I saw a lack of enhancement. Tissue paper does not move in the same way as flesh. In exasperation one day in the back seat of a '39 coupe parked in the Court after a particularly intense bout of teasing I was invited to explore a little and announce the veracity of her claim. This I was pleased to do and happy to announce over and over again that they were real. I hoped after this that we would have a new relationship but soon realized that I was picked for this honor because I was the least aggressive of the guys in the group, most of who were always quite overt in trying to express their badness. In any case it did earn me some credits with the group but Mary and I remained friends only

But a curious thing happened as I became older and more worldly. Females stopped eliciting my usual automatic response and became merely other human individuals. But every so often a female throws a switch somewhere deep in the psyche and a glimpse of ankle or a new hairdo forces a shift in perception and I jump directly into Virgin Mary mode again. And I hear again the mantra recited by Sister Cecilia, my favorite blue nun. I am amused to wonder what her thoughts would have been if she had known what I thought about her at the time. Or, perhaps she did and had to keep reminding me that “Boys are bad, girls are good”.

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