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The Outsiders Constance Pultz

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Constance Pultz

THE OUTSIDERS

At Christmas there are always the aunts, whose names we forget between seasons. Abigail? Millicent? Hermione? There is seldom an uncle, rarely a Charles or a Frederick or a Henry to blow cigar smoke into our faces and unhitch their belts in a way our mother says no gentleman would wish to do.

Uncles never remember our birthdays. Aunts send us valentines marked Guess Who? Uncles pay attention to their watches. Aunts do needlework and dress up in tight shoes and frilly blouses. Uncles pretend we are boys and that they do not know us. Aunts nuzzle our cheeks and slip dollar bills into our palms.

We forget the aunts' names, but the uncles are Charles and Henry and Frederick. When they do not come to Christmas dinner we tell our friends they are hunting deer in the bitter cold of the Maine woods. When our birthdays come and go we say they are on safari.

We dream over the Christmas pudding, trying not to remember that once we stood in the dark of an upstairs window, watching the uncles slip silently toward the shadowed doorways of a street that is never mentioned.