

Maybe it all started when I got kicked out of the women's powder room at the Masonic Lodge. I was, I don't know, four or six—old enough to be love-struck with my oldest sister's friends and young enough to be more or less invisible to them. I'd play quietly in the corner and sneak looks as these young women applied fresh lipstick, as they adjusted their bras just so and rolled pale stockings into the dark region between their pale legs. Sometimes I wouldn't even have to look—I'd just close my eyes and breathe in their perfume, a scent as beautiful as their orchid corsages.

“Hey—what's *he* doing in here?” one woman I was in love with said, whereupon I was scooted out of the women's powder room forever.

The door shut behind me with a little whoosh of perfumed air, and I slowly scuffed my way downstairs to the pool room, which just then happened to be empty. I was just above eye level with the huge mahogany pool table, and I rolled a few balls around the green baize—angrily at first, and then with building interest. The solid weight of the table, the sea of green cloth, the click of the brightly-colored balls, the soft *thunk* of the rails, the surprising angles—all of it was mesmerizing. This was, I realized, a beautiful game.

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