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CANTALOUPE ISLAND

It drove Oliver bananas when his sister used his washcloth; the last time he found his face covered with black streaks, which only made sense when he saw Melissa heading out the door with Reno, her eyes dark with mascara. Now he folded the dampened rag in half, then again, smoothed it down just-so next to Melissa's sink, and grabbed a fresh one. As he washed his face, Oliver tried to ignore the detritus of cotton tubes, parabolic reflectors, tweezers, paint brushes, curling iron, hair rollers and the rest of Melissa's beautification-industrial-complex tossed around like post-Godzilla Tokyo. He scrubbed the washcloth up and down, left to right, up and down, imagining his fear ladder; the lowest rung, stable; the next one, a little creaky—he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Save some skin for tomorrow, okay?" his mom said. She had his saxophone case and her car keys. "Go on and get your books, you're late."

He wasn't late. He couldn't be late if he tried.

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Right at the bell Oliver took his seat in the front row of the Pacific Coast High School jazz orchestra, opened his case, and pried the segments of his alto saxophone from their crèche cradle. Emily Mink was already there to his right, sax assembled, eyes half-closed, chewing her lip, looking at her music, thinking about god-knows. She was thin and pale, with lipstick that matched her pink cheeks, and straight, luminous hair that went on forever. *Supersax*, the boys called her. (Julian, first trumpet, claimed that her perfect white teeth were fake, and that she'd take them out before she'd go for your *spit valve*, by which he did not mean kissing.) Oliver lined up the gooseneck of his alto, sneaking looks at Emily moistening her reed. Unbelievably, they'd gone out once; two months ago, the winter formal . . .