

0. **Grace:** I was 14 years old

1. **Chorus:** I was 14 years old

2. **Grace:** a young, slender girl with a short pixie haircut who congregated after school with a group of friends in Washington Heights, New York City

3. **Chorus:** New York City/ New York City/ New York City/ New York City/

4. **Grace:** at “the steps”—steep gray concrete steps linking two neighborhoods: the lush, green, tree-blooming, up-on-the-hill Pinehurst Avenue section and the dry, commercial-store-lined 181st street down below.

5. **Chorus:** humming...

5. **Grace:** That’s where my sister and I lived in an apartment with our immigrant parents and grandmother, a view of the George Washington Bridge and the slowly moving Hudson River in our backyard. Nestled at each stair landing were enclaves of benches for those who needed a breather as they made the long and arduous trek to the top. But for a high-spirited young lady with all of life’s possibilities looming before her, bounding up and down the stone stairway was a breeze. I was the fastest runner in my public school, even beating out the boys, though for the past two years I could feel my interest in the opposite sex changing.

...chorus/ end of humming

6. **Grace:** Richie,

7. **Chorus:** Richie

8. **Grace:** a very tall, handsome, sandy-haired young man with the clearest brown eyes, two years older than I was, would occasionally hang out with us, and I felt this incredible urge to win his attention—a desire to bump into him to get him to notice me. I had an innate sense of the power of my own budding sexuality and a teenager’s trust in surrendering to what was dark and mysterious—not worrying about consequences—coupled with a belief in the incorruptibility of innocence. I had heard rumors that 4. **Grace:** Richie, 5. **Chorus:** Richie was a bad boy, smoking, playing hooky, and getting into all kinds of trouble in high school, but I knew that whatever he had experienced before meeting me would change. And I was right.

9. **Grace:** One night

10. **Chorus:** One night

11. **Chorus:** humming...

11. **Grace:** at a party, Richie,

12. **Chorus:** Richie

13. **Grace:** having drunk too much, became sick, and, retching over the toilet bowl, he admitted to feeling a mutual attraction. I, who don’t drink at all, clearly understood the import of his response. A bond was sealed that was to last for two years. A relationship of intense beauty and emotional anarchy was formed, waged by teenagers in the vortex of “romantic love,” where infatuation, anger, and jealousy crack through the shell of invincibility and time is forever-after. We were inseparable—a couple of kids who believed that we could build a cocoon around our lives that could last for an eternity.

...chorus/ end of humming

14. **Grace:** I would accompany Richie,

15. **Chorus:** Richie

16. **Grace:** on his after-school job delivering clothes for a dry cleaner's, walking up and down local city blocks, waiting on street corners in the heat and cold while he delivered the neatly pressed clothes on hangers wrapped in plastic. While we walked we talked about everyday, mundane activities. We attended different high schools: I went to one that specialized in art and music, he went to one locally—a star of the swimming team. Primarily we were interested in the pleasure of being close to each other. The hypnotic, captivating excitement of upcoming sensual contact hovered over all our activities—particularly on those afternoons when no one was home and I would go to his apartment, where we probed the topography of unknown and unexplored bodily terrains.

First love is the most magical, deliciously exquisite, and seductive period of one's life, when the world actually becomes luminous without the need of the sun or the moon.

17. **Grace:** Richie,

18. **Chorus:** Richie

19. **Grace:** was never a bad boy, and I was not the “bad seed” that my mother once called me. Together we felt secure and protected, buoyed by our ability to connect and blot out everything and everyone else.

20. **Chorus** humming...

20. **Grace:** Because of the fervor of our intimacy, which was considered to be unhealthy, our worried families eventually decided that it was important that we be separated, and

21. **Grace:** Richie,

22. **Chorus:** Richie

23. **Grace:** was sent to school in Tucson, Arizona, a world away from New York City.

Ultimately, passions drain, other distractions and people come into our lives, and communication fades. Years later, once I got a computer, we were back in touch. He now had a wife and children and I a husband. We saw each other again when I was visiting a very close friend in California who was ill with AIDS, and we sat on a rock, meeting on the opposite coast from where we began our friendship, and talked and talked, the sensitivity of his presence still giving me solace.

24. **...Chorus** end of humming

22. **Grace:** Richie,

23. **Chorus:** Richie

24. **Grace:** died unexpectedly a few years later from a heart attack, but the memory and poetry of our dramatic youthful liaison is permanently inscribed in my heart, which has never capitulated to anyone else with the same abandon.

25. **Chorus** humming end sequence