Strange Ways of Kissing Since the handshake and formal introduction Sunday morning, the question of Mr. Snyder's blindness had overwhelmed Charlie. It wasn't as though Mr. Snyder had a sinister sort of milky film over his irises as you often see in movies. It was a blank stare, through you, meant for some distant point that troubled Charlie. He understood, of course, that a blind man must point his head one way, and that it's of no social consequence to a conversation which way the head of a blind man is pointed. Nonetheless, an imaginative boy of 12, Charlie began to construct detailed theories as to why Mr. Snyder looked where he looked. He knew that Mr. Snyder had been in the army during World War II. And so, as one might expect, the first imagining had to do with warfare. He visualized an enemy capturing Mr. Snyder. They would have wanted information. After fruitless interrogations they eventually lay Mr. Snyder down in what looked to Charlie very much like a dentist's chair, clamped his eyes open, and poured in sizzling, steaming poison. Charlie didn't like this version. Mr. Snyder was a nice man, a friend of his mother's, and the idea that his eyes had been tortured out of him disturbed the image of Mr. Snyder lounging and drinking iced tea with Charlie's mother on the patio. Charlie considered the possibility that a simple disease had managed to blind Mr. Snyder. Germs that had been resting on a fallen paper cup may have found their way into Mr. Snyder's mouth. They must have made their way north, to his brain. Eventually, they plunged into his eyes and ruined them. "Yes," Charlie thought, "but how boring. Even if the vendor dropped the cup on the ground, he wouldn't have known he was blinding someone. It must be something else, something with more of a story." In his final theory, Charlie stopped for a moment to consider the image of Mr. Snyder. Mr. Snyder would stare away into the distance when he spoke instead of looking straight at the person he was talking to. Charlie tried to imagine what could cause this in a person when his mother came out into the garden. There was some connection, he thought, between the two. "If I lost something I cared about so much," Charlie thought, "maybe I wouldn't be able to look at anything around me. Maybe I would only be able to look to the distance, because I was always waiting for her to come back." Charlie thought about what could be so important, and he concluded that only losing his mother, whom he loved more than anything else, could cause such an affliction. He arrived at the realization nearly without the thought process. It became like gravity. This is what Charlie came to believe. Charlie, his mother Susan, and his father Tom, all lived outside a small town called Wiscasette, in Maine. The few houses in this patch of wilderness share access to the Atlantic. The neighbors, removed from the rest of society as they were, often socialized in walks to and from the ocean, after dinner. The driveways of the houses wound like tributaries, eventually meeting the red clay road, Brugen Street, which leads directly to the Atlantic. The area ought to have been more popular, considering the sprawling beach and rock formations and the general rugged northern air of the place. However, the beach remained unkempt and the houses sparse due to the obstinate wood that wove itself into immovable knots. Over the years, developers who ventured into the area rarely succeeded in clearing enough land to build a foundation. One such developer, after damaging his backhoe on a stub-