

Like New Houses Settling

Dressed in our blue trousers and our white polo shirts
we stood bashfully in two lines while we waited for church
always two lines
Had it ever been quiet you probably could have heard our knees and ankles crackle
like new houses settling on their foundations
But thankfully it was never quiet

We weren't Catholic
but when my dad left we had to move
Mom said we can pretend to be Catholic or I can go that school with no windows
I said I would do my best to pretend
I don't think you were Catholic either
but I knew it wasn't polite to ask
so I didn't

My shirt was too big
Mom found it at the school's summer yard sale
It hung loosely around my shoulders
begging me to fill it
I hated that shirt
Mrs. Vanderczyk said we weren't supposed to hate things
but I hated Mrs. Vanderczyk so it was all very confusing

One day in gym class I accidentally held your hand
We were playing capture the flag and I rescued you from jail
My brother said that it didn't count
but to me it did
My hand was sweaty
Yours was too so I think it was okay

I used to believe you were too good for this place
that the stench somehow couldn't stick to you
In fact I was sure of it
But then your mother overdosed and everything changed
You cried at the visitation and your cheap mascara ran like gutter water
I think it was the first time you ever stood upwind

My mom and I started bringing dinner to your house on Tuesdays
Your dad would drink half of a bottle of wine and cry
we got to eat TV-dinners in your room
You told me you felt bad for hating your mom
for dying
I told you I hated Mrs. Vanderczyk
You laughed
so we sat on opposite sides of your twin-sized bed
hating things together

A Hotel Bed

Unable to sleep despite the early hour and your shared evening
you lie awake in a hotel bed
watching the sunrise undress the virgin snowfall
You feel guilty
she wasn't yours to undress
she may not be someone else's
but she certainly wasn't yours

With the anesthetic of whiskey and rebellion long gone
the absence on your hand burns
like a soldier's leg forgotten overseas
Over and over you hear the ping of metal against hardwood
softened by the denim of a back pocket
a muted gavel falling

You want to roll over and look at her but you're terrified of what you may see
a mother's nose
a father's eyes
features previously masked by a short skirt and booze

I didn't mean for it to happen
It sounds hollow in your head already
and it will rattle even emptier when she reads it in a text two days from now
We can still be friends
will be her Abilenian reply
But after it's all said and done she won't sleep for a week
and you'll donate 300 dollars to a strip club on Hennepin and 6th

You'll see each other again
on accident of course
you'll hug and say hello
but your Chinese food will be getting cold
and she'll be late for a meeting
so you'll part ways like you should have from the start

The Man Outside the Arena

I woke up with a dream of writing a novel
but by noon I cut it to a short story
and by dinner I pared it down to a poem
and then eventually I gave up and just tweeted it

It could have been my breakthrough
my masterpiece
a wonderful idea that instead I distilled into 140 characters
a vision I traded for vibrations
instant gratification in my front right pocket

I wish I could blame my luck
but I was born a healthy white male

And now I can't blame my generation
a Millennial is the 6th richest man in the world

I can't even blame my parents
they didn't adorn me with trophies nor smack me with a wooden spoon

I can only blame myself
my ego
my crippling fear of not being liked
so crippling in fact that I'd rather create nothing
fluff
bullshit
than create something that someone might not get

Marred by dust and sweat and blood
Roosevelt stares at me from inside the arena
I cannot meet his gaze
I look down at my phone
waiting for it to light up and save me