

## More North than My Father in the Rain

My eyes ache, like swimming with them open,  
but I've been pulling them shut all day.  
Through the window in my kitchen,  
I watch the wind bat at a leaning pine,  
the green needles thick with rain,  
and think of my father,  
bent over boxes in late August heat,  
sweat dripping from his nose,  
preparing for his great migration south.

When I was eight, I stood at first base—  
the air clear and blue,  
my memory faded almost to white from the heat—  
and watched the baseball roll past me out of bounds.  
I heard the angry swell of parents' voices,  
but my obligation was unclear.  
I looked for my father in the stands,  
but my eyes refused to find him,  
afraid of finding disappointment.

I pinch the bridge of my nose again,  
close my eyes and pull down  
and feel what he must feel  
when he makes that exact gesture,  
when his eyes ache, like mine do.

When I was nine I stood in the chill morning,  
the browns of early autumn faded by mist,  
and listened to the deep voices of my father's friends,  
standing in a loose circle, sipping coffee,  
and planning a day of fishing.  
Their words lapped at my ears without meaning.  
I couldn't yet speak their language,  
the hard language of men,  
or bear the harsh taste of their drink.

We take our coffee the same now, my father and I—  
strong, sugar, cream, and often—  
but the colder rain against the window  
and the whipping, leaning pine  
remind me of the distance still between us,  
and my eyes still are aching.

His eyes still are burning in my memory—  
their angle steep as he walked me,  
ten years old and trembling,  
to the store's security office—  
the embarrassment and anger and, I knew,  
disappointment reducing me.  
The toy in my pocket boiled like spilled coffee.  
We kept this as a secret between us—cold and silent—  
and I'm still not sure which of us it protected.

I rest my head in my hand—  
two fingers against my cheek,  
two folded beneath my lips,  
my thumb supporting my chin—  
a pose I stole from him as he reclined in early evening,  
the blue light of the television jumping on his glasses.

When I was twelve, I stepped on a nail,  
crouching and jumping beneath the deck,  
the hot red of its rusted end  
ripping into the exact middle of my right foot.  
My father cleaned the wound, his hands strong around my ankle,  
covered it, and drove me in the backseat to the doctor.  
Five years later, in the woods in our back yard,  
he stepped on the jagged remains of a sapling trunk  
in the exact middle of his right foot.

Five years ago, in a sports club in Germany,  
we drank *Görs Moss* from a common mug,  
its cold sweetness covering its potency,  
the hard Bavarian tongue of the players  
singing their victory as they swayed side to side.  
My father chanted with them, his face red with drink and smiling,  
passed the mug to me when it came, and pushed and pulled me sideways.

The pine tree outside my kitchen window  
sways back and forth, fighting the wind,  
its needles clinging to the rain.  
I rub my eyes again, fighting the urge to keep them closed,  
and cling to the aches and movements that connect us.

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