

## When I Was Five

**Ceallan Hunter**

Dog hair, wet feet, and hallway encounters made my knees burn from grass stains. Mud tracked into the back rooms, and the tiled floors had scuffs from chairs. There was a warmth in the air that mixed with the growing number of gnats around the fruit bowl. These days, I was later told, were the days when things became unfrozen, when lost things became found, and when floods swarmed basements and brought up forgotten memories. These days were the days when coats were wrapped around waists, and mud collected on shoes and rugs. When earthquakes shook the house, rattled windows, brought up dust, and made dogs bark. The earthquakes were never bad; they lasted long at times, but we got through them, stood outside within them, and watched them, looking at the sunrise and the distant trees.

“There wasn’t a fence,” my mom has told me. This wasn’t entirely true. We had one, we just never used it. Fences didn’t make sense for us; despite the large black dog and the medium-large dog, the fence gate stayed open, slowly sinking into the grassy hill while occupants spilled into the tall grass fields or walked towards the hilltop patch of edible purple flowers. This was where the sun never went away, not a single cloud appeared, and the grass was warm to the touch. The fence wasn’t imaginary. It wrapped around the deck and the freshly cut grass, but could never fit around the extent of the fields that stretched into the

far and old woods. I lived under a raspberry bush, my face shielded from the harsh sun in those southern summer days. I laid under the bush so only my feet could be seen sticking out from the greenery. I laid in sunlight and sometimes in moonlight, my face never surfacing, my arms and legs cut up from the thorny underbrush, and the curls set on top of my hair catching on the brambles, leaving strains. Crickets hummed, fireflies danced, and fingers were bloodied and bruised. Snails were sometimes smushed underfoot, splinters got stuck in arms, and clothes hung from lines, getting caught in the wind and blown off. They were blown to the parts of the yard where things lost their way and never came back, or got caught up in attractions and didn't release themselves. They were blown to the parts of the yard where I could find myself for hours without being found—not when I didn't want to be.

I have memories of the tarps. I was pulled on tarps with crunchy orange and red leaves letting me hide below them, with my stuffed triceratops under my arm soon to be lost, then found, while I could hear my sister breathing heavily. Hiding there had become somewhat of a tradition, after the raking had been done—not by me—and the sweaters had been zipped down. I kept my breath still and my eyes open, looking up at the large blue sky and bare tree branches. These days, the air was crisp and the nights were longer, and I would fall asleep on the hard floor. My large dog would sleep beside me, with large grunts I found comforting. These days were when my sister began to leave for hours out of the day, gone in the early mornings to return in the late afternoons with a large smile as she bounded from the yellow vehicle. I would run toward the fast yellow streak as it approached, my bare feet a blur. These days my mom would either type on the computer or also leave, and if she left she would come back tired, her back slumped over. These days I would watch my dad make food and sit on the kitchen floor with bare legs, or gather on the front lawn in my skeleton pants, waiting for my sister to return and get off that yellow thing. My dad would stand with me most times. Sometimes he would read to me, sharing both short and long stories from his own mind, until my sister came back with her own stories. She would talk about big fancy words, and big fancy ideas I had never heard of, though she said I was going to. She would write on paper with bright colors, in handwriting that started to look like my mom's.

Cold days never lasted too long, and snow never lasted long at

all. Thus, when we did have snow, we spent all our time out in it. We were wrapped in scarves and coats so thick that we could barely move when we finally stepped outside. On the days when we got too tired and weren't ready to return to the wood stove in the confines of the living room, we sat in the snow, and looked at the world suddenly and momentarily white. There were rock formations covered in ice, and trees' skeletal hands reaching out with white fingertips. Clouds passed overhead, and sometimes sunlight splayed out, making everything glitter and shine, and the snow didn't seem so cold. It was silent at times. We never got many visitors this time of year. We never got many visits from family I mean, or so my mom would say when she thought I wasn't listening. I know now why, and for a while I didn't recall this. Now, I can think of what was bare at this time, and I can barely sense the resentment shrouded in smiles and nods for me and my sister to open our presents.

It all became a part of everyone who ever lived here and anyone who ever spent a short amount of time here. The languid ties of each year melted and met the next, never abruptly or sharply. People came and went, and left parts of themselves here, or forgot to take all of themselves from here. Illusions and clouds now obscure most ideas and memories. Time now blankets old thoughts and rumors, and hides what happened, or what we thought happened. Now, the words on the tongue of a page are all that remains, where sometimes old photos are drudged up and compared and rummaged through. And when this happens, the cloud parts slightly, and something that was in the back of your head comes a little closer. But the cloud soon will cover itself back up and hide something that you thought would never leave, and then you are the stranger to the moment that was once so vital to you. Then, there's a part of you that you can't place, that you can't entirely picture, and is now suddenly far away, blurry to your eyes.

**Ceallan Hunter** is a junior at UND studying English and photography. She enjoys reading, writing, traveling, and backpacking. She has always had a love for writing and wants to continue a career in this field. She writes poetry, nonfiction, and fiction, and she tries to incorporate nature writing whenever she can.