

Always the Weight

Darwyn Jones

“I’m going for a walk.”

You say it like it was normal, like you just thought of it. Go to Maple Street and stand in front of the weedy graveled lot wedged between the McIntyre’s house and the Parker’s trailer. Stand at the ditch and flip bottle caps between your thumb and pointer finger. Try to sail them like Frisbees. You’ve thrown hundreds of them into the empty lot, aiming toward a wrapper, a rock, a dirt patch. Be conscious of the road; constantly watch for your brother, Jerry, to turn the corner. He’ll come fifteen, maybe thirty minutes later. He’s almost seventeen, drives the car on errands for Mom, has muscles spread on his arms and is way bigger than you.

When someone is bigger and wants to lie on top of you, they will. In the middle of the night when you’re sleeping under afghans crocheted by Mom, in the middle of the day when cartoons are interrupted and you have to take a walk, or early in the morning when the house is still whispering—they will lie on you.

When you are really young, like five or six, you don’t fight because it’s someone you love, someone who loves you, someone who notices you. You accept the hand-me-down toy or the cool denim jacket and you try not to cry. When you are eight or nine, you don’t fight because he twists your arm or holds his fist up ready to punch you or, and this is what scares you, he tells you Mom could get hurt. When you’re twelve, you’ve forgotten that fighting is a choice.

Let your body relax; it’s the sacrifice. You escape in other ways. As soon as he slips into bed or pulls you behind thick brush or pushes you through the open window of an empty house, let your mind start running. Go to the middle of Fort Davidson. Lie in the grass, let one ear feel the cold flesh of the ground and the other listen for a sound to focus on; wind sweeping through leaves, squirrels chattering, acorns dropping.

Open your eyes and watch a ladybug tumble through blades of grass or look to the center of the Fort where the large oak stretches and explodes into the sky. Stay in the Fort as long as you can.

Some things will bring you back. His weight will push your face into the mattress, or the dirt, or the wooden floor, and you won't get any air. The Fort fades away and you notice. Push your body up. He won't let you go, but he'll adjust. When you catch your breath, run again. Pain splices itself into the Fort when it is too sharp or too quick. You hear yourself cry and feel the tears and the weight.

Always the weight.

The longer it goes, the more you'll be pulled from the Fort. Push yourself further. Climb Pilot Knob Mountain, stand on the cliff and look over the entire valley. Let your eyes follow the 'S' curve of Highway 21 that cuddles Arcadia, Ironton and Pilot Knob. Look for the things that you know—Family Market (where you buy candy with the dollar that Mom gives you on Thursdays), Iron County Library (three more books to read before you get the Summer Reading Ribbon), Arcadia Valley Elementary (another escape). With practice, you'll leap to the top of the mountain just by hearing Jerry's laugh coming down the stairs or knowing he'll be home when you get off the bus. Running lets you miss out on things—things you don't want to see, things you don't want to feel, things you don't want to admit. But, it pulls the good with the bad. You don't know how much you've missed. You never will.

Running fixes things. When your brother, Eddie, opens the basement door and Jerry shouts, "Get out of here," and throws a pillow—even though you saw Eddie's confused face, even though the two of you locked eyes, even though you watched Eddie's jaw clench and saw his chest take in a deep breath, even though you watched his head drop before he backed out of the door and pulled the door closed—you know Eddie wasn't there. It never happened. If it had, he would have helped you.

You run because brothers don't hurt brothers.