

The Art Supply Room

2:45 p.m.
religious class at
the Catholic School
seventh grade
a Wednesday
religious instruction
thou shalt not...
a man in black with
a white collar
I never looked at
him, I avoided
him, I--a special
favorite, was sent to
get art supplies

He followed me
into the art supply room
and closed the doors behind
he came to me
and pressed his body against
my withering frame
I felt his
erect penis
against my heart
holding my face in his
holy hands
he spoke but a few
words:
"I love you"
and was gone

Silence

I was outside, the
clouds and the sky
fell black
the streets were deserted
silent in mourning
i walked home

And the priest had said
as gently as he could
don't tell anyone
you could cost me
my career
i'm going to
burn in Hell for
what i've done to you
but i'll forgive myself
you can go

My head had never been
so heavy
my secrets had never been
so hateful

My house frowned at
me as i rounded the corner
my mother smiled
dinner was almost ready
why was i late?
stopped to talk with the
father

I ate pork chops and
mashed potatoes in the
dimly lit kitchen, my
father looking stupidly
emptily on
i thought of the cold rectory
floor
it was all
i could do to
keep myself from
screaming

In Confession

"Father, forgive me for my sins. I swore nine times: shit twice, fuck once, and hell six times. I also thought bad thoughts about...it's difficult to explain...about men." The priest shifted his weight and spread his legs. "I watch football with my dad and I get excited. They wear such tight pants. I've masturbated about them. I feel so horrible, what should I do?"

"Come to the rectory," he said, "I don't have enough time here to explain to you how you can cure yourself and stop these bad, awful thoughts. Say ten Hail Mary's and five Our Father's."

The rectory office was small and plain. A desk separated us but he spontaneously pulled his chair 'round and sat just opposite me: "This way," he said, "we could talk one on one." He spread his legs wide, his black pants snug around his crotch. "When you masturbate, what exactly do you think about?" he asked. "I think only of men—the football players or maybe a man I saw at the beach. I pretend that I look up between their legs. I imagine that I reach up and touch the bulge in their pants or underwear." The father spread his legs wider, his right hand fell between his thighs.

"You must think differently," he said abruptly. "The next time you masturbate, just before you are about to ejaculate, think of men along with something awful like vomit or feces. As you begin to come change your thoughts. Think of women along with something beautiful like a field full of flowers or a sailboat on the ocean."

I was delighted! I would follow his instructions, even though I didn't completely understand them. I only wanted the bad thoughts to stop so I could be normal like the other kids in school. He rose from his chair and stretched, leaning his chest and head backward, forcing his pelvis forward. I could see a large bulge in his pants. He reached down with his hand and touched it, adjusted it, never looking at me. The bad thoughts were happening. I didn't want to look but couldn't help myself. My heart burned like I hadn't known. That night I masturbated about vomit and feces, I had forgotten the part about women and beauty.

The Rectory

November
chill
afternoon light
fading
school books in a
holy corner
He stands
nervous
God bless and
forgive us both

Sin
a hand on my
pale thigh
priestly love
I'm twelve
lust in his eyes
father don't
please stop

Naked
before him
shame
an unwanted
erection
uncontrollable
too young, too
afraid, too
confused

My desire for
a real father
a man
attention
all gone wrong
rape
it's my fault

A message
intimacy
a messenger
erotica
God and his holy
erection attending me
his fat, hairy
belly over
me, covering
me
the laying on
of hands

Uncircumcised penis
a blessing
hot iron
burning my face
I shut my eyes
turn the other
cheek

Excrement

Afternoon recess at St. John's School. The still rising sun had failed to relieve the day of the morning chill. A vigorous dew covered the grass. Overhead a clamorous flock of geese, late on their journey south, flew swiftly on a cold southward wind. I did not want to play ball or be with the silly girls. The priest, who I was avoiding, walked nervously around. I didn't look at him but I could feel his stare.

One of the geese discharged its excrement onto the backside of my shoulder. Without hesitation the priest came over to me and pointed it out. "let me help you wipe it off," he said. He led me into the school and down the stairs to the kitchen in the basement. I was angered by his aggression, I could go and wipe it off myself. He persisted against my faint requests and insisted. What was I to do?

We passed by the kitchen, I stopped. He went toward the door to the boiler room and singled me to follow. Why the boiler room? What was he going to do? Whether or not I should fight never crossed my mind. I was not taught to disobey but to bear the pain of compliance.

A large steel door closed behind me. I stood at the top of a black steel platform with five descending steps. Two large Catholic boilers toiled indifferently. The priest was down by the sink, smiling his nervous smile. He held a damp cloth in his hand, I had forgotten about the excrement on my shoulder.

He came to me at the bottom of the stairs and turned me around to scrub the back of my coat. He pressed his pelvis up against me and his hands fell down around me. I could feel his erect penis pressing at my behind. The school bell rang. I ran to my class. The halls filled with distant, strange laughter. I hung my coat in the back of the room; the excrement was gone but a stain remained.

House breeze

My parents' room took on a different shape, it became narrow and long, everything was so much farther away. Day and light were being sucked out and I didn't want it to leave without me.

My mind was all chaos, as if I were taking some tropical drug. I went to their room for some aspirin, I craved relief. I had to escape from wanting the priest to touch me, from the monsters in the schoolyard, from this tiny house.

Two wouldn't be enough. How many? I can't ask mom and dad, they were in a trance watching TV, reading the daily newspaper. They wouldn't understand. A handful would be enough. I took the plastic bottle and poured its contents into my sweaty, shaking palm.

Mom entered the nearly dark room, floating on a light autumn wind that pushed through the house. Her smokey arms embraced me. She touched my wrist and the aspirins poured back. "Don't follow the day, the light son. I need you here with me. I love you."

I put the bottle back into the medicine cabinet--guilty and ashamed. I could not do this to her. I walked out into the living room, all the lamps were on. My father was reading and my mother looked at me worried. I smiled, gave her a hug, a kiss, and went to my room--my mind all chaos.