

Remembering

We were boyfriend and girlfriend when I was in fifth grade. Well, you wanted us to be, but I chose another boy. The one who kissed me on the cheek during a Christmas song in front of my mama, in front of the school, standing on the auditorium stage.

But you and I, we remained friends. Long after our legs hastened into the running man or our arms bounced up and down doing the wop. Way after childhood had mapped our different paths. Even when we were in eleventh grade and a group of us decided to go to the prom. We laughed, talked. Did all the things teenagers do when they sense adulthood is near.

Yes, our knowing of each other covered much of our lives. I was recently looking at an old photo of us. Before fifth grade. Back when I still sucked my thumb and your mom still picked out your clothes. And then there was another picture. The last one I have of you. At our ten-year high school reunion. Your gold teeth dim, you weak from the news that federal prison awaited you.

But isn't this strange? Now it's been over a year since they said your body was suspected to be mauled and buried, someplace we'll never find. Yet here you stand. Whole but not quite. Smiling with that cheeky grin. All five feet, six inches of you, slim and caramel. Eyes dark with the weight of what comes when you've seen too much, experienced a litany of hardships, walked in boots of stone.

"How are you? What really happened that night? No don't answer that," I say. Knowing I really don't want a response. Hoping that your smile, the one that is covering what looks like sadness, is enough for me to know the truth about how your bones rest.

As quickly as you came falling from the sky, you vanish. Into what feels like a storm of dust on the ground. A cloud at my feet. Your footprints are all that's left.