

A sliver of sun leaks between the small crack in the door. It leaves a dull warmth, just there enough to keep my mind off the cold maple pressed against my back. I am still, refraining from breath. I am certain the faint rise and fall of my chest will cause the doors of the closet to creak. Pins and needles track like fire ants down my legs. Or was I actually being bit?

Don't move. Not a sound.

I have been sitting in this position for far, far too long. I lie stiff like the old leather coats sun-bleached above my head. I am not comfortable, not even in the slightest. But, I'd rather face eternity in the old armoire than jeers of my friends satisfied with finally finding me. I stayed in that closet-coffin until that streak of orange sunlight shifted blue. At first I was nervous. I had to force myself to breathe slowly, but my mind still raced. What if they never found me? It's a good thing my resolve never wavered. Because to this day those friends still recall my hour in the armoire as the most impressive hide-and-seek performance of our childhood.

An honor, I'll admit.

Only did I surrender after hearing the distant calls of authority; My friend's mother. She scolded me, claiming that I had scared her enough to call my parents. My dad wasn't nearly as mad as I thought he would be. He didn't speak to me with the sharpness that comes with discipline. His words were soft.

It was the first time I heard the word *dogged*.

He called me dogged.

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My ninth grade English class, much like the armoire, smelt of stale wood. It was in the oldest wing of my High School, with original flooring dating back to before my grandparents walked the same halls. It squeaked comically loud. My friends and I used to joke that the floor was screaming to be put out of its misery. Imagine an eternity bracing the weight of a million heavy teenage feet? I'd scream too. Mrs. Crowley might've been as old as the floor boards. A statement that, at first, rings cruel. That is, until you spend one class with her. Her shrill, cigarette-worn voice still echoes in my mind when I write. Especially when I misspell "tomorrow". I got deducted an entire letter grade for that.

“Writing is a discipline, not a pastime,” she’d declare.

The way she said “discipline” made it sound like a punishment we’d all signed up for. Her glasses, which perched precariously on the end of her nose, would sometimes fall off after yelling at a daydreamer. It was a comical sight. A woman, who could realistically be a hundred years old, with hands flailing as if she dropped an explosive. For a brief moment, the tension in the room would dissolve into muffled giggles. I heard some students nickname her the *Witch of the West Wing*. Fitting.

Funny enough, I think she liked me.

She said I was *eloquent* for a knucklehead. She hated us baseball players.

Those floors were ripped up the following summer, and Mrs. Crowley still has a job.

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My mother and I once cracked up laughing during a particularly quiet segment of Christmas Eve Mass. The Priest was named Father Bush. This was hilarious in my nine year old head, because Father Bush was in fact, bald. My mother tried to stifle her laughter, but her face grew red and creased with the weight of an impending belly-laugh. It wasn't long before disturbed faces pinwheeled around to stare at us. I caught sight of the elderly woman in row ahead of us, her delicate silver hair pinned neatly. She turned, her eyes narrowing in disapproval. That scowl was memorable, sticks in my brain like the bubblegum smashed beneath the pews. It seemed to echo the disapproval of the entire congregation, a silent chorus of judgment that only amplified the hilarity of the moment. I think most of them were more embarrassed than we were.

Now, I don't know if that has anything to do with being kicked out of Sunday school the following week. The teacher, so boring I forget her name, cited that I was a nuisance. Her source could have been the elderly woman, her disdain must've been contagious.

She called me *childish*.

An interesting choice of words for a nine year old.

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Nothing brings me back to my childhood quite like the smell of fresh cut grass, and stomach bile. Before you wince in disgust, I didn't say it brought back happy memories. I recall one particularly smoldering day on that practice field where my illustrious highschool athletic

career changed forever. Football double-sessions are bad enough on the body– some days I swear I spent the better part of the afternoon smashing my torso into an oak tree. The oak tree being Robby DiFazio.

There was a legend about Robby, that he was held back two grades in elementary school for hurling a chair at his gym teacher. I believe it, he was built like a twenty-something senior in highschool. Well over six-foot and built like a washing machine, Robby's two-cent brain was trained to do only one thing well, and that was to pulverize any half-sized freshman put in front of him.

And so he did.

Every day for a week, every July, for a pair of three hour practices a day.

I wasn't good enough to line up with the starters as freshmen. So my confrontations with Robby Refrigerator were limited. In fact I took it for granted until that smoldering afternoon.

Mere minutes away from practice's final whistle, the coach brought the team together for the dreaded Board drill. It was football's biggest test. The ultimate show of courage, strength, and unnecessary roughness. Coach would call out two names, who would go head to head. Both combatants started in a three point stance with palms on either side of a two by four plank. Once he says hut, it's game on. Not for me though, whose name was called alongside our beloved half-man, half-kitchen appliance. The size difference was clearly not enough to sway the coach's decision to throw me out there.

I don't remember the drive home, apparently I didn't talk much. Whether that was from shame or a mild concussion, I still can't decide.

Coach said I was *ballzy*. I'm not sure I had a choice.

Either way, it was my last football practice.