

It's about the wall, back when I was five. The wall in that small bedroom at my grandparents. I stayed overnight a lot with my grandparents, instead of babysitters, so much that they called their third bedroom my room, like I was their direct child.

The bedroom was in the middle of the other two bedrooms; my grandmother slept in one and my grandfather the other. Hers was the big room, on the corner of the house, with yellow walls and lace curtains. His was smaller than mine even, with just one window and painted brown. They rarely spoke. I had short hair and bangs and didn't like vegetables. I was mild mostly, not disruptive, respecting my elders. I was an only child (still am) and the daughter of a mother partial to vodka. At home my parents slept in twin beds.

But this is about the wall. The section of wall behind the door. The walls in the room were light blue and had a tiny texture on them, thousands of little spackle-points.

I took a pencil and shut myself in that room and scribbled on the wall behind the door. Scribbled makes it sound little but it wasn't. These were big slashing graphite swipes – up and down, up and down, and when I was done, it wasn't just behind the door, you could see it encroaching on the wall above the nightstand. I don't remember doing it, but I remember it being there, that marked up wall, on the many subsequent nights I slept over at my grandparents. If I pushed my head up to the top of my bed and bent my neck, I could see a slit of my grandfather's open doorway, and tell if his light was still on. My grandmother kept her door shut at night and no one talked about the wall.

In Between

Church of Colors

Red gave the sermon. Blues made up the choir – turquoise, navy, cornflower, and midnight. Silver was an acolyte who almost set the altar cloth on fire. Brown's the organist. Sky Blue tried out for choir but didn't make it. Yellow managed the nursery but refused to change diapers. Only one child was lost that first year. Pink kept the books, noting that donations were down, due to a fading congregation. Purple passed the communion tray. Gold rang the bell. Green mowed the tiny patch of lawn out front and washed the dishes after fellowship hour. Black presided over the funerals, like you might expect, and White was the wedding hostess. Orange was the deacon, who, like a ship's purser, had an unclear role. Somewhere above, God wore Ray Bans, blinded by his own faith.

Flying into Burbank to Bury My Mother

I count swimming pools like she taught me each unblinking blue eye hedged in the flocks of mock mansions the promise of turquoise counting, there are so many before we sink your dry box into earth.

Closing in on the airstrip the only blues are royal tarps hiding piles next to carports and the small kidneys of cheap motels striped of their liable diving boards bathing cap suctioned to my head daisy bobbing, slippery body down the curved slide into her wet waiting arms.

Today I learned that poets have shorter lifespans than the national average – is the figure – shorter, even, than all other writers which may be a case of shorter work shorter life or simply the average of ripe old Whitman, Frost with the young carnage of Sexton, Plath, and all the angst slit across the years.

We can take up wheat farming to reach eighty-six or carpentry for seventy-nine even barbering with those straight razors will buy a few more years us hiding in the back room trimming words into poems.

Span

IN BETWEEN



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