

“Three Times Goodbye”

By Tyler P. Fick

Photographs speak of things invisible. I let the photograph that was crinkled with fists of anger, damp with tears of loss and blackened by the mark my footprint had left on it fall to the floor. It seemed to belong on the floor swimming, maybe drowning in my tears. I look down at it satisfied it had fallen face down so the image could not haunt me, but I almost immediately sense a loss because of my longing for the connection, the touch. To speak the impossible is easy. I knew he and I would not be together forever. But to speak of the invisible makes me grip my fingers together as I grind my teeth. I never knew all the times he spoke of love he held invisible lies in his words. Words like little tiny ants, running, scampering all about coming out like routines, like something he had to do to in order to keep his post, like little black nothings.

I am sitting here thinking about ants and about how they scurry away, thinking of their real purpose in life, thinking of how insignificant they really are, convincing myself those little tiny ants are the poison of this earth. Each little ant has nothing to offer, and the next time I see one I am making sure that my foot lands on it, giving that ant the birth of a new life. Seems only right.

It was in those last nights of the summer that I felt his hand slip away from me. I convinced myself to not care at first. But he just shot those ants at me, and I felt my stomach began to quiver because I thought of those tiny things scurrying about in my soul. I threw up that night in his car and he yelled at me, but I felt relieved. I saw the ants exit my soul. I guess he didn't see the ants. They are kinda small. So I can remember it like it was yesterday, he took me in his arms, kissed me, and then he let me go. It seemed so easy for him to do. When we sat in the back of his bronco, I felt dizzy. I felt the world spin above my head, as if I was shut out, stuck in the back of that car forever, incoherent, queasy, and surrounded by tiny ants. He sat Indian-style and I barely could see his face, but I could make out that he was lying because I felt the ants moving up to my eyes, irritating them and that made me cry. It was always the ants' fault. Never mine or never his. Soon enough I felt him draw near and he touched me and his touch sent shivers down my spine. Somehow I lifted my head and I found his eyes. I felt his shaggy hair, I felt his hand upon mine, and I felt my heart breaking. I couldn't believe how stupid I had been. I kept asking him why I was so queasy. He never responded. I never wanted him to though, I sought comfort in his silence, and at least that made the ants stop marching out of his mouth.

That is the story of our ending.

Memory creates as much as it records. One day I went out to meet him by his bronco. He looked beautiful. He had come by to pick me up for a dance because he wanted to make me feel better because I had been forgotten, well “stood up.” He looked beautiful because in his hand he held flowers and he held a broken heart, from the cruelty of another. He looked to me for comfort, for protection. We made sure each other had fun that night. I looked for him when I lost him, he found me when he lost me. I can remember him, I got my coat, said goodbye to a teacher, he looked at me the whole time,

and then he reached for me and grabbed my hand. I looked at him and we reached for each other through the blinding clouds of loneliness.

Outside is not what we think, instead it is full of ghosts that pass by you and make you remember your shadows in life. I once heard him brag about me to a friend of his. I remember hearing him laughing, I remember the echoing sounds of the male egos slapping five, I remember the lies started then. I remember the ants then too. "You are over analyzing what I had said about you. I love you still, and our friendship is all that matters to me," he would say. I remember feeling queasy, and I remember the world shutting me out as the ants surrounded me. And I remember thinking I had never reached for him to begin with. He had reached for me to end his loneliness and that's what made his touch so tender. And he let me go when his ants could once again carry him on their back.