

I Have the Antidote

It was truly a summer made just for the prettiest of boys. Golden hour, just as they removed their sweat-dripped undershirts, and you would believe the sun is a spotlight angled just for them to highlight their most elegant features. The orange warmth of August to kiss farmer's-tanned skin. A salty mixture of two brunette heads that lean on each other, nudge each other, prod at the pheromones that question: what are we? And where do we go from here?

Evenings that dipped into night, where the sweat dried and the breathing became heavy underneath a canopy of corn husks, the boys made a routine of hiking to the nearest farm, a forty-five-minute walk from their small town. The distance was no worry, though the silence sank its teeth as they trekked in mud-covered boots with heads down at the dirt ground beneath their feet, not holding hands, refusing to touch.

The first time was hurried. Both boys' sets of ears were attuned to the slightest of sounds, struggling to keep focus on the task at hand. They both finished too early and giggled over the unused condom that left a white ring on one of their jeans' back pockets.

The walk back home was somehow worse than the walk there—as it wasn't simply the silence that affected them, but the voices of their family, of their friends, of God. If one of them had broken through the silence, possibly offered a hand to hold, a shoulder to nestle into with the false security of a hug, could it have made a difference?

Instead, there was a mutual understanding that the silence must be deserved. What is there left to say now that the body was filled with a poison that had no antidote? What do they have now, but each other?

The guilt from a once-glowing summer quickly turned the two sour, though. The silence between them became the new norm, and nights at the farm became less frequent as the weather grew colder in the autumnal months of Appalachia. The older they became, the less inclined they were to pursue any form of physicality, be it man or woman.

Settling themselves firmly in no-name jobs to fill their time, occasionally the two would pass each other in the grocery store of the same small town decades later—pause to wave and share a half-smile, but refuse to get close enough to touch what is better forgotten.

One might wait in his truck in the parking lot with his headlights off to watch the other leave the store. All that could be said with eyes was said in those longing stares—and the one walking to his car would always be aware of the staring, would grow to yearn for it.

Every movement now was a treat for them both in these rare, stolen moments in time. The placing of groceries in the trunk. The dusting of fake dirt from the jeans. The harsh slam of the driver's door. The slow reverse out of the parking lot with head turned and one arm clutching the passenger's seat for support and the other gripping the steering wheel.