

Jacob Ellis

by Brian Michael Barbeito

My name is Jacob Ellis. I was thinking about school and all those years and years and how they go eventually away but always remain somewhere in the mind as if imprinted on an akashic record. I was dizzy there, dizzy with dread and always on the verge of falling. Maybe I was mental or maybe it was a blood sugar thing and sometimes I think maybe none of it even ever happened at all and was just a bad etheric dream. Hocus! Pocus! Majik! Focus!

Sometime during Sunday afternoons the dizziness would start and things got bad on the inside. I started to feel like clockwork this foreboding intuition and I knew too well what it was all about. It was about school and the idea of attending it.

There was nothing so bad on paper about school, but I could never get used to the smell of the cloakroom with its musty coats and boots and shoes. There was something forgotten or lonesome about all the hats and mittens and the hooks affixed to the walls with the little names on tape that sat crookedly under them. These pieces of tape never quite stuck properly on the cold cement walls and the same could have been said for me as I never quite stuck on the school.

I pushed through the feelings the best I could but they were heavy. I tried to think of other things, of good things, like beaches or about a song or about anything- but it never worked out well. The school waited and the morning would present as too bright, too real. What's more, everyone there knew what to do, but not I. I kind of just floated around on my feet. People had decals on their shirts and seemed to know things about clothing. It's not like their school work suffered either, because they achieved academically. I couldn't figure out the fashion part or the academic part and just went along for attendance role and tried to slip under the radar.

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Knowing laughter in the hallways. Who are they? So sure of themselves.

I, recoiled and trying in vain to understand.

Saturnine feelings and the cold bricks inside and out.

Long walks home on abandoned pathways beside the chemical ravine.

In the end, after failing the standardized literacy, science, and mathematics tests for the third time, they spoke to me and I heard the words but could not respond.

"You only answered half the test. Do you even understand what you are reading? We call it reading comprehension. You must know that. You must have heard about that."

The adult world.

They know cursive and long division and many things besides.

They don't know about dreams and rivers.

They don't know the wind and the rain and the silence before late afternoon storms.

They are disappointed. Their words are diplomatic enough but this is just their anger dressed up in its Sunday best.

I stared to the outside of a window over the head of the voice, a voice that I figured later could be said to represent all institutions everywhere. There was a flag dancing some curt and sure movements in the strong and determined wind. I knew the noise it was making out there, but could not hear it. I just watched and watched. They didn't know that I thought of myself as victorious. I felt like I had won a secret game because, equipped with my dread and spaciness, and plagued as I was with an ever-enduring vertigo, I had never actually passed out.

The school was a like a Heavy Weight champion- lean, mean, disciplined, and tough in every way. I had gone all the rounds and it had never knocked me out. I was dizzy there, and would be so in all the places to come. It was bad then and it only got worse at other venues, in other cities even. But I stayed strong in my own way. I stayed the course.

I am a survivor.

