

Miniature Golf

by S.H. Gall

Was it middle school? When Dad decided he'd been a little on the absent side? I think it was. I think I was in seventh grade. We had to get up extra-early to go out for breakfast, just Dad and me, before he could drop me off at school en route to work.

He took me off the beaten path, to a dark-paneled room attached to an obsolete motel. We drank Donald Duck orange juice from tiny glasses scaly with soap scum, ate cold rubber scrambled eggs, and sausage patties crusted with burnt fat. My mind was occupied with the day ahead, the bullies, the queers. We were silent to each other, silent or dumb, deaf or disinterested.

I was confused, and sad in a way I didn't yet understand. Sadness as foreshadowing. I knew this was called "bonding," and that Dad was "compensating," whatever that meant. Dad requested grape jelly from a waitress with night-smeared mascara and breath like a distillery. He carried his battered briefcase with those tense pale hands, sat it by his feet on the floor beneath the booth. I studied my elaborately torn cuticles like maps, ways of being.

Over the soggy toast and watery coffee, we tried and failed to exchange pleasantries. I could barely look up, to his face, into his foreign pale blue eyes. Instead I looked at the food on my plate, and thought about things that, in civilized society, are best kept under the table.

Outside this strange and ordinary place there was a miniature golf course. It was overgrown and long out of use, but I could identify with the rust-coated windmill and the algae-limned teeth of the tiger's maw. It was the dessication that I'd come to associate

with youth. It was the past, and likely the future. To the present it ceased to exist.

