

Nothing Much

by Timothy Merath

He stood in the middle of the empty field. Just brown mud with a hint of red, as though reflecting some of the sunset off to the west. Over the ancient oak trees and patchy wall of stone. There it was safe.

As a boy, he had little hope of ever becoming anything. Anything at all. There were days spent, pencil in hand, staring at his homework. The words and equations a couple of feet from his eyes but the concepts he was expected to grasp weren't anywhere close. Anywhere at all, really. So he sat in silence and waited.

When his only friend, the red-haired girl next door, grew breasts and the attention of the other boys, she never spoke to him again. Not through words, at least. She'd give him a small smile in the halls but wouldn't slow her gait in the slightest. He was thankful that only he seemed to see the smile. Who knows what would have happened if the others had known. He'd seen the boys defend her with fists.

Sitting and waiting. Cap and gown. He had made it through school without being bullied or teased. That felt like a win for a while. The Ds he received in each class, year after year, weren't much for winning. The teachers never asked him to try harder. Never tried harder to teach him. He wasn't a sponge and they knew it. He wasn't worth the time. His name is called. He walks, he shakes hands, he exits stage right. Silence.

She still lives next door. Her kitchen window faces east. She is breastfeeding her newborn daughter. Such a quiet baby. There, out in the field, is a man. Alone. She wonders if the land finally sold. She wonders. Faintly. Whatever happened to the boy that had lived there.

What was his name?

