**December, 1989**

Ashley McCurry

Mother is an extra cup of sugar in the Kool-Aid, orange plastic pitcher sweating on Formica counters. Tan, wrinkled cleavage and taut smile serving pot roast and potatoes with reindeer oven mitts.

Father is a chipped olive ashtray, overflowing with loose change no one wants. Picked clean of precious quarters for arcade games and vending machines. Sandbag legs hesitating at the front door after third shift, head craning toward the neon bar sign down the street.

Stepbrother is neighborhood bicycle gangs, dirty magazines under the mattress. Playground dust kicked up by sixth-grade bullies and class clown antics to absolve his peers. Wide-eyed at the comic shop, reaching for Wolverine and Mr. Fixit in formalwear—maybe worth something one day.

Sister is the promise of honeysuckle dew and twilight dips in the reservoir. Cricket chirps filling the vacant spaces between words. Beloved debutant in junior high, staying late and hiding letters from the new teacher in her pencil bag.

Uncle is smoker’s cough, dialysis appointments, and fried bologna sandwiches on white bread. Pleated brown corduroy, glowing embers in the dark, white noise tv static at 2:00am. Grey snow puddling in the garage.

You are worn leather jacket musk and gasoline, hips pressed into mine, grinding to “Personal Jesus” at the pinball machine. Shopping mall food court grease, hot breath through graveyard teeth, lost hairline. You are roads leading West, endless stretches of sunrise reflected in the rearview mirror.