

An Education

Choate Rosemary Hall, the elite Connecticut boarding school, said on Thursday that at least 12 former teachers had sexually molested—and, in at least one case, raped—students in a pattern of abuse dating to the 1960s.

—*The New York Times*, April 13, 2017

There are no people or stray cars in the aerial view, only trees beginning to flare with color around the lawns and ball fields. The flat perfection of tennis courts and brick buildings that receive the sun at predictable times. *Fidelitas et Integritas*—the motto no one really remembers—is still sealed with a crest: a gold boar and three swords aiming for the future.



You may picture me with a knapsack, walking to the chapel to draw balconies and arching windows. The assignment is to show perspective. Any object—however large—will try to disappear, its lines veering toward a dot on the horizon. This is the morning I discover a pulse sloughing down my legs and blooming through layers of clothes, the morning I lock myself in a dim green stall and hide in the echo of running water. The raw cup of the body fills and drains without me saying yes.



What I do not know is that history follows many kinds of shame through white Corinthian columns. Our teachers, unsealed in middle age, take the delicate knot of a student and press the spine of her textbook flat. Trust enters so quietly, without interruption, and can almost be caught in the tones of two muffled voices talking behind a door. The details scatter into a cat that a girl bends down to touch, into cups of tea spiked with rum. Every rule erodes around the child whose kiss is so new that it's still wet with questions.



How does anyone find a way out of being told to get in a car and hide under a blanket? The girl who breathes in the dark, under the smell of dog and exhaust, is not given back to herself in the same condition. Neither is the boy who enters an apartment with a book and gets talked into bathing with the shades drawn. The damp expanse of his back receives an imprint of lotion that he will never lose.



Silence is a lectern and the aisle that meets it, sun across rows of empty seats, an unplayed organ hulking in an upper balcony—its pipes vaulting towards the ceiling. Silence hovers over all the beautiful heads, over hands rinsing blood in a porcelain sink or opening a blister pack of birth control.

It is not me. It is me. It is any of us in a sundress, standing with the French teacher. Our shoulders pale enough to burn in those first hours of May, turning a smooth immaculate red.

Any of us with a spray of baby's breath in our hair, looking from the gulf of our lashes towards the camera and a world that doesn't see a story in the tilt of his shoulders or the indecipherable flower pinned to his lapel.