

Middle School Romance

BY JACOB BUTLETT

When I walked to the front of the class to give my project on God-knows-what, I couldn't stop looking at the slender lectern. I was twelve, enamored by anything I could squeeze, like lawn chairs and tall dollhouses. But in this moment, I adored this lectern most of all, its metallic base a hubcap that had flung itself from a passing truck, fluttered through the open window, and landed love-struck at the shrine of my holey sneakers. I lowered the stem by turning the knob on the side—the knob smooth as skin, the stem round as a copper braid trailing its phosphorescent luminescence close to the moaning hardwood floor. Cold as fresh strawberries, its stem fitted snugly in my hands as I carried the lectern a few feet toward the blackboard—an excuse to grasp it, now slick as my palms—and as I turned to the class, I relaxed, breathing slowly, their yawning faces stuck to the wall clock like wet tissues. I set my notecards on the top of the lectern, my fingers soon sprawling on the edge of the slanted stand like roots crawling through moist mud. While I read my notecards, the top became a spin wheel where I fondled the sweaty woody varnish with impunity, as though I could mold a beaming face and naked abdomen onto its surface. I leaned forward and rested my elbows on the lectern, wondering how much weight I could add to it before it would grab me like a million satin hands and force me onto the floor, where I pictured myself wrapping my feet around it, as though it were playing hard-to-get, and holding it close to my chest—a girl in my arms, a flaccid doll panting noiselessly against the veins in my neck, the acne on my chin. But when I finished speaking, the lunch bell bellowed and the class rose to leave. Gathering my cards, I glanced at the lectern once more and prayed that my passion would last. I returned to my desk and picked up my lunchbox—the desk legs curvy like smiles, the lunchbox big as pink puckered lips.