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Childhood Comfort: Three Poems

Hallie Ross

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Childhood Comfort: Three Poems

Hallie Ross

Story of My Youth

Through the branches to enter,
we with grass-stained clothes

playing in our little
kingdom that no one else

knew of, pointy pine
needles, dead flower petals:

What are you doing now,
Youthful freedom? Red

sticks of plastic we found
in the afternoon snacks,

keys but only imagined,
still, the only way

to enter the kingdom,
belonging in our imagination.

Your Car

It seemed a secret hiding place—
sun blinding us through the windshield in
your car, music playing softly

over the radio, not loud so that
you could hear me
talking to you—and it was just you.

That was the way you were, giving
all your attention to me. Other cars
sped by us, sun glinting off their windshields,

too, but it was only me who noticed
that beauty because you were busy
noticing mine, sitting right beside you.

You'd let me talk and talk—
I liked it, no one ever let me talk—
and you wouldn't say a word,

just smiled and took me in. So young
and so free, we drove along state road nine,
straight and hilly, until we arrived

at our destination, not wanting to leave
our little hideaway, messy with trash and change
shoved into the sides of all the doors,

and a thin layer of dust covering
most surfaces. We opened our doors,
joining the world again, and you

weren't focused on me anymore.
Were you real? Was I only
imagining the version of you in your car?

On Mud and Cornstalks

At noon in the cornfield
of the place we used to call
home, we'd squat and kneel
in the sun's bright gaze

and dig until we saw the worms
doing their worm things,
stretching and contracting—long
then short—in the rain-filled dirt.

We learned about them,
how they still squirm
when they're cut in half,
two little worms from one.

How miraculously they
kept stretching and contracting—
long then short. Death came
and birth came and the worm—