



School

A school on recess is silent.
It is not empty.

The men who handle the fixing
nod their sweet heads at the sight of you,
ask with such earnestness if you need something,
you could kiss them.

The women in the office have grown weary of the AC,
or they are sweltering,
battling humidity that curls the papers,
bringing order to what has been pure chaos.

Your presence feels like an intrusion,
pure annoyance.
You can't help but agree.
Still, they will smile and sigh,
help.

The halls are buffed or not.

The gym is waxy with a sheen you can smell from the cafeteria,
ready for the adolescent sound and fury.

Somewhere,
there is a mess of boxes.
A wilting trophy case.
A stink still rising from
last year's lost and found.
A tangle of pests feasting
on forgotten Easter candy.

Somewhere,
a classroom is lit by daylight only.
Maybe an ancient desktop chugs along,
resuscitated.

There, a teacher surveys industrial dust,
stares into the middle distance—
a near-empty lot,
an overgrown courtyard,
an extravagantly astro-turfed field—
considers the enormity of it all.
Sighs.
Gets back to work.

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Truth and Love

There are a million things
I should be doing right now
That aren't writing a poem
So I will write a poem

I'm using an old note
On my phone so I promise
The title is not premeditated
It's just something

One of my students said
During the usual Wednesday
Afternoon meeting of the
Malden High School

Philosophy Club it was
The start to her rejoinder
"So back to the Truth
And Love thing" we had

Been discussing the
Question "What is love"
And we could not agree
If love was closer

To Truth or Untruth
Like when Proust's
Jealous Lover thinks
Albertine is cheating or

When one student talks
About how her sister
Says she loves her
Abusive boyfriend

Even went back to him

She said how can we
Know what it's like
From the outside

(I hear this and think
About how no one would
Understand Lol Stein
If she explained herself)

And then someone else
Says sometimes even on
The inside you don't know
Like you could think

Everything's fine but
You're really hurting
The person you love or
You're calling something love

That isn't and now
We are talking about labels
Who can call what
What and two students

Gesture at my bi pride
Flag during their stories
About how they relate
To that label, what coming

Out was like for them
The munchkins are almost
Gone and we agree
We'll continue next week

Talking about labels
We haven't gotten
To the bottom of it yet
Like the laundry pile I

Should be putting away
Instead of writing this

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