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Chains

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Chains

Abstract

Chains is a poem that was inspired by the events surrounding the Steubenville Rape Case, and it is my interpretation of what the victim could have been feeling. The poem was written as a way for me to try to understand how something like this could have happened.

Keywords

Poetry, Creative Writing

Disciplines

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Chains

*In 1786, Fort Steuben was constructed to protect the surveyors of the town and to prevent squatters from settling on the unclaimed land. It was named for a major general in the American Revolutionary war.*¹

In a town founded on protection, two boys
on the high school football team raped
an unconscious sixteen-year-old girl. Steubenville, I learn,
was named for Major General Von Steuben, who taught his officers
the importance of military tactics, drills and discipline,
the way years later the coach would train his players,
toeing the chalk-white battle lines,
preparing for the game of war.

This *city of murals* covered with
soft images of daily life and the great
Dean Martin who extends his welcome
to the viewers while crooning his secrets,
now houses a new nickname, one that colors
the town with violence and sadness.
It is now the town of the rape case, the town
that tried to brush aside the truth and blamed the victim.

She cannot recall the six-hour time span,
when two boys used her body as an object,
and her peers stood and watched, their only actions
the clicks of a camera and their typing on a phone to spread
her humiliation across the internet. A text message sent
from one boy to another likened her to a dead body, limp and unresponsive.
In court, the boy said that the sex was consensual,
but how can you get consent from a corpse?

When her mother woke the next morning, closing her robe lazily
and heading to the kitchen to make breakfast, did she wonder why
her daughter did not come home the night before? Did her father know,
as he shook the morning paper open to read the sports page,
that his little girl had been taken,
her body claimed and presented for the crowd to survey?
Steubenville, *where you always
have a home*, the town website reads. But can she feel at home

in her own body, though
she does not remember through the haze

¹ This information was compiled from www.oldfortsteuben.com/history.html

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the ghostly touches of those boys as they took
her body over and over, or feel the flash
of the camera penetrating the dark air,
capturing her,
burning her
to an unmistakable memory?

A female news reporter expresses pity for the young men,
whose reputations will follow them
for the rest of their ruined lives.
She does not mention the young girl
whose body is no longer her own
but belongs to the boys who pillaged her, her peers
whose silence encouraged the acts against her ragdoll body,
or the coach whose protection did not include her but the heroes of the football team.

No, She does not mention the young girl who cannot erase
what she cannot remember, who cannot shake the feeling
of squatters taking up space in her body.

I think of my own father, standing at my bedside
after a car accident left me concussed, bruised
and broken inside, and how his large, warm hand
gently surrounded my trembling, bleeding palms.
We both cried out of fear for what could have been lost
and thanks that I had survived.

Did this girl's father cry too? Did he cry at the loss of her identity,
ripped from her hands and changed? She is forced to wear this new one,
heavily, chained around her neck and wrists,
rape victim written in the cold metal, while the two boys
walk freely through the halls of the juvenile detention center
for two years, before they go off to college or to work.
She is sentenced to life as a survivor of this horrific violation of her person,
and the ghost of what has happened will walk one step behind her,
its silvery toes always at her heels.