

# “Dust.”

Chase McKnight

It was always her. From autumn evenings spent beneath trees glowing from the lights of Central Park came mornings wasted away with one another in bed, without thought of ever waking. Slideshows of burrowing up to our necks in your father’s freshly raked leaf piles flash in my mind on an endless reel as I scrape what’s left of fall from the bottom of our gutters. Hanging your dresses, I recall the shade of every gown you dawned at our school dances; some spent together, some apart. The sparkle of your eyes glistening under the lights of the cafeteria we made our ballroom; I would’ve danced forever. I wish I remembered it all sooner, why do our sweetest memories remain forgotten until the one with which we shared them is gone? Perhaps I could’ve loved you deeper if I had remembered why I loved you at all. Why do I only recall the good, when you’re no longer here to remind me of it? At times I wish I only remembered the worst about you, maybe then your absence wouldn’t leave such a chasm, then perhaps I could’ve learned to love again, but how could I learn again what only you could teach? Darling, why did you leave when you knew I had to stay? I’ve done my best to live the same as when you were with me, I just wish I knew how. I’ve started cleaning the house, the living room first; enough dust rests on those shelves to cover the streets of Times Square. I never knew what it was about dust that made me boil, perhaps it made me sneeze, or its unbecoming haze atop shelves made me anxious, maybe I just liked dusting. Since the unwelcome arrival of winter, it would seem our favorite old café

grows emptier each morning, the hardwood floor creaks louder, or maybe there just aren't enough voices to drown it out anymore. I still look up from my newspaper to find you sometimes, even though your hand doesn't stretch across the table to hold mine, I still listen to your fading laugh as it echoes through the walls of the café. I often catch myself spouting to you the mundane details of my day, stories of my childhood, silly tidbits I learned from my books, sometimes I just catch myself staring; staring at the empty seat my angel once occupied. Gazing through the window your chair used to hide, I watch as the young lovers exchange smiles walking cozily through the afternoon snowfall. In their eyes shine the same sparkle I found in yours as you danced and whirled across your old living room floor to the sound of a half-scratched Christmas record. What a Christmas it was. Though seventy years of your love may never be enough to fill the gaps I'll spend without you, I'm sure glad I was the man in your story. I'm always yours. I finally dusted today; I almost looked forward to it, maybe I needed the distraction. I shined my way from the kitchen only to end up in the living room where I began; the countertops are spotless, the cabinets shine like Sunday shoes, you would've loved to see them. Making my final swipes with our old duster, soaked in the lemon polish that coats every corner of the rooms in which our children grew, my final task was your little bookshelf, not even three feet high. Filled with your grandmother's romance books you made me read, coffee stains and all, the rusty cabinet hinges still squeal loud enough to wake the dogs. On the top shelf, where you used to rest your hands as you watched the robins hunt through the sunburnt grass, I found

the last piece of you I'll ever keep; before me laid the faded shapes of your handprints. Though your hands were gone, the warmth never left the wood. Never will the bristles of a duster nor the drops of our lemon polish ever erase the prints on the pine wood plank that call me to you. Though your fingers no longer graze the edges of the wood, nor the time-stained pages of the novels within, and though they may be forgotten by even I, when my mind is finally gone; they'll still point my eyes back to you.