



Foundation Talk

Peter E. Murphy

It was the summer something rotten seeped out of the sky, tainting every white-shingled house in Howard Beach piss yellow. The summer of stinky eggs, rancid eggs, a stench so sulphuric it burned the noses of every little girl, little boy, who rose that morning hoping it would be a day of sunshine rather than reek.

It was the summer the Boppers gave me a pink belly. Trapping me in the muddy foundation of a house under construction, pinning my legs and arms in the muck, lifting my t-shirt, unbuckling my dungarees and slapping my ten-year old belly like a drum. Calling me a douchebag, a little shit, a faggot, a cocksucker. Taking turns. Slapping me hundreds of times. I tried not to cry till they pulled the ladder up after them, leaving me stranded till dark, till cops took me home.

It was the summer of blue-clawed crabs mating on the barnacle-covered pilings of Shellbank Basin, double-decker crabs, the shell-less female beneath the hard-shelled male—and slimy eels on the slushy bottom—netting them, selling them to the accented woman who said, “Husband like fresh fish.” Who said, “Bring more, nice little boy.”

It was the summer the blond-haired girl kissed me in the foundation of another house under construction, the blond-haired girl who placed her hand behind my head and gently pulled me toward her. Who pressed her breastless chest against my chest. Who pressed her lips against my lips. Who slipped her tongue between them, rolling it around my tongue until I stiffened against my dungarees, until I became dizzy, until I blurted, “Foundation Talk.” She slid her tongue into my ear. She whispered, “Foundation Talk.”

from *Gravel*, October, 2016