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Reflecting on Heavy Metal

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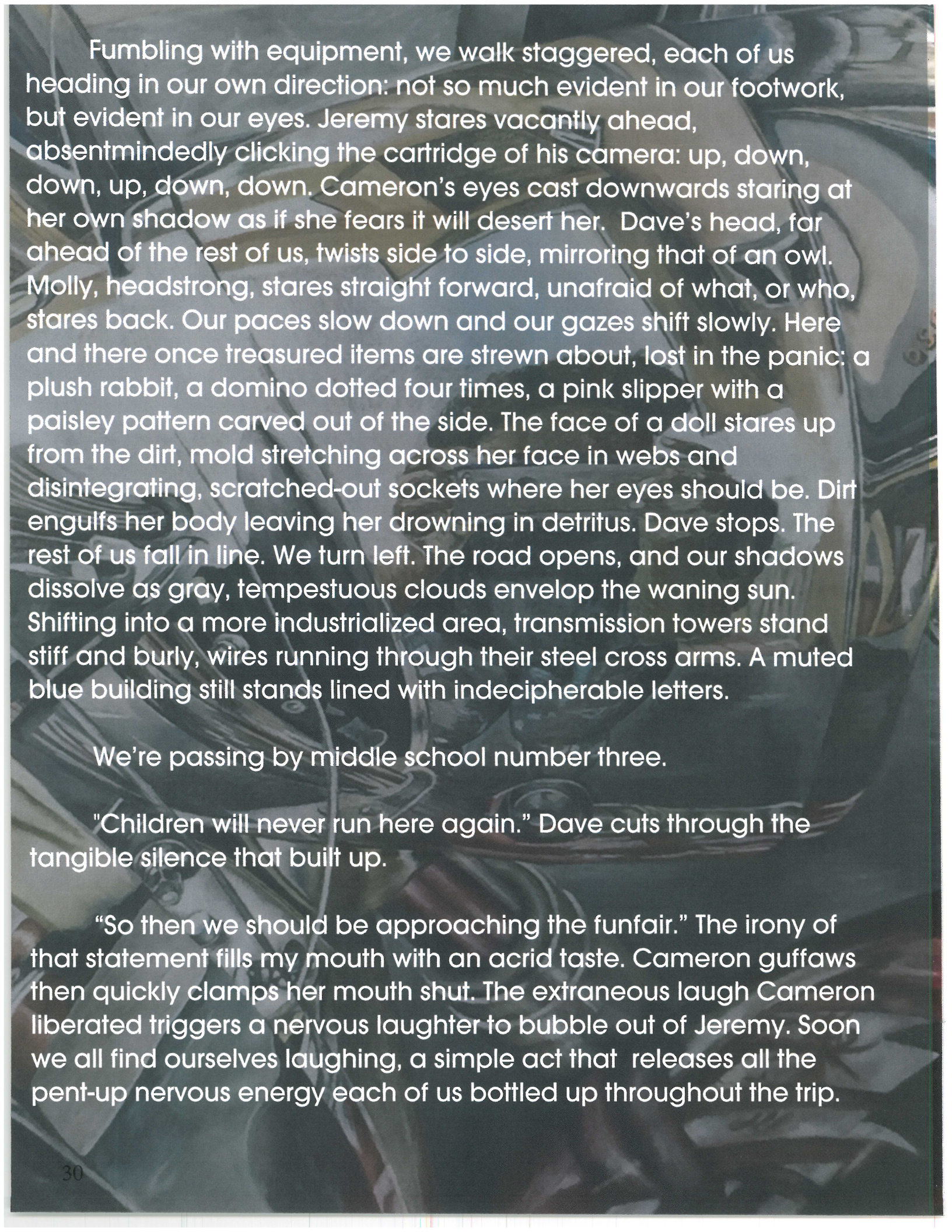


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Fumbling with equipment, we walk staggered, each of us heading in our own direction: not so much evident in our footwork, but evident in our eyes. Jeremy stares vacantly ahead, absentmindedly clicking the cartridge of his camera: up, down, down, up, down, down. Cameron's eyes cast downwards staring at her own shadow as if she fears it will desert her. Dave's head, far ahead of the rest of us, twists side to side, mirroring that of an owl. Molly, headstrong, stares straight forward, unafraid of what, or who, stares back. Our paces slow down and our gazes shift slowly. Here and there once treasured items are strewn about, lost in the panic: a plush rabbit, a domino dotted four times, a pink slipper with a paisley pattern carved out of the side. The face of a doll stares up from the dirt, mold stretching across her face in webs and disintegrating, scratched-out sockets where her eyes should be. Dirt engulfs her body leaving her drowning in detritus. Dave stops. The rest of us fall in line. We turn left. The road opens, and our shadows dissolve as gray, tempestuous clouds envelop the waning sun. Shifting into a more industrialized area, transmission towers stand stiff and burly, wires running through their steel cross arms. A muted blue building still stands lined with indecipherable letters.

We're passing by middle school number three.

"Children will never run here again." Dave cuts through the tangible silence that built up.

"So then we should be approaching the funfair." The irony of that statement fills my mouth with an acrid taste. Cameron guffaws then quickly clamps her mouth shut. The extraneous laugh Cameron liberated triggers a nervous laughter to bubble out of Jeremy. Soon we all find ourselves laughing, a simple act that releases all the pent-up nervous energy each of us bottled up throughout the trip.