

Good Fortune

Gazing balls are said to bring good fortune, and when I was young, shiny spheres of sapphire and regal emerald glinted from their heavy pedestals in better parts of town. As seasons changed, and the dusty blush of huge hydrangea bloomed over well-kept yards, brilliant shards of light played hide-and-seek among the gently swaying leaves.

We lived in a green asbestos-sided house on the way to *Smith's Quarry*. Grass grew sparsely in the shade of three maples on our small shelf of lawn. Quarrymen hurried past before the whistle blew at seven. Later, with the workday done at four, their tires spewed dust and pebbles along the bank, coating the straggly row of bridal wreath that crept down to meet the smooth paving of *Romeo Goulet's* drive.

In a grassy corner away from the road, the younger ones took turns on the single swing, its ancient chains suspended from a frame of corroded iron. One year, when the snow had seeped away, Dad hammered two-by-fours into a rough rectangle, lugged dirt from the quarry yard up above. And from then until the snow fell again, my brothers built roads, scooped tunnels, stacked cones into sticky structures in that gritty sandbox under the pines.

Out back, rough slabs of granite formed a slanted semblance of stairs. Up there, rhubarb grew tall and tart, close to the rusted barrel where we burned our trash. At dusk, while flames etched patterns in the crumbling metal, showers of embers, like glowing butterflies, winged their way toward the sky. And in those fleeting moments, our yard on *McLeod Hill* was as full of promise as the sweeping lawns, graced by gazing balls, in the other part of town.