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## Developing Nightmares

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## Developing Nightmares

after Arthur Tress's photos: *Boy with Root Hands, Riverside Drive Park;*  
*Hockey Player, New York; Hooded Figure with Child, Central Park*

What if a nightmare flaunted your fear in a square on a wall  
where you're caught, out of your mind, wide-eyed,  
boxed in tight in black and white, living it?  
Because a photographer whispered, *tell me your worst one,*

and developed your brain along with the scene,  
rinsed, with chemicals, in pitch black, you at eight, part boy, part tree,  
planted hard in pavement, your hands the unplugged wires of roots  
raw and upended, groundless and grayscale. Wasn't it just a dream  
confused about how to grow? Until the photographer

woke you, pulled you into night one morning, lured you with props,  
a promise of exposure, along with other boys who gave in  
to having their bodies softened with powder and faces touched  
with rouge. Then he shot you in your nightmares, each  
arranged, posed one by one, forever for all to see, loosened  
from imagination's privacy. *Don't move.*

A light flashes, the camera snaps, your fear blackens into reality,  
where a part of you remains stiff in frame and wide awake, now collected  
alongside the captured confessions of another boy, then another:

a young goalie crouched in city streets, body busy  
with deflective armor, his other face a skeletal matrix as if,  
in a fit of fear, its flesh withdrew beneath the bones  
for protection, left him locked in a hard exterior of defense, frozen

beside another boy standing just slightly, an inch or two,  
in front of death, whose long fingers close over his shoulders,  
whose cloak slowly darkens his legs, his torso,  
until he only has to back into death's body and become it.