

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.