

Boys in the Patch

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A mid-80s conscription:
a new-century resurgence.

Rounded up
sent way north

Boys.

all you need is
a good pair of boots
ablebodiedness
willpowers

White boys from good families told
this is the best money going.

“Hypermasculinity[’s]. . . [d]efenders lash out against perceived enemies. . . by feminizing those perceived enemies to re-establish a sense of control”
(Letourneau and Davidson 2022, 102).

after hours
in man camps

boys high on dope
boys like heroes

mobile workers
big bucks

flying back home
250 on 63

“it is. . . emotionally damaging to young males to be isolated and without. . . nurturance”
(hooks 2004, 43).

boys gone from their moms

forced to be strong men
never-been-wrong men

and aunties
and sisters
and girlfriends
and boyfriends

tough
rough

and communities

jammed in steel-toed boots
rammed in white crew cabs

Big boys don’t cry.

It gets better.

“But they, you know, my kids. . . They have things we never had”
(Beaton 2022, 352).

We see you, out in the wild, at family dinners, showing your nieces your mashed potatoes gravy volcano. When grandma suggests a walk after, you go. You hold that tiny hand that finds yours to cross the street.

Where did you go? We need you. Let us reach out to you.

Extracting, prying, pulling: this is the poetic turn into giving, adding, putting in.
We arrive at tenderness. In reciprocity, back and forth and back again. More than. We can do tender.

Why couldn’t we?

You don’t need to compete anymore. Let it go. We will learn to catch you.

You will learn to catch yourself
and not fall for it ever again.

We can do this.

You consider the “rigid and narrow spectrum of masculine ideals [that were] strongly enforced, and. . . the continued need to prove oneself” (Letourneau and Davidson 2022, 98)
and know that it was a strange microcosm of a sick society.

We will repair.

They teased you for crying: they’re wrong.
They called you oversensitive: they’re wrong.

They praised your violence: they’re wrong.
They said danger was exciting: they’re wrong.

We’re sorry for all of it. We were all wrong.

Sources

Beaton, Kate. *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2022.

hooks, bell. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*. Washington Square Press: New York, 2004.

Letourneau, Angeline, and Debra Davidson. “Tracing Resistance: Hypermasculinity and Climate Change Denial in the Heart of Alberta’s Oil Country.” In *Gender and the Social Dimensions of Climate Change*, edited by Amber J. Fletcher, Maureen G. Reed, 89-108. London: Routledge Press, 2022.