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The Way of the Cross in Whiting, Indiana

White plaster plaques, darkening from industrial grit. Fourteen of them, a story you walked through, down one side and up the other of the center aisle of Sacred Heart Church, alone or in congregation. Alone was more like it. Especially afternoons in thin Lenten light. You ran the gauntlet with Jesus, wham bam bam, like fourteen tough rounds: Him, the one you put in this pickle though you weren’t born for two thousand years to come. But who’s quibbling about two thou when the connections start connecting in that Ingmar Bergman light? Fourteen stops—Jesus condemned, picking up the cross, falling once, meeting his mother, getting a little help carrying, then his face toweled (leaving a picture behind), falling twice, talking to Jerusalem ladies, falling again, stripped, nailed up, dying, taken down, and put into the sepulchre. Brother! Then you walked home in the snow, so lonely you felt part of it all. And if you needed further proof there was the Public Service Co. window with the brackets for the state high school basketball tourney. Narrowing, narrowing, narrowing from left to right, the light on in that window all night. Poor Noblesville, poor East Chicago Washington and Goshen—South Bend Central moving through the brackets bound for Naptown. Basketball—two forwards, two guards, and a center—the Five Sorrowful Mysteries. The brackets—the great web of losses, till all were losers but one and that one was never us. My footprints in snow, so many directions in one—the Way home, the Way of the Cross, the Way of basketball. “Hoosier Madness” they called it. I call it good luck to be Catholic in Indiana where Lent and the state tournament conjoin, where the Mystical Body of Basketball makes a sideways pyramid, reaching, reaching across to the one-and-only one to suffer no defeat.

James Hazard