Dust and Air

I.

Sitting in a church, in a pew cramped next to my mom singing the melody. My grandma sang alto. I used to think she just sang hymns out of tune. Either way, she sure was sure of herself. I wasn't sure. I would sing the melody listening to my mom. I looked up into the golden finish of the wood rafters. It wasn't just dust and air blowing all around up there. This was God's house and He had to visit sometimes.

II.

Sermons always have moral lessons: right and wrong, black and white. They told me exactly what I should do. Except, they never told me what I should believe. My father's parents know their Apostolic church has been chosen to go to heaven, and they know that when my father left, his mind must have been poisoned by my Lutheran mother. Where does that leave me? Singing and listening. Black and white. Black or white. Baptized and confirmed. But what did I confirm?
III.

The grooves of my footprints in the firm snow reminded me of a toddler drawing a sun: a circle with little lines stemming from every side. Because toddlers’ circles have sides. The sun bounced across the wide Nature Center path, through the empty space between the branches where this browned, frail bur oak leaf used to hang. But, it wasn't just dust and air blowing through here, everywhere. Where did we worship before churches were built?

IV.

I've always wondered about the people in history who claim to have contact with a divinity. Whether it is real, or could they be hallucinating? Lying or misinterpreting? My experience (in the pew) is of a presence around my heart, connected with a feeling and a memory; in the Nature Center too. The presence is a pressure that makes me smile sadly. Love and wishful thinking.
In the moment when I can see both horizons, the black sky blurs with the black dirt, the world feels like one big doll house inside a snow globe, and the stars are a clue, the only inkling we get of what is really out there. I feel small, as if life was His dream. But maybe we aren't small to Him. Like a teddy bear is to a toddler – half her size but her whole world. It can't be just air and dust. I was left to pretend to believe