

TRINKET

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Abstract

T R I N K E T

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TRINKET at its center, is a story of a woman searching for her childhood. Through the eyes of the treasures that occupy and color her world, we are introduced to the moments in her young life that shaped her. The passing of time is uncovered through object memory, as her associations combine storytelling and the tangible to explore the beginnings of her fears, joy, isolation, and confusion. Tangled and fractured, we witness the gentle grief with the conclusion of a childhood, and the realization that, despite great changes, some things stay the same.

THIS COLLECTION IS DEDICATED TO

my family
and
my first love

this work
would not have been completed
without their company

thank you for filling my days
with
warm light

CONTENTS

Artist Statement

~

introduction

I.

water mirror pencil cake floor stairs mud doll candy bear car pigtails window teeth wall

II.

jeans table mold picture book crab sandwich bathtub periwinkle cowboy boots prayer tupperware lipstick

III.

house gate pillow stone jello tree rosary lullaby phone scissors carousel dew

~

box

ARTIST STATEMENT

Trinket

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My thesis, titled *Trinket*, is a collection of poetry that centers object memory as a way to examine a singular childhood. Object memory utilizes the trinkets as a way to travel back across time, giving life and connection to inanimate objects through recollection. Composed of three sections, the reader is presented with the torments, confusions, and the small joys of an ever-changing girl and her family. We witness her questioning as her awareness ages her, and the reader is encouraged to consider how much of ourselves we retain from our childhood and what is kept away. As a whole, I want the collection to represent the hidden ways we learn from small experiences, and how this in turn will shape our reality and connection with the spaces and communities we exist in.

When first approaching this final quarter, I was apprehensive as to how to proceed with my thesis. Much of my writing over the years centered my perspective, and writing from the “I” became fatiguing. I was conflicted with centering myself in poems, often finding the writing process to be constraining. For this collection of work, I wanted to challenge myself to consider another perspective to view an experience in. With this shift at the forefront of my mind, I began to open myself up to writing again. This change of perspective allowed for me to develop the protagonist of this poetry collection, a little girl that shadowed my own childhood experiences.

With the beginnings of my thesis showing promise, I selected a collection of materials to further develop my writing. During my studies, the works of E.J Koh, Oliver de la Paz, Lynda Barry, and Han Kang bravened me to approach this project. Much of the work for this collection is driven by the question, “*What would I like to forgive?*”. This question was presented to the audience at a reading of E.J Koh’s new work, *The Liberators*. In her debut novel, Koh writes about the impacts of generational experiences. Koh uses the ties of family to drive an examination of how lives are shaped by others in small or grand

ways. With each presentation of a character within the novel, we as readers are able to examine the choices, thought processes, and characteristics that unite the characters together. While the connection between the characters are apparent to the reader, the characters themselves are divided with their own struggles with individualism and identity. As the book continues, the characters eventually realize the ways in which their lives and personalities are reflected in each other in surprising ways. The book itself makes an impact emotionally as well as artistically. The use of multiple narratives, exploring each character's thoughts, hopes, pain, and desires, allows for a compelling and diverse conversation. The characters are deeply familiar with their mistakes and vulnerability, allowing the reader to feel deeply for their lived challenges. The ability to develop these characters individually makes their personality concrete and their connection to others within the story tangible. The reader is encouraged to build assumptions about certain characters, only to have those assumptions broken as the novel progresses. There is a simplicity in this execution of character development that feels intimate and grounding.

After reading her novel and considering the question of forgiveness that Koh posed at her reading, I was compelled to process this in my own poetics. Writing, and arts in general, has the ability to generate healing. The artist can use their form as a means to examine their own hardships. Writing has the same ability for me, and as a writer, I felt that putting my lived challenges onto paper was part of healing. However, forgiveness was not part of that process. The answer to this question was to forgive the situations that occurred within my life that required me to grow up fast. I wanted to forgive the external influences and its shaping of my childhood, and acknowledging this gave my writing purpose.

Another work that contributed greatly to my thesis was *Names Above Houses* by Oliver de la Paz. This collection of poetry felt very strongly aligned to my personal experience and the central themes of my thesis. *Names Above Houses* is a poetry collection centering a coming-of-age story of a young boy and his family. Displacement, grief, and acceptance are all integral themes within the work, building a conversation around what it looks like to grow up groundless. The collective reflections of the family drives the work. Through the different observations of the family members, readers experience all

characters from different angles of closeness. While they all had their own unique perspective, enriched by their lived experiences, they all contributed to building an external perspective of the boy, Fidelito.

I wanted to implement the strategy of character building through the observation of family within my own thesis. I was reminded of the “it takes a village” saying when working on the topic of childhood. This was the case for me and my siblings, since we spent most of our childhood within the houses of our grandparents. Not only are social interactions established within family, there is also a cultivation of cultural identity introduced. I saw this concept played out within Fidelito’s family and their contributions to his perceptions of the world. While the main speaker in my thesis establishes the world that the reader steps into, her dynamic between family and objects within her life better illustrate her personality.

Two works that inspired my exploration of object memory were Lynda Barry’s *One! Hundred! Demons!*, and Han Kang’s *The White Book*. While these two books have their differences in form and subject matter, they both used objects to generate their writing.

Barry used “demons” to generate her writing, which came in different forms. A past relationship, an old stuffed animal, or even scent was a catalyst to a learned life lesson. The graphic memoir uses humor, color, and comic panels to display a thoughtful reflection of a childhood from the perspective of her adult self. Each demon reveals and connects to the person she is in the present, which allows for the reader to consider the ways in which their childhood concerns and fears evolve with them.

Kang’s book uses the color white to generate her poems, all exploring the color in surprising ways. Using the color white, Kang builds a narrative of memory and connection. Personal and riveting, she navigates the absence of color through themes around possibility, recollection, and reality. The poetry itself seemed to have a tendency of microscoping inward on a topic or image, then moving outwardly to an idea or concept. It would also reverse this method of seeing, beginning on a large scene, usually focusing on the imagery of nature, to reflect on a small, shared uncertainty of life. From its outward appearance, the collection would seem to be about the singular color white, but it develops a strong conversation about life, grief, and the great “what if”. Similarly to Kang and Barry, I used an object or idea to generate my writing. The use of trinkets within my thesis is a similar device as it is a catalyst for

memory. Both Barry and Kang brought to their work a great feeling of connection and gentleness through their craft choices. With each new introduction to an object, the reader is brought to a memory.

While all writers that I have mentioned thus far worked with different forms, the heartline of my thesis is influenced by memory, as tricky and elusive as it may be. Memory within text has a certain melancholic presence that has the similar effect of daydreaming. I wanted to replicate the feeling of looking at an old photograph or finding something once treasured in my collection of poetry. This feeling of nostalgia and remembrance can come with sudden connections that are often surprising or unclear. At the center of reflecting on the past is this feeling, which combines the present and the past simultaneously.

Reading these texts allowed me to build my thesis foundation. While I was inspired to apply what I've observed in the work that I admire, I was also curious as to how I could bring my own sense of style into the writing. The books that I have read all named their characters, creating clear distinctions between the different voices within the work. Unlike the books I read, I decided to generalize the names of the figures within my writing. I wanted to give the reader to project their own family and experiences onto the characters. In order to further build that connection between the reader and the writing, I gave familiar titles to the characters. Grandma, Grandpa, Father, Mother, and Sister define the characters and their dynamics to the speaker, but also leave room for the reader to also define them with their own associations.

In the past, I have brought various levels of visual art to my writing. Whether it was painting, photography, or the visual structure of the poems, I explored what could contribute to the overall experience of reading. As an artist, I found that incorporating visual aspects to my poetry allowed for reaching a broader audience. In the first initial stages of creating my thesis, I wanted to pull back from the usual visual techniques that I would employ to draw the reader's focus to the writing itself. As I continued to develop the storytelling, I wanted to find a way to build a sense of a child's presence. Similarly to when you see coloring on a wall in a home, you'd assume that there are young children occupying the space. To create this experience, I used imagery at the beginnings and conclusion of each section to build an environment of color to contrast the severity of the poetry.

I decided to simplify my visual approach in order to keep the focus on the writing. The visual work for this collection includes watercolor illustrations as well as excerpts from my diary that I kept as a girl. Each section of my thesis begins with a tracing of a quote from my diary as a child. The handwriting, as well as the thoughts written, age the speaker as they progress through the collection of poetry. They introduce the mind of the narrator before the section begins, alluding to what the reader might expect as they continue with this story. Each section ends with a collection of watercolor images, all representing the trinket that the poems within the section are titled. Not only do these visual elements bring their own personality to the collection, it also furthers the world building and allows for better visualization of the writing.

While the girl remains nameless, much of this work is a reflection of my own experiences and upbringing. The characters in this work are all based in my own family dynamic and memories. While I write from personal recollection, I also felt a great responsibility to stay honest with my reflection of this history. When writing from such a personal narrative, there is a kind of unique pressure that comes with creative non-fiction. Poetry often allows no room for shyness, and demands much vulnerability not just from the writer, but also the subjects that they are building their content around. I made an active choice to step away from claiming the voice of this collection as my own, in order to better define the speaker in this collection as an independent character. In essence, she has the same dreams and wants as many in the stages of childhood, and I wanted her experience to be something universal, even in its specificity.

While I was writing, I would often find myself reflecting on the necessity of my voice. There is a large collection of poets and artists that articulate their perspective of the world in new and thought provoking ways. I have had my share of witnessing the work of others that have significantly enriched my understanding of the world, and there is a creeping pressure surrounding my own writing that wants me to do the same. My relationship with poetry, over other forms, has been one where the focus has been introspective. I wanted to consider the greater implications of this work while still creating an honest reflection of my childhood experiences. It is challenging to consider the significance of your work to others when you understand its personal value. My attention in writing is designated to the mundane,

quiet moments in life. I am most compelled by considering how I can color in the emotions, thoughts, and experiences that can be collectively shared in surprising ways. With the state of the world in its current hostilities and violence, my story felt almost insignificant and selfish.

I noticed while writing this collection that it was easy to become disjointed with the present. In the attempts to chase future achievements instead of looking at the day in front of me, I am unable to examine the life I have. Writing poetry has allowed me to ground myself in what is real, and ultimately, I would like my writing to offer the reader the same sense of sanctuary. I returned to the work I deeply admired that also discussed, perhaps upon first glance, what would be a small story. E.J Koh's book was, in essence, a story about family, Oliver de la Paz and Lynda Barry discussed childhood, and Han Kang wrote about memory. All of these works brought meaning to me, simple as they may sound. This reflection gave me permission to acknowledge that my thesis does have to be something revolutionary. Through the process of workshopping my material with the cohort and with professors, I was able to recognize that the purpose with this work is not to present a mind altering-question or concept, but to rather ask the reader to consider why dust is settling on something that was always there but now forgotten.

Childhood is far more complex than it is credited for. Teaching and working with children has reminded me that this period of life impacts the time that follows. Children absorb more of their social life, emotional recognition, and triggers without having the ability to articulate the complexity of their world. Confusion, frustration, and fear during this growth is imminent. Experiencing strong emotions without having the ability to define them is, quite frankly, terrifying. I notice this occurring with my students, and there are times where we take time to discuss and demystify their fears and emotions. In this current position, as an educator and student, I was surprised at how much I began to learn about myself through being a figure of care and empathy in my student's lives. My memories of childhood are fragmented, and the worries and stressors of my students reminded me of how I once occupied the same headspace as they currently do. Adults are dismissive of children's worries, and in the attempt to claim

importance and severity, we neglect the possibility that the monster under the bed decided to grow up alongside us.

When considering the question of what the necessity of my work is, I find the answer with what I needed as a child. Most of this collection has the presence of solitude, and it acts almost as a character in itself. It is felt in the silent examination of the girl's observations of her world, and she is seen to occupy the space of her own thoughts. Isolation and solitude is felt by the reader when acknowledging that the girl sees and feels things greatly, but does not express them. There is a great element to childhood where this solitude and being misunderstood come into play. I want this collection to provide a way to bear witness to this aspect of childhood, and also as a means to heal it. While this collection is a look into my own experiences, it is my hope to have it become a starting point for readers to acknowledge their transitions and eventual growth out of childhood. Being a kid seems to be the most influential, strange, and fleeting moment. This work speaks to these fleeting moments in an effort to ground the reader in the present time.

Trinket, on the surface, is the memories of a girl growing up. This childhood is reflected in the things that she remembers, in the objects that have given her company. However, as I wrote more into this project, I found the true heartline of this work. *Trinket* is a collection about a woman asking why she needed to grow up, and her feverish attempt at scooping through evidence to see that she was also once a girl. It is the torment of defying and accepting the power of time. In its true essence, this collection is an illustration of grief, confusion, joy, and reclamation that exists within each transition throughout the entirety of life.

INTRODUCTION

she kept a box
more to close than to open
of things

sheltering a reminder
under soft dust and sunspots

to return

~

she has one thought.

which was an inkling,

then a pocket,

then a quiet storm,

in which she stole away into.

everything she is now, she woke into.

but how might she remember

where she'd been walking away from

so she has one thought

and it stands with her

uninvited

persistent

she's forgotten something.

she turns around.

there

beneath her

something is glittering on the ground.

~

perhaps
it is the softness of sun
or the bitterness
being absent
leaves on the back of the tongue

that brings you back
to the ground
to the box
more to close than to open

I.

lost we fun; Happy!!!! I am
Drinking milk mmm. also I am out
of Bed,

W A T E R

she plucked four bones from her mother
to begin with
before she descended

water into air
her open eyes claimed
this returning
before her
shallow breath did

there were no stars here

M I R R O R

glasses covering wide eyes
but her sister will insist
that they are small

black hair that
turns chocolate
in the evening sun

skin she'll
raise to compare
to her mother's coffee
adding cream into
the cup
until it matches

she looks for herself often

she traces her hand
over paper with a yellow pencil

STAIRS

with her father sleeping
she climbs fifteen stairs
on her hands and knees
to sit beside her grandmother
to have her hair touched
bruised petals
folded in strands
a quiet to fill the silence
of an orange morning

C A N D Y

she received two laces of candy
each dipped with crispy sour sugar
two because she has two hands to hold them with
the warmth of her palms bearing down on the sweetness
turning it sticky

when her mouth is pink spun sugar
She'll be taken to wash her hands

with four hands in a sink
she'll look between them
trying to find her own

CAKE

six candles to remind her
she is not a baby anymore
and there are responsibilities

she carries her little sister around
the tops of its toes settling in the crease of her thigh
and teaches her to look out of the window
when the baby sleeps
she places her finger between the nose
and upper lip
she will not move
until the permission of breath
excuses her

she waits on the stairs for her turn in smallness
only to suddenly
outgrow it
and she is confused at the celebration of
something she never quite asked for
disguised in chocolate frosting

with an exhale
the charred wicks
ribbon smoke
and she has forgotten
to make a wish

F L O O R

 baby sister falls a second time
 unable to recognize its feet
 its small body rolls against the floor in its frustration
and she watches the commotion from inside the door frame

 she doesn't remember this part of life

 with a firm hand on her shoulder
 she is told that some lessons are lived
as together they watch the baby pull itself up
 using the linty fibers of the couch cushions

 the baby takes three steps with its hands in the air
 fingers waving in the sunlight

PENCIL

how might you spell a name

mother a later love

father clouds dancing alone

grandparents split drying fish in a plastic basket

siblings syllables colliding with familiarity

strangers a black fly with an iridescent green spine

herself a mouthful of rose petals and thorns

M U D

three girls lay upon their grandma's bed as she wipes the bottoms of their feet clean
gritty and cold, the towel embraces their heels

lines of time taught her that all children are the same

the girls will eat
hot dog and rice
they whisper
and braid into each other

and the old woman
will wash the doll's clothes
eroded with dirt

each hung upon a clothes line
with a single pin

D O L L

they hit each other
each attempting to push the other off a bed
both suddenly so big and so strong

each waiting to take a large bite
out of a shoulder
and arm
a knee
the collateral limb
impulse bore into

even with a fistful of hair
they each agree to silence
so to not endanger the other

to play fairly
is to
inflict pain quietly

and there
cutting its fingerprint across her pupil
she sees a single indivisible line and knows
that they will always belong to each other in
a way time was not allowed to deny

B E A R

when the light runs through the window
she'll hold up a single stuffed bear
and wait
for it to blink or move in the way it did
when her father held it

she wishes for him a life of his own
the bear wishes the same for her
only he cannot say it
he'll let her hold him instead
again and again

when she first learned that children could also die
she hoped that she would be buried with this bear
so that her thoughts would not suffer
the torment of inactivity

perhaps her thoughts could play
when her body could not
perhaps she would still have nightmares
perhaps she would still be alive
he is not afraid of eternity
a circle is his favorite shape

she'll pull lint off of the little bear's body
and place the pieces of tangled fabric
in her mouth and
pretend it is strawberries

the sun has already set
there is no need for any more thinking
with three pieces of lint
pressed to the roof of her mouth
she'll hum a song she spent the day trying to remember
as beads fall from a hole in his right foot
the bear thinks to himself that loving something well
is very hard to do

C A R

before the drive returns to the familiar side of the pavement
before the road turns into the shape of a home
she will opens her eyes and squint them
and headlights will become flowers
or stars reaching their arms above
in limitless perception
disrupting the sky

performing her silent film sleep
her face
roses
asking once again to be smaller than she is
to be held beyond her age or her weight
disrupting the sky and
perhaps
she may always hold their hands

PIG TAILS

instead of
sugar and spice
she belongs to
a soft belly
and pockets of things

a cold wet comb is
set to her temple

pulls

again and again and again and again and
her mother lets go a sigh

hands at the middle of her back
would convince her to the sink
washing her face as if the sun would come off with just water

the soft drumming sits behind her eyes
looking anywhere
but
up

WINDOW

she wants to go outside to pick her mother flowers
a pale drooping bouquet of white

please watch over me
she asks before she goes
walking springtime

tired of pinching, tied with a blade of grass
sweet dew boils at the end of the severing
she thinks that it is the prettiest of rain

mother looks through a window.
no longer watching the girl,
but searching for her flowers in the grass.
making circles,
looking for shades of yellow and white.

T E E T H

she learns to smile
from her grandpa

as they slide their feet forward
sweeping the floor
with their
tsinelas
he laughs and touches her cheek

she thinks that before he pulled all his teeth out
each meeting their end with
the collision of rusted pliers and decay
she would not know him

filled gums would bruise her eye
his words known to everyone then
and perhaps he would not have so much time
for a little girl
who asks far too often
for him to recite his memory
into shapes of clouds

he holds his coffee still
somehow
on the slanted porch step
and she pushes her front tooth into motion

covering her mouth
at the taste of blood

W A L L

whether she was an apple or glass
she could not know
but she wanted to spin

just as an apple or glass might do
she recited her name in her head
to recollect what she was

and again she spun
because there was nothing in so much motion
solids become water blurred
sounds are fractions
and life dissolves into gray lines
strips of paper
dust that mimics snow

the dust that mimics snow flies
as the right side of her head makes contact
with the wall that was quiet beside her

she cannot recall blame
so she doesn't shout
as she lays cleanly across the wood floor

aged hands attempt to catch
the liquid drizzling from her crown
as if they don't know any better
she sits on the kitchen counter top
as towels blush crimson
when they greet the side of her pretty little head

sodden
the fabric falls asleep at her left hand
her eyes are far too still
sounding out numbers
counting letters.
the earth sitting so close to her chest

she promises to play quietly



II.

I did not do much today
I went outside and blow bubbles and
playde with chock. I really dont know
~~what~~ what to write in here

J E A N S

*These are my favorite jeans.
They have flowers made of thread at the bottom.
The flowers begin at the knee and fall downwards.
They were my sisters before me.
And they will belong to the baby after me.
Then they will belong to waiting,
in a box within the closet.
But for now they are mine.*

*Yesterday, my mother played the radio and we danced.
I think all the time is here with us.*

*My legs hurt, and
the hem begins to trace my shin instead of my ankle.
I ask for another day.
Another day with flowers that were never mine to begin with.*

*This body metabolizes itself.
I cannot sleep.*

Dance with me.

the girl will ask her mother
perhaps for the rest of her life

T A B L E

to sit beneath wood
is to hear voices or to quiet them
in a home with no doors,
she drapes collected blankets over tables
fastening edges with heavy cups
she returns to her knowledge
of crawling upon her hands and knees
electric light cuts through the many textures of fabric
so that she may be unafraid of oversaturation

the table does not tell her
that the world is the same as she left it
where will her quiet be then
the table thinks that perhaps
a child remains a child
if it's hunger is satiated with illusion
it wants very much to grow its four legs alongside her two

PICTURE BOOK

she writes stories of bunnies and bears
a life unafraid of the forest
drinking tea
fresh out of gingham baskets
stories of a duck that turns into crackers
who is returned to his body by
a witch with one eye
with gratitude given through friendship

she writes about girls
that are shadows of her sisters
and draws them into a beautiful standing home
she colors popcorn
and leftover drawings
onto their coffee table
in a living room they
do not need permission to enter
or to wait until empty

she writes of her greediness
of matching bed clothes
soft bread in plastic wrap
clean hair
and the answer
yes
staples it
and hides the stories into a drawer

in the corner
static light burns into her temple
she presses her face into these pages
waiting to evaporate into graphite and dyed wax

C R A B

she watches grandma baptize eight crabs
with a blackened toothbrush
they wiggle slowly
as she holds them on their backs
cleaning their milk stained stomachs

they stretch their many limbs at the foreign touch
when she leaves them in the sink to set water on the stove
the girl peers over to touch their sunset bodies
as her grandma did
and they reach to her

the girl is moved aside with a single raised voice
as the crabs are carried to the pot
she stands to listen
their tapping against the metal lid
under enormous heat
asking politely
to be forgiven

M O L D

the corner of her eyes is a space
forbidden only when she sees the end of everything

rabbits die running and she thinks
the same of a house that contains too many lives

its legs start to tremble and strain
when its walls begin to corrupt in on itself at all hours

when it sobs before you
you open your hands looking to catch what is left of them

oh oh oh
it says to the girl
i remember when people were small and gentle

black mold spreading like lace
and cream
over its floor and ceiling
her forearms and throat

wallpaper sagging
she does not want to grow any taller

S A N D W I C H

the sandwich on the kitchen table
is as long as his forearm

he bought it up the street
for his grandchildren

not because it is especially delicious
wilted lettuce
and sweet red ham
cheese to stick to their molars

but because it is enough

the girls sit besides him
as he slices it into four sections
three for them and one for their brother

B A T H T U B

when naked
was something other than shame
skin fell around her bones like fabric did

together, two girls sat fully dressed in their bodies
in the bathtub
water making lines on the center of their stomachs
one taught the other to make jellyfish
from the towel they used to wash their backs

they take turns patting its bloated head
that pushed against the surface
they release the responsibility of its own form
before it asks the hard question of creation onto their knees

the two girls are dried and sent to bed
and the jellyfish is wrung out before it learns its voice
and calls to them

PERIWINKLE

she stands carefully
a paper doll on stocky legs
the layers of tulle and organza
will argue against each other should she move abruptly

when her mother dressed her that morning
lifting new white stockings over her small ankles and knees
raising her hands above her head
she is told that her dress is periwinkle
the space between a soft blue and lavender
an indecisive kind of fearful

around others, she is cooed after
they lifted her above their heads or
held closely to their faces
a labor she does not understand
cheeks always so very cold

when she is set down again to be forgotten
she'll stand as a little beautiful thing
looking for its mother and father
unable to walk forward on
its crossed legs

COWBOY BOOTS

the stitching dug its nails into her calves
so she pulled up her socks
in between her stomping

grandma and grandpa
clapped for her
the higher she kicked
the deeper she swung her hips

she danced
a body feeling slightly more
than nothing

a flame
acting
a wildfire

P R A Y E R

with her hands pressed together
somewhat awkwardly
she thinks about what
she would like to
ask the night

she'd like to eat
soft chocolate bread
or tilapia

She'd like
a new sweater for her bear
or perhaps pants
as he had none to begin with

~

her hands press together harder

she wants to place every blanket over self
and pretend to know a womb
she no longer wants to read
moods like seeing colors

waiting for a word to
become a hole in the wall
a door split from its hinges

the sound in her head is growing too loud

the sound in her head is growing too loud

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~

her hands release each other

she wants
to be forgiven
and loved
like a boy

she covers her ears

T U P P E R W A R E

in august
when heat ran ribbons above asphalt
and the front door would stay ajar
she would open the neapolitan ice cream
at the back of the freezer
and find fish heads

she'll try to cover their eyes before
diving through the bags of meat
fresh from the commissary
to cool her body

outside
her name is recited in excess
they had quietly set the hose on
just enough
and they smile at the secret water
coloring their shins and feet

LIPSTICK

forks and knives against porcelain plates
a friction stirring with aggression
that should never be there
and yet she always sees it
but cannot tell its name

plastic on sofa when warm
clung to the back of her thighs
and while the adults played their words
and laughter in continuous repetition
something she supposed
you must agree upon in order to become older
she detached her legs from the sofa
to climb white carpeted steps to a dark room

before a large mirror she saw what she knew herself to be

in the cleanest of glass
they choose volume to mask meaning
and she is disturbed by the cadence of their conversation
sounds crashing against the light on the ceiling
stirring into themselves
until there is nothing but smoke

she pulls open drawers
small golden tubes roll with its waking
her hand catching one
as she looks over her shoulder

she spins the lipstick
as high as it might stand
and pressed the lid down upon it



III.

I have been feeling
different emotions lately,
and I feel like I'm
changing. I don't want
to change, I like the
way I am.

HOUSE

the house and the girl do not say goodbye
they do not believe in it

what happens instead is
the house knows that
what remains will be
the dust that sweetens the corners
of what she keeps
it will be with her then

it is strange
thinks the house
her father
mother
brother
and sisters
didn't look back as often as she does
they didn't lean against its walls
small and gentle

loneliest is the child
that is taught to be a woman
before she realizes
how the sun sets

so
the house watched the girl go
knowing heartbreak has two feet

G A T E

where is she
where was she
where has she been
there is thin light everywhere
and she sleeps most of the time
the rings around her neck are creeping
below her eyes and
people begin to say that they
have seen her before

as she sits atop a porch to watch
a gate swing with wind
she convinces herself that
maybe the wind might be
a human asking her without a body
to seek something she has lost a long time ago

hard wood attempts
to keep her from hearing the wind's call
but as she stands up
it accepts the inevitable
that a child is no longer a child
when it learns to run
its eyes over clouds
to seek where the sky might end and
everything around her
knows and knows and knows
that the hole in her head is filling

P I L L O W

she calls to many in her sleep
but none so often as her sister's bones
to her belly and back

what may a single body do
when it only knows to dream in threes

when she returns home again
they bring their heads together
they are unafraid to ignore the places
where time has dug into

they don't tell her
her hair has grown the darkest

STONE

chewing sorrow dislocates jaws
but in the presence of a tomorrow can look like
butterfly wings
eyelashes fluttering against cheeks

the jaw splits
in two
to recount steps looking for
a memory of color

and over the course of air
a feather laid on its belly
waiting for the impact of ground

chewing sorrow bares teeth and gum
to snow and asphalt
voice mimics the abrasion

in a sore throat words cling like microfibers
until they emerge to speak of pain
as if they were inflicting it

spinning wildly

your eyes haven't an arch or splinter when it is your first life
and
there is salt for your empty stomach

J E L L O

grandpa is seeing his mother in the corner of the room
while the girl feeds him soft sugar free strawberry jello

refusing to eat anything much
like a child
she dresses her eyes in deep shades of sorrow
until he opens his mouth

with a bright red tongue he says
thank you, baby
after every spoonful

she'd empty her pockets in exchange for
time to be longer than a room

window shades defuse
the warm light
as
she reads to him
and his mother

T R E E

his
eyes are
gray
when they
were once oak

what is this really about
when we must come down
where we once stood so
gently

to an open window
she raises her first curse to the sky
for spending the rest of her days
remembering
a smile she used to sit so closely beside

R O S A R Y

women carry their tears on string
wrapped around their fists so blue
catching moonlight

she sits timid in the warmth

they puddle themselves together
counting their shadows with a
shared voice
smelling of body salt and vanilla

LETTER

if a lifetime is spent within words, i'll share with you the ones i understand fully.

I am sitting in a cafe where everyone discusses amongst themselves the correct way to pronounce ube. I listen, and they all happen to be wrong somehow. I should learn to mind my own business. Maybe I won't feel disappointed so often.

if this is my first life, then how do i know you so well ?

I am reading a book here, too. It's making me think of my own mortality, but not in a scary way. It's more comforting, do you know what I mean? Have you also thought about your own mortality lately? In a non-scary way? That's probably a personal question. I should (again) learn to mind my own business, but I thought I should ask.

I'll bring you to this cafe, I think you'd like it. Let me know when you'll be close enough, and we'll go together.

i will not be everlasting.

I don't feel at home here, but that's not a bad thing. Sometimes I mistake this place for home. Depending on the time of day, the sky is similar to the one we used to look at when we were together. But I am reminded that this place is still a stranger to me whenever I look up at street signs. Maybe I'll be able to walk back without looking at them. I'll be more confident, I promise. Maybe, I'll make this place my friend, but you know how I am. It will probably take a while.

I am thinking of a word, and I want you to guess what it is, okay?

~

if you hadn't promised to meet me again, how would you say goodbye ?

I still have a fear of disappointing people, so I won't say that I am lonely. I don't want to burden you either, so I won't say that I miss you. Instead, I will say "I'll see you soon", and look forward to the time where it happens. I hope you can understand.

I am walking home now and I don't look at the street signs. This is good. Remember when I told you that I got off at the wrong bus stop, and I had to walk 15 minutes to get to the apartment? I'll get better at that too. I'll probably tell you all about it.

across these skies, i'll remember you. i'll think of you the most.

Did you eat? I bought these mini blueberry waffles yesterday, and I think I'll make some for dinner. Remember when we would eat cereal and reuse the milk ? We would eat so quietly. I'm home now by the way. I had a good day, and I hope you had a good one too. You'll have to tell me about it. You can tell me tomorrow if that works better.

*Remember when I told you to guess what word I was thinking of?
Tell me the word you thought of when I see you next, okay? Write it down, so you don't forget.*

Please don't forget me.

*i'll see you
soon.*

LULLABY

shh

the magnolias and jasmine
lay heavy on her skin

shh

the dead bee on the sidewalk
makes her stomach hurt

shh

not the tired you
can wake from

shh

everything in the sky seems
pink and starving

shh

it's there crossing the street
it's there chewing with its mouth open

shh

her body is in its second changing
and her nails makes their bed in her palm

shh

people are wasps in the sand and
looking to the ocean makes her forget how to swim

shh

PHONE

even from this great distance
like pollen on her skin
mother hears her daughter weeping

when she calls
a soft itching of static
she asks her girl
if it's gotten any warmer where
she is

all the time
somehow
knowing

SCISSORS

they ask her to draw pictures of paper dolls for them
she asks them how they would like the hair to be
the clothes
the shoes
the smile
the length of spine
they perch at her shoulder confining her movements to
graphite lines
she doesn't mind the closeness interest provokes

they are quiet like this
their irises burning faster
waiting for the world they built under the lights
to be ready to cut out and performed

a still life
to be crumpled

C A R O U S E L

in a large concrete yard
two girls ran up to her to pull at her arms
they wanted to spin

each upon a wrist
the two
as she took to the middle
screamed after each other
the girls outstretch their hands trying to meet the other's back
but never letting go of she that spun in the center
because there was nothing in so much motion

she recited her name in her head to recollect what she was
not what she remembered to be
in another life she wonders if she could meet them again
each a horse in lace pastels with wild glazed eyes

you are very young
they say after looking at her for a while
with their breath becoming mist
they sit her down to touch her hair

D E W

leaves cry
and fall from their mother's bones
too
when they are born

her earlobes ride the tops of her shoulders these days
mostly because she must have answers now
mostly because she is ashamed of pretending

she used to carry things
unsure where to set them down
when she asks the wind,
who remembers her the most,
what this is all for
the wind turns her pockets inside out.

the wind was waiting for a clear sky or
to remember what lines to trace to find
right where her heart is
a girl is a girl
is then a sore woman
perhaps taller perhaps
with longer fingers
perhaps with recesses of her mind
churning rock to sand

round then sharp then pieces
looking for magnetism
or a street corner that looks familiar in lamplight

and despite her body growing unfamiliar
she'd like to remember it all
not through the witnessing of others
borrowing memory bleeds ink
and despite any configuration
it'll never be hers

~

no
she'd like to remember it all

especially the spinning
the fractions of air becoming her skin
and her anchor
she is dizzy now

before she leaves,
she picks up what remains
of the trinkets glittering the ground
lining them up
to ask for them to find her when
living is forgetting

together,
as she walks away, they all decide that they
are nearer to her
than they have ever been



BOX

dust rolls onto itself over the length of her pointer finger as the girl and the box sit together

To know I am a woman is to say
Once I was a girl
Afraid of her life timing

the girl admits there is still so much for her to learn

To know I am a woman is to say
Once I was a girl
Ashamed of the way her home smells
Aware of the scent lingering on her skin

to which the box replied

To know I am a woman is to say
Once I was a girl
Who believed everything her sisters were
And broke storms to bring them a quiet day

~

“were” and “are” sound the same when your eyes are closed

To know I am a woman is to say
Once I was a girl
Who bled tears to her father
To which he replied
Push them back

all of herself are strung up together in pleasant conversation

To know I am a woman is to say
Once I was a girl
To whom I say good morning to
With each passing of a mirror

and all dust spins the same

