

Not A Tracing: A Map

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ABSTRACT

This work concerns women within a single family and the ways that these women experience various levels and types of trauma, ranging from sexual trauma and child abuse to addiction and mental illness. Using various types of research and childhood memories, as well as the inherited stories from generations prior, this poetic memoir investigates long-term effects of intergenerational trauma on the collective consciousness. *Not a Tracing* employs rhizomatic philosophies both in research and in form, braiding narratives and moving from eras, emphasizing circularity throughout the manuscript. It also employs research from leading trauma and feminist researchers, as well as notable organizations like RAINN and the American Psychological Association.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....1

NOT A TRACING: A MAP.....22

REFERENCES.....202

VITA.....206

INTRODUCTION

In January 2020, I started this book while taking Diana Khoi Nguyen's *Colloquium in Poetry* course. My objective was to write an essay braiding Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony at the Kavanaugh trial with nonlinear, episodic prose detailing my mother's life. It was meant to be contained, if not in form than by semester; I never expected to still be working on that same material three years later.

Writing this, however, has been defined mostly by its surprises. I've seen how the relationship between my mother and myself, within the context of our family, is deeply dependent on the story of my family. In order for one story to make sense, I need to tell all stories. I cannot talk about my mother without looking to her mother, just as I cannot talk about myself without including my sister. All of these relationships are intrinsically necessary. Many of them are complicated even further by the mere fact that they exist only in memory or story: my mother's relationship to her deceased mother, my relationship to my estranged sister, our relationships to ourselves *then* and *now*. How can I map my mother's addiction without mapping her sexual traumas, her childhood abuse? How can I illustrate my childhood without including my father? These are the dilemmas I began to face, and thus, the project began to sprawl and move between places, times, and people, ultimately transitioning from lyric essay to a nonlinear poetic-memoir of my family, trauma, and recovery.

Though initially an essay, the project eventually evolved into its current prose blocks, giving space between sections:

My therapist says I have low self worth. She says I'm porous, more
susceptible to penetration or permeation. And she's right, what others
think about me matters to me. Their response to me, what I say or
look like, weighs on me.

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As a child, my mother was often beaten by her mother, whose blue black rage filled all corners of the house, her hands gripping the whip or paddle or belt, whatever was in reach. “You knew her mood by the by the pounding of her steps as she walked up the stairs,” my mother tells me. My mother grew up in fear, afraid to tell her mother even when she’d compound-fractured her own elbow, worried she’d be told to get a switch off the front tree for the hassle and cost of a doctor’s visit. She slept on the broken arm until her mother discovered the blood in her bed.

Since each piece is dependent on the next, the book can be read holistically as one single poem following the multigenerational experiences of two families—or as a memoir employing lyrical prose to create a mutual experience. This ambiguity between genres highlights similarities in poetry and non-fiction, which formally underscores the mirrored experiences between the women of different generations. This formal approach also calls attention to the rhizomatic philosophy of the book, which is backbone to the entire work. Moving from Indiana to Florida to Tennessee, from the 1930’s to present day, the pieces create a cyclical feminist historiography that reveals the traumatic effects of sexual abuse in layered and multigenerational narratives.

One connecting thread is the use of memory and shared experiences, which attaches individual pieces to each other, as I investigate my own fragmented memories as well as my mother’s recalled memory of childhood rape and the stories of abuse and violence passed on from my mother. Additionally, I use trauma and memory research to support the personal narrative and fragmented details of my grandmother’s, mother’s, and my own experiences with sexual misconduct. My own memories are interrogated and questioned, showing the multiplicity of memory, how events that happen over and over become folded into one, long moment. I question my own memory not in disbelief but to illustrate objective skepticism and establish credibility. I show this skepticism

through direct statements or through the use of speculative “or,” highlighting various ways that something could have gone or the various times something happened:

The first time Julie scolds Kurt. But when it happens again three months later, it's the Fourth of July, I'm in a red tank top and shorts carrying hot dogs out to the grill, he comes up behind me and rubs my shoulders, my neck—she calls me a home-wrecker. Or is that the time she said I'd made it up?

Place connects each piece to the other, as the manuscript moves from my mother's birth town of New Albany, Indiana to my South Florida hometowns and eventually follows my family and I to Knoxville, Tennessee. Place grounds the poems and moves them forward, as each new setting brings threads of history and experience; and it texturizes the sections with details that imply or contrast a state of mind or emotional state. In the case of my mother, place is especially influential to her character development. For her, South Florida exists as a suffocating and harsh atmosphere whereas the eventual Knoxville setting represents sensitivity and rebirth for her. New Albany and its surrounding areas—namely Louisville and Lexington, Kentucky—color my mother's childhood with poverty and abuse, but these moments are tinted in her nostalgia despite their burdens. Similar, South Florida through my eyes exists as more than a place but a symbolic representation of recklessness as well as a deep pit of memories complicated by their emotional contexts.

Trauma additionally binds the poems, as it moves from my mother's child abuse, sexual abuse, and eventual substance abuse; subsequently, trauma also exists in my own narratives, as I deal with my mother's abuse, my parents' marital issues, and my own sexual harassment experiences. In my work, trauma is cyclical and illustrated in each generation of women in varying manifestations, from my grandmother's life to my sister's. Alongside the trauma, forgiveness and love also run through this project and link not only the poems to each other but also the relationships within the

poems. Maternal love is complicated through illustrations of daughters stepping into parental roles for their mothers, and martial love is tested through years of drug and financial abuse. Forgiveness would not exist without trauma, and subsequently, this book could not exist if it weren't for the eventual forgiveness reached in both primary relationships.

When her mother dies, three months after her Leukemia diagnosis, my mother is twenty-six, and by now, they've grown to be friends. They have jokes and secrets. They have routines and habits.

With her paycheck from Kroger, my mother took June to the Estée Lauder counter, had her face done for fun, the lipstick and eyeshadows an unknown indulgence. When she had died, and it's time to pick the clothes for burial, my mother takes on the responsibility like she had all the others—sleeping at the hospital, sitting through chemo, rubbing lotion into her skin. She looks through June's closet, a mess, a heap of clothes unfolded and piled atop each other, but she can't find the skirt to the pink dress-suit June wore to church. My mother brings the funeral home a shirt, a jacket, and panties. "Bury her without the skirt; she'll get a kick out of that."

As a multigenerational narrative, the collection functions as a poetic memoir that maps the different evolutions of trauma within two the primary families: my mother's family and our family. The broad scope of this means that it is not only a memoir of myself or my life, but a memoir about women and their relationships, about my mother, her relationship with her own mother, and my relationship to my mother. It also examines the relationship of sisters—my mother's sister and my own sister—and the tension mirrored in these connections. In many ways, my life has mirrored my mothers, including our half-sisters, nearly ten years older born of different fathers than our own.

As the book parallels my life with my mother's, it essentially foreshadows many of my own experiences by looking at my mother's experiences. Further, the book functions as a literary illustration of women as they process various traumas, at varying levels and degrees.

Not A Tracing also functions as a braided research project highlighting the long-term pervasive effects of abuse, both child and sexual. While the personal narrative moves the project along, the research balances emotional context with credibility. Research allows a reprieve between the more dramatic prose sections while also illuminating the emotional stakes:

My middle name comes from my mother's mother, June. Her name was June Rose, though she was born in November. Daughter of Huntley and Alene Hockersmith. Huntley was a plumber, a man who used his hands, cracked dry in the Kentuckiana winters. Huntley and Alene had six daughters, June the first. Huntley would go into their daughters' beds at night or he'd bring them down to the basement.

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Childhood trauma can have epigenetic and intergenerational effects. Studies have found that children who experience abuse can display changes in their genetics, which can affect the way genes are expressed and used. One study found that children who had been abused showed drastic changes in genes linked to cancer, heart disease, bipolar disorder, and depression, among other physical and psychological disorders. Another study found that one-third of those who survive child abuse become abusers themselves once they have children.

As the collection moves through generations, it moves through themes, from parenthood and child abuse, sexual assault and marriage, drug abuse and recovery. The ripple effect of these traumas connects these themes as well as relationships affected by these challenges; as the narrative evolves, my parents' marriage, my relationship to my parents, and even my own marriage, are re-

vealed to be impacted in various ways by the events of the past. Further, the long lasting effects of trauma ring throughout the collection, uniting each section with the next, from research elements to the personal narratives, each ultimately building to depict many generations' worth of trauma. To counter this, the project also relies on the theme of growth and evolution, of processing and forgiving, which balances and verifies the overall voice.

Research also unifies the text, creating pauses between the narratives and anchoring the emotional weight with credibility. The research also ranges greatly: I move between sources like the U.S. Department of Justice, which I use to describe the five subtypes of child abuse, to local news agencies like West Palm's WPTV or the Sun-Sentinel, which help me characterize early 2000's South Florida in its pill-mill heydays. I also rely heavily on research surrounding sexual assault and child molestation, using information from the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network as well as the National Sexual Violence Resource Center to illuminate how many young girls suffer sexual abuse, how rarely these crimes are reported, and how detrimental sexual violence is to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. There are multiple sources on drug abuse as well, from the American Addiction Centers' research describing the ways that opioids attach themselves to different receptors within the body to the Centers for Disease Control's statistics on opioid overdoses, particularly those of women, as well as a study from the National Institute of Health on the serious effects of Buprenorphine, the narcotic pain reliever to which my mother first became addicted. I also consider pivotal works like Bessel van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps Score* an important reference text for my own understanding of trauma, as well as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which illustrates the ubiquity of the young "passive sexuality" seen throughout the manuscript:

Simone DeBeauvoir's "*The Second Sex*" says *We have seen that in a majority of women a passive sexuality has also developed since childhood: woman likes to be embraced, caressed, and especially after puberty she wants to be flesh in a man's arms; the role of subject is normally assigned to him.*

I remember me. Nine years old. Small for my age. Big eyes. Long light brown hair. It's Halloween. I'm in a hula-girl costume. A straw skirt. Seashell bikini top. Lei draped around my neck. I dress by myself, and come out to the garage where mom is smoking her Camel Lights. I appear in the doorway. "Mommy, do I look sexy?"

There is also much research done prior to this work which informs my writing and my thought processes as I write and investigate the stories passed down to me or the memories I hold myself. Feminist therapist and researcher Maria P. P. Root's work on insidious trauma, as well as her arguments on what defines trauma, helped to broaden my own working definitions and to better analyze the different layers of trauma. Root proposes a "multidimensional" view of trauma and asserts that most women in western society suffer some level of second-hand rape trauma caused by the collective stories and collective consciousness: most women live with the fear they could be raped, or raped again, and that this would likely be at the hands of someone familiar to them (Webster 134). Women become traumatized by the experiences of others; when we are told about a neighbor getting raped or our own mothers' sexual assaults, we experience second-hand trauma.

Maria P. P. Root says: "(1) Direct trauma includes traditional forms of trauma (war, accidents, natural disasters) as well as sexual and physical abuse, sudden or debilitating physical illnesses and culturally bound atrocities (internment of Japanese Americans, dislocation of native groups and genocide); (2) Indirect trauma is secondary trauma, whereby a person is traumatized by the trauma endured by another person. Friends, family members, direct witnesses to trauma, people who are habitually exposed to trauma (professionals who work with trauma victims or members of the media) could suffer indirect trauma. Women, as a result of being socialized to be relationship-dependent, may be more likely and vulnerable to indirect trauma; (3) Insidious trauma is form of psychological or symbolic threat based on individual characteristics that are directed towards a larger group of people who are marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, class, sexual orientation or physical ability. The effects of insidious trauma

become part of a collective consciousness, leaving generations of people traumatized as a result of their ancestor's direct suffering."

While it has not made it directly into the project, I've also read important research on collective memory—particularly the work of Ron Eyerman, who argues that collective memory of any group of people, particularly when that group is in some way disenfranchised, is pivotal to that group's identity. "Collective identity formation" is directly connected to collective memory, which Eyerman describes as that which "orients a group, providing the temporal and cognitive map [...]; collective memory unifies the group through time and over space by providing a narrative frame, a collective story, which locates the individual and his and her biography within in" (161). While Eyerman's research looks at large groups, I look to my family, and I think about our collective memory and how it has shaped my family, particularly the women:

My mother has always been fearful, double-checking doors are locked, alarm set. She sleeps with a baseball bat, knives in the top nightstand drawer. Insists on wooden rods in windows despite locks, always leaves a porch light on. Long after our German Shepherd dies, she keeps up "Beware of Dog" signs. She reads that a dog's sound deters break-ins so she buys an alarm that barks aggressively whenever its sensors are set off. She answers the door yelling at a nonexistent dog, "Get back, get back, stay!"

The manuscript opens as my mother and I wait for hospital results late at night in December 2019. Through the book's braided narrative, a conversation is revealed wherein she describes to me a recovered childhood memory of a violent sexual assault that returned suddenly while watching Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testify. The project weaves and multiples its narratives, broadening scope to include my grandmother's sexual traumas and the physical abuse she later perpetuated. Eventually

my mother's addictions and compulsions are revealed, and their impact on our family unit becomes apparent through the memories I introduce. As the project moves between eras and settings, the pieces reflect a pausing and rewinding, a sort of formal way of processing trauma.

Female relationships in this text are crucial and are evaluated at multiple levels, at times uncovering cyclicalities of family history and the parallelism of mine and my mother's lives. The relationship between my mother and her sister ultimately foreshadows the tension between my sister and I. Additionally, the tension between mothers and daughters, the eventual friendship and love through years of strain, similarly highlights the book's heartbeat. While it covers traumatic and painful memories—memories from my mother's childhood and my own—the book is not meant to feel stagnant. It does not intend to linger in those moments, rather it is meant to reveal evolution and movement in these relationships:

My mother's childhood stories scared me when I was young. I didn't understand how she could ever recall her mother with fondness. I remember she and I were baking, breaking eggs into a bowl with a hard crack, when she told me about the time she had a persistent toothache, and her mother and aunt were tired of hearing about it. Sitting there in the backyard, fixing a broken fence or light-post, her aunt took a pair of rusted pliers and, while her mother sat by laughing, pulled out the aching tooth. "There, now you can't complain anymore, can you?"

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But she did have good memories—once she was the only child left to feed and her parents no longer had to shop at food banks. In the late 70's, she and her parents flew to Italy, visited her favorite brother stationed in the Navy. In Rome, she and her mother went shopping as her father walked the Coliseum. Her mother bought her a blue silk scarf, big enough to wrap double around my mother's slight frame, and fashioned it into a top by folding it into a triangle and tying it

tight around my mother's chest. She wore it with wide-legged white pants, her sun-tanned shoulders bare except for her blond hair.

Emotional evolution within the project's narrative are important not just to illustrate repeated history and eventual relationships that develop, but also works to ground and contextualize the rhizomatic approach that helps shape the entire manuscript. *Not A Tracing* dissolves notions of beginnings and endings, illustrating instead how each exist within each other. It also blurs lines between individual experiences, pointing instead to a collective consciousness. Lastly, it works to dislodge notions of genre by obscuring lines between memoir and poetry. All of these obfuscations are purposeful and inspired by arguments of rhizomatic philosophy, which repudiates chronological, linear, conclusion-driven logic in favor of a disorganized system of growth.

These rhizomatic philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari inform not only the philosophy of the manuscript but also its form and structure; their arguments describe the structure and nature of my text throughout their definitions of rhizomes. They reject notions of binaries or linearities and assert instead that "in nature, roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramifications, rather than a dichotomous one.... Even the book as a natural reality is a taproot, with its pivotal spine and surrounding leaves" (5). In this way, events in the past exist right next to events of today. This idea of a "circular system" is key as *Not A Tracing* highlights multiple systems within my single family, the "spine" connecting all "leaves."

The rhizome's movements and connections to each of its parts are crucial for this work; nothing exists separately or unfolds in an orderly way here. *Not A Tracing* moves outward like a web rather than straight through. In this way, it pushes against organization and instead highlights interconnectedness: "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (7). Each relationship is tangled with the next until each layer of the book is revealed to connect to another.

Plants are not the only rhizomes, according to Deleuze and Guattari, who assert that animals also create rhizomes with each other and with other species. They use an example of an orchid and a wasp:

The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen.

Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome.... At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. (10)

In this way, the mothers and daughters, or the pair of sisters in my text, are constantly creating a “deterritorialization of one” and a “reterritorialization of the other”: as my mother recreates the image of her mother, her mother exists again, newly, in that image; as I reveal myself slowly morphing more and more into my mother, I am recreating my mother's image or shape, which she then occupies. Deleuze and Guattari further argue this same principle applies to books: “the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an appa-parallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can)” (11). *Not A Tracing* then, while mimicking the structure of rhizomes, their movements and developments, creates a rhizome with the world it evolved from, one existing within its image of the other.

Further, rhizomes—people, animals, plants—survive trauma: “a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines...These

lines always tie back to one another” (9). Again, we encounter the notion of returning or connecting to other parts, a circularity, not linearity. In this way, my project and the rhizome are both map-like:

What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious... The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting... Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back ‘to the same.’ (12)

In this way, the nonlinearity of my work allows for multiple entryways; as a circle starts and ends anywhere, my book can be picked up from just about any point and it would still generally make sense. Additionally, the end leaves us in motion, with a sense of ongoingness, rather than finality.

Further, I would assert that memoir in general is a genre of map-making; even in those memoirs which unfold chronologically, there is a calling-back to the past which is way of drawing of a map back to or from oneself. This contextualization happens only in the framing of history and the interrogation of memory—in the deep honest engagement with the past and with memory. I’m thinking particularly of Amy Long’s *Codependence*, a memoir of lyric essays detailing her chronic pain, addiction, and family dysfunction. Similar to my Long’s work, my collection spans decades and makes use of switch-back time and humor to inform present day situations. Further, the memoir’s honesty and vulnerability interrogates actions and behaviors, including those outside the main point of view. Again comparing my work to Long’s, both look at compulsion, addiction, and recreational drug use in juxtaposing ways:

And blueberries—for two or three years, all she eats are blueberries. Two or three pounds a day. People don't believe me. I take pictures of the fridge, filled with packs of them. My father tells me she puts \$3500 on a credit card in one month. All blueberries. When she goes to Costco, they—other regulars, employees, managers—call her Blueberry Lady. Customers see her cart, filled with crates of them, and ask, “do you own a bakery? do you make smoothies? what do you do with all these?” She shrugs, “I just eat them.” And eats them she does. Like popcorn, a few tossed into her mouth at once. She goes around the house, carrying them in a bowl. When she goes out for errands, she puts a carton in her blue leather purse, as blue as the berries inside.

...

Now that I've graduated from community college, there's time to wait before starting at the local university in autumn. In this gap, I start taking Adderall. As an adolescent, I refused illicit drugs, prided myself on sobriety. I felt superior. But this prescription for Adderall feels acceptable because it comes prescribed by a doctor. At first, I only take them occasionally, but they make me feel great—I need so little sleep, so little food. Occasionally I crush and snort them on my cell phone screen, parked in plazas across Boca and Delray or in the bathrooms of bars, the orange powder getting into the cracks on my screen protector. More often, though, I break them into halves and take one every morning, maybe another in the afternoon. I feel like this is a good way to ration and be sensible with my own drug use.

As effects of sexual trauma are sprawling, and as the project has evolved, building on the psychological and biological research surrounding sexual abuse, it has become increasingly fragmented; the storytelling collapses timelines so that events occur next to each other, one connected to the following through the underlying narrative. The literary rhizomatic approach creates an opportunity for

new information to organically emerge through the braided narratives so that each additional thread makes sense, each thread appearing like a new branch naturally breaks through dirt. Further, this approach emphasizes the events and the individuals, rather than analyzing or critiquing them, so that they are authentic. The rhizome model also allows for a natural mirroring of events without a sense of predictability so when experiences are reflected in different individuals it feels fitting rather than contrived:

One summer, my mother tells me, Leah comes to stay with her at Denise and Ed's house. Leah falls asleep on the couch, Denise goes to bed, and my mother and Ed are watching TV when he wraps his arm around her and gropes her, cupping her small breast in his hand.

...

I'm fifteen when my sister starts dating Kurt. One night, my sister and Kurt come over. My mother, sister, and I fight about something. After, we get into Julie's car, I-95 north outside my window. Julie drives, Mother sits passenger. Kurt and I in the backseat. I'm still crying. He scoots so close our legs almost touch. My right, his left. I remember I'm wearing shorts. It's summer. He rubs my knee slowly in circles. Then the soft inner part of my leg. First time I'm touched like this. Gravity presses into me, holds me in place.

Additionally, the rhizome's botanical origins offer an interesting way to use plants and place to depict the alternating settings between the subtropics of Florida to Appalachia to the upland south, something I use to ground the pieces regionally. *Not A Tracing* balances the nuance of memory: some details may be hazy, but the setting rings clear. The outside world often becomes clarified by the floral and botanical descriptions: palm trees, bulb flowers, various pine trees. While grounding the work in place, this also points to memory and its fragmented systems, illustrating memory's ability to be simultaneously hyper-focused and slippery.

This nonlinear, or rhizomatic, approach to narrative illustrates a tangled system of roots and shoots, an emotional enmeshment not dissimilar from what Sven Birkerts describes in *The Art of Time in Memoir*, but while he asserts the “crisis of entanglement and willful push for separation” is the primary motivation of memoirs written about mothers by daughters, my project seeks to highlight this enmeshment and to grow from it (145). While it’s crucial for my speaker to be her own solid character, it’s also important to emphasize the lifelong connection between mothers and daughters, rather than push away from that connection. While his arguments surrounding mother-daughter memoirs at times feel too binary for me, I appreciate his thoughts on trauma and memory. If Birkerts’ theories surrounding trauma are correct, as I would argue they are—“[after trauma] the normal continuum of growth is violated”—then I would suggest my manuscript acts as a literary recollection of the various “growth continuums” within the lives depicted. Further, the braided narratives interspersed with research reflects his theory that traumatic memories “require different strategies of representation.”

A much more wholly applicable and nuanced look at mothers and daughters, and the writing of mothers and daughters, comes from none other than Adrienne Rich in her essay “Motherhood and Daughterhood.” In this personal yet critical analysis, she examines the effect of mothers on daughters and illustrates a complicated relationship, where the daughter at once seeks to “repossess” her mother and “be repossessed by her” (107). My project reflects this return or movement back to the mother through continual examination of my mother and her mother, and each of these respective relationships. Further, while this is a memoir of these relationships, it’s also memoir of myself and my connections to these women; as Rich asserts, “it is my story I am telling, my version of the past.” While my mother is a primary subject of this manuscript, ultimately my story and my narrative will be what readers seek to empathize with; ultimately, I am the speaker.

Rich describes a yearning, a longing for mothering on behalf of daughters, especially daughters who feel, in some sense, unmothered; she contends that even as an adult, this daughter “who grew up in a male-controlled world, still feels, at times, wildly unmothered” and thus she “may spend her life proving her strength in the ‘mothering’ of others.” Within the framework of my project, this absent mothering manifests in both primary mother-daughter relationships, in the child abuse my mother suffered and the drug abuse I witnessed my mother suffer. This missed-mothering transforms daughters in my manuscript into premature adults who assume parental roles over their own mothers, seeking to heal or soothe whatever ailments are suffered, in an effort to feel that they—the daughters—are worthy and valuable. Despite this dearth, Rich describes an inherent identification with the mother, a sameness from the shared “reservoirs of anger” and the “deepest mutuality,” down to the sameness of their bodies, their shapes and functions. Rich does not condemn or criticize, but offers a compassionate and honest account for the unique connection between mother and daughter, admitting “our own mothers alter in perspective as we ourselves change.” Similarly, I seek to explore and highlight my own identity and its overlap with my mother as a way to understand her and also find a way to understand my own self.

Rich also asserts that daughters who are loved more completely by fathers than mothers must love their fathers “at the mother’s expense.” In *Not A Tracing*, my father is often contrasted by my mother, his presence a consistently reliable foundation amidst the surrounding chaos. While my father is a gentle, stabilizing force in our lives, the book complicates even this heroic figure, showing multiplicity at every level:

The intrinsic differences between Julie and I—her jealousy; the simple, undeniable ranking within the family that I never understood but felt—became clear. In that moment, a memory resurfaces. I’m three or four, being held by my mother as we—my mother, sister, and I—stand in the doorway, backs to the front door, sister standing between

father and mother. Julie is eleven or twelve, standing there between two screaming adults. Mother is trying to take us to a hotel for the night or maybe just drive up and down A1A for a few hours. In my small brain, I don't understand it, but father points to sister and says, "you can take *that one*," then points to me, "but *that one* is mine."

This moment in particular works on various levels of memory and characterization—illustrating not only my father's complexities but also my mother and sister's deeper natures. It also helps to build a portrait of my childhood and my parents' marriage, the tumultuous nature of those systems.

My project takes its place among the contemporary poetic family biography *Litany for the Long Moment* by Mary-Kim Arnold, which relies on adoption and immigration documents braided with her own evolving narrative as she seeks to situate her own identity within that of her mothers', both biological and adopted. Similarly, I place my work next to Lilly Hoang's *A Beastiary*, which investigates family relationships and histories, woven with research and fable. Both Arnold and Hoang's work bridges memoir and poetry, using lyricism and memory to create ambiguity, while weaving outside narratives or research throughout the body of work. These works, like mine, closely investigate identity and the formation of identity within a family unit, especially for daughters and mothers.

I also place my work next to contemporary poets who write about family trauma, especially regarding mothers and daughters, like Chloe Honum and Julie Marie Wade. In Honum's *The Tulip Flame*, she maps her identity as it forms, filtered through her family's traumatic experiences with her mother's chronic and repeated attempts at suicide. The perpetual cycle of fear and loss palpates throughout the collection as she moves between poems. Wade's books *Wishbone* and *Small Fires* both look at the complicated nature of her parents' relationship and her own relationship to them, as well as her relationship to the outside world, which acts almost as a projection of the family dynamic. In her books, her parents' marriage is unhappy, and her mother is emotionally abusive, withholding,

and manipulative. Wade's characterizations of her mother, however, remain fair, unaffected by their eventual estrangement. Her work feels perseverant and optimistic, ultimately landing in a place of acceptance despite the trauma of disownment. Additionally, Wade's work spans genres, bridging poetry and lyric essay so that the two overlap and tangle with each other.

Since my work has many different threads, I also consider it situated next to contemporary works that look at gender, family dysfunction, and addiction, like Eula Biss, Kayleb Candrilli and Amy Long. Biss' *The Ballonists* uses braided prose poems structure to tell a fragmented family narrative seen through slippery memories. Candrilli's works specifically look at addiction in Appalachia and gender and sexual abuse in their poetic memoirs *What Runs Over* and *Water I Won't Touch*. Utilizing prose poems, Candrilli's tenderness and anger, sensitivity and urgency, come through with dark imagery and existential questionings. Long's memoir on addiction, chronic pain, and family dysfunction, *Codependence*, is a master class on vulnerability and honest interrogation of self. Additionally, Long's description of family dynamics, especially sister relationships and the complexities within them, as well as the complexities of mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships, situates her text alongside mine.

My work can also be placed with contemporary docupoetics, such as Layli Long Solider, Claudia Rankine, Maggie Nelson, and Solmaz Sharif. While Solider, Rankine, Nelson, and Sharif are very distinct voices, each have written books which investigate form while also relying on current or past events to move the work along. Solider's collection *Whereas* employs legislative language while discussing not only the oppression of her people but also the mother-daughter relationship, from the mother's point of view. Rankine's famous *Citizen: An American Lyric* looks at race and police brutality against people of color in a contemporary American setting, using her own experiences as well known cases of racism in pop culture to highlight the trauma black Americans suffer. Nelson's *Jane: A Murder*, a memoir in verse, explores the murder of her aunt in 1969 and braids verse with court

documents and journal entries from her deceased aunt. Sharif's work interrogates language and its own abuses, both suffered and perpetrated. Books that deal with trauma, as these do, often exist in these braided spaces, where they weave their poetry with the language or evidence taken from the outside world. In the case of these texts, I'd submit they help readers absorb the traumatic events while also lending authority to the writer's voice; women so often in cases of trauma are disbelieved, and I think adding outside voices to our own makes us feel safer, more secure that we will not be dismissed. Additionally, while not at all contemporary, I find tremendous inspiration from *Holocaust* by Charles Reznikoff, in his use of documents to speak unimaginable trauma, therefore almost completely removing himself from the work and allowing the trauma to speak for itself, and also in his distance and his almost painfully stark descriptions of brutality.

As my project bridges genres, I have found myself inspired by works also of nonfiction, such as *She Said* by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, which expands upon the investigative journalism report that exposed Harvey Weinstein, and *Dopesick* by Beth Macy, which illustrates how powerful a hold the opioid crisis gripped America during the 2000's. I also found myself deeply moved by Alex Marzano-Lesnevich's *The Fact of a Body*, which braids their own narrative of sexual trauma and self-discovery with court case analysis, exerting authority over their prose to either move or hold the audience in distinct moments. Least expectedly, I found myself so strongly inspired by the novel *A Short History of Women* by Kate Walbert, which similarly utilizes a nonlinear narrative that illustrates circularity and intergenerational trauma through the voices of various women of one family. While these projects do not find themselves directly represented in my work, they inform the way I think about my work and they provide me with perspective I wouldn't have otherwise seen. When I read these works, I feel as though I'm seeing from behind my mother's eyes as a sexual abuse and rape survivor and as an addict.

Not A Tracing differs from a lot of contemporary poetry because it connects so many avenues: the interrogation of memory; the differing levels and types of traumas; addiction, recreational drug use, and chronic pain; the Upland South, the South Florida Coast, and Appalachia; sexual abuse, rape, and harassment; family dysfunction. It is especially distinct when factoring in the philosophical backbone by Deleuze and Guattari; the philosophical argument's affect on form and content help make . This book is a synthesis almost of everything I've listed here, and more texts I'm not naming but which have influenced my work, filtered through my own experiences. The cyclical-ity of my work also strikes me as a way of expanding the conversation around not just sexual abuse but child abuse, drug abuse, and mental health. Like Kate Walbert's novel, one of my primary aims was to show the multigenerational traumas carried in women today. While incomparable to the plight suffered by women of color in America, and elsewhere, the story of my mother and the women in her family felt meaningful and necessary for me to write.

My own opinion is that the line between memoirist and poet is very blurred; I'd argue that Julie Marie Wade's work can be read as a type of docupoetics and that Maggie Nelson's *Jane* is as much a memoir as it's a crime analysis. For me, in particular, these odd lines of genre are always fuzzy, always tempting me to press up against them, to challenge them. I grow bored of conversations surrounding genre; I'm not certain they are as distinct as many scholars would argue. What matters to a much higher degree is craft and the respective perspectives available in these various texts.

While these books vary in topic, genre, and form, each reckons with trauma, or multiple traumas; building on the arguments of Maria P. P. Root, I believe that trauma is wide-spread and exists in most good writing because that is where tension exists. There is trauma in forming an identity, as we see in Mary Kim-Arnold's work, and there is trauma in claiming an identity, as we see in Kayleb Rae Candrilli's work. There's trauma in creating, losing, or leaving family, as we see Wade and

Nelson's work. And inversely, where there is trauma, there exists growth and survival. There is no before without an after, so while I've taken much from these texts in terms of their treatment and experiences of trauma, I've taken just as much from their use of recovery and rehabilitation of spirit and soul. Ultimately, I aim for my project to feel living, in motion, and perhaps a little incomplete—I want to formally and contextually represent evolution, an unendingness, a perpetual cycle of breaking and regrowing.

NOT A TRACING: A MAP

“...she is twelve years old, and her story is already written in the heavens.”

—Simone de Beauvoir

“fixed stars / Govern a life.”

—Sylvia Plath

I sit on the end of my mother's hospital bed, my legs criss-cross on the rough white sheets. My mother wears a hospital gown with blue dots, a blue cuff on her right arm that inflates regularly. I was in the bath when I got the call. I jumped out without washing my face and threw on clothes not warm enough for this Appalachian December night. My mother's blond hair is pulled back into a pony, her face clean and anxious.

Senator Dianne Feinstein: “Sexual violence is a serious problem, and one that largely goes unseen. In the United States, it is estimated by the Centers for Disease Control, one in three women and one in six men will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, 60% of sexual assaults go unreported. In addition, when survivors do report their assaults, it’s often years later due to the trauma they suffered and fearing their stories will not be believed.”

My mother is born and raised in New Albany, Indiana, a small town opposite Louisville, Kentucky just across the Ohio River. From my mother's bedroom window, she can see the K&I Bridge that leads into Kentucky; she can almost hear the river rushing. My mother grows up on the corner of Dewey and Butler, at 1631 Dewey Street, a Victorian two-story painted white with a small yard, five doors from the house where her mother—my grandmother—lived from eight years old—1613 Dewey Street.

My middle name comes from my mother's mother, June. Her name was June Rose, though she's born in November. Daughter of Huntley and Alene Hockersmith. Huntley is a plumber, a man who uses his hands, cracked dry in the Kentuckiana winters. Huntley and Alene have six daughters, June the first. At night, Huntley goes into their daughters' beds or he brings them down to the basement.

Studies show, childhood trauma can have epigenetic and intergenerational effects. Researcher have found that children who experience abuse can display changes in their genetics, which can affect the way genes are expressed and used. One study found that children who had been abused showed drastic changes in genes linked to cancer, heart disease, bipolar disorder, and depression, among other physical and psychological disorders. Another study found that one-third of those who survive child abuse become abusers themselves, once they have children.

My therapist sits across from me next to a window so that the afternoon sun pours in besides her. Today I notice she's blown out her brown hair into waves. When I tell her I keep waiting to feel fulfilled, she says I have low self-worth. Actually she says I have little belief in my self-worth. She says I'm porous, more susceptible to penetration or permeation. Of course she's right. Everything is heavy. Nothing without meaning. When I throw away a recyclable, I feel its heft.

Growing up in Indiana, my mother is often beaten by her mother, whose blueblack rage fills all corners of the house, her hands gripping the whip or paddle or belt, anything in reach. “You knew her mood by her pounding up the stairs,” my mother says. She is fearful, afraid to tell her mother when she compound-fractures her elbow, worried she’ll be told to get a switch off the maple out back for the hassle and cost of a doctor’s visit. She sleeps on the broken arm until her mother discovers the blood in her bed.

I'm twelve when I begin emptying my mother's vials of Stadol, a narcotic pain reliever, prescribed to her to treat migraines. Usually administered intravenously before surgery or during labor, the drug is also available as a nasal spray to treat chronic pain. Stadol, otherwise known as Butorphanol, is not well-known: there are no news reports about it, no books written about its effects. Though similar in chemical structure, each like photocopies of the other turned on its side, Butorphanol is more potent than Morphine. I search and find the small brown bottles scattered in her bathroom drawers, her nightstand, her purse. I pour the golden liquid down the sink, refilling the bottles with water so she doesn't notice them empty. I don't know this will cause withdrawal or that she has other bottles hidden.

My therapist tells me our brains seek out and hold onto information we need. For years, knowledge can remain suppressed, submerged, a raft held under water waiting to break surface.

Botanically, rhizomes are a part of the plant that exists under soil, a hidden pathway connecting one stem to another, holding both roots and shoots. Rhizomes don't have clear beginnings or endings; they grow expansively from every direction, both into and out of the soil. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari applied this to philosophy, taking a nonlinear look at history. They used metaphor to suggest the individual and collective have no distinction, no center or origin point. Their book, "A Thousand Plateaus," begins with a chapter simply called "Rhizomes."

Deleuze and Guattari say: *A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes. Plants with roots or radicles may be rhizomorphic in other respects altogether: the question is whether plant life in its specificity is not entirely rhizomatic. Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout.*

I'm twelve when my mother explains in the parking lot of a Delray Beach Blockbuster that my sister and I have different fathers. We're in the gold Nissan minivan I hated, with the automatic seatbelts and the doors I have to slam closed. My mother's body faces me, mine hers, and she says, "haven't you ever wonder about the Pruitts? How they are connected to us?" The Pruitts are my "aunts," or rather my sister's father's sisters—my sister's aunts. Not related to me at all.

In that moment, a shift happens, and I understand so much: the reason for Julie's jealousy and the palpable familial ranking I hadn't understood but always felt. It all became clear. In that moment, a memory resurfaces. I'm three or four, being held by my mother as we—my mother, sister, and I—stand in the doorway, backs to the front door, sister standing between father and mother. Julie is eleven or twelve, standing there between two angry adults, pink pajama shirt hanging off her shoulders. Mother is trying to take us to a hotel for the night or maybe just drive up and down A1A for a few hours. I can't understand it then, but father points to sister and says, "you can take that one," then points to me, "but that one is *mine*."

One time, I'm sick—sicker than usual, Little Mermaid quilt up to my chest, which is rising and falling heavy—Mom asks, “why are you breathing so hard?” I feel bad that I can't answer, that I don't know why. I'm taken to the emergency room where the doctor is mean. Mom looks embarrassed when he asks her: “don't you know what asthma is?”

Researchers estimate that one in five, to one in nine, girls will be sexually abused. Of cases reported, 93% of victims under eighteen know their abuser. Almost 60% of these are acquaintances. Over 30% are members of the victim's own family. Sexual assault survivors often suffer psychologically for years, especially if unreported or repressed, and they are three to four times more likely to suffer drug addiction, PTSD, and major depressive episodes.

My mother sits up in the hospital bed, hands in her lap, and she's telling me stories I've heard before. It's December, and the hospital has strung some Christmas decorations around the nurse's station—garland and a small tree. There's a wood cross hanging in her room, which I glance at occasionally while she talks. I'm nodding along to her story, but really I'm thinking that it's late, Brandon is probably in bed by now, and I hope her results come back soon so we can go home. My mother's narratives wind and consistently miss key parts of information—an erasure or redaction. She begins to tell me about Leah Carr, her best friend growing up. I've heard about Leah my entire life, how she and my mother first smoked cigarettes together, coughing and choking on the menthol lights, how they snuck sips of whiskey. I met her once in a Value City in Louisville when I was a teenager, but now nearly two decades later, I remember nothing about her.

I want to tell you a story to show who my sister has always been: Julie, eight years old. Her father's mother has died. No words spoken to Julie's father in years, but our mother travels back home, takes Julie to the funeral. *Grandma Pruitt was good to us, she loved Julie so much*, mom says. Julie wears a black velvet dress with lace cuffs around the collar and sleeves. Her blond hair short and round. He stands on the opposite side of the casket, then on the other side of the house. Irish wakes go on so long. Finally, Julie stomps across, her little patent leather shoes squeaking against the cold Indiana wood. He looks up from his whiskey, stunned, his daughter, his own face in miniature staring back at him. "Are you not going to speak to me at all?"

After years of sleeplessness, and at the behest of my therapist, I see a psychiatrist. She's a bit taller than I am, straight brown hair pulled into a low pony. She's soft around the edges and seems kind. She looks tame, like the kind of woman who has never taken an illicit drug. I'm hoping she'll give me a prescription for something that will knock me out at night then send me on my way. Instead she looks at the anxiety score from my diagnostic analysis, asks, "when did your anxiety first start?" I've never been asked this. I pause.

And then I remember: panic attacks, bawling breakdowns as I'm dropped off at school or gymnastics. A child, I never slept over at a friend's house, and now I say it's because my mother was afraid of their fathers—what they might do in the middle of the night—and that's true, but I don't mention my fear when I realize I'll be separated from her. I say I quit gymnastics because I hate competition, but truthfully, I couldn't tolerate knowing she wasn't on the side of the mirror. I've never talked about the moment in the Books-A-Million when I, so small for my age, got lost in the towering shelves. The store, like a hedge maze, felt purposely complicated to navigate. It was huge, and I was alone. The relief that hits me when I turn around, tears streaming, to see her blond hair, tan face looking at me surprised—it feels like I'm saved, like god sent down a hurricane that took my entire town, but spared my home.

One afternoon, my friends Kate and Gloria are at my house after school. We're playing with my Polly-Pockets—sitting criss-cross on the old brown carpet and opening each case, putting our Pollys in hot-tubs or at vanity mirrors—when I hear my father yell for my mother, hear the way he slams the front door behind him. She's maxed out another credit card, or maybe overdrawn the bank account again. My friends and I hide in my closet while my parents scream at each other from across the living room, as they shove heads into mirrors and bodies into tables. I try to pretend that the closet is some kind of sound-proofed panic-room, but we hear every crash, every explosion. I explain to my friends that this is what my imaginary friends and I do when my parents fight. I try to pretend it is all fine, all normal, no big deal.

The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. When rats swarm over each other. The rhizome includes the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed. Animal and plant, couchgrass is crabgrass. We get the distinct feeling that we will convince no one unless we enumerate certain approximate characteristics of the rhizome.

There are days when things are calm, though, and I take care to learn how to cook and clean then so I can do it around the house. I like when dad teaches me how to chop parsley, or mom teaches me how to fold berries into batter. With these tasks, I learn how to conceal myself, how not to attract attention. I feel like I'm a bother, sick all the time, so it makes me feel good to be self-sufficient or to take care of mom instead sometimes. I like to feel grown.

Because of my severe asthma, my doctors recommend to my parents that I don't participate in PE like everyone else in my grade. Instead, I spend time with the librarian Ms. April, helping to reshelve books or else reading by the big window while my classmates run and play outside. I don't feel excluded as I watch them; I feel special, I feel grown. I love this time. I love helping Ms. April, love being the only one here in these quiet moments, reading whatever I want, walking among the shelves and going behind the counter, where students aren't typically allowed. There's a sense of control I feel when pushing the cart of books and putting them back in their place, like I'm helping to restore order to the entire world one slim hardback at a time.

For middle school, my parents decide a private school might be more understanding of my “health problems”—my absences for pneumonia and bronchitis, my multiple daily Nebulizer treatments, my odd list of allergies. They decide on Seacrest Christian Academy, though as a family we’ve never attended church. This seems odd to me, but I want to make mom happy, so I go along. The school is big and looming, the halls sparkling white, a fancy courtyard with the Eagle mascot in mosaic. Seacrest goes from pre-k to high-school so everyone attending sixth grade knows each other. I’m one of two new students. Me and this boy William, who everyone ignores—with his ticks, and stutter, and inability to look anyone in the eye. I sit with him, placing my tray next to his. I feel so mature, having bought these nachos and tater-tots with cash from the cafeteria. I’m thinking it’s the right thing to do, the Christian thing to do, sitting here with William, but no one else joins us, I stop, start trying to sit with other people. I want friends; I don’t want to be a *pariah*, a word I recently came across while reading the dictionary. My friends from my old school are all at Boca Middle now, taking classes together, eating school pizza together. I want friends, but I’m new here and frail-looking, smaller than everyone else and with hair so long I can sit on it. My backpack isn’t a backpack at all, but rather a suitcase I have to lie-down and unzip all the way around to open. And when my mom picks me up from school, it’s in that gold Nissan minivan.

When I get mono and then rebound mono, I miss five weeks of term. Then one day, as everyone is leaving school, end of day bell still ringing, I’m pulled aside by a secretary and given a letter for my parents. Later that night, my parents read it and tell me it says we should find another place for me to continue school, that I’m being asked not to return.

I read that children of addicts grow up in denial, unable to accept their parent is, in fact, in trouble. I read that children of addicts grow up to be self-reliant; they avoid needing people. Children of addicts learn to live in fear; learn to be guarded, skeptical, and anxious. They learn to contain and deny emotions, or they become severely codependent. Children of addicts are twice as likely to become addicts.

The house feels different. Things are changing: I'm home all the time and Julie is away. Now Mom and her fight so much. She's eighteen, with a job, a car. Independence. One night there's a fight over some powder mom finds in her laundry. Julie won't say what it is—outraged they even ask—then admits it's BC Powder. There's a fight, the biggest yet, and the next day, Julie and her boyfriend come and put all of Julie's clothes in black trash bags. There's a house for rent in Delray Beach; they've signed a lease. I hate seeing her neatly folded clothes torn from the dresser and shoved into those bags, seeing them carried out in lumps like garbage. It feels like a break is happening. It feels out of control.

A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines. You can never get rid of ants because they form an animal rhizome that can rebound time and again after most of it has been destroyed. [...] These lines always tie back to one another.

My parents agree to home-school me after Seacrest's letter. My mother will cover the liberal arts and humanities and my father math and science. But lessons rarely happen. Instead every few months, one of them gets anxious that I should be properly educated, not just reading whatever books I want, and for a few weeks, I sit with them at the kitchen table, fluorescent lights overhead, studying history and biology and math. Then it stops.

But I read. I read medical textbooks for fun, certain I want to be a doctor. I read the dictionary, captivated with words, the way they gave me power to describe with precision. I read Shakespeare and Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost, feeling drawn to the sadness I find there.

It's not bad, though. While other children learn how to label the anatomy of a sunflower—I imagine a worksheet spread open over their desks in class, a black and white drawing of a flower—I learn what the earth feels like when it gets into every part of your body.

One summer—I think I'm ten or eleven—my mother and I work everyday in the side-yard. We pull out weeds and patches of sharp grass, sand and dirt sticking to our skin, creeping into our mouths. We rake and hoe and lay plastic sheeting, taking breaks to eat egg salad sandwiches on pita or popsicles in the shade of the plumeria, staring at the work still to be done.

We buy pallets of bricks, wheelbarrow them to the yard. We dump them out and lay them side-by-side, so the grooves of one brick press into the grooves of another. At night, our bodies hurt from good labor, and we rub shea butter into each other's feet, braid each other's wet hair—me then her.

My mother's childhood stories scare me when I'm young. I can't understand how she still recalls her mother fondly. One day, mom and I are baking muffins, breaking eggs into a bowl with a hard crack, when she tells me about the time she had a persistent toothache, and her mother and aunt were tired of hearing about it. Sitting there in the backyard, fixing a broken fence or light-post, her aunt takes a pair of rusted pliers and, while her mother sits by laughing, pulls out the aching tooth. "There, now you can't complain anymore, can you?"

Some days, or maybe weeks, especially early on in the homeschooling, my mother and father do their best. My mother and I go to a school supply store in Deerfield Beach and walk the rows of homeschool supplies organized by year and subject—fourth grade, fifth grade, U.S. history, fractions. We buy stacks of books for the year, one for every subject, and for hours, we sit in what’s supposed to be my bedroom as I work on social studies and English at a small desk that faces the window. A mechanical Lisa Frank pencil in my hand, I scribble looping-scrawl answers about World War II and Shakespeare. She lets me listen to music while I study—Alanis Morissette and Melissa Etheridge CDs filling the space behind me—something my father dislikes when he and I work on math in the kitchen at the dining room. The workbooks have bright colored-covers that make my stomach turn; everything about this signifies incompetence. I’ve already been made to feel like an ill-fit, something less-than at Seacrest Christian, and these workbooks are a physical representation of that now too, a way to measure exactly how much I don’t belong. My father tries to teach me his own personal tricks for algebra, things he made up as a boy, and the kitchen starts to feel like an interrogation room during these lessons, the lights turn harsh and confrontational, the chair hard and uncomfortable, even my father’s kind, considerate demeanor seems probing and forceful to me. And when these lessons start to fade, I experience a mix of relief and anxiety, worried about when they’ll start up again while knowing that I should be doing them.

My mother, like so many addicts, is prescribed pain meds because she has pain. At least at first, or at least in part, perhaps.

In addition to headaches and migraines which she'd had as long as I could remember, my mother begins when I'm sixteen the process of having veneer caps over all of her teeth. For her entire life, my mother has hated her teeth. *Little Miss Rotten*, they called her on the school yard. Her teeth were small and uneven. They're unhealthy—full of cavities and weak bone underneath. She tells me the story of riding her bike to her first dentist, which she paid for with her paycheck from Kroger, when she was sixteen.

The veneers, in the end, fail. Her teeth have too little bone to support their weight. Now my mother is left toothless, because the small, drilled-down teeth under the veneers are not really teeth at all anymore. They must be pulled. She must try implants instead. Again and again, these too fail. Dentists implant bones in her mouth, bones from cadavers, an organ transplant for teeth. They too fail, again and again.

Through these visits, I sit next to her as she's in the waiting room, as she's in the dentist's chair. She squeezes my hand so hard I think she's going to break my fingers as the dentist pushes a needle deep into the roof of her mouth, and after, I drop her off at home, then drive to Walgreens for the Percocet, the sun just setting behind the beach.

My mother is sitting upright in the hospital bed. Her hands rest in her lap, and she's repeating stories I've already heard. There's that wood cross hanging in the room, and I keep glancing at it occasionally as she talks. The lights on a small Christmas tree twinkle. My mother tells me she was at Leah's house one day, a house smaller than my small Knoxville apartment. She loved Leah's family, how Leah's mother smiled and gave her warmest socks for my mother to wear at night. My mother was asking to sleep over, in Leah's pull-down bed set up in their kitchen. I'm checking my phone, replying to Brandon's messages. My mother continues her story.

My grandmother June worked in a factory sewing collars onto shirts. At night she came home sweaty, lint and thread stuck to the crevasses of her neck and arms. One time, she accidentally stitches her finger to the collar of a shirt, looks away for a second to laugh at a friend's joke and feels the needle's stab. I see her coming home with a wrapped finger, blood poking through. She changes into a housedress—something blue, plaid maybe—and sits on the edge of the bed, wood creaking below her. What does she think about here, before she sets off to make dinner? Does she think about the slow silent forces building her life? Does she think, *this is all so much?*

Julie. Where is Julie in all of this? Now that she's moved out, our relationship is never consistent. Sometimes she shows me new music—we sit on my bed listening to Nine Inch Nails or Wheatus together—then we fight. I look back through the photos, and I remember the anxiety I had with her. One time, maybe twelve or thirteen, I save up months worth of allowance. Something I'm prone to do. Where am I going anyway? Julie comes over, and she, mother, and I go out to lunch. I feel so proud to have enough money saved that I pay for our food. By the time we get back to the house, Julie is boiling. "I can't believe my little sister has enough money to pay for lunch! What a spoiled Boca brat!"

One day, I read a book about butterflies, a small square hardback we bought at Costco on Saturday. It covers the different stages of butterfly development, and I learn that the Tigereye Swallowtail is native to Florida. Suddenly, I see them everywhere. Years later, I'll plant a hedge of milkweed in my parents backyard and watch as caterpillars eat the plant leaf by leaf. One night, I'm out with Brandon, and he says, "Look, a Monarch." And I say, "No, that is a Tigereye Swallowtail, native to Florida," and he doesn't know it, he can't know it, but it's eleven-year-old Emily reciting this after she's just read it sitting on the back porch, watching Swallowtails take off from the citrus trees.

Like me, my mother has one sister—a half-sister, though neither of us has ever actually used the term. Like me, my mother's sister is also nearly ten years older and of a different father, who did not want her. This all makes sense eventually.

My mother's one sister, Denise, married Ed Green, when Denise was eighteen. Denise and Ed had kept their relationship secret for several years because Ed was twelve years older than Denise.

Ed becomes like a brother to my mother. When she's twelve, she starts spending weekends and summers in Lexington at Denise and Ed's house. He owns a couple McDonald's, making him the wealthiest person my mother had ever known. In the afternoons, she swims in the lake and then walks into one of his restaurants and orders anything she wants. Her first luxury. He teaches her to water-ski and drives her around the horse farms. He makes her feel special. He makes her feel seen and cared for.

One summer, my mother tells me, Leah comes to stay with her at Denise and Ed's house. Leah falls asleep on the couch, Denise goes to bed, and my mother and Ed are watching TV when he wraps his arm around her and gropes her, cupping her small breast in his hand.

“Protecting Your Children: Advice from Child Molesters” says that child molesters often begin by earning a child’s trust. They become friends with the child, they tell them secret jokes and make them feel special. They give gifts or treats. It says that child molesters are often well-known and liked; they’re usually stable and employed.

I feel so much anxiety with math and science, subjects that put my *ineptitudes*—another word I recently read in the dictionary—on display whether in regular school or homeschool. In school, I hated being called on or turning in homework. With homeschool, my father’s mathematical genius makes me feel inferior; I feel like I’ve missed an important gene. I have his eyes, his ability to understand parts, to dis- and then re-assemble something. Equations and formulas, though, never sink in my mind like grammar or vocabulary.

Because mom wanted to be a nurse, we have leftover medical textbooks from her college days. I love reading them. I love their diagrams and lists, their vocabulary. I learn there are names for things I never thought to label. Their leather bound covers and thin paper feel like tactile knowledge, something old and sacred. Books become embodied understanding to me and they feel like a way for me to gain experience and insight without anyone looking over my shoulder or oppressing me in anyway. I can be alone in a room, on our back porch, in a tree. Reading is a solitary act, and I revel in this.

In the background, the first bombs dropping into Iraq blare from the living room TV as my father stops me in the hallway. “What is she taking? What is she on?” he asks me. I stare down at the white tile floor, shiny from the day of bleaching and scrubbing the way my mother has taught me to do. I notice the baseboard is dusty. “She’s fine, she’s not on anything,” I say, thinking of the yellow pill organizer in her purse filled with Xanax and Amitriptyline and Percocet we picked up that morning from the Walgreens by the beach.

My mother has been hallucinating conversations with travel agents, falling over herself as she tries to pack lemon juice and staplers with toiletries. “She’s fine, dad,” I repeat, pushing past him to get a dust-cloth to wipe the baseboards. She always likes returning to a clean house after traveling.

My father is not careless or dumb, just efficacious, diplomatic. An immigrant with olive skin who knows how to weather, knows resilience. When he came to this country, he was alone, the first, the anchor to us all. My father is concerned with productivity, with durability and practicality. His favorite color is concrete, and even after he gets LASIK eye surgery, he still wears his glasses so he can see even better. When we drive around town, he tells me about the apartment building he managed in exchange for free rent. And when I look into his eyes, I see my own—not green or brown but hazel. In the pictures of him, he has some hair, but never much—dark curls crowning his head—and a broad smile, indicative of some secret hope nestled inside him.

My mother and I each began suffering migraines and headaches at the age of six. In first grade, I went to my teacher and said, “Ms. Prichett, I have a headache,” a word I only associate with the pain I’m feeling because I hear mother repeat those same words so often. I recall thinking, *so this is what she means*. Now I start to come home early from school and writhe in pain, and mom gives me Tylenol or sometimes Excedrin. Or sometimes I come home and nurse her headaches, if dad is working or in his office, get her new ice packs or stroke her hair, quietly opening and closing the bedroom door.

How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of deterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogenous elements, form a rhizome.

Later when my mother told Denise what happened, Denise said she'd asked for it, she'd wanted it to happen.

My mother's hands are in her lap, she sits upright in her hospital bed. "Leah's father said, 'come over here and sit on my lap, and maybe I'll let you spend the night.'" My mother was eight or nine. I stop looking at my phone. I stop glancing at the cross, the Christmas lights. I watch her face, her lips, so much like mine, thin and serious. Her hands rest in her lap still, left hand inside the right. She sits hunched over, a child in confession. "I sat on his lap, and he grabbed my breast, like this." She takes her right hand and gropes herself. "They were tiny, barely there, I don't know why he did it, but I ran home and told my mom, which was a big no-no because she'd already put on her housedress, and now I was coming to bother her with this."

When I tell my therapist about that moment in the hallway when I was twelve, when father stopped me to ask what mother was taking, I start to see clearly how the three of us—my mother, father, and I—became like a three-legged stool, dependent on each other to stand.

And my sister? With the tension between her and my parents, and her and me, the chasm between us grows and grows. Even when Julie lived with us, I enjoyed feeling needed, so I got mom's icepacks and helped with her meds most times. But now that Julie is gone, and dad is busy working, and I'm being homeschooled, there's no one else but me. Now that mother's medicine intake is increasing, I'm covering for her, and also giving her the pills—but hiding some of them too when I can. I don't think Julie knows, and I don't think dad knows. Part of me wants to tell them, but I don't know if I can trust Julie, or what dad would do, so I just keep covering and pretending everything is okay.

2001: a new bookstore is built in our part of Boca. This is expansive for me. It feels like my world is breaking open. Eventually Brandon and I will loiter there, I'll study there, write college papers there. But before all that, I'm a lonely thirteen year old girl spending hours in the poetry section reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Edgar Allan Poe. When everyone else is at school or work, my mother and I go there, and I sit in the young-adult section reading novels and memoirs. I read stories of lost teenagers trying to find themselves and see myself reflected in the pages. When adults come with their children, I lunge with recommends, not to the children, who are my age, but to the parents—has your daughter read this? What about this one?

I'm fourteen, but I still share a bedroom with mom. Not for a lack of space—I have a room but I never sleep in it. And my parents haven't shared a room since I was a small child. For years, I'm too attached to her to sleep apart, to be away from her for that long. And now, I know also that it will hurt her if I ask for my own room, so I don't say anything.

In these nights lately, however, I'm woken up by her deep breathing, her exhales shaking the bed. Or I don't fall asleep at all, instead lying there, waiting to feel her breathing grow heavy so I know I can get up and sneak online, find some distraction in the chatrooms and strangers there. Some nights I'm so tired, I sleep on the hard rough couch that sits directly under an air vent. I don't know why I don't go to my own bed instead. Maybe the room is too dark or too quiet, the bed too big.

Self-blame and victim-blaming happen simultaneously in a perpetual cycle. Victims of sexual assault blame themselves, believe themselves to be dirty or ruined, at fault for whatever happened to them—*maybe I was too nice, gave the wrong idea, didn't actually say no*. Psychologists suggest this is an effort to regain control: survivors tend to believe that if they modify their actions, they can prevent another assault from happening in the future, and then they can feel a sense of reclaimed power or control.

Others say because society blames women for their own assaults, we internalize this and begin to blame ourselves—*maybe I was too nice, gave the wrong idea, didn't actually say no*.

Meanwhile, their fights are still happening. Almost always about money—she's spending too much, he's always away making it. I comfort her as she cries in the bathroom. Then follow days of unbearable silence in the house: him in his office, us in the bedroom. Two separate existences under one roof. I hate these stiff days where I have to avoid him, my allegiance to her, of course. Everything feels so tense and uncomfortable, and I just want things to be normal.

Just before my fifteenth birthday, I start to feel resentful of the role I'd been given, or had taken up willingly all those years before. I demand my own room, my own place to sleep, and so I move bedrooms.

Now in my own room, I can stay up all night if I want. I can be in chat rooms talking to people across the world if I want. I graffiti the walls with marker—poems and quotes, mantras and lyrics. I hang up posters of Eminem and Britney Spears and Aerosmith. I get an online boyfriend who lives in California. I install a phone hidden behind my headboard so I can talk to him all night, whispers my parents never hear, never listen for. I learn just the right way to turn the front knob or slide the glass doors, so silently not even the dog notices.

The internet becomes a buffet of social interaction for which I've been starved. Good or bad, I meet people: boys, girls, men—lots of men. A dam broke and no one notices the deluge happening in the corner bedroom, a torrent of validation and interaction.

One time at that same bookstore, I can't decide. I have too many books. Three or four titles I want. I'm always this way. My mother buys them all. "I promise you this," she says as we stood in the check-out line, "I'll never say 'no' if it's a book."

Now as an adult, I still get headaches and migraines regularly. I'm still sick often, even if my asthma and allergies have mostly subsided—the flu or bronchitis every semester. In addition to my headaches, I have chronic neck and shoulder pain. Then in April 2022, I'm lifting weights, a hobby I pick up as a doctoral student. I'm about to finish a set of squats when I fail and hyperextend my back, dropping the weights behind me. A loud thunk echoes through the gym, and I feel a pull deep in my lower right back. A pain I ignore for two months until walking starts to hurt. In June, when I start physical therapy, they treat me for a bulging disc and recommend an MRI, which my insurance denies. My physical therapist tells me without the MRI, they're really only guessing at a diagnosis. Each time I go to PT, it's \$75. They recommend three times a week; I go twice weekly, and each time, I hurt more after. But my insurance won't consider the MRI until six weeks of PT, so I continue, paying \$75 each time, hurting each time.

Somedays I wake up and take a handful of Tylenol with breakfast.
And I smoke a lot of cannabis too. Mostly for medicinal properties,
though I live in Tennessee, where it's not legal, even medically. I
function better stoned—my anxiety reined, my pain at a tolerable
level. When stoned, I finally can eat my PB&J or hummus.

For my mother, the year I'm fourteen is the year I begin to reject her.

For me, it's when I start to hate my body. It's when all my internalized beliefs about myself and my body—about women and women's bodies—begin to manifest. I'm not sexy, I'm not hot. I still look like a child. My hair is too long, my chest too flat, tummy not flat enough. I feel like a failure, like I don't know what other kids my age know.

When I tell my mother that I hate myself, she says something like “let's talk to your dad when he gets home.” Sitting in front of the JVS speakers in the living room on the floor, he holds me while I sob and say I just want to die. He says, “Emily, Emily, stop, it's okay, it's okay. Let's go to the mall and buy you some new shoes, okay?”

At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp.

My orthopedist says he'll request an MRI and that because I've done the recommended PT, my insurance should cover it. The day before the scan is scheduled, I get a call: my insurance is still denying it and my appointment is getting canceled. I can resubmit for authorization and wait, but I've had to wait seven weeks for this MRI appointment, and it could take another seven if I try again for approval. My back hurts so often and so much, walking the hills on campus is harder each day, and I'm so tired of this battle: my doctor recommends a treatment that my insurance later denies. I have to call my doctor's office nine times before I talk to a person so I can relent. *Please do not cancel my appointment. How much is the MRI? Will you take credit cards?*

Because of my childhood illnesses, and all the doctors I went to with my mother, as an adult I feel familiar with doctors' offices. I'm comfortable in them—the waiting, the forms, the same questions over and over. But sitting here in the orthopedist's office, I feel frustration. Last month, after I agreed to pay out of pocket for the MRI that my insurance has been denying, my ortho diagnoses me with SI joint dysfunction. Now he says because I've received no relief from his treatments—the cortisone and numbing injections—he suggests we “try” an operation, which can't guarantee relief either. My time here feels pointless. I don't get to finish my questions or ask everything I want before he's rushing out the door. When I leave, afternoon sun hits my face and I know it's the last time I'll come here.

Two years after confessing my depression to my parents, I start therapy with a psychologist who specializes in adolescent depression. As a teen, I love him, and when I stop seeing him another two years later, I thank him for saving my life.

It isn't until I'm almost thirty that I remember, uncomfortably, the day in his office, sitting opposite his large wood desk, when he asked me to lift my shirt and show my stomach so that he can try to convince me I'm not fat.

I don't say no, even though I want to, even though I feel uncomfortable. I do not listen to my body. I silence myself for the sake of someone else. A pattern that would follow me—a pattern that is already occurring in other ways.

My mind tries to solve this: if only I could understand why ~~he~~ I did this, I could let it go. If I understood the logic, I could change it.

My mother is still sitting in the hospital bed with her hands in her lap, telling me stories. I've stopped glancing at the cross while she talks., stopped looking at the garland along the nurse's station. The blue cuff on her arm slides down, sounding an alarm. I silence it, readjusting the cuff so it's above her inner elbow. It reflatates, records her blood pressure on the display. As I sit back on the bed, she asks me if I remember the Kavanaugh hearings. When I say I do, she tells me about her group of childhood friends. "The Dewey Street Gang." I've heard about them, their pranks and games—doorbell dash, red-rover, tackle football. But then she tells me about a boy I hadn't heard about, Bobby, an older brother of a friend.

When the Vietnam war ends in 1975, my mother's oldest brother Carl returns home an alcoholic. In the backyard, there is a small shed where he keeps extra booze hidden from his parents and siblings. My mother finds him there when she is looking for a hoe. He attacks her, tackles her to the ground, pins her body beneath him and tries to take off her clothes, puts his hand under her shorts embroidered with daisies and peace-signs. Her mother comes looking for her (or maybe she heard the shouts and grunts) and finds him on top of her. She screams his name before picking up a shovel and hitting him over the head with it, pulling him off as my mother goes running back to the house, leaves in her hair falling out behind her.

Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order.

Visiting home one day, I sit in my childhood room and thumb through my old photos. These are the photos I never took with me when I moved. Only one small box, but I said I didn't have room. Shocked: so many with Julie—she and I on my bed together, arms wrapped; us after a concert; dressed for a play; my birthday, her birthday, Christmas. I forgot these pictures, these moments.

In so many, she wears no smile. A blank stare back at me as I sit in this dim room. I've never noticed. She must have known, as I do now: when my father is behind the camera, taking our photo, he's only looking at me.

When I look at Julie, I see resentment. And when Julie looks at me, she sees imbalance. As I get older, I start to understand it, but I hate how she blames me for it. And now as I'm getting older, trying to be like sisters, she uses stuff I tell her against me. Now I don't feel like I can tell her anything.

Shortly after hurting my back, I have a birthday, so as a promise to myself, I start yoga. Historically, I have hated yoga. The slow pace, the imposed silence, all the breathing. But because of my back and my increasing inflexibility, I know it's right. So I'm determined to make it a practice. And I do, finding I enjoy it and that more than anything so far, it helps ease the pain and provides me with tools to control it more than anything else has. What I don't expect is how much I start to enjoy the imposed silence and all the breathing. I start paying attention to movement, trying to move as slow as possible. I see how in my life I rush—in the bath even, I'm so efficient, scrubbing my body as fast as possible and later, rubbing lotion over my skin as quickly as I can.

German psychologists recently conducted a study that compared rape survivors from World War II with women who had not been raped, but experienced other forms of war-related trauma. They found that those who were raped suffered more traumatic effects for longer periods of time than those who were not raped. Researchers don't quite yet understand it, but rape survivors suffer more PTSD and psychological effects than other types of trauma. When factoring in rape survivors whose attacks have gone untreated or unacknowledged, the traumatic effects are worsened and more intense. Symptoms can worsen over time and become more severe, manifesting in nightmares, flashbacks, major depressive episodes, and drug addiction. The National Institute of Health reports that over a third of adolescent victims of sexual assault will turn to substance abuse before they turn eighteen. The National Institute of Mental Health says over half of all PTSD sufferers will develop a substance abuse problem.

But my mother does have good childhood memories too—it becomes easier once she's the only child left to feed. In the late 70's, she and her parents fly to Italy, visiting her brother stationed in the Navy. In Rome, she and her mother go shopping as her father walks around the Coliseum. Her mother buys her a blue silk scarf, big enough to wrap double around my mother's slight frame, and fashions it into a top by folding it into a triangle and tying it tight around my mother's chest. She wears it with wide-legged white pants, her blond hair hanging above tanned shoulders.

That is what I imagine her wearing when they meet that August night. Denise introduces them, but he can't believe they are sisters: Denise so loud and eccentric, my mother so reserved and sober. One, a wild-child, the other, naive and reserved. Six weeks to the day after Julie had been born, they meet, and my mother senses in him something she had rarely known—stability, gentleness. But still, they did not fall in love immediately. He is foreign in all ways. So easy and kind, generous and accepting. A small town girl like her, a Southern Baptist from New Albany, Indiana—where had she ever before met a man from Lebanon, from a Muslim family, before? She let him in slowly, then all at once.

I'm fifteen when my sister starts dating Kurt. One night, my sister and Kurt come over. My mother, sister, and I fight about something. After, we get into Julie's car, I-95 north outside my window. Julie drives, mother sits passenger. Kurt and I in the backseat. I'm still crying. He scoots so close our legs almost touch. My right, his left. I remember I'm wearing shorts. It's summer. He rubs my knee slowly in circles. Then the soft inner part of my leg. I've never been touched like this. I freeze there in the backseat, streetlights blurring outside the window.

One time, I meet a boy—no, a man—in the mall. Working a Motorola kiosk, he beckons me to *come here*. This is exactly what I've been seeking on all my walks through the arteries of the Town Center Mall. Attention. Validation. Later that night, after my parents have fallen asleep, he picks me up down the road from my house and takes me to a party at the Boca Inn, a run-down hotel off Federal Highway. It's more a gathering of five or six twenty-two or twenty-three year olds hanging out in a shitty motel, drinking 40's and getting high. He asks me if I want a drink; I say no, thanks. He asks me if I want to smoke; I say no, thanks. He pulls me into the bathroom where we make out and take a shower together. It's the second erection I've ever seen in person; he's completely shaven, pink and exposed, and I don't like it. He doesn't push or force me, but I feel expected. Why had I come? What did I want, if not this? It's too far, too late. I go down on him. Then he gets out of the shower and leaves the bathroom. I feel relief, like my purpose is complete. Maybe I can go home now.

He leaves the bathroom and tells everyone to get out. Then he takes me to the bed and says he wants to fuck me. "I'm a virgin," I finally confess. He looks at me, disappointed, put off. I feel like I'm supposed to offer him something, like I should be doing more. So I do: "But I guess you could fuck me in the ass instead, if you want."

Some nights my mother plays music until the tall wood-paneled speakers shake. Diana Ross, The Eagles, Tina Turner. I dance around the living room while she sits next to the sliding doors, looking through CDs or reorganizing VHS tapes on the shelves. After the carpet is pulled out, replaced with the white tiles, I wear socks and slide around, pretending to ice-skate around the living room while we belt I Will Survive. *At first I was afraid, I was petrified.*

I'm sixteen the first time I swallow a bunch of pills from the medicine cabinet—some handfuls of Benadryl and Tylenol. Mom and Julie and I had argued about something, some slight one of us took too seriously. No one notices me hallucinating in my bedroom with the door closed. I don't know how long it lasts, but when I tell mom about it the next week, she says we need to tell my psychologist. Doctors tell my parents to keep all meds locked away, including the Zoloft and Ambien I've been prescribed. They suggest family counseling.

Years later, an odd series of events will have to unfold, and I'll meet a man—through the Internet, of course. But something about this is different. In the beginnings of social media, before Facebook, Yahoo! Answers creates a profile component to its infamous social media platform. And of course, I have a profile. Though I'm in college by now, I still spend a lot of time online, answering and asking any variety of questions on Yahoo!Answers, and I see patterns: the same people answering questions in the same sections of the platform as me. I befriend some of the people I see regularly. One of these regulars, I find out through the Yahoo! profile, is local to Boca, a guy my age with blue eyes and soft dimples in his cheeks when he smiles—a man named Brandon.

For my mother, falling in love with my father is slow, then all at once. For my father, it is inevitable. Here is a woman who needs you. Here is a woman who you can help. A woman who loves you, a beautiful woman who you also love. What does it mean to fill a role and to find someone who will step into a role for you?

I have never asked my father why he fell in love with my mother, but I think he would use words like “responsibility” and “care” if I did.

My mother sits up in the hospital bed with hands in her lap, telling me these stories. She's alert, her words flooding out of her. Bobby, she tells me, was thirteen, a couple years older than her, when he pinned her to a bed in a room above someone's garage. "I never remembered until watching that trial. I told your daddy when I remembered and I asked him if he thought I'm dirty now, if I'm ruined."

Mom and I spend a day on the beach, turning every twenty minutes, reading each other magazine articles. I swim out into the deep water, and she screams at me from the shore, uses my middle name. I tread water, laughing, toes nowhere near the bottom. When we leave, we go to Krispy-Kreme, get three dozen hot donuts. We each bolt four in the car parked under a ficus tree before we feel sick. For two hours, we drive around Boca, and I roll down my window, holding out the tray asking strangers if they want a donut. The sun is setting, sky darkening, when we go back to the beach, find a couple living under the pavilion, give them the remaining dozen.

The first time Julie scolds Kurt. But when it happens again three months later, it's the Fourth of July, I'm in a red tank top and shorts carrying hot dogs out to the grill, he comes up behind me and rubs my shoulders, my neck—she calls me a home-wrecker. Or is that the time she said I'd made it up?

Sunday afternoon, my parents want to go to Costco. A common ritual. I don't want to go; I'm seventeen and I'd rather stay home and be alone than follow my mom down every aisle of the warehouse. Mom is offended. Her feelings are hurt. A fight ensues. By now, they've given me my meds again. They think I'm okay. She yells at me, *fuck you*. I feel so unheard, so diminished. The small Ambien go down easier than the Benadryl.

When I wake up at the children's hospital, I'm strapped to the bed. My right hand is swollen from a busted vein, and my throat hurts. A doctor explains my stomach was pumped and that I'm going to be transferred to a local institute for a seventy-two hour hold, what's called a Baker Act in Florida. They want to make sure I'm not a harm to myself. I protest, but only briefly.

I can't stop crying as I wait in the holding area for the mental health institute, can't believe this is happening to me. My life feels out of control. They place me in a room with two twin beds, a bathroom with no mirror—can't have anything that could turn into a weapon. For the time I'm there, I have to go to group therapy, where I feel out of place: some of these other kids have tried to kill their parents or they set stuff on fire at their school. My problems, comparatively, feel small and insignificant. I don't talk about my mother's addiction or my brother-in-law's advances on me. All I can say is, "I hate myself and I don't know why."

It's a warm autumn in Knoxville, hints of gold starting to seep from the leaves. I've signed up for a two-hour breathing and meditation yoga workshop, which is today. I may never be able to do a headstand, but my downward-dog is getting pretty decent. I love how it stretches my lower back, especially if I do it one-legged, forcing my foot flat into the earth and extending the muscle all the way from my legs into my back. The yoga instructor has us transition into any comfortable seated pose and she instructs us to inhale *so*, exhale *hum*. Inhale *so*, exhale *hum*. She tells us to understand this as meaning *that I am, I am that*. Inhale *so*, exhale *hum*. The room is warm and sun filters through the skylight. As I practice this breathing, thoughts scroll through my mind, and I try to remember my intention: *so, hum. That I am, I am that*. I try to make the words fill the space in my mind instead, getting louder with each breath. It feels good to have something small and specific to focus on rather than everything else in my mind. Clearing my mind of any thought feels unattainable, but replacing them with something else feels realistic.

When I'm released from the mental hospital three days later, I make a promise to myself to never return. To never let myself spin so out-of-control. I feel embarrassed and grateful, ready to refocus myself. Mom picks me up, and we stop for chicken tenders on the way home. Now I see: this is when I learn to compartmentalize. To put certain things in boxes within myself so that they only occupy so much space. I hated everything about being there—the bleached sheets and nurse who checked our mouths for stowed-pills. But it drew an important line for me and made me redefine the kind of person I was willing to be.

One time, Brandon and I are drunk at one of our favorite bars in Deerfield, ocean waves sounding behind us, when I say, “we should buy surfboards.” I haven’t surfed in over ten years; Brandon’s tall, thin body has never been on a board. Yet he agrees with no pause, and that night we carry two surfboards into our Miami apartment, leashes dragging behind us on the carpet. My love with Brandon took time, grew organically, a seed in water over many nights, but I love that he is fearless, willing to jump and trust what’ll happen.

Julie has always been that eight year old at the funeral—willing to stand up to any injustice or slight. Unafraid, or at least more capable of hiding her fear than I am. I think of her first place after moving out—an old broken-down house infested with wolf spiders the size of my hand. I’m always afraid when I’m there, anxious a spider is going to jump out around any corner, yet she seems at ease. Now when I think about that house, with its perpetually dusty floors and windows that don’t lock, fresh from our parents comfortable home, I don’t see so much an obstinate and difficult woman, like I did then, but instead I see a teenager—maybe even one of my students—a girl trying so hard to be, to prove her own worth.

I'm lying on my bed, face-up, in my house in Knoxville, home from a long day on campus. My calves are hanging off the edge, and I can feel their weight pulling on my back. My SI is angry, bones grinding uncomfortably. I'm watching the ceiling fan above me, feeling frustrated about the ache in my back, when I think to myself *pain is companion to life*. For as long as I can remember, it's been there with me. There is no escaping it, whether migraine or joint pain, it's there. Pain is language my body uses to tell me *pay attention, stretch, rest*.

*We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided,
inspired, multiplied.*

One summer, my mother, sister, and I go to stay with my mother's sister Denise in Newburgh, Indiana for a week. I'm eight, my sister sixteen. There are photos of me on the riding lawn mower with my mother, giant sunflowers obscuring part of the picture, blue skies behind us. I'm wearing a baseball cap, smiling broadly. My mother is tan, her blond hair light from sun.

My memories of this trip are hazy; I remember my aunt's son EG coming for dinner, I remember Denise teaching me to eat peanut-butter on rice cakes for a healthy snack, I remember her encouraging my mother to lose weight, I vaguely remember Doug, Denise's new husband. I mostly remember her yard, the birds and trees and flowers. The purple coneflowers that grow as tall as I am make me feel like I've been transported somewhere mystical.

In the early 2000's, my mother can open our Boca Raton Yellow Pages and flip to P, find pages of pain doctors, pain clinics, pain management specialists, and go to three or four in a day. By then, Florida had already began expanding these so-called "pill mills," mostly cash-only clinics that often had pharmacies attached to them, a one-stop-opioid-shop.

But I have no idea how pervasive it is. How can I? There is no way to know until later how profitable some clinics are. It isn't until the end of the decade that people see how little governmental oversight exists, and how that meant that by 2010, almost all of the top one-hundred opioid prescribers in the nation were coming out of Florida. No one could have known, least of all I, that South Florida in particular was an epicenter for narcotics. All I can see is my mother, caught in a storm too big for any of us.

When it's time to start college, I take the GED exam because that's how the homeschooled graduate high school in Florida. Over the course of two days, I take the exam, and ultimately fail the math portion.

I'm ashamed, here taking the test again—the uneven desks and fluorescent lighting, the cheap thin scratch paper we were given, all seem to reflect my shame. Trying to force myself to recall and understand equations, guessing at answers and knowing I'm getting them wrong, I feel like I'm spinning out of control, like everyone can see through me. All I want is to sink into this desk and disappear.

When I pass the GED, I realize it means college, something I've always wanted, but now I'm terrified at the idea of starting at the local university. Its huge class sizes and traditional students, with their regular high school experiences, feels too reminiscent of Seacrest. I can't bear it. Instead, I enroll at my local community college, where I test into the most remedial math classes. Even though I'm still struggling with math and biology, I love college. The autonomy feels freeing, and I love being on campus: meeting new people and reading my textbooks in the courtyard, eating lunch in the cafeteria. All of it feels so important, like I'm in control and moving forward in my life.

I come home from class one summer afternoon, sunlight radiating off asphalt. I'm taking remedial math II, in the hopes I can start college algebra in the fall term, and I thought about staying on campus to do homework. Once inside the house, I wish I had. The curtains are pulled, and it's so dark inside, when I open the front door, the sudden flood of light reflects off the white tile floor. Our dog meets me at the door, tail wagging nervously. She sheds in the summer and piles of her hair line the baseboards like tumbleweeds, scattered along the tiles we used to bleach. My mother has been sleeping on the couch while her room is repainted deep blue, and when I check on her, asleep there, I notice she's peed herself. As I try to lift her, to pull her to the bathroom, she's stands, stumbles a few paces, and collapses into the TV stand. I watch her moan on cold floor, and—for just a minute—contemplate turning around and going back to campus, leaving her here alone.

Many years after that trip to Denise's house in Newburgh, my mother tells me that after we had left and returned home, Julie told my mother that Doug had raped Julie in the middle of the night while the rest of us slept.

On the first day of term, I meet and become immediate friends with someone in my statistics class, Aiden. We're finishing our homework at Starbucks one time when he asks if I want to come over, maybe we get a little stoned. Even though I'm twenty, I've still never smoked weed, but college has opened my perspective, and unlike some guys, I know Aiden has no motives outside of friendship. Soon I'm spending half the nights of the week hanging at his house, smoking from the gravity bong we make in his sink from an old Gatorade bottle or else passing a giant glass pipe back and forth at the dining table. I find that while it's fun, I'm also less nauseous; I can eat. My head hurts less, my anxiety tempers. While others get paranoid or too stoned to complete basic tasks, I feel capable, focused. It's like cannabinoids are missing puzzle pieces in my body. When stoned, I clean and organize, write papers. At night back home alone, I curl up in my bedroom window and smoke from a small vaporizer and read books, blowing the smoke into the side yard.

In college, I'm free. I love my classes, even the statistics class, where the professor lets us talk out the problems and use formula sheets during tests. And the contemporary literature class too; now I think I want to change my major to English. It feels so cool to have friends, to have a life outside of my mother and father and the issues within our house. If I'm not in class, I'm at one of the club offices where I volunteer, or else hanging with Brandon most nights at bars around town. I worry about applying to universities once I finish at PBCC, but I'm hopeful I can get into one of the local schools, like FAU or Lynn, at least.

My mother always disliked Florida. When my father first accepts a position as city engineer and buys a house in Boca Raton, she doesn't leave Indiana. Instead she drives the twenty-or-so hours every few months, staying a long weekend. After the first trip, she returns home and tells her mother she could never live there—so flat and hot, so manicured and artificial. Lawns all green and meticulous, women's nails covered in acrylics. So many perfectly manufactured teeth. "The beach is pretty, but I hate the sand and the ocean scares me," she had said.

Years later, she and I are eating a picnic in the backyard under the Slash pine she hates so much when she tells me that if her mother hadn't died, she wouldn't have ever left Indiana for this "miserable place," which means Florida, which means my home, and as a child, I wonder if it means me too.

In December 2010, I finish PBCC with my associate of arts degree. I've been accepted to Lynn University, walking distance from home, to start in the fall. In the meantime, I start taking Adderall because I want to lose weight. As an adolescent, I refused illicit drugs, prided myself on sobriety. I felt superior. But this prescription for Adderall feels acceptable because it comes prescribed by a doctor. At first, I only take them occasionally, but they make me feel great—I need so little sleep, so little food. Occasionally I crush and snort them on my cell phone screen, parked in plazas across Boca and Delray or in the bathrooms of bars, the orange powder getting into the cracks on my screen protector. More often, though, I break them into halves and take one every morning, maybe another in the afternoon. I feel like this is a good way to ration and be sensible with my own drug use.

One day, after a minor outpatient procedure to remove an ingrown toenail, my mother insists on driving us home. I'm supposed to drive, but she's taken anticipatory Percocet and Xanax, and combined with the analgesic, she's feeling good. She stops us at a pet store, where she's stumbling down the aisles, slurring her words, picking up dog toys and treats. I rush us out, embarrassed in front of the cashier. By the time we leave, mother is angry, confrontational—a side effect of the narcotics. While driving, palm trees blurring by, she makes a wrong turn, exits onto a small road intersecting with the main road.

What happens next, I don't remember. What I remember: I come to and we're in the middle of the intersection, smoke issuing from our silver Honda. I don't quite understand it. There's people all around us, and far down the road is an SVU with a large dent in its side. I'm aware now that I'm in pain, that the airbag in front of me has deployed, and so has my mother's, who is groaning from the driver's seat. I realize what's happened, and I start praying, *please don't run any drug tests*. My father shows up, EMTs show up, and we're taken to a hospital. The Honda, totaled, gets towed away, never seen again. The scene is cleared, and it's like nothing ever happened.

Later that night, I storm into her room and swear at her, curse her. I feel like a deep trust has been broken, and I'm so angry that she wouldn't just let me drive us home—if she'd let me drive, I keep saying, none of this would've happened—why couldn't you let me drive?

Looking at her now, as I sit on this hospital bed, my legs criss-cross on the rough white sheets, I think back to the trial, Kavanaugh's indignation and rage, Dr. Ford's testimony. I imagine my mother watching it on TV—she'd be living here in Knoxville by then, in the house they'd just bought. She'd be sitting on the blue recliner in the blue room, as she calls it, listening to Dr. Ford's description of that bedroom, of his hand on her mouth, the hallway she escaped down. In the blue room, the curtains are open, soft light filters in, and as my mother sits alone there, something deep stirs within her, a memory resurfaces—her soft figure so delicate and penetrable, so defenseless. Just a small girl then, eleven or twelve. She remembers: him, the weight, the force. Now when I sit here, I see how she bends—years of these hidden weights, years making herself smaller, smaller, her body curves in, her shoulders and back turned toward themselves.

Now, I can understand a little more how much Julie wanted to protect her relationship with Kurt. Now, I can understand a little more why she didn't rush to my aid.

For Julie—here is a man who loved her, and here I'm saying he wanted me. I understand a little more now. It must have been easy for him to say I'd lied, I'd misconstrued, must have been easy to want to believe it, to believe it.

I can't see it initially, but within a few months of finishing school, I begin to spiral. I feel like I'm reentering puberty: everything so difficult and incisive, so heavy and monumental. My father asks about a spot on my face, and I fall apart in tears. For weeks, no one knows I'm staying up late into the night, bingeing and purging, carrying everything straight into the bathroom with me: chips, peanut-butter cups, thin mints. Down then up it goes, right into the toilet. At 3am, there is no one to notice this odd ritual, an armful of snacks I carry into the bathroom. And since I'm not in school right now, I have no schedule, and I feel like I'm floating through life without any sort of accountability. I feel out of control.

Then one night I have a dream where I'm also sleeping, and a version of myself appears and says, "quit the Adderall." I've had dreams like this in the past, where my subconscious anxieties speak to me, revealing something I probably already know but am not ready to admit.

Within days of stopping, I feel clearer. I start eating regularly—stop starving myself all day only to binge and purge all night. I sleep harder than I've slept in months. I can't believe so much of what I've been feeling has been affected by this prescription.

My therapist wants me to accept my anxiety in the same way I have accepted my pain, as companion to my life. She wants me to find some comfort, knowing that I shouldn't worry about getting rid of it, instead I should know that there is no ridding, only accepting. She wants me to understand what she calls *radical acceptance*. I think I'm getting closer. Yoga helps too, *so-hum* helps—helps me to recognize anxious thoughts for what they are and let them exist in the same room as me without feeling dominated by them.

When her mother dies, three months after her Leukemia diagnosis, my mother is twenty-six, and by now, they've grown to be friends. They have jokes and secrets. They have routines and habits.

With her paycheck from Kroger, my mother took June to the Estée Lauder counter, had her face done for fun, the lipstick and eyeshadows an unknown indulgence. When she dies, and it's time to pick the clothes for burial, my mother takes on the responsibility like she had all the others—sleeping at the hospital, sitting through chemo, rubbing lotion into her skin. She looks through June's closet, a mess, a heap of clothes unfolded and piled atop each other, but she can't find the skirt to the pink dress-suit June wore to church. My mother brings the funeral home a shirt, a jacket, and panties. "Bury her without the skirt; she'll get a kick out of that."

Once I start at Lynn, college once again for me becomes a reprieve. I study at the bookstore or my father's office, avoiding home as much as possible. The house is so dark, the curtains always drawn. She is so difficult to be around, her slurred words, her unpredictable states—will she be coherent today? Will she even be awake? College, like the books from my childhood, is something I pour myself into. I apply for master's programs in writing. I see a path for my life clear in a way I never have before.

Since quitting the Adderall, my drug use remains recreational. I try shrooms and experiment with MDMA and ecstasy. On these drugs, I have no pain; my head feels light and my body limber. But I know better than to use them often. Cannabis, however, I consume daily. I become adept at making my morning coffee with a joint balanced between my fingers, a trail of smoke lingering behind me. At night, I take my bath with an ashtray resting on the edge of the tub.

In the middle of the opioid crisis, no one knows it's happening. No one suspects young athletes, middle-aged dads, and Suburban housewives. When we walk into Apex Pharmacy or Delray Shores Pharmacy, we aren't aware millions of other prescriptions like hers are filled. I stand in line slightly behind her, skin goose bumped in the chilly AC; she's sighing as the line doesn't move. Someone is always arguing with the pharmacist.

Years later, the CDC discovers that from the start to the end of the decade—2000-2010—opioid overdoses in women were up by more than 400%.

I pull into the driveway after my first week at a new job when I see my mother wandering the front yard, looking for something. I get out of my car, ask what she's doing. She's looking for Eli—Julie and Kurt's three-year-old son. He was in the backyard, she says, and she went to get him water, and now he's gone. We search the house, the closets, under desks. Panic begins to trickle down my neck, settle into my stomach. Where could a three-year-old go? We call my father; he comes home with his brother and my cousin. I text Brandon, tell him I can't make our date, explain in anxious bursts; he says he's leaving work to come. Our neighbor helps search the yards, the neighborhood. We walk the street, yelling his name, hoping that he'll pop out from behind a shrub or neighbor's car, say "boo!" like it's all a big joke he's playing on us. My father pulls me aside, asks "Do you think she's on something? Do you think this is real?" "I don't think she would hallucinate something this big." I'm beginning to imagine us on the news, begging for his safe return; I'm picturing Eli's straight blond hair, blue eyes on a Missing Child flier.

Three cop cars arrive. They walk through our small house, made smaller with their hulking bodies, their hands on their belts or guns; they open all closets, ask us to explain events. We're standing useless in the living room. Finally, we call my sister. I don't know why it took so long; I don't know if we were waiting to be sure Eli's gone, or if Julie hasn't been answering her phone. What I remember most is the pitted, pathetic look the cops gave us when Julie, over speaker, said Eli had been home all day, that he is in his room at this very moment playing with Lincoln Logs.

That's when I begin to realize how serious her problems are. I start speaking to Julie again for the first time in five years. She and Kurt are married now; they have two sons. I avoid him when I come over, leave before he gets home from work. She and I don't address it. We don't address a lot of things. We sit in her screened front porch in Boynton Beach, passing a bowl and comparing what our mother has told us. I try not to inhale too deeply when she smokes her Marlboro Lights, the smell lingering in my hair. I tell her about the fights mom and dad have, how mother is up all night searching her room for something, how father came home and thought she was dead one evening. We agree an intervention is needed.

She never censored me from things like other parents did. I'm young when we watch *The Accused* with Jodie Foster, that infamous scene—her body forced against the pinball machine—sears itself into me as I sit on the brown living room carpet, sucking on a fruit roll-up wrapped like a bandage around my thumb.

Young also when she told me about the woman who lived down the road, how a man snuck into her house, attacked her, pinned her to the bed. How he stayed there until the album she was listening to looped over, heavy drums filling the space.

My mother has always been fearful, double-checking doors are locked, alarm set. She sleeps with a baseball bat, knives in the top nightstand drawer. Insists on wooden rods in windows despite locks, always leaves a porch light on. Long after our German Shepherd dies, she keeps up “Beware of Dog” signs. She reads that a dog’s sound deters break-ins so she buys an alarm that barks aggressively whenever its sensors are set off. She answers the door yelling at a nonexistent dog, “Get back, get back, stay!”

Maria P. P. Root says: “(1) Direct trauma includes traditional forms of trauma (war, accidents, natural disasters) as well as sexual and physical abuse, sudden or debilitating physical illnesses and culturally bound atrocities (internment of Japanese Americans, dislocation of native groups and genocide); (2) Indirect trauma is secondary trauma, whereby a person is traumatized by the trauma endured by another person. Friends, family members, direct witnesses to trauma, people who are habitually exposed to trauma (professionals who work with trauma victims or members of the media) could suffer indirect trauma. Women, as a result of being socialized to be relationship-dependent, may be more likely and vulnerable to indirect trauma; (3) Insidious trauma is form of psychological or symbolic threat based on individual characteristics that are directed towards a larger group of people who are marginalized by gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, class, sexual orientation or physical ability. The effects of insidious trauma become part of a collective consciousness, leaving generations of people traumatized as a result of their ancestor’s direct suffering.”

We try an intervention.

No, we try many interventions, each quickly dissolving into another fight. Perhaps my sister says “listen, woman, you need to open your fucking eyes and see what you’re doing before you die alone.” Perhaps my mother retorts that we’re all conspiring against her, that she’ll never agree to be “put away.” My father doesn’t know what to say other than he’ll hold all her drugs and dose them to her. And me? What I do say? These periods in Boca blur like the seasons, all hot and sticky, melting into each other like candle wax. In my memories, I try so hard for so long and then I can’t anymore. I’m seventeen one moment, marching into her room after the car accident, saying I’ll never look at her the same if things don’t change, then I’m twenty-one the next, convinced there’s no change in sight. I’m surfing at Red Reef Park driving the silver Honda, then I’m starting college and studying at my father’s office, staying as far away from her as possible.

The weeks following Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony, pundits were quick to claim disbelief. They were quick to say that many women make false allegations against men, despite research that shows false reports rarely occur. Despite that nearly seventy percent of assaults are never reported. No one mentions that sexual assault is the least commonly reported crime of all crimes tracked. They claim that she didn't say anything earlier because it didn't happen; they don't address how many women don't come forward because they won't be believed or because they're afraid their lives will be ruined.

Despite the darkneses within my family, I still find sources of light. I still love college and my classes, especially in my final year, when I feel like I'm now, more than ever, a skilled student. I'm falling in love with Brandon, and we're spending almost every night together. And although I'm nervous about what will happen if I get into an out-of-state writing program, I'm going in and trusting that it'll work out later. He makes me feel brave and capable, so I'm pretending for now to believe I am.

One time, she agrees to hand over control of her pills, to let my father give them to her as prescribed. This lasts until he thinks she's "better" and "in control." Just like when they argue over money. She spends \$400 at Target or maxes out a card at the mall and they blow up at each other. Stiff, thick silences fill the house. He takes away credit cards and checkbooks then gives them back, expecting different results.

My father is well-intentioned, gentle. He overwaters plants, makes our plates before his. When he develops an allergy to tahini, he still makes hummus for us. My mother loves the story of how, shortly after they met, he discovered her parents' washing machine was broken. She loves explaining how he fixed it using a penny he bored a hole through. He understands physics, knows how many pounds per square inch steel can hold and the flexibility rates of concrete. But he doesn't understand emotional and mental porosity, how someone can take in the world like soil does water.

One time after a particularly bad fight—about money or pills or maybe both—mom and I go to stay with my sister. He calls me on my cell, says he doesn't understand why she keeps doing this, why she can't just stop.

My mother loves also the story where she and my father, not long into dating, went grocery shopping at Kroger, so my mother could use her employee discount. My mother put one can of baby formula into the cart for Julie. My father, always pragmatic, says, “it’s cheaper to buy the whole case.”

“I can’t afford the whole case.”

“I’ll buy it,” *and he bought the whole case* I hear her finish.

Or the story where he came and met her after her car—a Mustang or Camaro—blows up off the highway in Lexington. It’s autumn, not too cold out yet, so she starts to walk with infant-Julie along the road until a trucker pulls over and drives them to a payphone. An hour later, my father and uncle show up with a tow-truck. He brings the car back to his apartment, where he takes apart the engine, replaces the transmission.

My father has always been this way. Rushing in, generous, altruistic, doing what he thought was right, what he could.

It's a Friday, I'm off work, and Kurt is here. I'm talking to my mom in the living room; she's on the couch folding laundry. The TV is on —Dr. Phil, then local news. I'm standing behind the loveseat as Kurt walks in from the backyard, sliding open the door so light floods the dark living room. He comes up behind me and begins to rub my shoulders. I don't remember what I'm wearing, likely a tank top or t-shirt. The leather couch is cool against my hands. I pull away from him, walk into the kitchen, where my father is making shawarma. The smell of meat lingers. Parsley sits on the counter. They haven't renovated the kitchen yet; it is still the original avocado green from 1972 when it was built. I stand behind the island while my father slices tomatoes, stirs tahini. Kurt follows me into the kitchen and continues massaging my back. Again: I remove myself, I say nothing.

My mother says she and my father couldn't believe Kurt touched me like that, right in front of them. "I know. I've told you about it." She tells me she's going to call him and tell him off. I tell her not to, but she does. She calls and threatens him. I'm not sure what he tells my sister, or how she finds out, but I'm at work when Julie barrages me with calls, voicemails, and texts. "Y R U trying to RUIN my life??" "U R a homewrecker." "u spoiled fucking liar." I say nothing. I silence my phone.

My mother always had compulsions. Smoking, shopping, narcotics. One time, a hurricane hit and left us without electricity for three weeks. My father invents “hurricane pizza”—pita with sliced tomatoes, cheese, and hot sauce toasted in a convection oven run on a generator. A year or more after the electricity comes back, my mother continues to eat them—only hurricane pizzas—every day. She eats them for so long with such frequency, my father becomes sick at the sight of them. Nearly ten years later, we’ll still joke about her hurricane pizza phase.

I understand compulsion. As an adult, I go months eating hummus for lunch everyday. Or peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches. There comes a point where the thought of anything else gives me anxiety, makes my stomach turn and heart race. My father cannot understand this.

My father calls one morning. I'm walking to the campus library. "Your mother is losing her brain." I've heard this story before: he came home last night, a little past seven. I was at Brandon's apartment, where I'm spending more and more time. Her bedroom door was locked. He knocked and knocked. He banged on the door, he kicked the door. He tells me he nearly busted the damn door down. Then she comes out of her room. "I'm ready," she says, all dressed up.

"What are you doing?" he asks.

"We're going to a funeral, right?"

"What?"

"We were at your sister's house, or someone's, yesterday, and today is the funeral." He says she didn't know what day or even what time of day it is. He says she asked where their grandchildren were, hadn't they been there? "We haven't seen them in three weeks," he told her. "She doesn't have any drugs, does she? You've kept them right?" I say to my father on the phone.

"She does, I think. She hides them."

"What does she have? Percocet, Vicodin, Xanax?"

"Yeah. I think she sees a pain management doctor."

"She doesn't tell me that."

"She doesn't tell me either."

And blueberries—for two or three years, all she eats are blueberries. Two or three pounds a day. People don't believe me. I take pictures of the fridge, filled with packs of them. My father tells me she puts \$3500 on a credit card in one month. All blueberries. When she goes to Costco, they—other regulars, employees, managers—call her Blueberry Lady. Customers see her cart, stacked with crates of them, and ask, “do you own a bakery? do you make smoothies? what do you do with all these?” She shrugs, “I just eat them.” And eats them she does. Like popcorn, a few tossed into her mouth at once. She goes around the house, carrying them in a bowl. When she goes out for errands, she puts a carton in her blue leather purse, as blue as the berries inside.

My mother sits up in the hospital bed, hands in her lap. It's around eleven at night when a doctor comes into her hospital room, says her results came back normal, she can be discharged. "Oh, thank god!" she says. I ask about follow-ups and he suggests a cardiologist. I take his card and shake his hand while she signs paperwork. "Please text your dad to let him know," she says, as I pass over her clothes. I drive her home, letting her roll the window down so the cold air breezes through the car. We point out Christmas lights along the way, and I put on Dolly Parton's *Hard Candy Christmas*.

One morning I'm getting ready for my last undergrad class when I hear my father answer the door, hear Julie stomp past him. I rush to collect my bag, avoid confrontation. I still have not replied to her texts about Kurt. She opens my bedroom door. "You aren't answering my calls, and we're going to talk about this shit." I tell her I can't, I have class, I have to go. She blocks me, screams in my face. My father stands dumbfounded in the hallway, still in pajamas and house-slippers.

My mother is in her bedroom, either ignoring the situation or too dosed to hear. I stare into Julie's face, several inches above mine. "You want to hit me, don't you? Do it, c'mon, hit me." I feel trapped. I swing first. Then she's on top of me, then I'm on top of her.

My father pulls me off. I sprint to my car, realize she's parked blocking my exit. I look up to see her fighting through the front door—my father trying to hold her back. She screams she's going to call the cops, have me arrested for assault. I pull as far onto the lawn as I can, throw my car into reverse, and peel out over the curb. She disappears in my mirror.

Women are less likely to be believed if they report more than one assault. They're less likely to be believed if they don't report it immediately, or if they don't remember everything, or if they stay friendly with their abuser. Women are not likely to be believed.

Inside Southern says, “One reason people blame a victim is to distance themselves from an unpleasant occurrence and thereby confirm their own invulnerability to the risk. By labeling or accusing the victim, others can see the victim as different from themselves. People reassure themselves by thinking, ‘Because I am not like her, because I do not do that, this would never happen to me.’”

The night before picture day at school, Denise cuts off my mother's hair so that the ends are blunt and shaggy, bangs short and jagged. Every year, their mother, June, would say, "don't you dare touch her hair," and every year, Denise comes into their bedroom, scissors in hand. She'd get a beating for it too, but she didn't care. When I ask my mother why she'd let Denise do it, she says, "Denise would promise it'd look good, and, I don't know, I trusted her." My mother has always been trusting. I understand this compulsion too. I quit asking why.

When I drive back after taking her home from the hospital, my head fills with images of thin wrists eclipsed by hands, a small mouth covered with a palm not much bigger than hers. It's almost midnight, days from Christmas. The city sleeps, plastic candles glow in windows. Quiet terrors happening behind closed doors. I try to remember myself at eleven, try to picture her then, too. That night, I half-sleep, dream about ficus trees ripped from the ground, about compound fractures, bright white and bleeding.

Labor Day weekend, Brandon and I are at a bar, talking to a woman about a football player who has recently been accused of sexually assaulting several women. “I just don’t think he did it, I think it’s all a conspiracy. Why didn’t they come forward sooner, all those women? No, I don’t think so.”

Sometimes when she's not home, I search her drawers. I find mostly what I expect: her favorite paring knife in the nightstand, the Dove chocolates and M&Ms in the dresser, the picture of her mother laughing in the front yard, holding up a baby I know is my sister. I search for the pill bottles I know must be here. Sometimes I look through the clothes, sometimes I smell her Chanel No.5 or steal a chocolate. Sometimes I sit on her bed, all the drawers open, thinking—when did this all start?

I'm driving north on A1A one afternoon when I get a call from a 305-number. Miami. I've applied to graduate programs for writing, including Florida International University in Miami. I answer, and it's one of the faculty poets, offering me a spot. The road ahead of me opens, and I look at the ocean to my right. There's some clouds covering the sun, but the water is a clean blue. In this moment, I feel so capable, validated. I feel like all that time—in the library, at the bookstore, tucked away scribbling in a journal—might finally amount to something.

*The world has become chaos, but the book remains the image of the world:
radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos. A strange mystification: a book all the
more total for being fragmented.*

My father calls me on a Wednesday. Brandon and I now share an apartment off Biscayne Blvd, near FIU's campus in Miami. I'm on my balcony writing, traffic blaring below, but I answer, intending to say I can't talk. I don't get the chance; he says yesterday he had a doctor's visit in Delray Beach. He didn't want her to go with him, could tell she was "off," but she insists. Along the way, she begins to nod out. He gives her four business cards out of his pocket, asks her to count them. As he's telling me this, I picture them in his car—he's in a white button down shirt and black pants, she's wearing that navy and white striped blouse, blue jeans. He reaches into his pocket with his right hand, holding the steering wheel with his left. The business cards, I imagine, are bent at the edges, slightly stuck together. "Count these," he says. Confused, she takes them out of his hand, gripping weakly, unfocused. She tries to count them, fumbling with the cards, nodding in and out. "One... two ... two...three... one...."

My mother is the last of five. An unplanned pregnancy. In the picture of her in my mind, she's smiling, her teeth are small and uneven. But her clothes—a blue corduroy jumper and long sleeve yellow shirt—are clean and pressed. Her face is thin, skin bright and clear. The year is on the back, a slanting cursive I recognize. *1970*. She digs dandelions out of the grass with teaspoons; she plays tag football with her brothers. Already her body has known betrayal. Already it knows weight.

As a graduate student, I begin to write about my mother's addiction—the time we couldn't find the olive oil for days until I reached for a maxi-pad under the bathroom cabinet, where she'd put the oil; or the time she crashed into someone's mailbox; or how she can't remember what I tell her from one week to the next, her memory like hands cupping sand, more falling out than staying in.

What I don't write about are the bottles of pills I swallow at sixteen and seventeen. My stomach pumped, bits of charcoal staining my *duck duck surf!* t-shirt. The mental hospital for adolescents where I sleep in a room with another girl who won't speak and spits out her meds each morning.

I don't write about my teenage sexual experiences. The men I meet and let touch me. AOL chat rooms, the pictures, the mall, the old ice cream stand in Delray. At night I return home and feel used, disappointed in myself. None of these sexual excursions result in physical pleasure for me. But there is a fake power that young women feel when they can please someone, when they have control in pleasing someone, and I enjoyed that sense of control. That fake power. And I'm wanted. How much I need to be wanted. How much I still need to feel wanted. Somedays the need reverberates inside me. I'm nothing if I am not wanted. How can I be anything if I am not desired?

I don't write about the way I flirt with Kurt once I know he wants me. The way I flirt with the family doctor. The way that even when I'm not flirting, I want to be desirable. I feel so tormented, and I don't know why. Is it fair to say I'm out of my mind with self-loathing? Some days I restrict my calories so much because hunger pangs feel good—half a bagel, salad with no dressing, diet coke. More than one occasion I hurt myself and feel relief at the pain—the handle of an old screwdriver, a blade over skin. My walls are covered with pictures of Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson, and I stay up late into the night, doing sit-ups and scanning pro-anorexia chat boards.

What I wish I knew: I wish I knew the value of my body, how fine it was—is—muscles and bones that work even while they ache. I wish I knew my worth will never be fulfilled by someone else's approval, that it is there inside me. When someone compliments me, I can say *thank you*. When I fail at my own expectations, I can try again. I don't need to poke holes in my own worthiness. That fourteen year old girl hurting herself because she'd ran up a cell phone bill, the sixteen year old starving herself—that small girl hiding in the closet—I wish I could go back there and take her in my hands and tell her *give yourself what you deserve*.

I wish I understood that I can't change any of it, but I can accept it. I'm working on that still. I think that's the last part. Through all the silencing I did as a child, I see how now it's still my natural defense mechanism. Today when I'm faced with a drunk man getting too close at a bar, I silence myself and freeze, and then later on the way home, I think about all the things I know I should've said.

Simone DeBeauvoir's "*The Second Sex*" says *We have seen that in a majority of women a passive sexuality has also developed since childhood: woman likes to be embraced, caressed, and especially after puberty she wants to be flesh in a man's arms; the role of subject is normally assigned to him.*

I remember me. Nine years old. Small for my age. Big eyes. Long light brown hair. It's Halloween. I'm in a hula-girl costume. A straw skirt. Seashell bikini top. Lei draped around my neck. I dress by myself, and come out to the garage where mom is smoking her Camel Lights. I appear in the doorway. "Mommy, do I look sexy?"

On Fridays, I drive up to Boca, visit my parents. My father at his office, where I get a summation of current events. How he doesn't think she should be driving, but he doesn't know how to stop her. How some days, or weeks, are better than others. "She's clear right now," he says, or "she's fuzzy today." He tells me she is up all night or awake early in the morning, cleaning or looking for something. When I go to see her at home, I stop to buy her flowers. Gerberas or lilies or tulips, something pink or yellow, something that can't grow in the sandy soil and humidity. I walk into the front door that she's unlocked for me. AC blasts and my skin goosebumps. I wait to see her, to hear her speech, before deciding how the afternoon will go. Some days we run errands together. I drive us around Boca and Delray, taking A1A the entire way. We get lunch at a deli—she orders soup, potato or broccoli cheddar, and I get a turkey club. I eat soup the same way she does, nervously, embarrassed when I have to wipe it off my chin.

Sometimes, for hours, we follow Julie's first boyfriend, watch him to make sure he isn't cheating. Sometimes we search my father's car by night, flashlights flickering in the dark, looking for evidence of betrayal. We never find any, but that doesn't stop mom from believing it exists. She has never believed she was enough.

One day, my mother sees Brandon's shoes. "Emily, who bought those for him?" "He did." "Are you sure? A woman didn't buy them for him?"

I wish I could say I found this belief, but I'm always looking for Brandon to find someone younger and more attractive, someone warmer and friendlier, who's easier and more less weighed down.

After her mother dies, she drives down to Boca for what she intends to be the last time. She pulls into the driveway and my father greets her there, but he isn't my father yet. And she isn't my mother. They hug, he kisses her cheek and forehead loudly, lips smacking. How long have they been doing this now—he here in Florida, her there in Kentucky? At least a year. She looks in his eyes behind his glasses and tells him she can't anymore. Or maybe she says she won't. It doesn't matter. Three days later, they buy gold rings from Sears and visit the Delray Beach county courthouse. In a month, she'll realize she's pregnant, and the following May, they'll have a daughter they name Emily June.

Other days, I can barely stay in Boca half an hour. I watch the time and wait for it to pass as we sit in her cold bedroom with the heavy curtains closed. She says she's tired and that's why it's hard for her to stay awake. I want to believe it, but the way she's scratching her nose and arms tells me she's on something. It makes my skin crawl. Now that I'm not living at home, now that I don't see it daily, I find it intolerable. I don't know how I ever lived down the hall from this.

Sometimes we sit on her bed and watch TV or talk about what shows we've been watching. I tell her about my grad classes or the other students in them, the books I'm reading now, vent how much I hate Miami traffic. Her bowl of blueberries sits next to her, and occasionally she'll toss a handful into her mouth. Sometimes she dozes off while chewing them, her face and mouth going slack, head falling backward, and I shift on the bed to wake her. Or when I'm angry, I'll shake her awake then leave, saying I-95 will be bad if I don't go. Sometimes I sit there and watch her breathe, unsteady and heavy, watch as her body shakes and drops with each breath, a body trying to become free of some invisible weight.

When I drive away, I feel like I'm escaping and also like I'm abandoning. Years later, I'll look back and wonder why I didn't shake her awake, why I didn't demand something change.

On my thirty-first birthday, Brandon gets up early, leaves. I fall back asleep but wake to smell bacon, to hear pans shifting on the stovetop. The birds outside are loud, robins and blue jays enjoying the late spring's bright sun. Knoxville in May is generous, green and pink. The world outside is burning, but I stay in bed. It's a relief to have an excuse to be unproductive. Brandon comes into the room, sits down a plate of bacon and waffles with blueberries. I make sure to eat all of the berries.

Women raped before the age of eighteen are twice as likely to be raped as an adult. Poor women are more likely to be assaulted than affluent. Girls aged fifteen and under are more likely to be assaulted than those who are older. Women who drink or do drugs, women who use public transport, who go out alone. Women who say yes, who say no, who say nothing.

Trips up to Boca become less frequent. Or they remain the same, but I stop going by the house. It feels easier to drive by and imagine what's happening behind the front door than to stop and find out. Somedays I park in the plaza across the street, the same asphalt lot where I learned to rollerblade, ride a bike, drive a car. Sitting there I'm reminded of the nights when they'd fight so bad, she'd drive us for hours along A1A, sometimes ending the night in this lot, watching and waiting for the lights to go out, signaling he'd gone to bed. When my father starts telling me to go see her, I stop going by his office. I spend more time watching the traffic from my balcony and applying to PhD programs that will take me away from here. If I don't get in, I'm afraid I'll never leave Florida.

Before I defend my master's thesis, I meet with my committee. I tell them my parents will be coming, and I ask them to phrase questions so they don't suggest my mother. The day I defend, I call my father to ask how she's been, if she'll be okay. I imagine her with slurred speech, dozing off so her head falls and jerks back up. I can't tell if I believe him because I want to or because he's honest when he says she's okay today. When they show up, I examine her gait (does she look steady?), her smile (is it painted?), her speech (is it clear?). She's never herself in groups or with new people. Never talks to strangers, hates small talk. She's uncomfortable, and I can't tell if she's nervous or if she's dozed.

The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. ... The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways; in this sense, the burrow is an animal rhizome, and sometimes maintains a clear distinction between the line of flight as passageway and storage or living strata (cf. the muskrat).

My mother is daisies. Tulips. She's rice-crispy treats for breakfast. Egg salad lunches. Yellow cake batter straight from the bowl. She's cotton sheets fresh from the dryer. An old quilt. The smell of bandaids, of bread, of fried donuts with cinnamon. She's magnolia blossoms. She's clay dirt thick as gum under shoes. She's the song of fabric ripped apart, the sound of creaking wood and scissors gliding smooth through paper. She's a shovel cracking open earth. She's the fabric, she's the earth, holes waiting to be whole. A child, I used to write her poems and leave them around the house for her. Now I think I was trying to grow flowerbeds in all the hollow spaces.

I'm scrubbing my floor when my father calls, hard breeze pours through the balcony doors. He says she is in "bad shape" today. He didn't want to leave her alone, so he made her go with him to a job site in Dania Beach. He says by the time they'd arrived, she'd worsened. Her words were slurred and she could barely walk. He told her to stay in the car as he goes into the building to inspect it. He says, "I'll leave the car running, and I'll be back in ten minutes, just stay here." He leaves her as her head falls down, jaw slack, and eyes glazed. When he comes out of the building fifteen minutes later, she and the car are gone. I've stopped cleaning. I'm sitting on the laminate floor with my back against the chalk-white walls. I'm imagining her driving, half-awake, along a highway swerving into other lanes. Or perhaps crashing into someone along a sidewalk. I'm imagining my father standing outside the construction area, looking left and right for the red sedan, cell phone in hand. He's calling her, he's pacing, he's looking again.

After twenty minutes of constant calling, she answers her phone. Her voice is garbled. He asks where she is, what exit she sees; he tells her to pull into a gas station. He pays a construction worker to drive him to where she is, twenty minutes up the Palmetto Expressway. When he sees the car and her inside, he runs to it, his pockets jangling. The car doors are still locked, and she's passed out again. He knocks on the window and she jumps. He helps her shuffle over to the passenger seat. She protests, says she's fine. As they drive home, he says he was shaking. He says, "I don't understand." He says he demanded to know what doctor she's been seeing, what she's been prescribed, what she's taking. He says, "I don't understand." She can barely respond, she doesn't understand why he's angry. She says she was told to move the car, that someone called and said to move the car. She doesn't know where they are.

One day, a neighbor in our apartment complex sees me parking, sees my hands full of plants and grocery bags. Asks if he can help, asks if Brandon and I eat tamales, he's just made some, he'll bring them over. He picks up my bags before I can refuse, which I have done in the past many times. I've rebuffed him rudely, and now I'm trying to be nice. I don't want him to think I'm a bitch. He walks me up to the apartment and walks in, sets down my Publix bags. He's being nice, kind.

But the entire time, I'm wondering, *Are you a predator?*

By the time my mother is my age, she had two daughters, a dead mother, and a husband. She is still breast-feeding me; they are talking about another child. When she talks now about raising me as an infant, I can feel the joy in her voice like warm air filling the room. My father would drive home for lunch, and they made love in the bed they still shared while the sun filtered through the blinds. Weekends she made French toast and they grilled at the park with a tunnel that led to the beach. Those early years, she's happiest. This is before miscarriages, before separate bedrooms and separate dinners. Every *before* has a past. My mother could not know then what could become of this life ~~she was~~ they were building.

*It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows
and which it overfills.*

When they get home, he searches her drawers and closet but doesn't find anything. She's yelling at him, asking what he's doing. "Who's the doctor?" he says. She doesn't understand or she denies. I see her sitting on her bed, half-conscious, dozing in and out. I see him pulling clothes and shoes out of the closet, underwear and bags of candy from the dresser. He demands again, "Who's the doctor? Where are the pills?" They keep going in circles until finally, somehow, he gets out a name, finds a bag of orange pill bottles buried under the bed hidden in a shoebox. Some pain management doctor in Boca. He looks up the number, calls the office. I hear the vibrations in his voice, rising up as the phone rings, waiting for someone to answer. He tells me he "blasts" the doctors office, says they had to have known they were prescribing her too much, how dare they do this to his wife.

In April, I tell my parents I'm moving to Tennessee for my PhD. My father is proud I'll be attending his alma mater. Under my mother's happiness ripples fear, uncertainty. Change unsettles her. To her, going there means choosing him. She doesn't trust I won't leave her behind when I leave Florida.

The last time I see her before leaving, she gives me a wooden angel in a box. Inside the box, she writes: "My sweet daughter. You go on this venture with all you have in you. I will miss you so much but this is where you must go. Please be careful. Relax. Try to have some fun. I'm always there for you! Day or nite I'm here. Love Mom. 7/26/28 [sic]"

What is it about this note? Its error tells me she is unwell when writing it, but the intent is pure—for me to enjoy my life because she has not enjoyed hers is always pure, and I worry so much that I am failing her in that, that I am failing all the women before me in that.

During a session, I tell my therapist a story: when I'm six or seven, my mother buys pre-packaged blueberry muffin mix—the kind with a can of berries to fold into the batter, with an egg, some water, and oil—for me to make on my own. The gift of autonomy. What trust she had in me, to do this myself.

Today I make blueberry muffins and I'm taken back there—I crush fresh blueberries with a fork and their soft syrup reminds me of my small child hands operating the can opener and draining the tin into the sink. I fold the berries into the batter as she taught me, with the soft rubber spatula, their blue swirling coloring the mix. She saw in me a kindling that had not flared but is sparking. She said *here, do this because I know you can, because I know you want it.*

One of my last days living in Miami, I'm driving south on Biscayne Boulevard. Traffic is as it always is, stop and go, nothing but brake-lights and horns. Stopped at a red-light, my eyes start to wander, eventually falling upon a woman wearing layers of clothes—far too many for Miami. In her hand, she holds a pigeon. Not cradling it, but holding it by its feet, gripped tight in her fist. Before I know what I'm seeing, she slams the pigeon on the sidewalk. Once, twice. Blood spatters concrete. I blink in shock just as the cars ahead of me start to move.

I can't know then how often I'll dream of that, of that solid smack, the splattering of red staining the sidewalk, the small body going limp.

It's summer, mid-July, five days into my move to Knoxville, Tennessee, my father calls. I'm assembling a bookshelf, holding the phone to my ear with my shoulder. One week ago, he says, my mother checked herself in rehab. He says Julie came to the house and said if she didn't go, she couldn't see the grandchildren anymore. I sit stunned for a second before asking how long she'll stay. "At least a month." I ask if I can talk to her, and he says not for another week. No family phone calls for the first two weeks. He says she's doing okay, he talks to her doctor daily, she's finishing withdrawal right now.

Drs. Thomas R. Kosten and Tony P. George at the National Institute of Health say: “Repeated exposure to escalating dosages of opioids alters the brain so that it functions more or less normally when the drugs are present and abnormally when they are not. Two clinically important results of this alteration are opioid tolerance (the need to take higher and higher dosages of drugs to achieve the same opioid effect) and drug dependence (susceptibility to withdrawal symptoms). Withdrawal symptoms occur only in patients who have developed tolerance.

Opioid dependence and some of the most distressing opioid withdrawal symptoms stem from changes in another important brain system, involving an area at the base of the brain—the locus ceruleus (LC). Neurons in the LC produce a chemical, noradrenaline (NA), and distribute it to other parts of the brain where it stimulates wakefulness, breathing, blood pressure, and general alertness, among other functions. When opioid molecules link to mu receptors on brain cells in the LC, they suppress the neurons’ release of NA, resulting in drowsiness, slowed respiration, low blood pressure—familiar effects of opioid intoxication. With repeated exposure to opioids, however, the LC neurons adjust by increasing their level of activity. Now, when opioids are present, their suppressive impact is offset by this heightened activity, with the result that roughly normal amounts of NA are released and the patient feels more or less normal. When opioids are not present to suppress the LC brain cells’ enhanced activity, however, the neurons release excessive amounts of NA, triggering jitters, anxiety, muscle cramps, and diarrhea.”

Because I can't call her, I write her letters, tell her how the cardinals off my balcony remind me of her, how she'd love the willows and magnolias here. I tell her the fog is thick off the river in the morning. I tell her about my classes, the books I'm reading, my students. I tell her that everywhere I look, I see her reflected back at me—the dogwoods, the pansies, the Baptist small church on the corner of my street.

Suddenly, I find myself longing for my mother. Suddenly, I am seeing her everywhere. Also I'm worried about her, I want to know she's okay.

I'm at a quarry with Brandon in Knoxville. This is our new home. The water is deep, clean, surrounded by rock and trees. I'm floating on my back, watching the clouds float with me. It's August, the sun is out, but when the wind blows I get goosebumps. I climb out of the water, sit on the rocks with our towels and drinks. I watch Brandon, his arms and legs stretched like a starfish on the surface of the water. I grab my phone to take a photo and see I've got a missed call and a voicemail from a 561-number. West Palm. I listen to the message, and I hear her voice. It's her, but she sounds different, clear. "Hey honey, it's me. Your daddy told me you were worried so I wanted to call you. I'm okay. I miss you, I hope everything is okay with you. I'm allowed phone calls now, but I may not be available when you call back, just leave a message with the receptionist and I'll call back. I have to go now. I love you."

In October, my parents visit. My father drives us around, shows us where his old apartment used to be, across a church parking lot, walking distance from campus. The weather is cool, and my mother rolls down the windows when we drive through the hills, sticks her face out into the cold. I point out magnolias and weeping willows along the way. I tell her she should come back for spring, see again how green and pink and purple the world can become. Before they leave, we eat fried chicken for lunch, licking our fingers.

Though Florida is home, Knoxville starts to feel like a return to something prior. A genesis. My parents tell more and more stories of their time here, and Brandon and I develop our own roots. Where Florida felt like a transient space—somewhere I was always hoping to only exist for a certain period of time—Knoxville begins to feel like a place where I can cultivate a life.

A particularly warm November afternoon, Brandon and I drive to the courthouse. We have a 3:30 appointment. I don't wear a dress, but a golden skirt instead. He's in jeans and a long-sleeve shirt. Here's something we said we'd never do. And yet, we sign the papers and when the officiant asks, we says, *I do*.

“Activities Recovered Addicts Should Avoid After Rehab” reminds me that addicts should avoid tempting places and situations and emotional triggers. Substance abusers should end relationships with toxic people and rebuild relationships with healthier people. They should replace old behaviors with new, ideally better, ones.

Maybe this is why many addicts choose out-of-state rehab facilities because their every street corner becomes a trigger. The sound of the train from their bedroom makes them crave a well-timed Percocet—they need new sounds, new smells. They need to hear blue jays and think about the new grass coming in. They need to retrain their brains and create new pathways, and that’s harder to do when triggered in the same environment that got them addicted.

It's still dark one morning when Brandon wakes me kissing my cheek, my forehead. I turn onto my stomach, push my backside into him, and he wraps his arms around my chest. Our bodies' boundaries, broken. When he comes, his whole weight pushes into me. *Women's bones are made for this*, I think. Made to withstand the weight of all of gravity, the whole ocean pressing into you.

I talk to her every day after they return home. I tell her how the weather is changing here, growing colder daily. She tells me how nothing is changing there: Nordstrom holding its winter sale, shark sightings at the beach. Her life is stale, a series of never-ending days, surrounded by memories of withdrawing in the living room, screaming matches in the kitchen, weeping in the bathroom. The entire house, a trigger to her now. Despite this, when my father says they might buy a second home up here by me, somewhere she can experience snow and leaf change, somewhere he can come and reminiscence college, my first thoughts are cautionary: what if she runs her car into a pole up here? She'll have to live alone often, if he travels back and forth to Florida. I'll have to take care of her, and I don't know if I can. I wake up in the middle of the night with nightmares of my father dying alone in Florida, a heart-attack in the middle of the night. Or her falling down the stairs in a new home, broken hip or neck, a body on the floor. I dream of red flashes against a gray background. I dream of a pigeon beaten against the sidewalk, blood on concrete.

It's a long weekend. To fill my time, I empty my kitchen cabinets and pantry. I categorize everything, toss out expired food, buy containers for everything. I wipe shelves and handles. Scrub the top of the fridge like when I was young and my mother and I would do this. It was my job to clean the highest and smallest spaces, climbing on cabinets and counters to reach them. I'd wash and wipe dry the sugar and flour containers because my hands could fit. Now I have a stepladder; I go up and down, putting each new container filled with pasta or powdered sugar neatly on the shelves. When I'm done, I stand back, take pictures of the organization and send them to my mother. "Look what I did today." "I love my house organized. I feel overwhelmed when I open any cabinet or drawer and it has no structure. It's too much like my childhood [sic]," she texts back.

My mother disappeared so slowly—like god taking apart the world, one grass-blade at a time. After a while, it's hard to remember what the earth ever looked like. I ask my father, "what was she like before this? who was she when you met her?" All he'd say was "she wasn't like this."

When they buy the house in Knoxville, and she starts her life here—middle of winter, gray trees and sky blurring into each other—she becomes a plant lifting its head to the sun. She blossoms, and with it, our relationships changes. It happens quickly. I feel like I'm that girl in the Books-A-Million again, who'd lost her mom in the tall shelves, only to have her returned by some heavenly miracle. When it snows in January, she sends me a photo of her standing in a haze of white, flakes catching in her hair, and with the light above, it almost looks like a halo.

It's not easy to see things in the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below, or from left to right or right to left: try it, you'll see that everything changes. It's not easy to see the grass in things and in words (similarly Nietzsche said that an aphorism had to be "ruminated"; never is a plateau separable from the cows that populate it, which are also the clouds in the sky).

I have never yet thanked her, but it is my sister who ultimately made our mother go to rehab. It's Julie's bulldog-ish strength and stubbornness and willingness to go to combat—all the things I wanted to be but wasn't. After all I had been there for, all I had done, I wasn't there for that.

I enter the jewelry store to pick up the wedding band I had resized. It's a small shop in a strip mall off Kingston Pike in Knoxville. There's a glass counter in the middle filled with necklaces, sparkling and silver. It's owned by a woman named Pam; Pam is in her 50's or 60's and wears her black hair long and straight. When she smiles, you see all of her teeth. There's an assistant, Liz, who looks not too much older than me. Pam asks about my name and says I must be the only person in the world with it. We start talking about names, and I mention my middle name, June, is after my grandmother. Pam asks, "was she born in June?" and I say, "no, she was born in November, but when she was born, and her father first saw her, he said, 'she's as pretty as a June Rose,' and so they named her that, 'June Rose.'" The women coo and aw, "how sweet," they say. As I exit the shop, silver band now snug on my finger, I hear one of them say, "June Rose, how lovely."

One weekend, Brandon and I drive to Columbus for a concert. It's six hours from Knoxville, and along the way, we watch the surroundings change from mountains and hills to plains and corn fields. We stop for donuts and coffee in Cincinnati, and I pick up a chocolate sprinkled for Brandon while he waits by the illegally-parked car. At the concert, we're surrounded by teenagers and so many young people maybe at their first concert ever. I remember my first outdoor concert, where people sat on a grassy knoll with fringe blankets and got stoned to Blink-182. Now I'm a woman with a house and a husband, sat on the grass getting stoned to Phoebe Bridgers. When she sings *anyway don't leave a stranger* I feel Brandon's hands on my shoulders, I feel his body sway with mine and I think: this is us building our lives together. We can't know now what will happen with what we build.

Emily June Jalloul, daughter of Elisa Jane Jalloul, daughter of June Rose Dooley. My name exists because she did. Because of him—he said she was pretty as a June rose. That’s how she got her name. Pretty as a June rose. Born in November, a cold hard winter. But June Rose, they named her. He said she was pretty as a June rose. He said come down to the basement. He said this is how fathers show love. He said be quiet. He pulled her, held her down. He said, pretty, pretty as a June rose. He said he loved her. He said sometimes love hurts. He said I am your father. He held her down. He forced himself inside her. He held her down. Pretty, pretty as a June rose.

The rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and...and...and..." This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for?

In late September 2021, my mother and I take a trip to New Albany, Indiana. We drive down Dewey Street, stopping in front of her old childhood home. The hedges her mother planted have grown so high, the house is barely visible. It's a small street, no lines in the road to designate lanes. The houses along the way have chipped paint, car parts in the lawn, broken porch steps. One flies a confederate flag. When we're there, my mother talks about the wood floors her mother hand-sanded, the Tiffany lamps she scavenged, the handmade Christmas ornaments. She tells me it's sad to be there, in a way, to see how much was lost. I try to imagine the dark stain on the floors, the clothespin ornaments wrapped in gold ribbon. Everything in me aches; grief is written all over her. I wish I could take the floors and lamps and ornaments, wrap them, give them back to her. "Here, mom. Here is the childhood you never really had."

Writing this, I begin to understand loss. About how some things we can never get back. I look up Polly-Pockets from the 90's, and I'm shocked by how much I recognize, how many memories come flooding back to me. The deep joy I felt at these tiny little dolls that fit so perfectly into these tiny little places. Like they were meant to be. And suddenly I'm hit with a wave of grief; that little girl playing with her Polly-Pockets on the ugly brown shag carpet in the smallest bedroom with the window that faced east so each morning the sun filled the whole space easily, already that girl feels so much—so much fear and worry, so much heaviness. I wish I could go back and hug her, give her some kind of security, a raft or float. I wish I could go back and bottle that room, its ugly carpet and old toys, to run my fingers over the books and CDs. This is what my mother means, I know now, when she talks about loss—about those doorknobs, and the floors, and the Christmas ornaments. This is what she means when she says *you can never go back*.

On my 33rd birthday, my mother and I drive around Knoxville listening to music, bouncing from shop to shop. At our last, I buy a rug for my guest bathroom and a bottle of honey-almond lotion for mom. As we're driving away, she asks the time. "2.45." "This time thirty-some years ago, I still hadn't seen you," she says. "I didn't see you until around three in the afternoon."

And of course, I've heard this story before: after laboring for twenty-two hours, the doctor anesthetized my mother—as they did then—and performed an emergency c-section. I'm delivered a little after 10.30 in the morning and held by my father around 11. I see him in a blue isolation gown, large framed glasses, that broad smile. I see her in a blue hospital robe, thin tan face turned to one side, sleeping off the meds, strands of blond hair covering her ears. There's me in his arms, small and wet-looking, red skin, head full of jet black curls. After nine months of hearing her voice, feeling her presence, I went suddenly hours without. I recall back to my childhood, crying as she drove me to school or gymnastics, so deeply afraid of being apart from her.

In my mind, these two events are connected. No memory of those first hours outside her womb exists for me, but I'm sure I know myself enough to know, even then, how traumatic it would have felt. How it would have felt like a flesh ripping, like pulling a plant root and all straight from the earth.

My mother has always said she knew I'm stubborn because I didn't want to leave the womb, but I think the truth is I didn't want to lose her.

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