

ELSEWHERE

Her insistent yellow kitchen follows.
Honeysuckle straws on my back,
on my shoulders from leaning
against the wall—me in the edges.
The sour sun I drew every year. The same
rays, alternating short and long.
An easy pattern. The same sun
my mom told me not to stare
into. The one that baked
me inside a strapless bikini.
A belt at the waist.
Canned hairspray back to liquid.
I stayed out for the college boy
across the street. Yellow hair.
He burned. He told me legends
like The Jawbreaker,
that my friends and I had
to put our hands on. No one
told us splaying ourselves
on driveways would hurt us.
The yellow *Slow Down* sign
someone tagged.
The cat that looked yellow
if you were far enough away.
The daffodil a skater I had a crush on
picked from the high school yard
for me. I didn't press it into a book.
It's stuck in my hand still. My hand
in the first-row seat of the yellow
bus because I liked talking
to Jamie, the driver, who chewed
and spit dip and moved the bus through
little and big roads. The roses I hunt
for my mom, The Yellow Rose
of Texas. Bluebonnet country.
The Texas flag. The rodeo with
a pastel pop princess. Violence

I couldn't see. The animals.
The Icee inside a souvenir
cup. The smell of animals.
The singer's mouth too close
to the microphone. I couldn't understand
why the sun wasn't there lighting up
the animals. I ask for lemons
at restaurants. Yellow highlighter swallows
my books. Everything is important.
I shouldn't forget any of it.

I'VE BEEN BURNED BY THE LIGHT

Before I knew joking could be flirting.
Before I knew more about plants.
Before I lost the clean backyard pool.
Before I knew to hold my breath above a jump.
He told me ear wax would keep soda from
bubbling over. He told me to try it.
He walked into the pool, and the steps lit
him up. I didn't know what to believe.

I told her the camera flash was lightning.
I'm sure someone's said it.
I say burn it all down more than before
I was a teenager and carried a lighter
in my pocket. I didn't smoke. She told me
she likes it when people wear stickers
on their faces—buildings with chipped ledges.
She talks about her feelings without metaphor,
without coffee and confrontation. She's moss or fern.
She has a therapist. She puts in the work.
She has good posture—an apple on her head.
She works on it. I don't admit I'm an empty spigot.
Lying gets easier. Believing gets harder.
Her questions remind me I don't know
what I'm doing. I'm tracing over facts.

THE BODY AGAIN

I memorized all the bones
for school. I loved saying
phalanges, metatarsals, carpals.

A doctor says which bone
you broke. I know the bones
around it: radius, ulna.

I teach my chin to lift, my eyes
to see into faces, into mouths,
the mandible. Song for the doctor:

my grandmother without calcium.
Her husband, calcium in the blood.
Their son, titanium knees.

People want to know about the screws
holding you together. Give me your ear,
the bones I got wrong: malleus, incus, stapes.

E-MAILS WITH SUBJECT LINES LIKE *FEEL ALIVE*
IN A NEW DRESS

The dress is tall, vaporous. A stifled yawn.
It will be pulled by the hard corners
of the house. The dogs will think
it's a shadow or maybe light.

You left this behind. Did something catch your eye?
I shook my head yes. The package on a map.
The dress, another stent. I'm in the mood for living.
I'm waiting to look alive, to have my living catch up.

IT WAS SUMMER

I tipped garbage
bins brimmed with

still water. Most of
the mosquitos dead-gone.

The flower bed finally opening.
Everyone gets hurt.

The porch flooded
with their flying. I heard

dew draping onto grass.
I walked inside a morning.

My body barer than
afternoon, I held out

my forearms. I said
I wouldn't slap death

into them. My blood,
strawberries with

their caps bitten off.

CHILDCARE

We joked that the cyst was my twin. I was carrying
another version of me, one I don't listen to. Kicking me,
she asked, *why won't she listen to me?* My twin and her temper.
A student masseuse touched my back when I was 21.
He said he'd work around it. I asked the dermatologist
to see the cyst after she was removed. Was she still mad?
Things would sound different now. The dermatologist told me
it was okay that I was nervous. I explained that wasn't it.
I wanted to understand my sister, a shrunken heart, a splotch
on gauze. *Now you can wear backless dresses.* An answer
to no one's question. *We won't send it off. We know what it is.*

BLIGHT EXQUISITE

I scan plants on walks. I have a garden that doesn't belong to me.
I document my property before storms. Just in case.

The film developer saw my smile before I did. Double memory.
I was smiling for myself while other campers ate lunch.
My growing zigzagged teeth I can fix with an app now.
I can close my mouth.

The neighbor, who sings with Billy Joel inside his house,
told us our heavy tree was dying. Who lets his boys play outside
in winter. Who makes scrap metal art in his backyard, near our tree.
Who must have been keeping an eye on it.

We had it cut down, one foot at a time. Pieces dumped from the sky.
Not enough rope to bring its body to the ground. The house flinched.
The disease looks like it's still here, like it took over what's left.

When I look in the mirror, I don't smile. I size myself up. I'm looking
for a fight. If I could just straighten these teeth out.

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