

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

SCRAPBOOK

Megan Kuyatt, Master of Arts, 2016

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Writing

The poems in *Scrapbook* are rooted in memory and the act of remembering. While the poems explore different personas and landscapes, they continually return to the poet's childhood home: a falling apart 50s rancher, where the domestic and mundane are always accompanied by the bizarre. While the mother tries to make order out of these experiences, the poet becomes the quiet observer, journaling and collecting memories her mother would prefer to silence. Influenced by Elizabeth Bishop, Patricia Smith and Shuntaro Tanikawa, these poems tell stories through colloquial language that understates the strange details of everyday life.

SCRAPBOOK

by

Megan Kuyatt

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Scrapbooking

Between the pages of my first
year scrapbook, a piece
of my mother's umbilical cord:

dried like a fruit skin, crusted
brown like a pressed flower.
On the end, a couple light

hairs: auburn and white-blond,
the same kind I still feel buried
somewhere inside me.

My mother always said I'd understand
once I had my first child, but now
twenty-one years later, she looks

at the dried blood-thing the way
an old woman looks at her visiting
daughter, wanting yet unable

to remember her name.
My mother peels back the scrap-
book page—it's orange

from dried-out glue. She takes out
the cord and throws it in the trash.
Good riddance.

Sometimes when I was younger
and we argued, my mother would say,
I won a science scholarship

with Johnson and Johnson once.
She'd pull out her yearbook
where her Russian instructor wrote

that she could become anything
she wanted to. When I was younger,
I needed many things to remind me

of my worth: a fruit-by-the-foot wrapper
from a Saturday outing with my father, the silver
metal given to me in an ice skating class—

My mother, having been given
just me, made books for every year
of my life, filled with reminders.

Her Arms Are Calendars

Despite warning labels reading: *do not use on skin*,
Kelly used her arms like paper reams, writing

Gelly Roll reminders: *Math problem set due Tuesday*.
Call Anna. I told her the ink was toxic

but she shrugged, drawing a heart on the gap
between her ring and pinkie fingers.

The marks were milky pink, luminescent even—
I think about the radium girls who painted

their teeth glow-in-the-dark for late-night pranks,
who pointed their paintbrush tips with their lips

the way their managers showed them, who were told
the only effect from radium was some color in their cheeks—

In the dark, the radium girls glowed like those clocks
they made, even the dust on their corsets was illuminated.

One girl got her tooth pulled but the whole jaw came with it.
Another broke her leg tripping on the dance floor.

I don't know what it's like, to feel my jaw collapse
like an eroded cliff, teeth falling out, honeycombed bone—

my mother, on my getting married, gives me three pump-
bottles of Johnson and Johnson baby soap. *If it's made*

for babies, it's gotta be safe, she says. I don't tell her
about the article that just came out: the moms asking why

there's formaldehyde in that soap. I can't know
what gave my mother her fibromyalgia. I wash

my hands in her soap— it's been three years
and I still haven't gone through all the bottles.

I Don't Like to Think About Emergency Rooms

The same night my husband was in the ER for a panic attack, a mother died on a stretcher down the hall where a woman screamed, *Where's my momma don't touch me I want my momma.*

My parents heard that woman down the hall & my father said it sounded just like my voice & right then they thought my husband was— & I was—

& sometimes when we're talking after dinner by the fire my parents still talk about that moment of knowing & not knowing.

I've screamed like that once: when my mother threw out the leftovers from that \$30 dinner my father bought me for my 21st birthday & I kept screaming, *You can't do that you can't do that those are mine* & my mother after it was all done said that people scream like that when someone dies not when food's thrown out & that someone who acts that way over food isn't ready for marriage,

& now I understand what she meant, hearing that woman & her sound, like the sound in an asylum after being tied for too long, like the sound that follows a stillborn daughter, that hell-sound, a sound I can't pretend I know.

I was in my plush bedtime boxers & UGG moccasins & I was ready for bed.
I was writing poems when my husband leaned on the bed, his phone dialed to 911

In the hallway, a paramedic measured my husband's vitals & people were running past us & the floor was stained forever-dirty speckled egg-shell & the air stung with rubbing alcohol & body & that woman & her mother just out of our sight & how everyone else continued their work even though they could all hear it & my husband attached to the stretcher next to me & my husband trying to smile at me & my husband's heart charted on the screen looking normal, but how could I know—

The paramedic who rode in our ambulance said that mother called just after us & even though she got here it was too late.

I squeezed my husband's hand until I felt his pulse ride through him.

Power Outage

My mother's washing hairbrushes
in the bathroom sink
with the last of our well water.

Our black plastic hairbrushes
with little blue balls on the bristles
drying on my mother's vanity.

My mother, the one who had me read
missionary biographies & adoption
catalogues, wanting me to know a glimpse

of living elsewhere—how can she forget
right now: those girls in Africa & China
who don't have hairbrushes let alone water?

Soon, *we* might be without water
unless the pump turns back on, & we've gone
a week without power before—

I ask her what she thinks she's doing,
my voice loud & matriarchal.
My mother, pulling out her hair & my hair

in wet clumps, kneading baby shampoo
between empty teeth. Her fingers
are cracking, burning red in the water.

I never asked her for clean brushes.
I never asked for most of my mother's gifts.
She tells me, *I'm trying to keep a level of decency.*

Tohoku Ghost Stories

We remembered the old ghost stories, and we told one another that there would be many new stories like that. Personally, I don't believe in the existence of spirits, but that's not the point. If people say they see ghosts, then that's fine – we can leave it at that.

- Masashi Hijikata

the old woman who visits me for tea is dead but I don't have the heart to tell her
every time I see my mother there's a pool of seawater in her room
and still no one's removed that boat off the top of the Sumitomo's building
if a boat can get all the way up there what keeps us from disappearing into the sky
like the woman who walks each morning across the ocean and back I wonder where I'm
going now
what can I talk to my friend about these days I still *have* my son
who collects the things found on the beach someone's television set a rusted refrigerator
a woman says that soon this city will be filled by God but is God a tsunami that takes
years to drain out
the phone calls I get are from numbers that don't exist
my husband calls his friends several times a day *how are you? how are you?* just in case
Otsuchi becomes a great washing machine again tumbling us in and out of memories
it's come to the point I can't even go out in the rain anymore that's when I see
puddles like the eyes of dead people what can I do put them in a cup
my daughters were lined up like bowling pins outside the school waiting for the
earthquake
why didn't I keep her home from school that day she complained about her throat
every day someone new is sick whatever we try to rebuild is barricaded by ghosts
even taxi drivers refuse to go to Sendai afraid of catching ghosts

one man's address led to a concrete slab the man was gone but the driver opened the door

just in case I was never high enough I kept climbing the stairs but how do you outrun an
ocean

with all the old houses cleared and the new ones rising it's becoming hard to remember
what we looked like before

Baptism

outside McKeldin Library

Grace steps into the fountain & the white
robe clings to her piano black
legs, glowing right through the fabric.

She comes out from the water
& everyone is crying, *She's saved*
now she's saved now,

that grimy college water rolling
off her skin, salvation rolling off
her skin. Someone wraps Grace

in a blanket, it is so tight around her
as if someone is trying to suffocate her.
I think about these laws & what it means

to be born of the water & the spirit
& what do they see in that fountain water?
Is there something about *that* water—

I put my hand in the fountain.
It is not electric, my hand rises
with the same eczema patches.

Someone gives Grace a dry t-shirt, she pulls it
over her head. Grace is heavy with water.
She carries it with her up the steep hill.

Mouse

The one night Mandy babysat for me, we found
a mouse on the glue trap behind the TV—
I'd never seen one up close before, alive, blinking
those candy-button eyes, legs twitching in the glue.

I was used to the dead ones in the walls,
or the ones that would come and go, leaving
their calling cards in the pantry,
their tooth marks in my playdough canisters.

That was the same night I offered Mandy some
of my candy stash: a bright pink plastic ladybug filled
with hard candy hearts. She asked me *how old's that stuff*,
and I said, *only a year*. She politely refused.

When my parents came home Mandy kept saying
she couldn't believe it, Mom kept apologizing,
as if mice are something that can be apologized for—
(didn't everyone have mice in their homes?)

I wanted to keep it as a pet, but Dad took care of it—
that is, Dad took the pallet, glue and mouse and all
downstairs to his workshop, where a smell
lodged itself in the corner behind his workbench

until he took out the trash: filled
with unsuccessful traps dabbed with peanut
butter, rolos wrappers and the legs
of crickets who couldn't escape my father's broom.

Luke 20:9-12

My father and I drive by a homeless man, who stands by the red light with his hands cupped out, fingers exposed—that January air—and my father rolls down the window to give him a five, telling me he’s learned it’s better to give money than nothing at all.

As we get on the exit ramp for 495, I tell him about the man I saw in Annapolis the other day, who was kicking a light post, screaming and weeping. When I saw him I locked my doors, the way my mother does whenever she sees a dark man walk by. It’s one of those things I always chastised her for— that electric click, locking door—

What would’ve happened, if I opened my door, gave him money, or maybe some crackers from my purse? If I embraced him, or bought him some gloves? Would he have hit me? Grabbed my purse, and ran? Or would he have clung to me, his arms going limp as he continued to weep?

I am a woman and this is what I have been taught: there are some things that shouldn’t be risked. *I don’t want to test the angels*, I say.

My father says: *you should be concerned, I’m glad we raised you right.*

Our conversation goes silent, as if a solution has been found.

Out the window, it smells like snow and diesel. The sky, overcast like a ceiling. What a living room this median makes—

My father makes a business call, and right now, I can’t stop thinking about the parable of the tenant: the owner knows there will be consequences for the message he gives his servants, yet who finally says:

I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.

Could he have known he would find his son dead at the hands of those workers? He must have, because we all know who was the father in the parable, and who was the son—and who am I, to worry about safety when that same Book says He will even feed sparrows?

Because if that Father were a man who valued safety, the hand of God would linger like a dark forever veil between us and our home.

Pit Stop in Yass, NSW

Enroute to Melbourne

Pictures of burgers, dogs, and meat pies plastered
to the sides seem promising enough. We pull
into the parking lot beside dumpsters,
and one white rose blooming against the fence—

valleys interspersed with ranchers, a neighborhood,
really, and afraid of not finding anything else
we stop at the general store—called TAKE AWAY?
or maybe SEVEN DAY FOOD SANDWICH BAR? COCO-COLA?

Inside a girl my age is making meat pies. A frozen
margarita machine sits in the corner, beside boxes
of dusty Kindereggs. A fridge covers one wall,
filled with every flavor of Nestea imaginable.

We don't have time to stop in Canberra
so we have to settle for this: a dining space
of once-white chairs and a patio table
by the freezer. We sit by ourselves and eat our pies.

And that's when I see it there,
on the shelf, between paper towel rolls
and trash bags, generic canned soup and insto-
noodles, and a lonely can of Rogan Josh.

I can't look away, that circle of Kashmiri dust
around its base, creating a dark barrier
between itself and the other goods. What would anyone
do with it anyway, put it in our pies?

The thought makes me nauseous. My mother
kept cans like this, all in the basement: lined up
like little soldiers, ready for Y2K,
a power outage, whatever disaster might come.

She kept them there for years, sometimes—
so every once in a while, I would go down
and throw out the ones that were no longer good.
Sometimes I would open one that was just on the edge,

and try to make myself eat it—it seemed such a shame
to let it go to waste. And I don't know if it was the guilt
or the spoilage that made me stop, but they all
got thrown away in time, still mostly full.

Tokyo Steakhouse

I.

I wanted a Japanese man to love me, but when the businessman—his voice slurred with sake—told me I was pretty, I did not desire him. He was not my manga hero. Though younger than my father, he had hinting grey hairs, and was sweating loneliness.

I was fourteen years old. He asked me what I did—and being the kind of girl who wanted to do something, I told him I was a writer, a poet—

He looked at me with blank wet fish eyes, and not knowing how to translate these things I said, *Haiku! A person who does haiku.*

He nodded, and we came to a truce.

*

My father turned to the businessman and asked how his wife was doing,

he said, *I do not know.*

My mother and I think about that wife sometimes.

II.

We met the secretary at the restaurant. In her pink suit, she laughed in her hand at all the right parts. She said nothing the whole night.

The qi pao silk against my thighs—Chinese elegance—seemed wise at the time. In my seat I felt like a stranger against a sea of suits.

Our cook grilled on a wheeled steel grill beside my mother while she thumbed at the book of John on her lap, knowing the brevity of strangers,

but all I could focus on were the songs of waitresses singing Happy Birthday to every table, their textbook English ornamental:

and many more....

and I thought about how
somewhere—this moment—
someone is being born.

Sinuye

The modern Ainu term for tattooing is nuye meaning “to carve” and hence “to tattoo” and “to write,” or more literally, sinuye “to carve oneself.”

-from Ainu Women’s Tattooed Lips

every time we talk about my youth pastor we talk about his tattoos

my youth pastor is covered in tattoos they spread from his back down his arms and all the teens think it’s the coolest those black crosses and doves and skulls against a congregation of button-up shirts and blazers his back is golgotha his arms crucifixions and resurrections happening simultaneously

my mother always brings up that verse that says not to defile your body and i think about the ainu women who tattoo their daughter’s lips by cutting open the flesh with a knife and covering it with birch bark soot making the skin blue into a holy mustache

my mother would not make a good ainu my mother did calligraphy in college so maybe she would give me a good tattoo or maybe her hands would shake seeing my blood on the nib of her knife maybe she would start the tattoo at the right age but never finish it seeing her daughter struggling against the pain of becoming a woman the pain said to prepare a girl for childbirth for marriage for the afterlife

my mother still has nightmares from when she was a nurse my mother does not believe spirits enter the body through the mouth but the heart my mother doesn’t understand why I still don’t hang out with the other youth group teens my mother would not make a good ainu

my upper lip is hairy like an ainu i don't know how i'd do in the hokkaido cold but i have enough hair to be an ainu i am pale enough to be an ainu if another word for tattooing is writing then every day i am tattooing every day i am carving because i know nothing i know something of what it means to be an alien in my own world

*

Rumiko / A Series of Possessions

Over the course of last summer, Reverend Kaneda exorcised 25 spirits from Rumiko Takahashi. ... 'All the people who came,' Kaneda said, 'and each one of the stories they told had some connection with water.'

- Ghosts of the Tsunami, Richard Lloyd Parry

I.

Yesterday I became a dog:
I didn't want to, but it
was barking so loudly
I couldn't bear it.
Making rice, I opened
the door of my body,
and that starving dog ate—
three men had to hold
me down as it entered.

*It's been three years
since I last ate, the dog said—
assuming the dog thinks
in years, that the dog feels
something like loneliness
from that couple who forgot
to unchain him when they left,*

assuming I can translate
the dog, or that smell from the local
power plant, which in time
became overbearing. And the silence
that followed. And the emaciated
dog that followed the silence.

II.

My wife lives in one
of the temporary metal huts
on top of the mountain.

After all this time,
no one has given her a real home.
Does anyone think about the old
besides the old?

She has a shoebox where she keeps
a white rope and strokes it occasionally.
I watch her, worrying
what she might do with that rope.

III.

—when I reached the side
of the mountain, I still thought
it was good to be alive.

I looked down at our city,
which moved like laundry
in a washing machine—

and realized that there must be
many dead people today, prayed
that I didn't know any of them,

but when my two daughters
were not found, I sought them
in a different place...

But still, I wander heaven
and haven't found them.
Have you seen my daughters?

IV.

Every time
I wake from war, I wake
wet with seawater.

It's like how, as a girl,
I would get up from my chair
and there would be a ring of blood
dripping from me, following me.

A thousand spirits wrestle me,
pressing, trying to get inside
as if I'm a place of pilgrimage.
But what about me tastes so good?
When will I find rest?

V.

Okaa san! Okaa san!
The girl inside me cries.
Sometimes, she is so
young that all she knows
to do is cry. Other times
she apologizes for letting go
of her brother in that *big
black wave*, which is
always coming—

The priest's wife must grab
my hand and say, *Mummy's
here. Let's go together.*
Wherever together is,
I do not know
how comforting it can be.

But eventually, the girl says,
I can go on my own now.
You can let go of me.

I let go and wake up
relieved, my body light.
I remember who I am:
a woman to be married.

VI.

Each person had
eight minutes.

I don't know what Kaori was doing,
probably in a classroom somewhere
with all those children
and all that water—
there must've been a lot of pushing.
But what did it matter in the end?
There were boats on top of buildings,
now, so many other parents
looking through piles of debris for
a familiar jacket, a signature
hair cut or lunch box.

How do I tell Kaori's father
about the twenty thousand bodies

at the bottom of the ocean,
his daughter perpetually dying
inside my mouth.

I was not there, but sometimes
I see it in dreams: far away, water.

VII.

My fiancé asks me
what movie we should see.
What movie *should* we see?
Who cares? What about the girl
who is unburied? And what
about her family?

Whenever I am with you,
when we are walking to the store
or going to the park, I see
dead people in the sky, trees, concrete.
Their stories fill my heads like birds,
and there will never be enough
cages to keep them at peace.
They no longer fight to enter me,
but sulk in the corners of my vision.

One day, when the sea dries up,
everyone will see them there:
huddled skeleton, and it will be
like Pompeii—people will try
to make up stories, understand
what they were thinking
when the water came—
but only God and I will know.

Initial Evidence

with lines from 1 Corinthians 14

“glossolalia...turns out to be only a facade of language.. no glossa, no matter how well constructed, is a specimen of human language, because it is neither internally organized nor systematically related to the world man perceives.”

-William Samarin

The first time it became evident to me: the credits rolling for the Passion of the Christ, my friend and her mother speaking in loud religious gibberish—

Indeed, no one understands them;

The teen boy sweeping the aisle looks up at us. What can I say? They're my ride home. I'm thirteen, maybe, and scared—their babble louder, garbled and stroke-like.

*...how will anyone know what tune is being played
unless there is a distinction in the notes?*

Only after the credits go dark do they go silent, getting up from their seats like any other family: asking each other about the movie, what we'd like to get for lunch, complaining about how salty the popcorn was.

I ask my friend what happened in there, she says we were speaking in tongues as if duh doesn't everyone do that?

*If then I do not grasp the meaning
of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner
to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me.*

Why was I surprised then, visiting her church: shaped like an amphitheater, all eyes pointed to the stage.

Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves

During worship the woman beside me stiffens like a brittle puppet, her elderly arms raised and twitching, moaning. Her back cracked backwards, a demon dancing inside her to an electrocuted pulse.

The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

Does she need help, I ask. Should I call 9-1-1?

My friend's mom says she's filled with the Holy Ghost

& praise Jesus hallelujah Jesus amen.

Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

What spirit is this? What's holy in that ghost?

God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

Up front the pastor says something I can't hear because the congregation is on fire, their bodies Pentecostal, a spirit eating their bodies.

...two—or at most three—should speak, one at a time,

Everyone is laying their hands on each other, their sweaty human hands.

and someone must interpret.

My friend's mom's hands smell like any other mom's: like house cleaner & soap.

*if...everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers...come in,
will they not say that you are out of your mind?*

She asks if I'd like to be filled with the Holy Ghost, I say I am filled with the Holy Ghost.

She says, would you like to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

I remember Halloween at AWANAs, my Sparks leader's costume a sheet with cut-out holes, asked me if I wanted to be filled with the holey ghost.

I didn't laugh, I was nine and thought it bad taste—

after all, I was filled and knew that power wasn't something to take lightly,

having memorized in Matthew 12 that

blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven—

A man runs through the aisles, a towel above his head like a white flag.

Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Even as the song ends, she will not move her hand off me.

...if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

When I told my friend I don't speak in tongues, for a moment she didn't believe me.

*...how will anyone know what you are saying?
You will just be speaking into the air.*

How do I explain? My ghost needs no God-language. My ghost needs no staged evidence. My ghost gospels me, gives my mouth a messiah, my ghost is not a paroxysm but a long-needed rest. And I will rest in my ghost.

*I would rather speak five intelligible words
to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.*

Habu Sake

I hear those snakes can go
a year without eating, that they
are only sedated in those jars,

that some people open
their drinks only to die from it
(is that part of the thrill?)—

but now, they've been lying here
so long that I see
the fangs have dissolved,

scales turned white
in the shop light, gums
curling into an elderly smile.

In that honey awamori,
they have become fetal
and fish-like. If I pulled one

out, it might crumble
in my hands! The serpent:
he who could strike

my heel, now I break
like bread: dough-
soft and indistinct.

I am not too young
to think so little of death.
I know if customs allowed it,

my father would buy one
and bring it back home—
but not for drink. It would be

another showpiece in his work-
shop, alongside village masks,
outdated calendars, the drawings

I made when I was 9. But he
has already found his alternative:
a pair of straw farm hats and besoms.

Outdoor Wedding

The morning of my wedding
my father makes a new handle
for his plow. Out the window,
a raccoon rolls down the aisle
of my lawn, like some distant uncle
who invites himself to a reception,
convinced it's his right to be wanted.

At first I thought it was an otter—
the way he surfaced in and out
of the grass, dancing from the punch
table to the chair we'd set
for my grandmother. But that 'coon suit
against the green shone brighter
than my own dress. I tell my father

to look outside. He puts down his work,
grabs a broom, heads out the garage door,
ready in his ripped canvas shoes. Outside,
the raccoon is still. *Don't go out there, Dan!*
my mother shouts from her window.
On her phone, she calls animal control,
saying: *It's dying and acting unusual*

in the same breath, as if the two
are synonymous. My aunt is parking
her car, carrying the bridal bouquet
while across the lawn a man in uniform
grips the raccoon by the ankle,
holding him in the air where he squirms
like a fresh market fish.

My father has finished his handle: it's a decent
replacement for the first one. It must be oak,
pine's too soft—He attaches it to the plow,
which sits on a pedestal. He told me once, this plow
was used two generations ago, when our yard
was still a tobacco farm. Years ago, he repainted it
a stop-sign red, but I see now the places it peels.

West Virginia with the Meisers

Walking behind the gas station parking lot, I found a shack where a man sold tie-die shirts.

He sat on the floor cross-legged & bare-foot, smoking a pipe that made the room smell like my mother's favorite health food store.

When Mrs. Meiser came in to find me she asked the man if he was filled with the Holy Ghost.

On the floor he looked like John the Baptist: his beard grown out & matted (maybe a locust somewhere in there?), feet dark & callused.

He smiled at her & told her his wife was dying of cancer & Mrs. Meiser said, *No wonder she's dying with you smoking that garbage.*

The room was filled with heavy racks of shirts that bumped into one another, hundreds of shirts made by this man. Some of them looked like they'd been waiting here for twenty years—how long it takes to find the right owner.

The posters on the walls were bright despite their fading & the light through the tie-dye created its own dusty stained-glass cathedral.

Mrs. Meiser pulled out from her purse one of those cheap-print tracts, the kind that say things like: *the Holy Spirit's the best medicine.*

She had loads of them for waitresses, lifeguards, for the people sitting next to us at lunch.

The man thanked her & laid it on the counter.

When I was a girl we used to put tracts in Halloween trick-or-treat bags as “a form of witness”—as if paper could carry the witness of such heavy love (as if any of us learned love through paper).

Mrs. Meiser, desiring to witness to the thing inside her, & I a witness to something else entirely—

On my wrist, one of those WWJD bracelets—& what would Jesus do here?
Jesus would sit on the floor, his feet dark in old sandals, would ask about this man's wife. He would buy one of the shirts (maybe three), probably bring back some Waffle House & multiply the sausage & the waffles, feeding this man—which is as good as five thousand—should he be filled & never know hunger again.

Bear

First thing I remember in Jillian's basement:
the bear on its hind legs, face frozen
to a grizzly growl, twice the height of me.

Against the green carpet & paneling, it looked
in its natural habitat. At its feet a plaque titled him
like an art piece, Mr. Chapman the artist.

Jillian showed me her father's bar, sitting
on a barstool, downing an imaginary drink.
Behind the bar, a wall of half-full bottles.

A couple empty glasses on the counter.
I'd never met anyone who had alcohol
in their house, let alone a bar.

A heavy stone dropped in me. I asked
if we could go upstairs, back to dolls
& trading cards. I forgot about the bear.

Only now, walking past Jillian's
do I think of it again. Her old garden box
is grown over, the grass tall like cattails.

Sometimes, I see deer graze in her yard.
Is that bear still in the basement, dark
& molding? I remember her father hunting:

his shots loud like a cannon. Then silence.
His dog's relentless barking. My mother told me
to come inside then, said he might mistake me

for an animal. I never believed that
but followed her anyway, our yard
full with a silence like war.

What's it like, to be a hunter's daughter?
The last time I saw Jillian she wore
tank tops too small, had three earrings

in the ledge of her cartilage. My cousin said
she smoked pot in the back school parking lot.
I remember once: a boy drove her

down the street on the back of his motorbike.
I thought she might disappear then in the black
of his leather jacket. But they came back shortly,

maybe twenty minutes later. I saw—I was picking
blueberries. She didn't talk to me anymore
by that point, but sometimes I found myself

standing on the border between her yard and mine,
trying to look into her windows for a glimpse of something
alive that I might remember, that might bring her back to me.

Eklutna Annie

after watching *Frozen Ground*

To identify a body from jewelry—that a girl might be found in her jewelry—

Your necklace, wrist-watch, bracelet are described as indistinct. A carved-shell ring, possibly hand-made. Thirty years later, reports still ask for anyone who might remember you.

If they found my body in the Alaska cold, would anything give me away? If I went missing, they might say: *she's known for her absence of jewelry*. No luxury of eyes, hair, fatty hips as witness—only bones & maybe accessories

& who can read bones from a carrion girl, half-eaten body, *just another missing girl*—

Your killer called you his first, said he didn't know your name. Told you he lived in Muldoon. Said he didn't pull a gun on you until you tried to jump out & maybe it was when the truck got stuck in the mud & you ran that he first thought of hunting: the thrill of overpowering you with your own knife from your own purse.

That pleasure as he buried your body, knowing you would be easily missed.

Yet what does your jewelry remember? The Eklutna woods, the Alaska pipeline and the lie or truth of your hometown Kodiak remember? Be happy to have these witnesses.

Eklutna body, your jewelry is primitive: like a museum display from an ancient people, not a 70's prostitute—

or is that just what burial is: an artifact factory

because from your turquoise bracelet & from your hand-carved necklace, your body is now the body of all girls missing from hotel rooms & job shifts, libraries & bridal dress fittings.

Everywhere my mother brought me, her hand was clamped firm on my wrist. Taught me to always look like I know where I'm going, head held up *like the queen of England*.

Some nights I'd walk around the yard & she came running down the dark hill. *Come inside*, she demanded & how dare I walk that close to the road where a man might pull me into his truck & drive away & no one would know until it was too late,

how *dare* I.

From the road, the house glowed orange like a kiln.

On all sides the trees gossiped our history in an airy language:

maybe about this yard once-tobacco farm;

maybe about a girl who lived in the woods in front of me, the now-ruined foundation of a
slave cabin;

maybe about my neighbor friend whose house is overgrown now, who I haven't seen
since we were girls;

maybe about you or a dead doe or another girl or maybe about me.

North Carolina Historic Home Festival

Three white middle-aged moms
bellydance in a local park, their coin skirts
clanging like aluminum cans. In bejeweled
yoga pants they move to Elvis Presley hits,
hips clumsy and off-beat.

While the single dads and married men
hold up cameras “to remember the moment,”
my father turns to the houses, which carry
the sort of beauty he can appreciate:
those vintage soffits, dovetail joints, colorful
awnings—my father imagines building
and rebuilding these homes with his hands,
deciding where he might put a movie room,
whether to cover the fireplaces in stone or brick,

and my mother beside him has a beat
in her step—not quite a dance—but she was
a dancer once, and for once I want to see her dance
in the middle of this street in front of everyone,
for my father to turn his head and look at her fully.

Neck Scarves

For P.E.

Paula, whenever I see you you're wearing that same lousy scarf

Even in July I see it religiously wrapped to hide the marks your father gave you

When I saw the picture of your house covered in caution tape, I was on the other side of the world in Japan for missions & when I told you I was going you said, *Oh that religious work*

Why didn't I tell you I hate religion too— it's funny how we always tell ourselves: next time

Remember, we used to bellydance in that basement

The walls, bare except for that one framed picture of Jesus

My father said only prostitutes shake their hips like that & I was always jealous that your father just watched us dance & smiled

Online, your sister said he cried *I'm sorry, I'm sorry* while slitting her throat with those box cutters—almost as if she were a box that needed to be opened quickly

Sometimes when I'm driving on campus I see you & want to wave but I don't

I know everyone wants to ask you questions but you don't have to tell me anything

*

Radium Girls

I. December 1923: Waterbury Clock Factory, Connecticut

my mouth is a room that lights up in the dark

the girl who trained me spatula-full of radium in her mouth the corners gritty
and glowing her reassurance that the paint is harmless taught us how to point the
paintbrush tip between our lips

my manager says a little radon puts the sex in your cheeks nudging my ass

some girls hate the taste but i love it it tastes like eternity

no matter how many times i brush my teeth at night i feel that gritty glue

i'm good and quick i get more dials done than the other girls

sometimes i only get thirty dials done a day what will my mother say when she sees my
paycheck

my mouth's been aching my mother blames my sweet tooth

last night a tooth came out i didn't have to do anything it just fell into my hand

other people buy radium soda radium candy radium facial creams but we get it for free
we're the luckiest girls in the world

in the dark we are suns our faces hands glow like the dials we paint

one girl's halfway to becoming an angel her back all the way down to her waist
glowing

soon we won't have to put it on at all it'll be in our bones it'll pour out
from our forever-twenty skin

II. August 2011: Miyakoji, Japan

when we visit our house we wear cough masks we wear suits

at our house the grass is tall and uncut everything is still on the floor where it fell when the earthquake hit

the body of a dog is tangled in our fence it hasn't fully decomposed a patch of fur like a felt block remaining on his right ear

first thing: my father disposes of the dog my mother gets on her knees and begins scrubbing the floor in her gloves and suit she adjusts the family altar and burns a stick of incense

every time we go outside my father brings a meter on good days we can play on the blacktop for thirty minutes

my mother asks me if I feel alright if anything feels odd i think about stuffing my mouth with our flowers eating the expired candy in our kitchen and becoming my own power plant

on the edge of town a cleanup crew fills bags with radioactive waste there are lots of bags they fill up my old school's baseball field the bags get high enough to build a black wall

They say They'll get rid of the bags soon but my mother doesn't believe Them she says They are burying us inside our own waste because no one wants to look at us and feel guilty no one wants to remember what went wrong or change anything everyone wants to go back to work back to their homes and return to what they've always done

my mother's voice gets loud when she says this she's holding a watch her mother gave her when she was a girl like me she drops it and it falls to the floor the glass face cracks with one split sound even so it continues ticking my mother goes silent i am silent—it makes every tick seem louder than it really is

Ekphrasis on My Grandfather's War Photos

The picture I remember from my grandfather's slideshow is of him with a Japanese woman: her hair in an American perm, striped t-shirt and capris like a flag against the Chitose village shacks, and that smile—her teeth showing—nothing like the geishas, who painted their teeth black to make small and graceful mouths.

My grandfather holds her close, his fingers tight on her shoulder, her breasts against his (is she wearing a bra?). He smiles and I see now why my mother always said he looked like a movie star. Together they look like the heroes in a romantic black and white film. He wouldn't give her a name, but said, *I almost married her.*

To think! I was almost Japanese—
for the rest of the night, I hold onto this like a prize.
What would my other life look like? I think how
my grandfather said on my going to Japan:
I like Japanese women, they know their place.
My mother explains: *he says things like that*

to rile you up. If you fight him back, he's won.
So I smile, silent. As if "knowing my place."
My real grandmother, a Scottish nurse who
"kept him in line" hardly seemed to "know her place."
Neither did this Japanese girl, who was out
with Americans instead of her mother.

That night, my grandfather showed us picture after picture,
all on the same film: a home tape of them all laid out
on his kitchen table. It was getting late,
but my mother would not interrupt him. In the dark,
her skin was even more moon-like (a pale
that strangers marvel at), but it was then that I saw her,

clearly for how she was trained: subdued hands folded
on her lap, hair styled the way she was taught proper,
lips closed in that public smile that even as a girl
I knew was a translation for worry—She sat like a geisha,
who can maintain the fantasy of another while also entering
deeper and deeper into her own internal fantasy.

Picking Blueberries

My mother's colander: metal
with small, heart-shaped mouths—
It was an old thing, probably
my grandmother's before, just like
that blueberry bush in our backyard,
planted 50-odd-years ago, a natural
inheritance. We never used
the colander except when picking
blueberries, and even that became a hobby
my parents left for their aging relatives
and home repairs, leaving me
every summer to fill it
with as many berries as I could save—
And still! All those ripe
berries left unpicked! How thrilled
all the deer must have been when
my mother came home with store-
bought blueberries: soft berries,
berries less blue. I don't remember
the excuses she gave me.
Something like: *It doesn't matter, really—
they weren't that much*, all the while
washing them in the sink. In her hands,
the berries were spotless: no twigs, bird
shit, dirt or spider webs. The berries
she bought were farmed and pre-washed,
but she continued to run water over them,
letting some slip between her fingers, down the drain,
where no birds nor deer could get to them.

Eighteen Ways of Looking at a Defunct Golgotha Fun Park

1. I am on the hill of skulls, putting with beheaded angels,
2. & if I get the hole-in-one at the end, what will come out? A gospel tract? A coupon for Heaven: BOGO?
3. All those Jesuses watching, lined up like schoolboys: beheaded Jesus, decaying Jesus, peeling Jesus, red white & blue Jesus, domestic Jesus, household idol Jesus, good luck buddha Jesus, 50% off outlet store Jesus—
4. & concrete Jesus at the last hole, he is “the way”—no one gets an ace except through him.
5. Someone has stuffed several of Noah’s animals from hole 2 into the whale’s mouth. He spits them out just as he spat out a lederhosened-Jonah years before.
6. Hole 5 reads: “& God spake all these words saying ”

What I hear is: the wind on the hill, the distant hum of go-karts in the valley.
7. Behind the greening ten commandments, a hand-painted sign reads: PAINTBALL WAR.
8. If my parents had known about this place, would they have brought me here?

I imagine my friend’s mother, asking putters a hole away if they’ve been filled with the holy ghost.

I imagine my own mother complimenting the gardening, or the peeling church at hole 13. My father would know better though—he would point out the tacky craftsmanship: the cross uneven, the pieces all glued together: carcass, frame & spindle—
9. What did the gift shop sell back then? Bible bags, reading: *The Best Gift in Life is Free?* WWJD bracelets? I remember wearing one of those as a girl: looking at it like some divine magic 8 ball, waiting for a flaming bush or pillar of clouds to tell me what to do about the boy I liked, the neighbor girl had never heard “the Roman’s Road,” who didn’t know Jesus,
10. & what *would* Jesus do at this Golgotha? Flip the picnic tables? Take down the crosses? Not like anyone would be there to witness his righteous anger. No one but God & His son.

11. Would it do any good? Ripping down this building, the dated street lamps, would that be a sort of resurrection? A sort of life?
12. The owner said his mother could get through the Lion's Den in three hits.

That his mother bought all the animals, all the angels.

That this is his witness, that this is his way of making the world a better place.
13. What kind of witness is a faceless lamb? A molding Gabriel? A St. Francis lawn ornament, carefully painted into a Charlton Heston?
14. I think of the woman at church who gave tracts instead of tips, who asked waitresses & lifeguards on their shifts if they knew Jesus died for their sins—how even now as I say that the words taste like apple vinegar, as if a gospel can go sour in the wrong mouth. I hated her for that message, an inverse of good news—
15. Now, looking at the golden calf, missing an ear, it becomes clear how quickly good gifts in a well-meaning mouth can become something altogether different, dangerous even—
16. Behold: the women at hole 14, beholding! & I, the ruins of a woman!
17. Three white crosses at the top of the hill, Christmas lights strapped to the sides.
No longer turn on at night.
18. *I say I am “#1 Shaded Biblical Mini Golf” but who do you say that I am, who do you say that I am?*

Preparing my Hair for the Wedding

In the kitchen, my fifth grade teacher
does my hair. She says, *I'd kill*
for hair as thick as yours, and from the way
she combs out my tangles, I can believe it.

In the living room, her husband sits
on the floor with a 12" tube TV,
watching what must be a soccer game
fizzling in and out of reception.

The room gives off the feeling
of a college apartment just emptied out
for summer. I remember now—growing up,
how we gave my old clothes to her daughter.

She's plugged in the curlers, they look
exactly like my mother's purple pink
Conair Hot Sticks, warming the kitchen
with the smell of burning plastic.

Once they're done, she wraps my hair
around each curler, telling me stories
of the girls from my class who have gotten
married, how she did their hair.

She tells me that before she taught at my school,
one student called her a white bitch.
Her husband still won't go to church with her.
Her daughter's just moved out to go to college.

Fifth grade was the year I lived inside Pokémon
tapes. When did I ever think about my teacher,
coming home to her school salary:
to the loneliness even in marriage?

She takes the curls in bunches,
like freshly cut flowers. She pins them
into place, and I feel the pang of bobby pins
against my scalp. This is the trial run.

She leads me to the bathroom, carpeted
and incredibly blue, giving me a mirror.
I move it, trying to catch even a glimpse

of my back—It's then I see myself.

Outing

We drive underneath a cement tent that reads LAUREL MALL in thin orange letters. This is the mall where my father worked at Pants Corral. This is where he heard

his first James Taylor album, where a customer took a dump in one of the changing stalls. Now the parking lot houses police cars.

The Formica floor is polished with fluorescent lights. Kiosks, but no people. A closed shop. Another closed shop. Shuttered storefronts read:

*Don't judge a book by its cover, If nothing ever changed,
there'd be no butterflies, It's what's inside that counts.*

I walk close to my mother. She says: *this was the first mall on the east coast with a food court*. Above: the food court light is off. In the center, a former

fountain stuffed with plants like a discount cornucopia. No McDonald's or Panda Express, only: Brass Hen, Grill-to-Go, Blue Sea Carryout.

By the broken escalator, a man is on his knees, planting new aloe veras. Aloe veras! The trim paint peels, but there is so much green in the planters!

He waters the palm trees, he looks like the kind of man who will continue to water the palm trees, water the aloe veras, the day of demolition,

the kind of man who does it out of *love*—No.

I'm misunderstanding. Today is a burial, the kind saved for Egyptian

pharaohs, who must be buried with everything they might need in the afterlife (Bootleg phone cases? Burlington coats? Dollar store shoes?).

The afterlife for a mall is another mall. My mother walks faster, towards the light of the glass doors, where her van is parked faithfully, just the way she left it.

Church Yard Sale

The velvet unicorn painting
Shaylin brought to the yard sale
was a beat-up thing: the unicorn's ribs

showed as if emaciated. A purple sky,
framed by fluted chair legs, held
unreal planets and Technicolor stars.

If only that were enough, but then—
a mandatory rainbow arrives
out from the unicorn's chipped head.

Our youth pastor told us that whoever
could sell it by the end of the day
would get twenty bucks.

Shaylin told us, *it used to hang in my nursery.*
Her fingers gripped the frame for half the morning.
When at last she let it rest against the table edge,

it glowed bizarre and phenomenal against
a parking lot full of sedans with ichthus decals
and tables of dog-eared self-help books.

I would take it home, I told her, if I had a place
to put it. I would never have such a place.
And who could? The unicorn smelled like 1991—

the year I was born—did I think
I could time-travel with that unicorn?
That I could save it with my money?

When it didn't sell, Shaylin took it
well under her arm and carried on
back to the car like a missionary

who is accustomed to having
her gifts rejected but who
regardless continues to carry gifts.

Foreigner

Why do I remember so little
about that visit to Maire's house
in high school (was it junior
year?) when we sat cross-legged
on the floor watching *Seven Samurai*—

all I remember from the movie
is the inside of those houses, so small
and bare with the tatami floor.
I tried to imagine living
in a place with such thin
walls, which it seemed someone
could pass through at any minute,

and at some point her mother
made us chicken pot pies
in her own kitchen, which wasn't much better
than those Japanese village huts,
an indent of a room where she opened
the oven door and it hit the opposing wall.
She looked so thin and tired that
she might have been Maire's grandmother,
her hands pancaked except
for those varicose veins mountaining out of her.

I can't remember what it was
Maire's father said that upset me so, just that
he was complaining about those stupid
pot pies like he couldn't get up
to get his own lunch, and how his wife
said nothing, continuing to bake.

Around his chair, orange pill bottles
collected like gossip. All the while
in Japan, it continued to rain.

He was the one who'd told us to watch this film—
one of the classics, he said. Maire,
adoring him, put in the DVD because
we both like Japan. Was that really
the only thing we had in common?

This is what I remember clearly:

when her parents left the room, Maire went to the pantry and came back with a tub of Utz honey wheat pretzel sticks. She said in a low voice, “Don’t take too many or else my dad will notice. If he knew we were taking these, he’d hit me for it—but they taste so *good*.” She put one in her mouth, the way we used to in elementary school, dangling it between her lips like a salty cigarette.

Maire said, “One day we should go to Japan together.”

Bark Painting of Fuji

Falling apart now, after all these years:
the mountain snow is cracking, the pine bark
Mt. Fuji flaking debris on my desk. The forest,

once mossy, now black-dry and rough. Trees
and a teetering bridge like scrapbook stickers
peel back and crumple. It can't be salvaged

by a frame. It sticks to my fingers: that gritty dirt
from another Japan, my grandfather's Japan.
My husband thought it was an arts and crafts project

when I brought it home. Said it was not staying
in our house. Such an ugly thing—where could I hang it?
Maybe chuck it in a campus dumpster—No.

If I left it on the library shelf, where people leave
old paper backs for grabs, would someone take this too?
A college kid offers to take it for five bucks. Only when

he comes to pick it up do I see how nice it sits
on my office desk. By then, it's too late.
Now, I miss its tackiness, falling apart, how

I could reach out and touch Japan. Thank God
I took a picture of it and can still see the flaking,
even if I can't feel it. I think about calling

the boy back, apologizing, asking him
to bring it back for a refund. But what then?
Soon it would all fall apart, only leaving dried

glue stains like toothless gums—it's a gross,
dirty thing even if I love it. What else do I have
to remember my grandfather's war? Sixty year old moss.

I assumed it was Mt. Fuji—as if every
Japanese mountain is Fuji until proven otherwise—
but my grandfather was stationed in Chitose (not

Tokyo), in the Korean War (not World War II),
says it was made by an Ainu craftsman
on Hokkaido, island of the snow.

To the Ainu who made this bark painting
Honsu was as far away as America.
His village had its own mountains.