

I can't think of a time I was not desirable. The meerschaum madonna on a marble stand, her head is covered by her hair, and a veil, and a halo: smash it, she represents a cult of womanhood, witchcraft, she is not a virgin saint she is a goddess, and she could rescue me. We are no longer allowed to leave the trailer park. A woman's body is shameful and must be covered, a woman's body is desirable and must be uncovered. Unveiled, the original apocalypse.

A woman's body is designed to be brought to its knees. A puddle of orange, dressing up the linoleum, chest flattened against the floor, I lick the puddle. Immaculate. Poverty is clean when it aspires.

Years later: suggesting myself via telephone, he will order them to hang it up, I will want to tell them what I have learned, that none of us can speak. Our story has no language. My loss always in communication with your loss.

Escape will recur. They will leave the trailer by the side of the highway while en route to a chicken farm down south.

The last page of the notebook, a scripture
defining death: water absorbed by the ground.
Blue notebook, a hologram butterfly cover.
Won in a county essay contest on fathers
and matter. Syntax informed by nineteenth
century novels, seventeenth century poetry,
the Bible. Imitating Austen in colored gel pens.
The failure of language.

A house wrapped in contact paper. This rag is ten years of dust. Stacking cans of salted pork from the government in the cupboard. Rooms cleaned everyday by noon, someone might want a tour of the trailer.

This poverty distinguishes from the other kind: there are friends' houses where I can't go because bugs, because disease. This poverty insists itself a temporary lapse: it doesn't belong to the other kind, at least not for long. The myth of this lapse, of poverty's limited duration, articulated in our gaze outward, our aspiration to acreage. The weekly expansion / contraction of a savings account. The three piece suits haggled over at Salvation Army. Wheels on a house hidden by sheet metal skirt. The skirt torn, the myth disproven. Disproven by transgenerational inertia: the bitterness, illness, malnutrition, injury accumulated in the body, surfacing later, poking out through decades of second-hand clothes accessorized by education, gauzy at the seams.

They will reverse the trajectory after the farm fails, we will find ourselves behind the counter at a dry cleaners, a smoke shop, a Burger King. Desperation: sliding bills out of a register when no is looking. Paranoia: slowly feeding them back in. Fist slipping into a deep fryer, skin floating in a tub of water, stamped, She will never be able to wear a watch over the pink and white tattooed sleeve.

We wear our poverty and no is so distinguished by what she wears as a woman, that is, someone who is hunted. I am wrapped in contact paper, I am clean.

A piece of paper, ripped in three. Edges curling,
the back is red. Writing hidden behind red.
Some substances identified only by their
response to heat.

You thought you were like your grandmother,
her collection of madonnas, filling a room.

Often on the edge of escape I stay to protect the smaller bodies that haven't yet been marked. Then something followed me down the hall this morning. The vent in the kitchen, inflating my skirt with warmth, in the hall a demon or some guide compressing the hairs behind my knees, compelling me toward the bathroom.

TV theme songs pulsing, concentric rings emanating through walls to my bed. Incomprehensible drone, a litany of threat. What remains of a song stripped of melody.

Sleeping under the pull out couch, sleeping on the trundle bed, an aerosol can (hairspray) hidden under the pillow. A hammer hidden under the pillow. Brothers sleeping on cushions. In the dream, the Mother has no eyes, I peel her egg shell covering. Morning, shadows moving on the floor. Something follows me down the hall. The locked door at the far end. Reaching the same point, and returning.

A concrete porch that bulges in winter. Peeling stairs. Something that could be a pipe or a bell, emerging from a broken tile. Stones dotted with weeds, cigarette butts. Wires everywhere, bisecting the lawn, delineating trapezoids part aluminum siding part sky. The clearing: I stop here, and wait. A broken light post, taped. Tape peeling. Edge moving, slightly. Trembling.

An empty box of chocolates, left on a bench in the woods. Gold foil crinkled beneath the clear plastic insert, multiple surfaces reflecting sunlight. Dozens of slopes in every square. Each square a story, each story a graph. This graph, having 3 axes, requires 3 rows of data. The data is plotted on the axes. What inhabits the space between the axes. What about the hyperbolas that approach the axes but never meet.