

Becoming

Contrary to popular belief, I didn't live on a farm. I lived next to a cornfield and an abandoned church, but the town fifteen minutes away was a good one, and I didn't have to muck up cow patties or travel an hour to the Wal-Mart, like some friends I know from "the real country." Instead, I would say I grew up in the country of suburbia: the spaces between fields and shopping malls and the laundromat with a tiny grass-patched cemetery fenced in the middle of the parking lot.

In a way, I came from the middle of old and new; historical buildings squashed next to Texas Roadhouse and too many intersections, even though we still only had one Starbucks, and you could see the Chesapeake Bay from the main road. I can still walk to the rocky beach from my parents' house, and I remember midnights spent skinny dipping in snake-infested swamp water, and the trail of poison ivy I followed to get there.

I grew up afraid. My mother was both overprotective and very anxious, and once we stayed in the car in our driveway for thirty minutes during a thunderstorm, since she was worried the lightning would strike us dead before we reached the house. I grew up locking my car doors (rational) and fearing driving long distances (irrational). I moved to St. Louis when I turned twenty-one and forgot what it was like to come home.

Here in the city, I say I grew up among cornfields; it's not necessarily true, just something to say. Something to explain why I can't parallel park and why I can't sit in traffic and why it took me so long to stop worrying about being mugged when walking downtown.

I still grow afraid, but I think it's of the wrong things. I drink till I can't think straight or walk straight or see straight, and then I drive back to my apartment and fall asleep soundly. Then I go to work the next morning and

worry a shooter will burst into my classroom and gun us all down. I meet strange men in the backrooms of bars and cower the next morning when forced to call my credit union.

Sometimes, I think I will become my mother. I already worry about everything I can think of, and I tell people I can't do math when really, I'm not so bad at it. Sometimes, I decide I will not be my mother, thank you, and I down two bottles of wine and kiss someone I don't know to prove it. Sometimes, I feel very much in the middle of things, like in between the old and the new, the country and the city, and I can't make much sense of where that leaves me.