

Salt Orchid

the orchid curls into itself, bleeding pale pink like the inside of shell, teacup on the kitchen table. her hands are rubbed raw from clothes washed in the sink, cotton to skin still damp, fingertips the color of blush. the morning seeps through the window; dew, frost, mist into the dust-filled room. in this room, she once told someone that this life is worth living, as a record worth playing spun and crackled a song they could dance to, easy. in the stillness, she wondered who she was, still. suitcase in the corner of the room, eyelashes thin, dirt under fingernails, car in the driveway in need of repair but she lived young and unaware. she is a soul remembered by a town who let her go; the return unexpected for them both. woods here are a wild place—old engine oil into soil, into maple roots, into throats of rabbits rustling beneath the undergrowth. wildflowers pull against the coats of coyotes. I stand beneath the canopy of green and think of the girl, her orchid eyes, speckled and open, her questions, her desire to understand the purpose of roots and veins and the blood flow beneath our skin. and how she forgives the rabbit for dying, the coyote for hunting, nature for teaching her how to dance, hungry and wild, ivy to stone to sparrow wing, free. the town inhales and exhales, cuts pathways to homes and lives separated by tall fences, gardens, niceties. lives connected by phone calls, hands held, dogs winding through seas of legs and summer days. the little yellow dog tells me that loving is a verb to be nurtured and warmed. she tells me mud-streaked, soaked from the river across the way: *this life opens for you*. I cannot take the hand of the young girl; she is a version of me from a long time ago still peering into rain puddles with dreams of worlds beyond their reflections, un-blurred, repaired, her father waiting at home holding her mother's hand, the family dog still alive, a family of four. I let this town hold me differently now, thorn in ankle, sun against cheek, footsteps left in mud, salt cracked against fingertips. the phone rings, the orchid loses a petal; I find a new record, and press play.