

## Everything Else You Left Behind

### Why I Wish I Was A Painter

One day on the train, I asked you what makes art good. You told me, *good art searches for truth.*

*What is truth?* I asked you, and we debated for hours whether truth was a form of God, of ourselves, or of something else entirely.

The other day, your mother asked me about this conversation. I told her what you said and she started to cry. She feels your presence in your paintings, and in everything else you left behind.

### On a Field Trip in Third Grade

We learned the lifespan of a butterfly. I still wonder how it would look to see the delicate creatures spread their wings.

### Your Sister

I first met her when she was five and I was nineteen. I wanted to ask her questions. Questions I thought a kid would like, such as *what is your favorite color? when is your birthday? what is your middle name?*

She acted shy at first, recoiled. But slowly, as the questions kept coming in, she began to unravel.

She told me about the gray white horse named Angel at the barn across the street. Every week, she would ride Angel, and together, they would learn tricks and jumps. Being that high up scared her, she admitted with a nod.

She told me that every day when she gets home from school, she opens her box of watercolors. She was working on a self-portrait then, and I asked if I could see it. She told me maybe, maybe if I come to her home.

She told me about the creek in her backyard. How in the summertime when the water isn't frozen over she races sticks through whirlpools, between glossy stones, through the steady stream trickling down the mountain.

When her voice grew tired from talking, she started to whisper. In a hushed tone, she told me she didn't want to come this weekend. She didn't want to drive down to North Carolina. She didn't want to meet me. Because then she had to think about you.

### On a Field Trip in Third Grade

The ranger told us butterflies die because people cut down their homes. They lose the trees, they lose the flowers, they have nowhere else to go.

Humans are the reasons butterflies die. And it's up to humans to keep them alive. It was his job to remind people of that.

### You Are Not Your Body or Your Brain

Each room in your house had different color walls. The living room was painted a dull beige. The dining room was painted a muted teal. The kitchen was painted a bright yellow.

Each room had a different life form, a different energy.

As I wandered from room to room, I looked for relics.

I saw your painting in the living room, two wolves roaming snow capped mountains.

I saw you in the family picture hanging in the dining room, smiling your impeccable grin.

I saw you in the kitchen, in the spiral staircase, in the creek flowing in your backyard, in the driveway leading up to your house, and down the street, across your neighborhood, in the winding road you used to bike down and gaze at the stars.

And yet, as I wandered from corridor to corridor, paced up and down the stairs, glanced out the back door, it all felt empty.

When I was younger, I was scared of spirits. Scared of otherworldly beings haunting those of us who are still living. Now, I'm scared spirits don't exist, that they're not real, that it's just us, and nothing else.

That the house, your house, is really nothing more than four different colored walls, and that maybe, there won't be another life where I see you again. Maybe this is it.

So I walk around your house, and I search for relics of you.

### On a Field Trip in Third Grade

My mother would not let me go on the butterfly walk. I thought it was because she didn't want me to see the dead butterflies, thought my heart too delicate to handle the sight of decay.