

Rituals

When you're eleven, you hide your dad's cigarettes under your bed, in the shoebox where you keep your journal and the pocketknife you stole at a flea market.

After half an hour, you tell your mom about the pack of smokes smelling up the underside of your mattress. You're worried about trouble. Time-out or a stick to the knuckles. Your parents have never hit you, but you've heard kids at school tell about it, anyhow.

"Oh honey," your mother says. She laughs and takes you into her lap, though she's told you before that you're just too big. "He'll just go out and buy a new pack." She holds you for a minute, petting your hair, before letting you run off and put the smokes back where they belong. Your father doesn't notice. This all scares you more than the cigarettes ever did.

At night, when you're supposed to be asleep, you hear them arguing about it.

"Don't you want to see her get married?" your mother yells in a half-whisper across the living room. You imagine your father sitting in his chair, not looking at her, fondling the box in his chest-pocket.

"You think this is gonna stop me?" he asks.

The next day, when you come home from school, your father is chewing Nicorette gum and frowning at the kitchen table. He doesn't smell the same. At dinner, he uses his fork to draw patterns in his rice, turkey, green beans. He doesn't look at you.

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Your best friend is a girl named Delsie. At school the two of you eat lunch in the science lab. The teacher keeps guinea pigs and bearded dragons and finches. She's turned the lab sink,

meant for washing beakers and graduated cylinders, which your school can't afford, into a home for turtles, and they bump against the edges under hot lamps. You and Delsie trade sandwiches. Her mother always makes peanut butter, which Delsie hates, and you don't have an opinion. The teacher sits at her desk and works on lesson plans or grades while the two of you secret yourselves by the rabbit hutch. After you eat, you feed the animals. You like catching crickets for the lizards from a terrarium filled with cardboard egg sleeves and potato halves. Delsie doesn't want to touch the crickets and she turns away as you shove them, wriggling, into the lizard's tank. You watch him eat. He smiles at you from under the glass.

A finch poops on Delsie's arm and when she starts to cry, you laugh. It's a mistake and she stares at you with such hurt you think you might have broken her. When you try to hug her she pushes you away and says, "Just help me wash this shit off!" The teacher hears and tells her not to use that language. Delsie hates being yelled at and won't look at you as you wash her arm with a paper towel wetted with water and hand soap.

At recess, Delsie doesn't tell anyone what happened in the science lab, but she won't talk to you. She flits between friend groups, shying away as you come close. Recess is held in the cracked basketball court. A chain link fence surrounds the perimeter, and when you give up on chasing Delsie, you walk around it, your fingers clanging against the metal, your feet following one in front of the other, heel-toe. Your father told you that this was how Indians walked when they wanted to be silent. You pretend that you are practicing to be a super spy. You will wear all black, and dangle from the ceiling like a spider. You'll be able to evade any situation, and people will think that you are a myth, or a ghost.

The next day is a Wednesday and Delsie isn't in the science lab for lunch. You sit by the bearded dragon instead of the rabbits and when Mrs. Cooper asks where Delsie went you say she had detention. You eat your ham sandwich and decide you don't like mustard.

You and your mother dance together in the kitchen to old country music on the nights your father works late. She stays barefoot, her long hair out of a bun and wavering down her back like pictures of desert sand you've seen in the movies. You try to imagine somewhere barren, dusty, where all the animals have thick skins and bodies meant for carrying water, but all you know is the humid throttle of your hometown. Rivers and creeks and iron-red clay staining your fingers, frogs singing gospel in the night. Your mother dips you and turns you out into a spin and this is how you learn to use your body like an instrument. The best lesson she ever taught you. You cook together, chicken potpie, a biscuit crust she rolls out of a can. She lets you use a spoon to pop the seal, and the small explosion makes you jump every time.

When you sit down to eat, it's often almost eight or nine o' clock. Your mother leaves the stereo on, the songs floating over your head as you pick the peas out of your food and line them up along the edges of your plate. You count them— thirteen, twenty-nine, forty-six. When the rest of your plate is clean, your mother divides the number of peas in half with her fork and makes you eat the remainder, watching as you slip each one into your mouth. You wish you had a dog. You would feed him like a fugitive, his tail beating against the linoleum floor as he swallowed each offering.

When your father gets home he smells acrid, and he doesn't seem to quite see you. He scoops you up into a hug and swings you around. You can feel the static of your mother's anger

over your shoulder but you don't understand; he's so happy. When their eyes meet you can feel your father's hands dig into your ribs, like he's holding on for dear life. He sets you down and kisses your forehead, and tries to kiss your mother on the mouth, but she avoids him and looks at you. She seems to be reading you for some sign that you don't understand. A secret language that you haven't learned to speak.

When Delsie comes back it's to tell you that she's learned the word *fuck*. As in— that fucking bastard. That's how she heard her mother use it, at least, over and over, when she found out that Delsie's father had been sleeping with a sales associate at Target. The closest Target was an hour-and-a-half away but they met on a dating app for college students. She was twenty-three. You learn all this when you stay the night at Delsie's house. The two of you sit in the living room, a cartoon movie playing on the television, while her mother sits out on the porch and drinks wine from the bottle and cries to her sister on the phone. You can hear her through the screen door- "fucking bastard, fucking bastard, fucking bastard." You and Delsie begin to make up rhymes about the other kids at school— "Randy Holcombe is a fuck, he should be hit by a dump truck."

You walk back to your house humming the made-up rhymes under your breath. It isn't late, just dusky enough for the bats to flicker between trees and the sky is your favorite shade of blue. When you get home, you hear your parents arguing before you open the door. You can't hear the words through the walls, just the tense voices, slightly raised. You shiver, even though it isn't cold. Over the past few months, your parents have been fighting more and more. Your father

comes home later, past your bedtime, and your mother doesn't dance anymore. She sits in the living room and watches television without really seeing it. It's like she's waiting for a sign.

As your parents' voices raise to a crescendo, you turn away from the door and run down the street, to the park where you played when you were younger. You sit on the rickety metal swing set and sway side to side, letting the creak of the metal wash out the taste of your parents' voices.

That same fall it floods, and you imagine that Delsie's father got wind of it, and got out while he still could. School is canceled for two weeks, as the roads become muddy swamps. You and Delsie sit on the front porch of your house and try to look for alligators in the high waters. A man floats by on a Johnboat, that's how deep it is. He's got an umbrella taped to one side but he sits in the rain, a fat yellow dog curled under the shelter.

Your mother won't let you out into the floodwaters. She's worried about a sudden current stealing you away, or the threat of snakes roiling under the brownness. Still, the vacation from school feels like snow days, only better. There's a metallic tinge of fear in your mouth, and you can taste it when you laugh. What if the water swallows the whole town? What if you have to live in the trees? You imagine people weaving roofs and walls from palm fronds, swaying rope bridges connecting one house to the next. You imagine swinging and balancing over the murky water below, like that game you used to play as a kid, where the floor was lava and you had to jump from chair to chair to avoid its hot embrace.

Because of the rain, your father can't get to work, and the three of you sit at the kitchen table and play board games when the power's down. Sorry, Trouble, Life. Your mother wants

something a little less metaphorical. “Let’s play Scrabble,” she says, and pulls the game out of the top shelf of the linen closet. Some of the letters are missing and when your mother wins your father says it’s because she hid all of the Qs.

When the power’s restored you call Delsie on your mother’s cellphone. She tells you that her basement flooded, and her mother is throwing all of her father’s things down the stairs and into the brackish water. You walk over as soon as your mother gives permission, and the two of you sit on the basement steps and shine a flashlight down into the darkness, looking for crumpled shirts floating past, swamp monsters mixed with her father’s cologne and books and belts.

“Fucking bastard,” Delsie says under her breath and you both grin. Her mother comes back to the basement steps and stands over you, hurling pairs of socks into the water.

“Want to throw something?” she asks, and you agree, so the three of you stand at the top of the stairs, throwing in wedding pictures and Cuban cigars and the blue ceramic mug that Delsie made for Father’s Day the other year. You look at your friend, and try to decide if any of this wounds her. But you see steeliness in her that you hadn’t noticed before, the knowledge that picking sides is a matter of survival.

In sixth grade, Randy Holcombe, who is, in your mind, still a fuck, stops picking his nose and trying to wipe the by-products on passing girls. Delsie begins eating lunch with him, at the metal picnic tables in the middle school recess yard. She wears skirts with daisies on them and barrettes shaped like dragonflies. She writes Randy’s name in her journal, or her name with Holcombe added on, or little hearts with R & D swirled inside of them. When you spend the

night, she shows you how she's learned to apply her mother's lipstick and eye shadow. She tells you about kissing, how you can practice on the mirror or on the back of your hand.

"Kissing is supposed to feel like falling in love," Delsie says, and you wonder how she knows what either one is like.

"You need to pick a boyfriend," she says. The two of you lay sandwiched together on her bed. "I have a boyfriend and you need one too." There is a threat in her words, a cold certainty. You pick a boy with thin blonde hair who's never talked to you, because you're pretty sure he's too afraid of his own shadow to bother trying to kiss you.

One day, in November, your mother takes you and Delsie and Delsie's mother to the mall in Spartanburg. She needs to 'just get away for awhile.' You aren't sure about this. She promises you that some girl time will be fun. Delsie is thrilled. She breaks open her stash of allowances and birthday money and shoves it all into a ziplock baggie— change and ones and a single, wrinkled, twenty-dollar bill that her uncle gave her when she helped him pick the right horse for the races. She counts her money—forty-seven dollars and sixty-three cents. In the car, on the way to Spartanburg, your mother plays the same country music you used to dance to in the kitchen. It feels like she's telling a secret.

The mall is crowded and smells like an indoor swimming pool, mixed with hot dogs and sharp perfumes. Your mothers let you and Delsie wander by yourselves while they look through the clearance racks at Dillard's and Macy's and Sears. Delsie leads you through the hallways, to a store that sells makeup and perfumes. You're awed by the complexity of colors. An eye shadow that looks like the night sky, another like the ocean. A lipstick that is the deep purple of an over ripe plum, another like orange rinds. You wipe each of your fingers into a different color, so that

your fingerprints are stained with a rainbow. You wave them at Delsie and she laughs. “That’s supposed to go on your face, stupid,” she says, and your smile hesitates. Delsie chooses a color and tells you to close your eyes. You shut them and feel her fingers on your eyelids, a gentle fluttering. You can smell her shampoo and the special scent of her sweat. When she moves back, you open your eyes, and she holds a mirror to your face. She’s painted your eyelids bright green, and even you can tell that the effect looks trashy.

Delsie wants to get her ears pierced and there’s a store in the mall that will do it for twelve dollars. They sell clothing and toys and jewelry perfect for twelve-year-old girls pretending to be older. Backpacks with dolphins on them. Sparkly notebooks. Friendship necklaces that change color with your moods. You pick a set out while Delsie’s talking to the clerk about the piercing. Each charm looks like one half of a heart. When you set them together they say “best friends forever.” You go up to the front and pay ten dollars. Delsie meets you on the outside of the store and she’s mad.

“They wouldn’t let me get my ears pierced,” she says. “They said I have to have my parents or be sixteen.” She leans against the wall outside the store, smoldering.

You look at her and tell her that the store clerks are all fucking bastards. She smiles.

“Fucking bastards.”

You give her one half of the necklace and help her clasp it around her neck. Her half reads *be frie for* and yours reads *st nds ever*. You think of it like a code.

In the seventh grade, the floods return, and your teachers decide to use it in their curriculums. Your life sciences class collects water from the gutters to look at under a microscope. You talk about environmental degradation, and how rising temperatures in the tropical Atlantic cause the storms. Your social studies class watches documentaries about environmental refugees. You look at before and after pictures of small islands that have been swallowed by the ocean. You remember movies you've seen about the apocalypse, and how you always thought it would be kind of fun, to be in charge of saving something. In English you write poems about loss. You can't help but slip in a line about Delsie's smile, and how it makes you feel like your heart is flooding. At the end of class, your teacher calls you up to her desk.

"This is a beautiful poem," she says. "And it has so much *soul*." Your English teacher is a young woman who wears too many rings and talks with her hands, so all of her words flash. "We have a state-wide poetry contest called Reflections, would you think about submitting yours?"

You shrug and take the application from her, along with a copy of your poem, marked up with red ink. *Lovely line break* and *great use of metaphor* and *this is so honest*. Honest. The word tastes like an orange rind on your teeth.

Delsie's standing at your locker, holding a stack of books. Her eyes are shining.

"Randy invited me to go to the movies with him this weekend," she says. The theater is playing an action adventure film about androids. "But I don't think my mama would let me go with a boy. Can you lie for me?"

You nod, even though it hurts that you aren't invited. You understand that this is something different.

“Maybe I’ll get my first kiss,” Delsie says. She grins at you, a tricky smile. “I’ve been practicing my kissing.”

You feel your face grow hot and hold the poetry papers tighter against your chest.

“What’s that?” she asks, and pulls them from your grasp before you can tell her no. She looks over the papers and before you can think about what you’re doing you take them from her, and rip them up into small, fragile pieces. Delsie watches as the flakes fall to the ground.

“Wow, okay, weirdo,” she says. She looks hurt. You don’t say anything. You keep your eyes off of her face, so she won’t be able to tell that you’re about to cry.

“I thought we didn’t keep secrets,” she says, and then she turns away. You watch her walk down the hall, her hips swishing angrily, a movement you haven’t mastered yet.

That night, you go upstairs to your mother’s vanity and find her hair trimming scissors. You feel like breaking something. Like you want to punch glass. You sit at the mirror and begin trimming your hair, cutting off the dead ends, like your mother does every few weeks instead of paying the salon. You let yourself fall into the rhythm of cutting, of the slow release like air being let from a balloon. You watch a river of hair fall from your head, what feels like acres and acres of rust-tinged strands, piling to the floor around you. You turn around when you hear your mother’s gasp. She’s standing in the doorway. She looks like she’s about to cry.

“What? What have you *done*?” she asks. She comes over to you and takes the scissors from your hands. Your hair is shorn, like a prisoner’s, like characters in movies you’ve seen about recovering from cancer. It looks like a battle wound. You pick up the strands of hair like they are something to be glued back together. You hold them like broken glass. They burn your fingers. Your mother sinks to the ground and in a moment of tenderness you fall with her, and

wrap your arms around her shoulders. The two of you sit in a pile of your hair. She's crying, holding onto you, and you wrap your arms around her shoulders and think of all the things you've never learned to say.

You and Delsie walk to the Dollar General together, to try to find something to fix your hair.

"I can't believe you did that," Delsie says. You run a hand over your head and shrug. You tell her that you wanted to try something different; you didn't think it would be this short.

"Still, your hair was so pretty." It's raining and you don't have an umbrella. Your rain jacket is an old one of your father's, because you outgrew yours last year and your mother hasn't had a chance to buy a new one. The hood swallows you, so you walk with your face in the rain, the short scrub of your hair absorbing rivulets that trickle down your back.

"I guess you'll save a lot of money on shampoo," Delsie says, and you laugh. You run up into a puddle and splash into it, and Delsie calls you a child. She wavers between following you into the water and holding her ground, her sense of propriety. The red mud sticks to the white rubber on your shoes and turns the laces brown. In the Dollar General, a woman with a tightly wrinkled face frowns at your dripping pant legs. You feel shame warm you, for your over-sized men's jacket and your poorly cut hair and your wet, muddy shoes. You look at Delsie. She's wearing tight skinny jeans and her hair is curled and shiny, a process called *relaxing*. Her mother used to spend hours lacing it with beads and braids, a painful process you would watch in horror. She folds her umbrella and sets it in a holder by the front door.

“We need something to fix *this*,” Delsie says, pointing at your head. The woman shows you an aisle with hair bands and hats and barrettes. You inspect the shelf for a long time. Delsie points at knit caps and soft flowery bands that wrap around your head. You pick up a baseball cap with a logo for the Atlanta Braves on the front.

“That just makes you look *more* like a boy,” Delsie says. She takes it from you and puts it back on the rack. “You know what?” she says. “With the right lipstick, this could actually look artistic.”

You follow her to the makeup aisle and she analyzes the display for a long minute. You don’t know what’s right. You don’t know what’s wrong. You rub your hand through your hair and tell Delsie to just leave it; it’s starting to grow on you. On the way out of the store the woman waves and says, “I think you look like a rock star. Very Sinéad O’Connor.” You don’t know who this is but you say thank you anyhow. “Come back to see me, now,” the woman says, as Delsie drags you out the door.

Your mother has started leaving frozen T.V. dinners in the refrigerator for you and your father. She’s gone before you get home from school, and doesn’t come home until long after you’ve gone to bed. You don’t ask where she goes. Your father doesn’t seem to notice. He sits on the couch, watching the news and then cop shows where people face horrible traumas and wrap it up neatly at the end of each hour-long episode, with commercial breaks. A group of teenagers in pig masks rape and kill a kindergarten teacher. A man with an assault rifle holds a high school biology class hostage. A five-year-old child with strangely colored eyes burns down her house. Your father watches these shows in succession, drinking beers and scraping the labels off the

bottles. You keep half an eye on him, as you write short poems in your journal, things you wouldn't show the teachers or submit to any contest or even admit exist. You work on your math homework. You're in algebra, a word from Arabic, meaning to set broken bones.

You remember the nights he used to come home late, laughing. You remember dancing with your mother in the kitchen. You remember the way you felt like a compact of two, a ritual of love.

You look through your mother's closet and find dresses you haven't seen before, swishing things in brightly colored fabrics, with skirts that are meant for twirling. You imagine your mother dancing. Some of the dresses are new, and still have price tags attached, values that add up to more than everything in your closet. You pull out a pair of shiny golden heels and strap them to your feet. When you stand in the mirror you look taller, like a predatory bird.

You turn and you see your father standing in the doorway, sipping from a beer.

"Those are a little big for you, kiddo," he says. You slip the shoes off your feet and slide them back into the closet. He sits on the edge of your mother's bed. He and your mother have started to sleep in separate rooms, a disjointedness they don't admit to. You've seen her, though, in the early mornings, before you leave for school. She sleeps spread-eagled, her hands curled along the edges of the mattress. She is a guest in her own house. Your father looks at the open closet, where the dresses sway in the breeze from the fan.

"She used to dress like that, when we first met. She was a cocktail waitress at a bar in Columbia, and I was getting some drinks with a mutual friend. We ended up at the same party that night. You know the rest." He tips his bottle at you and laughs. You knew your parents married young. You've seen the wedding photos, your mother's white dress bulging at the waist,

her face unlined and open. Your father had long hair, shaggy and curling over his eyes, but he stood up straight for the photos. His tuxedo looked a little too large, like a kid trying on his father's clothes. When you looked at those photos, you thought you'd never seen two people more in love, that small blossom of a family. Now you can see the fear there, too.

That night you stay up late, sit in your window, and watch your mother come home. You watch her get out of the passenger seat of an unfamiliar car. You watch a man step from the driver's side and lead her to the doorway. Once they're under the awning of the porch, you no longer see them, but you can imagine what's going on. You wonder if your father knows. You wonder if he cares.

The next morning, she's at the kitchen table. You come downstairs and see her shoving your book bag back together. You ask her what she was looking for.

"Do you have a lunch made?" she asks. You go to the fridge and pull out milk for your cereal. "Your hair's starting to grow back," she says. You run your fingers over your head, the fringe that falls like a duck's tail around your neck. She drums her fingers on the table, and smiles at you.

You ask her about the man from last night and watch your mother's face. Her expression doesn't change but her eyes grow darker.

"Oh, honey, that was just an old college friend. He's moved to the area and I thought I would show him the sites."

You pour milk over your bowl and watch the crevices in your cereal fill and rise.

Delsie spends most of her time with Randy the Fuck. They eat lunch together, laughing and holding hands. Sometimes she sits on his lap and he gets a grin on his face that makes you feel sick. It's spring and she's wearing shorts that expose the tops of her thighs. Most days, the gym teacher stops her in the hall with an index card to make sure she's not showing too much leg. She's started shaving and rubbing her skin with cocoa butter and coconut oil, which makes her smell like a warm dessert. She's never mentioned the poem you tore up in the hall. Your teacher never asked you about the contest, either. It makes you wonder if she even wanted you to submit, or just felt bad, for the weird kid with the too-honest poems.

The end of the year dance is coming up, still a few weeks away but Delsie has started planning for it like a wedding. She wants to go to the mall, to buy dresses and shoes. She wants to have her makeup done real fancy and she wants Randy to wear a suit, or at least a nice button down and ironed khakis. More than anything, she wants you to find a boy to take, so the two of you can "double."

"Just ask someone," she tells you, while you're sitting in the park, watching Randy's baseball practice. "That whole rule of boys asking girls doesn't apply to you."

You wonder why it doesn't apply to you. You pick grass out of the ground and lay it in a pile at your feet. You tell her you don't want a date. You tell her you don't want to go to the stupid dance. She asks why and you shrug. She asks why again and you look away. You tell her there's no one you want to take. You tell her you're not interested in kissing.

Delsie mutters something angry under her breath and you turn. You ask her what she said. Your voice is sharp, and shaking.

“You’re just not interested in kissing boys,” Delsie says. She swallows and stands up, brushing the grass off her thighs. “Don’t act like we don’t all know,” she says. Then she’s quiet for a minute. There’s a crack of aluminum hitting baseball and a whooping that signals the end of practice.

“I’m just trying to make this easier for you,” she says. “That’s all. You’ll get used to it.” Then she walks away, heading down into the field. You watch her go up to Randy and take his hat. She puts it backwards on her head and kisses his cheek. He grabs her ass and you walk away, shaking, your throat like an over-flowing glass.

When your mother leaves, your father starts up smoking again. He buys a pack of Marlboros and sits on the porch and chain-smokes into the night air, with the sunset. You go out and sit down next to him. The falling clouds from his cigarette remind you of videos you’ve seen of glaciers, melting into the ocean.

“You think she’ll come back?” he asks you, without turning. You shrug, realize he can’t see you. You tell your father about your mother’s dancing, on the nights he didn’t come home, how much she loved to dance.

“We used to go to gay clubs, when we were first dating. Your mother could dance and I could watch her but I didn’t have to worry, you know, about any of the men trying to pick her up.”

You shiver at the thought of your parents dancing under neon lights.

“I guess it was silly. It doesn’t really matter. People are gonna do what they’re gonna do.”

You nod, and your father smashes his cigarette against the porch steps. A trail of smoke follows the spot of ash on the hardwood.

Your father stands up, brushes off his pant legs, and puts the cigarette pack in his back pocket. He stretches and you feel something new is starting.

You imagine your mother driving west to California, her windows rolled down and the wind in her hair. You don't imagine that she left with that man. You imagine she left to be alone, to be with herself, folded into her loneliness like a caterpillar in a cocoon, waiting to emerge into a new light.

The dance is in the gym, and the teachers decorated it with paper flowers and white and silver balloons. The history teacher is playing DJ, and he stands on a makeshift stage on one end of the basketball court, spinning old pop songs and dancing around by himself. Whenever he's got a couple songs lined up, he goes off to flirt with the resource officer. Other teachers patrol the dance floor, making sure that students are maintaining the regulated six-inch distance, making sure that no one's snuck in alcohol, or condoms, or whatever.

You see Randy standing in a corner, talking to some of his friends. He's laughing and gesturing wildly, but Delsie is nowhere to be seen. You go up to him and pull on his shoulder. You ask him where Delsie is.

"Last I saw her she was out back, the crazy bitch," he says. "Why do you care? Are you gonna go kiss her?" His friends laugh and make lewd hand gestures with their fingers and mouth. You don't know what they mean but you feel your face grow hot with anger. Before you can

think about what you're doing you kick him square in the pelvis, where you imagine his balls hanging limply in his boxers.

He shudders and falls to the ground, spewing curse words and punch. You haven't seen a boy cry since elementary school. You've never hurt anyone before and at first you feel like you want to apologize. Then you see the gym teacher coming over to investigate and you disappear into the crowd.

Delsie is sitting against the wall, her monarch-yellow dress spilled out around her. You know your friend, and you can tell she's been crying.

You sit down next to her and look out into the parking lot, empty except for a few teacher's cars parked to one side, the lights shining white-blue over the sparkling pavement.

"He broke up with me," she says.

You ask why.

"I didn't want to do anything," she says. She looks down into her lap, at her hands. You hesitate, and wrap your arm around her shoulders.

"He said I should be easy," she whispers, and starts crying again. You hold her as her mascara runs over her cheeks, like in the movies. You think about how much of life is like a movie, and how much isn't.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I shouldn't have said what I said, in the park. It's not easier. I wish I were like you."

You don't know how to respond to this confession. You don't know how to explain that it isn't about being any certain way. You tell her it's okay. You weren't mad. You love her.

“I know,” she says. “I love you too.” She smiles up at you. “Boys are fucking bastards,” she says.

You walk together to the park down the street and swing on the swing set in the envelope of night. Delsie begins to laugh as she pushes herself higher and higher, her glittery yellow dress blazing behind her. You think she looks just like a comet. You think this would make a good poem.