
Southern Belles

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Class of 2017, Anthropology

This collection of poems explores the themes of family and memory, interrogating some of the most emotional pockets of one's life by threading words into images. The collection intentionally telescopes in and out of marriage, childhood and death to give readers a sense of the transience and fragility of a life. The poems aim to capture the fleeting quality of time, and burden the reader with a sense that we don't have very long to live—and therefore, we must live with all the gumption, the hunger, the awareness we can muster.

Hospice Room No. 5

1.

Harp music tickles the air
the way a baby smiles in her sleep.
A porcelain lady labors for air like a bed of coals.

2.

The days are beating her black and blue
From the ankles up.
Her eyes harden, sapphires in ice.

3.

She breathes, "I waited for you."

4.

I snake my arms around her, kiss her sleepy
hollow cheeks—her eyes close, but her
fingers clench around my wrist: her presence
oozes from my skin into my bones like lead.

Mental Health

My mother is a blemish of her mother.
She insists she isn't.
Every night
she made dinner for her family, sang them songs.

She read the bible every day,
she prayed. She loved God the most.
Last summer, I told her I was depressed and
she laughed.

She's having an affair with God;
my father knows it.
He stopped coming to church with us years ago.

Hiding in the hollows of herself, stashing her secrets
under her eyelids for private viewing—
she always wears sunglasses in bright light.
Sometimes though, out of the corner of my eye,
I catch her looking straight at me

Memoir

I was born bossy, and first.
I grew up around Republicans, Baptists,
who were terrified of hell and Y2K;
they loved to drink iced tea and
change the subject.

I wanted to drink neat tequila and sleep naked,
I wanted to spit fuck and not wear shoes;
I became addicted to secrets.

And when I dreamed they were always horrific;
my mother screeching my name from
behind a door with no doorknob.
Fire swallowed the house, but her moans droned on,
echoing from the ashes.

And my prayers, I meant them, but
they never sounded sincere, never
devout, like everyone else's. I had a
language, but no faith.

I learned how to wake myself up;
silently, without fear.