

it was always the moon holding hands with violence

for Ingrid

before the body was found, it was the moon who stood witness

to the angles she was bent into in order to be forced into the trash can

to the *him* who did the folding and shoving and stomping down

it was moonlight that glinted across her silver-painted toenail, stuck out into the night caught
the attention of the elderly homeowner who only ever went out there on trash day caused him
to go investigate despite the darkness

choreographed his startled fall back at the shock of it

and during the locating and assessing

the plastic bags and cordoning tape and notes and questions

it was the moon they sought

looking upwards between tasks to heave out their sighs

as though the moon could reach out and grab the sounds which floated
from their upturned mouths

shove them into its own mouth and

swallow

swallow difficulties that could not be made audible

help to keep things solemn and silent

once the driveway was scrubbed clean and everything useful taken in for analysis and the scene
re set to an attempt at normalcy: the moon bore down harder

on certain nights, its light splayed through the yew branches

to create a perfect square illuminating the site of the trash can

even passersby who tried to look away, who didn't want to think about the street's history,
could not avert their eyes from the luminosity announcing the place where an awful
thing unraveled

even now, all these months later: the moon's insistence wraps around the neighbors at
night particularly the mothers, who wake up in dark hours thinking about
the dead woman's poor young daughters

how they own that same shade of silver nail polish

(but they will never be able to use it again)

(and yet they still keep it)

about how easily it could have been them

(or, that still might be)

and when their thoughts overwhelm them

when they retreat to their bathrooms to splash cool water on their worrying

faces the moon shines into their skylights and modest windows

curls its fingers around their aging feminine necks

shows them what the shape and pattern of a rope looks like

in the moment it is pulled tight against another woman's throat

it is often the trees to bear witness

for Karina

edging the path's periphery, both as boundary and enclosure they are
the ragged and torn limitations of how far we are willing to go their
density thick enough to contain it all

the actions of the ones who hunt

the reactions of the ones who are stalked

the enacting of the same violences, over and over

the depth of a gash deemed fatal

it is a scene and a language familiar, cliché almost

“jogger” “unaccompanied” “nighttime”

“accosted” “assaulted” “struggle”

“discovered” “reported” “unidentified”

“wooded area” “alone” “she”

it is terrible, what the trees must see

something coarse in the soft middle of darkness

how they rustle and shake the way we all might when confronted

by the brutal possibilities held within human hands

the unheard sound of shaken limbs calling for help

leaves blown and scattered across the forest floor to

compost alongside other things fallen and dying

in the aftermath is silence

a silence of forests long-comfortable with creatures who attack each
other a silent song to mourn the appetites of ugly-hearted urges

and often, soon after, the trees are cut down
their density blamed for holding and hiding the terrible
for giving space to what we fear most
we are embarrassed by what we are capable of, and so we cut away at
those who peer into our bleak places

their bodies are pressed into the pulp of paper
and built as coffins around the carcasses of our most painful
griefs they become a way to tell these stories
and a way to bury them
another tale of a woman walking through a wooded
area and the dark things that caught up to her
in the thickness of the trees' cover

creekside

for Haruka

This is your path, your always path, your small boots scuffing into gravel, composing an endless loop of sound that I must shuffle away with the other noises too painful to think about. But you were barefoot at some point, your boots removed. I know this because he was found with your boot in his possession, but I do not know if it was taken off purposefully or if, in the struggle, it threw itself into his brutal path, his path devoid of sound because of the vacuum his violence creates. Small pieces of gravel kicked along the path and tumbled into the creek below, but there was no playful splash to proceed the sinking. This is stunned silence, falling down into a body of water; a solemn memorial that should never have to be.

In the collapsed moment, the moment of a brutality so casual it is a total stranger, language fails to seed in the mouth, sound fails to nest in the shell of the ear. You were probably taught to look ahead on the path, to unbend upcoming curves in your mind, to scare out what could be hiding in wait further along. But I have walked on that path alone, and I know the ways it turns in on itself, lengthens and shortens in disorienting ways. I know the oscillation of proximity and distance, how what was ahead of you, coming the opposite direction on the path, can make a sudden turn and take your direction, can come from behind, from a place you can no longer see.

These are your hands, your moving hands, fingers tapping into your phone, each press an overpunctuation in what will be your final sentence—full stop, full stop, full stop. In your dance classes, you must have learned how tension and release are two halves of the same movement, to

let your body play with the wavering point where one becomes the other. How to linger there, how to hang in the emptiness of a caught breath. When I was a dancer, that was my favorite but impossible moment. Was it yours, too? Were you, in that moment, watching the dexterity of your hands, your fingers tensing and relaxing as you typed into the screen, amazed at the gracefulness you hold in even these small movements?

along the blue ridge parkway

for Sara

He was the one who suggested calling the police, you see.

They both had to work late, so they missed the group hike organized for the staff earlier that afternoon.

Someone has placed a bouquet of wildflowers in the tangle of poison oak at the trailhead. There is a slip of paper with her name on it tied around the stems.

Her umbrella is red with white polka dots, so cheerful. That's how he knew it was hers when he found it.

She wanted to turn back because it started to rain. She was afraid of getting caught beneath such tall trees in the event of lightning.

She doesn't know the area well. She has only been here for two months.

She promised her mother she would be careful. That she would never go hiking in the woods by herself.

She was thrilled when she got the job. She needed to get out of Florida, even if for a few months.

They didn't know each other well. Had seen each other sometimes in the cafeteria. There are a hundred employees, you see.

A few miles north and a few years earlier, a woman was found naked, assaulted and tied to a tree in these woods. They never found who did it.

Bad things can happen in pretty places, you see.

She always loved the outdoors, you see.

He went on hiking for an hour alone because the rain does not bother him. He had a nice smile. He looked young, unsure of himself.

She was nearing 30 and still wasn't sure what she wanted to do beyond move out of her mother's house.

She never mentioned anything about a boyfriend to her roommate.

The trail is narrow and overgrown. You have to know what you're looking for.

He could see the red umbrella from far away. He started to run. He called her name over and over. She still had streaks of flour on her face from the bread baking she'd done that morning.

There are bruises along the neck and face but no signs of a gunshot or knife wound.

The cause is undetermined.

Some of her clothing was forcibly removed, you see.

She was too friendly sometimes, you see.

He gave up after about 45 minutes.

He checked her room, but it was empty.

He told the manager they should call the police. Something bad has happened, he just knows

it. It's only been a few hours, you see.

He was sweet about it, wiped the flour from her face. His hands soft and eager.

Thousands of tourists come from all over each summer because it is so beautiful

here. The staff is all young and mostly transient.

Who knows who is in those woods at any given time.

He has three stories. They are each a bit different.

He can't keep the facts straight.

He barely knows her, you see.

He doesn't remember anything, you see.

He just blinked his eyes closed once, you see.

She was just lying there, you see.

He's trying to help, you see.

He panicked, you see

They had argued, you see.

He doesn't know what happened, you see.

There was no color in her face, you see.

He doesn't remember, you see.

It couldn't have been him, you see.

He's not a monster, you see.

He was the one who suggested calling the police, you see.