

TIMESHARE

The boat, what we called a boat though it was only the frame and deck—the parts that don't float but will grant cover in a storm—lay capsized in the fenced lot behind our houses, what were our houses when we were neighbors and hadn't yet realized family was a choice. A fiberglass lean-to, mildewed and dank, seemingly fallen from the sky and hitched up on cinderblocks for all the world to forget. She doored it with a swathe of vinyl pared off from her stepmother's bolt and hung creased spearmint car air fresheners from the mooring cleats. I stocked it with candy salted away from months of bag lunches and other kids' unguarded Halloween rucksacks, because, as I told her, You never know. It was our fort, clubhouse, a foundation for the unfounded, our names chalked along the ceiling with nuggets of brick. Our sticker book, Scratch N' Sniffs festooning the grooved planks. Our movie theater, where, cheeks sandwiched, our teeth gummed with licorice, we shared my View-Master, one eye-slot a piece, and I yelled at her for clicking through the disc so fast that Daffy Duck was just an inky corona, and she warned me that life was cruelest to pussies. Then she hugged me, flinching as I tightened my arms around the whipping post of her ribs—her grandfather's Sunday church, though I wouldn't learn that until long afterward—and I held the View-Master in one hand and her in my other one. Our library, our treasure chest, our fifth grade smoking lounge rank from the Parliaments my mother's boyfriend gave me to get me out of the house on those time-crunched afternoons his wife would be home before dinner. Our clinic, where I doused her face in peroxide and she lotioned the buckle-sized welts long my back, where I first learned that you never feel closer to someone than when they see you bleed. Where I realized that *closest* isn't always close enough. Our altar, on which we immolated Polaroids of those who beat us touched us forget us, and I promised her we'd be heard. Our sixth grade speakeasy, replete with Jim Beam filched from her fifteen-year-old sister who got it from her boyfriend who told her never to call him that in front of "mixed company," which meant anyone who could do the math. Our bed, where, on a curb-rescued mattress, she struggled to compose a rhythm from my tone-deaf kisses and I fumbled the rubber and she said it didn't matter, where we were hot then wet then cold then silent until I admitted what she long knew and she hit me worse than my father ever did and then ran into the night where I gave chase as consolation. Her pharmacy, cached with a grab bag of pills bought from guys I didn't know by giving them what I wouldn't take. My hourly motel, where I let

men from nowhere treat me like a game of Skee-Ball—any hole they could land—from bow to aft to bow. Men old enough to consider me a boy, which I preferred because it meant I still might outgrow it. Her pulpit, black pen carved into the rotted wood, she Bible-thumped to the tune of Leviticus because where we come from shame's the best cure. My kennel, until one of her boyfriends tied up my stray and let him bake in the sun. Her Bermuda Triangle, where she disappeared through the god's eye of plunged syringes. My oblivion. Her oblivion. Our last words, civil as strangers, without an ounce of goodbye though I knew that's what she meant. Our time capsule. Time machine. Timeshare. My view of a place I don't go anymore. Our forever gone, if I ever had it. Our secret. The last one, that, like the countless others, I know, wherever she is, she's keeping it to herself.