

Fish

In one of the earliest memories I have, I am standing by a lake. I'm around five years old, maybe younger, sporting the bobbed helmet of hair all Asian kids have at that age for some reason. My bangs get into my eyes. We're in the southernmost region of Virginia, so they are sticking to my forehead with perspiration.

The lake is vast. In my childlike eyes, I imagine it as the ocean, teeming with fish. My dad and I used to go to that lake a lot. I would fall in, flailing around in a foot of water, and make my dad save me. I always was prone to theatrics. During those times, I never questioned why he was always at home. When he watched me drown, was there an instant when he thought about letting it happen? Was there the impulse to do it himself?

Teeming with fish. We would fish, or at least in my memory we did. Although I'm quite certain my family has never owned a fishing rod, and I'm not really sure if my dad knows how to fish. But when we went to the lake, which was right next to our house then, it was for the purpose of fishing. They said, despite my protestations, that I was too little to hold a rod, so I was relegated to netting duty. I had this tiny Fisher-Price fishing net that I really thought would catch a fish one day, despite the fact that it never had before.

One day- and this is the memory I remember, really remember, everything else is a retroactive jumble of feelings and stories from my mother and childhood photographs in scrapbooks- I looked down at the tiny net, clutched in between my two hamlike fists, poised just above the surface of the clear blue water, and saw a gaping hole in the bottom. And I remember a deep feeling of disappointment. Because now I knew that I would never, ever catch a fish.

I am standing by a lake as big as the ocean somewhere in Virginia, tears running down my face and fish swimming out of the hole in my net. They slip through my fingers, and I never see them again.

Closets

I'm eight years old, or nine, or seven. One of those ages when your body is still your body, not marred by hatred or loathing or imposed politics. My body is still my body, and I am small enough to fit into several closets inside our home. This home is again, someplace in southern Virginia, but it is not the same house that was next to the lake. I don't think about catching fish anymore. Instead, I play in closets.

My sister has her own room in the house, while I have to share a room with my parents. I am too young to question the fairness of this situation, or the normalcy. I like sleeping in my parents' room, hearing the gentle exhales of my mother and the heavy sputters of my father. My sleep comes easier, knowing they are still alive. Before I go to bed, I make sure everyone in the house is asleep and alive. Then, I perform a

complicated ritual of childhood neuroticism, checking all the doors and windows of the house to make sure they are locked. I triple-check the door to the backyard. I do not trust the others to do this- I have found a cracked window, an unlocked side door, too many times. I come back to the room I share with my parents, and if I am still scared that a murderer will come into the house and kill us all in our sleep, I curl up beside my mother in bed. In the middle of the night, my father, weary with sleep and pushed to the very side of the bed, will get up and sleep in my twin-sized bed, surrounded by a cheap white canopy. In my mind, having a canopy bed makes me one step closer to the heroines of my favorite books, *A Little Princess* and *The Secret Garden* and *Anne of Green Gables*.

I am a very nervous child, and I have seen too many *Criminal Minds* episodes with my sister. In one, a serial killer breaks into a family's house and kills everyone, except for a young boy hidden inside of a closet. Through the slats of the closet door, the boy watches his entire family get murdered. This experience turns the boy into a serial killer. In another, two men break into the apartment of a blind woman and attempt to rape her. The woman begs the men to instead rape her son, who has been hiding in the closet. I think the woman was faking being blind, but that's irrelevant to the story. Anyways, the rape and betrayal from his mother turns the boy into a serial rapist, or a serial killer, or some combination of the two. I am afraid that something like this will happen to me while I am in the closets of my house. Perhaps even as a child, I know there is something breakable within me, something that can twist itself bitter and serial and criminal, if something I see from a closet alters my world and family forever.

The closet in my sister's room is huge. An entire VCR TV fits in here with us. We lay a sleeping bag on the floor sometimes and have sleepovers, but usually I am in here without her. I don't know where she is when I stay here, but it feels like I'm in her room more than she is. I pretend I am Harriet the Spy, making a secret hideaway. I read tons of books here with a flashlight, and then end up falling asleep until she comes back and kicks me out. I watch Disney movies on VHS. My favorite is *Pocahontas*; I like the raccoon.

The closet downstairs, in my father's study room, is small and filled with boxes. We still sometimes go there and play, pretending we're in Narnia. Giggles and whispers escape from the closet, disturbing my father while he works relentlessly on passing a college Algebra class. My sister, always the aggravator, one time makes fun of my father for learning the same math as she is at her middle school. He gets angry at the noise, bellowing that he can't focus because of the kids he chose to have. He throws the heavy Algebra textbook at our heads, and it hits the wall. I want my mother, but she does not live with us anymore. She works in North Carolina now, driving seven hours twice a month to see us. I keep a journal to tell her what my life has been like in the weeks we do not see each other. I do not write about the closets.