

paula says whenever she gets on the bus she sees the dead bodies from “law & order.” actresses pretending to be dead & raped, because *isn't that the closest thing to being a woman*. paula bunches at the knees like stiff jeans, says she could teach me how to swim. we paint our eyes & put on aprons. paula curls the tips of her hair & we walk to wal-mart wearing bangles from wrist to elbow & buy toe-rings & bright scarves, put our lips on crooked in the dark &

—do you know all the things that i've done?

paula carries salt everywhere. says it's for protection. she coughs up lilacs & thinks i don't know. tuesdays at 6 we watch the loose girls play doctor with boys behind the mall. paula asks if i masturbate, says never mind cause i won't tell the truth. she says that her room is decorated with pictures of devon sawa & isn't it stupid that jesus let himself die like that & isn't it sad that she bleeds for 7 days. she says it's complicated. we shoot cassette tapes into the river & cry & suddenly it isn't. i tell her the marigolds in my lawn bloom orange & maybe that's where i get it from. after awhile, she says my face is like holding milk up to light. we watch fire ants burrow in the sky.

that summer we put pennies in the bathtub, wrote each other letters & watched them grow. we said *candyman* into the mirror 5x & waited for his honey-soaked-hook to snatch us. paula went around in furious pastels & watershed vocabulary, slipped through a keyhole on a dare. in the courtyard she'd stalk boys who cut themselves & i would always watch. paula would run from 1 block to the other asking strangers if she could borrow nail clippers. she took ephedra by the handfuls & laughed outside the doors of nursing homes. paula asked me, would i lick the bees for her? would i keep her stapled to the backs of books?