

# Surface Tension

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## Detachment

We had been released from one side of the country and dropped onto the other, landing in a dollhouse surrounded by pine trees taller than anything I'd seen, nestled in a neighborhood so thickly forested I thought we'd moved into a campground. I was comforted because the pines reminded me of what we'd left behind; I expected to be absorbed. But where other regions might have put welcoming gardens, our houses had undulating mounds of needles and only azaleas thrived in their acidic soil; the stifled light that barely filtered down prevented anything else from growing. So I would sit on the swing on our gracious front porch, beneath our slanted roofline, set back far enough from the road that I could barely be seen; in the middle of our suburban neighborhood, on the busiest street in the whole subdivision, I would sit out there and no one saw me.

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## Flotation

There was a drainage ditch that snaked through the whole neighborhood, running behind our houses, connecting us all from Westhaven through Club Pines and over to Dunhaven. Once, I released a pet crayfish into its shallow mud-choked waters, tired of the rancid marine smell in my bedroom; it had been a prize I'd won in school that I no longer needed because once I'd taken ownership

and publicly named it after the girls whose favor I hoped to curry, we both lost our value. I dumped the goldfish bowl and didn't even wait to see if Julie Betsy Lindsay tried to swim to its hopeless future or if it hovered on the surface, waiting to be taken back. If you want to live, you have to adapt.

I fantasized that, during hurricane season, when it rained hard and the waters rose, I would take a raft down the ditch, paddling through the neighborhood; I would encroach on their property, belonging for that brief moment, and they'd never know.

### **Suspension**

50 | There were train tracks backboning the neighborhood, and I wonder what would have happened if I'd received the adolescence I claimed I'd wanted. I believed in the myth of rednecks making out in the abandoned, rusted old car beside the tracks; believed in the fluids spilling all over the seats; believed the dirt-clod-clotted field must have seen all those kids running, hiding, dropping down out of sight, fumbling with clothes, rolling the cigarettes. I believed in the old tobacco shack at the edge of the field that must have seen bottles and bottles of smuggled alcohol, the pop tabs that must be buried under all that dirt, and I would wonder if, when the teenagers' teenagers were grown, the neighborhood would have to sprawl across the field to make way for newcomers; if, when they'd excavate the detritus, someone would try to piece a life together with the artifacts they'd found, or if, unlike me, they already knew what happened below the surface. I only knew I hadn't broken through.