

Excerpt from “The Neighborhood Watch”

The barometer drops and my eye opens up like a set of refracted crystals, the eye of a mosquito that develops an array of faces, half a picture. Taking care of the kids like this is difficult. I feel especially alone in these moments. I’m sitting with an ice pack behind my neck. I imagine writing an essay where the reader sits on a block of ice and tries to slide across the floor with their feet highlighting pre-placed words as they go. The words would be: propeller, lasso, scratch, ping, lift, off, now. Add a strobe light and yes, some smoke. I dare you.

Z is on the floor playing out her own story. “Who are you today?” her dolls say to each other. Today, I am a sick mother.

I imagine writing an essay in which cis-gendered straight men sit in a circle with their eyes closed meditating on the inner turmoil, inner worry of the world without any thought of self-preservation or self-interest. They just melt like ice cubes, all over the floor then reconstitute themselves in compassion without a thread of defensiveness. These beings are no longer ready to work. They are ready to work together.

It is two summers later: I am shuttling my daughter between occupational therapist, play therapist, neurologist. It is the summer of children being separated from their parents at the border. Between the summer of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling I have listened through the season of Las Vegas, Stoneman Douglas. I wonder after the others who have lived these seasons. What follows for them? What do the daily logistics of managing and recovering from trauma, the paperwork look like? Who gets to be safe? Who gets to be repaired?

The “swimming pool incident” has become a defining moment in my children’s lives. (*Are we going to the pool? Will the bad man be there?*) Both remember. (*Is the bad guy in jail? In*

jail, is there cactus on the floor?) For my youngest child, it's perhaps one of her first memories. Managing the aftermath of the trauma itself has made me less able to participate in a public domestic life. I continue to wonder where to put my weight, my time, my energy but this is mostly a moot question; I have no time to spare now. *(I'm still hungry!)* The doctor's appointments eat up all the spare time. All the spare cash. We are reduced, my children and I, to our symptoms, our appointment times, our co-pays. *(The good problem is that I love you!)* The ordinary violence of my life has not improved my understanding of this world; it has propelled me into another dimension where so many other people have been living unbenonced to me. I join them having accrued no additional wisdom, understanding, "silver lining."