

Sisters

Let's begin by stating that my sister is dead.

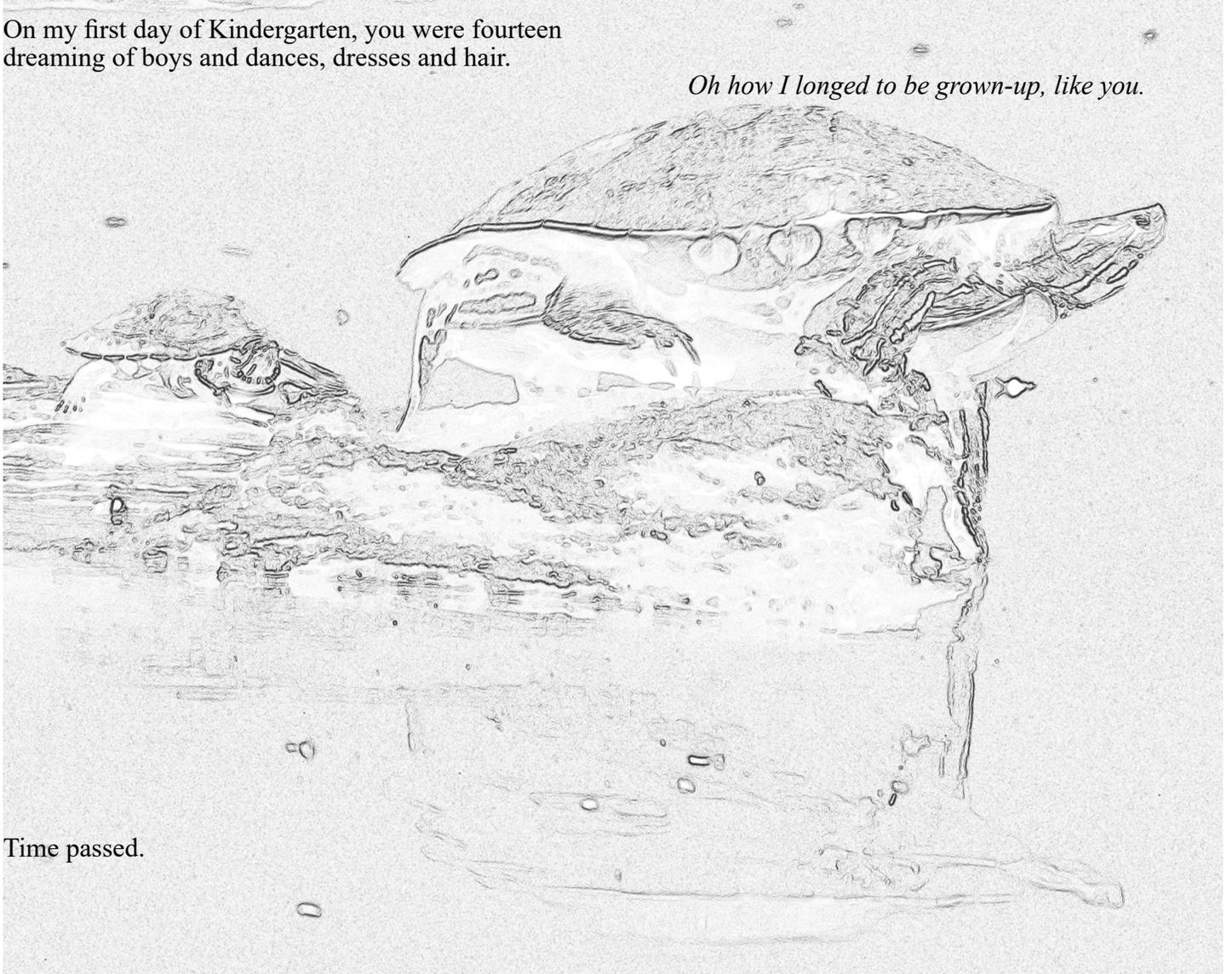
Let's begin by acknowledging that she is gone. It doesn't matter why. Don't say that she should have quit smoking years ago, before the irreversible damage was done. That is irrelevant. The end was rough. The things I always meant to say remain, and will remain forever, unsaid.

To my sister:

When I was born, you were ten
with no need for a baby sister.

On my first day of Kindergarten, you were fourteen
dreaming of boys and dances, dresses and hair.

Oh how I longed to be grown-up, like you.



Time passed.

You left home,
already dating your future husband
and dreaming of happiness of the June Cleaver variety,
while I was outside playing Batman and Robin with the neighborhood kids.

Time passed.

We grew up on opposite sides of Janis Joplin.

You tried to teach me the ways of your world.

(I was not a good student)

“Would you be my bridesmaid? I’ll sign you up for the Jenny Craig program so you can lose some weight and look pretty for my wedding.”

Sure! Umm...thanks?

“Now that you’re engaged, are you going to give up that Ph.D. program? Your husband’s needs always come first. That’s **my** secret to a happy marriage”

Nope. My marriage will be fine.

“You’re expecting! That is so great! So, when is your last day of work?”

I’m not quitting.

(A lot of people asked that question ... including my boss)

“A second child? Wonderful! NOW you’ll quit your job, right? I am SO lucky that I didn’t have to work. Tim takes such good care of me and the kids.”

I don’t have to work. I want to work. If I focus all my energy on those two babies, they will end up in therapy, no doubt.

(They did anyway. Life is complicated.)

“I don’t need to pay attention to what’s happening in the world. I am content in my own little cocoon. Tim will keep us safe. I’ll let other people do the worrying.”

What if something happens to Tim?

“I went to Mom’s apartment today. Oh my God, she has too much shit. I took a big load of her books to the library. It looks so much better now. She’ll be happy when she gets home from the hospital”

You did what? She loves those books. Why would you do that?

An ocean and a desert, separated by jagged mountains, steep and treacherous.

And more time passed.

At seventy-seven, you lay bony and frail.
Bedridden, oxygen flowing 24/7.
Dependent, like a child, on your child.

You seemed happy to see me and we shared old stories.
We avoided the jagged places and maintained peace.

The ocean and the desert remained distant.
I wish it were otherwise.

Hospice kept you comfortable, but there was no future.

The ocean and desert can never meet.

And yet,

We shared so much history
Mangled memories, silent secrets, kept even from ourselves.

I try to remember, to understand.
I wish I could ask you.

We hid behind veneers,
Each in our own way, wearing the costumes
Of the women we wished we were.

Those two women were light years apart.
but perhaps not.

We both loved flowers, birds
me in the wild, you in your yard or photographs.

We both loved theater,
me in the audience, you onstage, backstage, anywhere near the stage.

We both loved a good laugh,
And would have benefited from a few tears.

We both loved....
Yes, even each other.