**the devil may actually be down in georgia after all**

momma always said that the devil lived in georgia,

that he sat and drank sweet iced tea on the south carolina coast,

and kissed girls who got too drunk in tallahassee.

momma had a lot of things to say about those girls,

the ones with the fruity margaritas and loose lips.

transplants, she’d call ‘em.

transplants of what I don’t quite know.

she warned me not to be one of those girls,

the ones who came down from college in new york, boston, even those half-baked west coast sunshine villas.

they’re the ones in the short skirts who chew their gum way too loud, she’d say.

don’t be like that.

she taught me other things, too.

like how to ride a bike

and how to tell if the boy from down the street actually wants to have supper with you

or if he just wants to stick his hand down your pants.

maybe that’s why she didn’t want me heading out with jimmy to graceland,

but grandpops talked her into it.

life experience, he’d call it,

the type of things he always dreamed of.

before this I’d never left georgia,

spent all my holidays knee deep in the chattahoochee river

or pulling weeds at granny’s house in oconee.

alabama and tennessee are a whole nother world to me.

we cross the border as dawn breaks.

jimmy’s behind the wheel, me half asleep next to him.

the sticky air makes his hair cling to his forehead.

I think it looks real cute like that.

jimmy’s a sweetheart, honest.

he works at margie’s over the summer,

doling out ice cream to sun-tired kids

and spending weekends driving out to hunt in blue ridge with his pa.

he’s wanted to show me graceland for a while.

said he drove out there once and spent the whole trip thinking of me.

grandpops played lotta elvis music when he drove me to school -

I’ve loved it ever since.

huntsville’s bigger than I expected, and louder.

memphis makes me feel like

georgia’s a million miles behind me now.

graceland makes my insides bloom,

filled with love.

jimmy takes me out to dinner after and kisses me;

he makes my insides bloom too.

the drive back is quiet, but the sweet kind.

we agree not to tell momma ‘bout the kiss,

that’s for the two of us.

we’re welcomed home with peach cobbler and hugs.

sometimes I sit and wonder if jimmy’s the devil,

with his smooth talking and promises.

he left me positively dizzy when we kissed in tennessee,

just like momma warned me he would.

but maybe my momma’s the devil,

with her hatred of love and of sunshine and freedom.

those coastal girls ain’t never done nothing to her,

but how she hates them so.

who knows: maybe I am.

momma said the devil lives in georgia,

but I think the devil lives in all of us,

somewhere, somehow,

and we just gotta find the strength to kick him out,

to kiss boys and pull weeds and drink cocktails,

to work long hours and sip sweet tea,

to sit in the sticky, summer heat, and know we’re not quite so alone.

**the girl you wanna be**

*shoutout to the person you want to be. the person you might be willing to die to be.*

pretty, pretty, pretty.

soft and sugar sweet.

rose lipstick lingering on envelope corners.

pink mushroom earrings,

white polka dots

and shiny gold hooks.

tulle, cotton, slow spun wool.

pinks, yellows, a touch of off-white.

each material, color, everything

just as soft as she is.

makes you feel like sunshine,

golden rays of joy.

tastes like spearmint gum

and dried rose petals.

i cannot even begin to imagine

how beautiful it would feel

to be pretty, pretty, pretty

and oh so soft and sugar sweet.

**Four-Move Checkmate (The Scholar’s Mate)**

PAWN TO E4

the first time I played,

a boy with a bowl cut and gap teeth

told me that I had to protect my king

“I get him, you lose”

can a kingdom not function without a king?

can a queen not do the same as he can?

(better even, maybe?)

that day he beat me in six moves,

yelling checkmate

and rocking on his heels

as I sat, thinking of the lonely queen idle on her throne of off-white canvas.

BISHOP TO C4

a chess board arrived in the mail,

three thursdays into september,

a thick slab of marble

and dust coated crystals.

I bought it second-hand

from an estate sale in arkansas.

it was too heavy to fly back with,

but completely worth the $50 shipping fee.

it was how I learned to love,

how I learned to grieve,

to celebrate and to laugh.

**yosemite in may**

sticky, honey sweet sap dripping, dripping down onto my feet Where I stand beneath the grandeur of a ponderosa pine Where royal arch cascade shines in the light of daybreak straight ahead Where a mother fed her month old cubs last night Where thousands of heartbeats have stood Where I can smell the pine and hear the birds and feel the sticky, honey sweet sap dripping, dripping