Tabernacle for an Adolescence

The science experiments gone awry. The skulls of vermin and the black silk ribbon strung through them. The lamp she tied them to. The light she never left on. The place to bury cicada husks. The place to buy purple face glitter. The surface disorder. The forest and that one clearing swollen and yellow through the hacksaw trees. The sexy forest where she chose one man over another with her mouth. The fizz in the medicine. The stomach of noise. The faucets rusted out on the side of the house like sentinels. The floodlights turned off. The lake with all those leeches. The way they mirrored fucking—find something and attach yourself. The dock built in the middle of the lake she could never bring herself to swim to. The fish that appeared to be drowning. The uncanny light on the teeth they never had. The water plants recoiled so as not to have to touch her skin. The scream in the middle of the night in the town she forgot owned her. The hoot of the train as it mocked her staying there. The apples she whittled into pipes and the weed she forgot in another state. The lunch she forgot at her desk and the mold on the wheat bread. The man on the trolley who told her he’d certainly save her if she was drowning. The microscope her mother practiced scrutiny on. The antidote to all those pills she was taking. The walls with scrawled song lyrics and the irony in the rap music she memorized. The foreign exchange student and all her cigarettes. The stuffed owl in her grandmother’s house. The little boxes she collected. The boxes made in woodshop to hide her pills. The forest her father drove into to take her home. The dress he made her out of an old tweed jacket to hide her bare body. The instruments her mother used to pick her apart. The camera her father set up in the living room to reconstruct her face. The birthday cake slapped on her lap and the sleeves of the dress dragging in the chocolate frosting. The candles fallen to the carpet around her socks and the fire she might have been able to stomp out, had she not been still in the forest, a stump of a girl. The fire that started every time she came home and all those photographs nuzzled into her hand when she woke up in the trees. The mouths of fish hung above her. Proof she was not some experiment. The proof that she was.