

Elliot Smith
Sponsor: Melody Armstrong

"Things I Never Learned"

They say grief is loud,
a cracking, a storm.

But mine is quiet.

It lives in the space
between what I know
and what I was supposed to have.

Like how to braid hair.

I know the steps.
Three strands.
Left over middle,
right over left,
repeat until something beautiful forms.

But I never had
another head of hair
to practice on.

No one sitting cross-legged
in front of me,
complaining when I pulled too hard,
laughing when I messed it up.

Just empty hands
holding nothing but my own tears.

They do not talk about that part.

I do not miss memories.
I miss possibilities.

The sleepovers that never happened.
The arguments that would not have lasted.
The small, ordinary things
that needed two people.

And the braids.

Because I could have learned
on my own hair, maybe.

But it is not the same
as learning on someone else,
someone who stays still
because they trust you.

Someone who is yours.

Sometimes I stand in the mirror,
trying anyway,
fingers clumsy,
sections uneven.

Left over middle.
Right over left.

But it falls apart
every time.

Because there are some things
you cannot learn alone.

And I was meant
to have you there,
sitting in front of me,
within reach--

But I never did.