

**for jaycee**

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the bonds of my adolescence, broken  
once unknowing of the fate in which i would receive.  
my captivity.

i made friends with the shadows of these bare walls that refuse to break,  
i hide my face from the man who took my  
innocence away from me,  
a feature i should have had by default.

all things that i thought mattered, turned to dust with the slap of those  
handcuffs against my wrists.

the bonds of my adolescence, broken.  
broken like the earthenware of my existence,  
the security of my body is replaced with the reassurance  
that even though it hurts,  
his pleasure to feast upon a *child* is more important.

freedom is foreign.  
the battered-down shed is now my fortress,  
i am locked away, waiting for my prayers to be answered.

regretting the moment i walked out the door,  
the day my reality looked me in the eyes.

regretting the moment i froze in shock,  
the moment my hand touched the pinecone  
that symbolizes all that was taken from me,  
wasn't instead the hand of an angel, guiding me home.

fear kept me alive,  
but my captor kept me closer.  
those 18 lonely years of unwanted dependence  
on a monster.

my journey is nor beautiful or great,  
but my journey is *real*,  
because surviving is not living,  
and the anchor that lured me in did not come up to shore willingly.

a child by the age of fourteen,  
two by the age of seventeen,  
and though they grew inside of me,  
with me,  
to him, they weren't rightfully mine.

he did not buy me on a shelf,  
or a clearance rack,  
in a garage sale,  
but somehow he owned me.

unable to say my own name  
for eighteen years.

trauma held my hand,  
fear put a plastic bag over my head,  
sorrow tied me down,

but still, none of them  
amounted to the  
c r i m e s  
my enslaver committed.

the first night i was convinced it was a dream,  
a nightmare that would be ended as fast as it had begun.  
then, as i woke with the stench of reality clinging to my nostrils,  
i understood.

nightmares can be real,  
they can touch you without consent,  
in ways unimaginable to an eleven-year-old,  
nightmares can throw you in a labyrinth,  
given only the clothes on your back and a beast  
without dignity or morals to keep you company.

but if can you escape the  
nightmare,

handcuffs,  
labyrinth,  
shed,  
beast,

then the nightmare is nothing more than a dream too long