

grouper

my mom and i sit in her white suburban in the seafood market parking lot, six miles from where i was born a crackly red shrimp.

i tell her about the girl i miss and the owner of the turkish restaurant who chased us

down with the purse we forgot in the booth. i've stopped hesitating when saying

"she"

and my mom has retired from puckering her lips like she's pocketing cotton balls in her cheeks

at the mention of long hair or painted fingernails. the grouper behind the counter is baby-skin pink and fresh. i will get married

one day, maybe five, maybe ten years from now. how many cotton balls will caterpillar their way

back into my mother's mouth then? but for now we are just me and her and the dead fish in the trunk.

it hardly smells of anything at all except the ocean.