Sardines: A Novella
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I have spent this summer working on a novella, which will become my senior honors project this coming year. Its working title is Sardines, which reflects the project’s exploration of claustrophobic spaces, among other things.

The story is set in a coastal Maine town and follows an insular family and their interactions with the outside world. Specifically, it centers on their fourteen-year-old daughter, who has been home-schooled all her life and is just beginning to encounter kids her own age. As she struggles to understand the workings of this new teenage world, the adult world around her seems just as strange and opaque. Meanwhile, neighbors and relatives start to invade the insular space of the family’s home. Some of the themes I’ve had in mind while writing include loneliness, isolation, and claustrophobia—ideas that I see exemplified in the coastal setting. My protagonist goes to the ocean as a place of escape. She sees it by turns as liberating and confining to stand before the open but uncrossable space that is the water. She also grapples with the difference between finding and stealing, and what it means to call something her own.

My methods this summer have involved lots of time writing in the library. However, I also read extensively, taking notes on my readings and how they relate to my project. Some of my most helpful readings included Black Swan Green by David Mitchell, The Body by Stephen King, The Street of Crocodiles by Bruno Schulz, Project X by Jim Shepard, The Giant’s House by Elizabeth McCracken, The Member of the Wedding by Carson McCullers, and short stories by Joy Williams. I chose these works for their focus on teenagers, their form as short novels, and their writing styles. One of the most important things I’ve taken from my readings is just how careful women need to be when writing about women, particularly about teenage girls. It can be easy for readers to dismiss these stories as frivolous or girly. As I move forward, I hope to imitate the coldness of Joy Williams’s style and the unsentimental emotion of Carson McCullers’s, as well as the dark and fantastical atmosphere of Bruno Schulz.

The summer has been instrumental in giving me a solid foundation for my work this fall. In the past few months I have rewritten and restructured extensively, and even rethought things as basic as my character’s gender. I’ve found myself reflecting deeply on fundamental things like point of view and tense, now that I am committing to these choices for a longer story than I’ve ever written before. My writing this summer has served mainly to develop atmosphere and setting and to get a feel for my characters. This semester, I will be focusing more on plot and tension.

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