

CHELSEA COUPAL

## ORTHODONTICS

I bumped into your sister in August. Somehow, summer feels far away even in the middle of it; melancholy, even in August,

this heat. She has the same mouth as you. The way her lips fold over her teeth, the way her smile curves downward.

I haven't seen you in five years. Your teeth were tucked away, peas behind smooth shells, or beads. I used to run my tongue across them.

I still bite my nails until they hurt, still write you alive at night sometimes. I went to the orthodontist finally. I pretend we're walking

to your mother's grave, sun breathing on the backs of our necks, hair on my arms standing on end. August, early evening, melancholy.

The bright moon, already open, one pearl. Somehow you felt far away even in the middle of it. I haven't seen those places in years.

But they show up unannounced; the way rain comes, and you can smell how dry it's been, the dust that's settled over everything.

She really does have the same mouth as you, lips that fold together, tidy as a note. I bumped into her in August. She knew me right away.

I pretended I don't still hold those days between my fingertips, even though I run my tongue over the front tooth I chipped

around midnight fifteen years ago on a Bohemian beer bottle. I still do. He asked if I wanted braces. But teeth are bones, aren't they?

Orthodontists force them into straight lines slowly. Our teeth say who we are.  
Yet over and over, we force them together, slowly. These beads, bones, and pearls.