

Alone

Jacqueline Woodson

Some days I wear alone like a coat, like a hood draping from my head that first warm day of spring, like socks bunching up inside my sneakers. Like that.

Alone is how I walk some days, with my hands shoved deep in my pockets, with my head down, walking against the day, into it then out again.

Alone is the taste in my mouth some mornings, like morning breath, like hunger. It's lumpy oatmeal for breakfast when Mama doesn't have time to cook and I still don't know how much oatmeal and water and milk will make it all right. It's Raphael and Sean, my supposed-to-be homeboys going off without me to catch the new Spike Lee flick in Manhattan, then running up to me in the park where I'm shooting hoops by myself, and having the nerve to tell me all about it. "But why didn't ya'll come get me?" I ask, and they shrug, say, "We figured you were in your house wanting to be alone."

Some days alone creeps between my shoulder blades and hollows me out.

Today, alone is a pair of new Calvin Kleins wrapped up in white tissue, folded neat inside a brown box from Macy's. Today, alone is this empty house and a tiny note beside the box: Dear Melanin Sun, I miss you. Love, Ma.