The Departed Girl

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Abstract
This poem is inspired by a participant in Sunde-Peterson’s (2014) case study that explored how a gifted youth faced adversity. The participant who inspired the subject of this poem faced much trauma; Sunde-Peterson was interested in how this impacted her development, while this poem attempts to imagine her escape beyond the data collection period. Like Sunde-Peterson, the speaker of this poem also posits that how gifted youth respond to trauma warrants more attention.

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Keywords
poem, girlhood, runaway, trauma, coming-of-age

Cover Page Footnote
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She grew up without help in a town too small for her. Everyone knew it. Her eyes were wider than others’—she could see farther than the church and the school—both full of books she read long ago, like Matilda, who could never be satiated by the religiously curated words.

She became a real-life doll to the adults who cared for her. She was their confidante, keeper of secrets. She would listen and stare back with those glass eyes and flattened hair from too much time on her back, trying to quiet her thinking self. She began to learn that support would come for her “from the outside.”

Her departure was distressing; the player rejects the toy when it’s ready, not the other way around. She turned her glass eyes to a stranger she spent time getting angry at institutions with before leaving him for someone who read as much as her and could also cross borders.

Through moments of troubled autonomy and after finally finding a focus, she burned her possessions and became an advocate instead of a poppet, inhabiting soft skin this time that could be touched. She was a good fit in this new environment of confirmation, a sense-making process analyzed and therefore, valued.