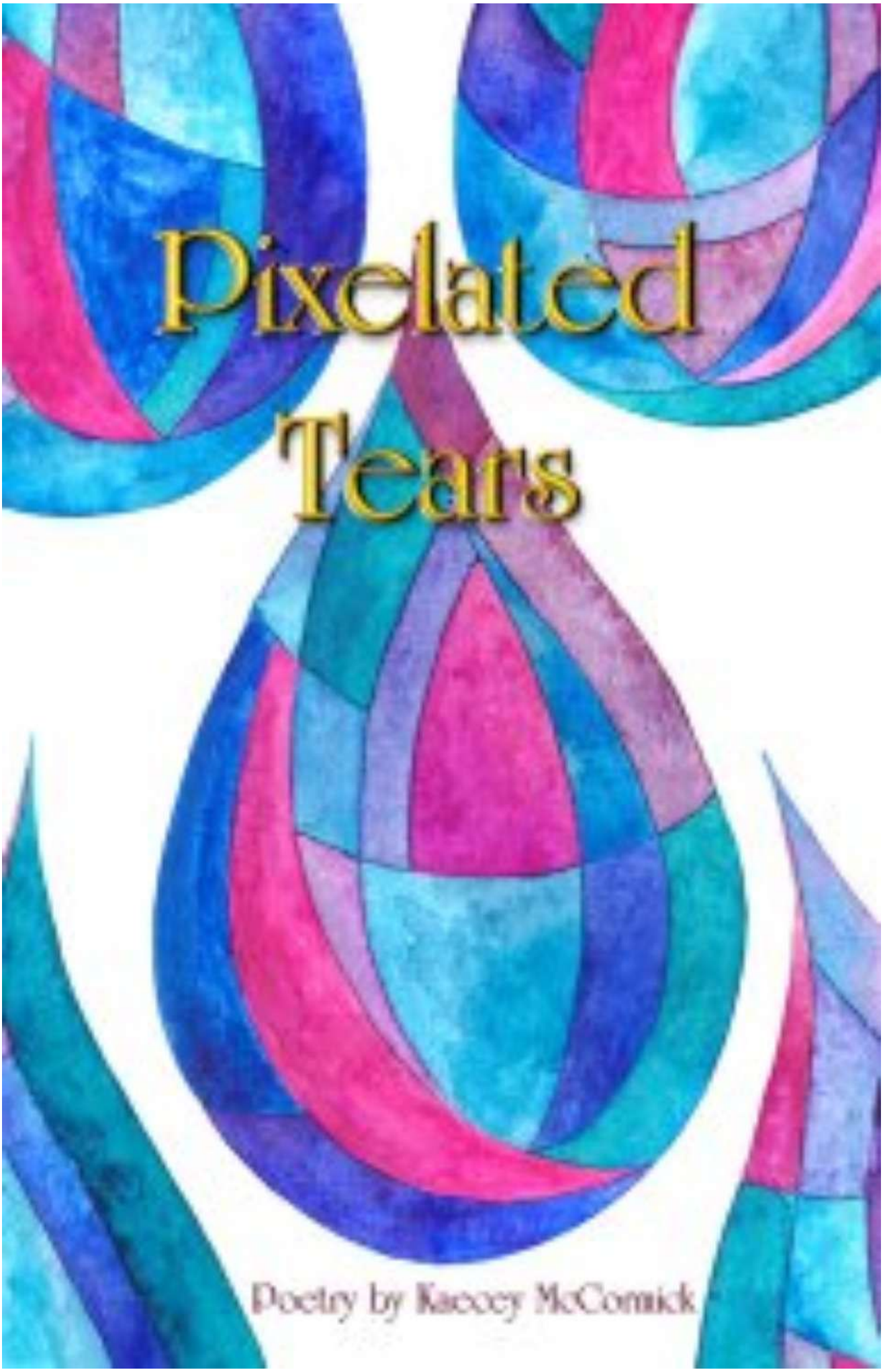

Pixelated
Tears
Poetry by Kaecey McCormick

BECAUSE I NEVER LEARNED THE NAME OF TREES

I couldn't name them, so I called to them in my head with the made-up titles from childhood dreams and fairytales, bestowing royalty on the silent stewards who lived in my backyard and the woods down the street.

A few answered.

They let me scale their smoothskin trunks and back into their thick boughs. When I rubbed my arms with their sharp-smelling leaves they laughed with silent shakes that rustled their branches and tickled my toes.

I smelled like a forest of nameless trees.

Others teased me, like the tight circle of babushkas, stout and squat, gathered close to gossip about the balding, lonely neighbor who stood on the hill next door or the barefoot girl hiding beneath their skirts.

I licked the blood from my fingertips where their needles pricked.

Another dropped me, her rippled, dry bark cracking beneath my fairylight body, her crumbled skin turning to dust under my sweating palms until her warped arm snapped and delivered me to the mossy floor.

I hid a match in the plaster cast on my arm.

THE BARN

you enter that space
where nothing can follow
not even dreams

and breathe deep the dry air
until you reach the place
where the light falls

from two panes and shadows
flicker across the floor
covered in cast-off cigarette packs

in the spot where you once
stood on the threshold of being a girl
and being a woman

and there you stop
and listen for her voice or
watch for the flowers on her skirt

THOUGHTS ON MY FATHER

In the shady afternoon before they arrived, I slid
a threadbare footstool to the basin and reached
still-chubby fingers to the medicine chest where the box
of shaving potions and magic brushes lived.

And breathed in the spice and tang from the forever-wet tips.
And painted my face with imaginary foam.

I made believe I was hi-ho off to work and slapped
elixir from the crimson sailboats on my cheeks,
inhaled the smell, which lingered everywhere –
the ratty green towel next to the sink,
his worn blue robe that drooped from a peg
in lifeless tribute to a weary man.

I felt him holding me as I peered at the glass,
hoped he would walk up from behind and follow me to the yard
where I climbed the leaning eucalyptus, or hid between the
skin-prickling
bushes and watched the cars arrive and crowd together too close,
like surging fans swelling toward a stage.

I think he was there – a ribbon of scent from an enchanted bottle
that I'd visit each day and one time stole to put under my pillow.

FERRIS WHEEL ON SANTA MONICA PIER

I open myself to the next raucous round,
sweaty flesh pressed tight inside my
gate. They'll use me for their pleasure then leave
me, tired and sagging, my once bright paint
fading under the infinite rub of salty air.

I long to close my eyes and ears, escape the unending buzz,
children laughing children crying parents scolding lovers loving.

Even when they're gone it continues –
the bickering of gulls fighting for the last crumb,
the endless beating of the sea upon the shore, upon the piles,
marking time in a slow decay,
a slow wearing away.

I want to rise, soar above the trees and seaside roofs,
drink in the silence which beckons from the space
between the water and the sky.

But I am held back,
back by the dirty castoffs,
detritus of the endless horde,
an empty popcorn container,
a single, dirty shoe.

HOW TO UNCOUPLE, IN BRIEF

You need a notarized list of assets
described in detail
with dated receipts
if possible
if you want to enforce the
full extent of the prenup.

Be brief, but thorough.

Brief, like the coupling –
a mock trial practice marriage,
a thorough test of our ability to
uphold an oath
resist perjuring ourselves
remain civil.

We couldn't.

Now a jury or judge
will determine whose claim
to uphold,
will decide who
shirked who.
But we'll both pay the
endless billable hours in
irreversible years.

THANKS

We sit on the cool rocks and watch the stars swing past the moon
kicking up the dirt, dropping pixelated tears as they go.

It's seeing this with you against the silhouette of our grief:
the burned dreams, the small mounds of dirt under too-large stones,
our fingers reaching for each other's in the dark.

Their laughter breaks the glass of our memories
turns our shroud to dust, tugs at our lips and pulls up the corners.
It dries our eyes with handkerchiefs sewn from patchwork dresses
dyed in kindergarten colors and floats us toward the harvest moon –

raises our eyes from the dead.

I'm watching you smile as you watch their joy and a quiet thrill grabs
my throat because I know what we have though not enough is
enough.

And my fingers
as they stroke the soft flesh on the inside of your arm
whisper thanks.