

The background is a watercolor illustration. It features several pieces of brown, textured cardboard or paper, some of which are folded or layered, set against a light blue, textured background. The overall style is soft and artistic, with visible brushstrokes and color blending.

## Letter to My Thirteen-Year-Old Self

I still keep your secrets. Keep them stowed  
as in a place that needs electric light at midday.  
A place always damp. I do not judge them or you,  
even late on a Sunday when I visit them, careful  
not to dirty my clothes with dust or the sprinkling  
of black mold that lies across the cardboard boxes,  
now soft, and ShopRite bags in which they're held.  
I flip a milk crate to sit on, gingerly open  
a box flap, and lift them out like China plates,  
each cushioned in a sleeve of folded Styrofoam.  
And mark what's still sharp: the silver trim  
around the edges, the plain translucence  
of what a person does when they stand  
with their back turned to the core of themselves,  
when they reach for themselves with eyes  
clenched shut. It stays with me like a cairn,  
the untidy pile they make: the boxes, bags  
bulging, the glimpses of what no one should ever  
have done, or have had to do. I try always  
to find for them and you a little compassion:  
for silences behind a locked bathroom door, for  
a toilet flushed twice. The compassion extends even  
here, now, to this moment. Your secrets are safe.