

Her brother snorts cocaine in the bathtub, so she pretends he's asleep. Arms over his chest, knees drawn, body curled. Brunette curls feather over closed eyes. Jacket for a pillow. In this reality, she'll avoid the door only to not disturb him. He'll be safe, half-wombed in porcelain, won't hurt himself – and she won't hurt him.

Before, they had a routine: one monthly call, in the morning. She'd lounge on her balcony, sunrise hazed over the skyline, phone cord tangled around her wrist. He'd stand in a phone booth after stealing cigarettes from the gas station, probably. He'd claim he quit smoking and she couldn't call out his lie because she hadn't seen him in two years. He still went to Church, apparently. It was the same conversation every time: he'd talk of the rabbits in the pine forest behind their old house; she'd talk of how the sun glossed against skyscrapers. All she wanted was to fairy-tale the city, her life. The freedom of balcony lounges, of growing pot on your windowsill and not going to Church on Sundays. They never talked about how she just left him. They never talked about how he let her leave.

The ritual allowed them to pretend nothing changed. She can still tell him to quit smoking and he can still call her Dotty instead of Dorothy. She doesn't call him anything. Co-workers think she's an only child. She tells strangers at bars that she has a brother, but only a brother. It creates a healthy distance. On the phone, she cringed whenever he called himself her *twin* brother. That he'll visit for *their* birthday. So she shouldn't have been shocked when he appeared on her doorstep, thirty minutes to midnight. In his face, she saw herself: her drugstore foundation in his freckles, her Valium prescription in his dark circles, her bathtub breakdowns in his red-rimmed eyes. He was taller now, hair longer, unruly curls teased the bottom of his neck. A golden hoop pierced his right ear. He wore a red corduroy jacket, the yellow 50% tag dangling from the bottom. Indigo and turquoise swirled across his button up,

a cyan lighter stuck out his chest pocket. He strode in like it was his own apartment. Up close, his eyes were as big as magic eight balls.

She should check on him, so she drifts from the kitchen to the hallway, sits underneath the window, knees drawn to her chest. Above her, a streetlight bleeds into the glass. Mice jitter inside the walls. He must be asleep. She should sleep, so she doesn't disturb him. She should make him breakfast for the morning, because it's their birthday, but all she has is rancid oranges, expired milk and a wilting basil plant. Before he appeared, she ate canned pineapples while she flicked through grocery coupons. She wanted to cry. She wants to cry. She thought he'd gone into the bathroom to cry. She didn't know he did cocaine. The bathroom is quiet, the door ajar, light spilling into the hallway.

Before the cocaine, he wanted to look at the stars. They'd grown up on farmland cratered in a pine forest, where the night sky was so clear, stars winked at them. At twenty-three, clouds and city polluted the sky. The moon filtered through like a car headlight. Streetlights and buildings constellated the city. The skyline juttled up and down, up and down like a heart monitor and he asked her, is this what being free looks like? Cold air prickled their skin. He gave her his jacket, she gave it back. She told him, you should get some sleep. He told her, I gave you my jacket because I love you. But isn't loving someone, she almost asked, just your capacity to be hurt?

She should check on him because she loves him, because that's what sisters do. She should crush Valium into two beer bottles so they can sleep through their birthday. She should squeeze in the bathtub with him. He's taller now, but they'll relearn how to slot together

perfectly. One of them can twist the faucet and preserve them in cold, the harshness of her unpaid water bill.

Before the cocaine, the bathtub, the city, the phone calls, there was them and the farmland.

Though the only animals were wild rabbits, a cluster of hens and a blind sheepdog who'd dig his teeth into a leather shoe like it was someone's jugular. The barn had been repurposed into a chapel. They'd lived with three other families and shared a mattress. They trekked an hour to school every morning, the sun sizzling the back of their necks. This was before they got pulled out to study scripture instead of sheep hearts. But that meant more time together. They didn't need other children, other Gods. This is how she knows him: he's sixteen and doesn't know how to hide the stench of cigarettes; he's five and doesn't know how to grip a pencil.

He's fifteen and can recite Revelation chapters with his eyes closed; he's nine and terrified of the sheepdog. He was a better Christian than her because he knew how to worship, how to fear. But he still snuck out with her to read magazines about rockstars and horoscopes.

Sometimes, after Church, they plucked clementines from trees and ate them out of their hands. Their first routine, first ritual.

On their fourteenth birthday, he stole their father's pocketknife from under his pillow and, behind the chapel, they sliced their thumbs open. A blood pact, she said. He cut first.

"Sometimes, I think about how this used to be a barn," he said, blade in his skin. "I think of the sheep being born. Being nursed. Growing up. Giving birth. Nursing. Dying. All in the same barn. And all I can think of, is how lonely that sounds." Blood trickled down his hand. But sometimes, I think the chapel is lonelier. Because worship needs absence, you know? For something to be worth worshipping, it needs to be out of reach." She didn't answer, just took

the knife and cut her skin, and when they pressed their bloodied thumbs together, he said:

“But we’ll never be lonely. Not us.”

Sometimes, on the phone, she lied. It was her routine, her ritual. She had to construct her reality. She had to look free. She told him, I don’t like Dotty anymore, it’s Dorothy. It makes people believe I’m whimsical. I work at a botanical garden where I steal monarch butterflies to press and sell. I house sit for a CEO and sometimes at midnight, I float in the middle of the pool fully clothed, like an Ophelian threat. I live with a mother who discounts my rent because she believes I’m the reincarnation of her drowned daughter. (I never told you, how I live alone and steal oranges from the neighbour’s yard and pretend they’re gifts. That I cut my hair with kitchen scissors to afford rent. That I told my therapist my brother died in a boating accident and now he makes me go on sea tours as exposure therapy.) She told him, I book motel rooms and replace bedside Bible’s with polaroids of me. One time God spoke to me in the form of a forest fire, and no, I can’t tell you what she said but maybe I’ll hide it in my stories, so you better listen. (I never told you, that I just wanted my voice to be razor and I wanted you to worship it. I wanted you to believe I’m deadly.)

The bathroom is quiet. Her brother is asleep. The hallway light fritzes above her. She should peek through the door again, but the last time was when she saw the powder. She’ll never hurt him like he hurts himself. She loves him. He’s her twin brother. Shared skin, eyes, birthday. They share an electromagnetic field, the zap of blood and birthdays down a tangled phone line. She’d tried to bury him. When she left, she stole a polaroid of him and his lighter and burnt him on the roadside. She watched his eyes/her eyes decay, the polaroid darkening, curling in on itself like a foetus. On the phone, his voice travels down the line and settles on her like a phantom limb. She eats stolen oranges and thinks of how the juice always trickled

down his chin. She goes on sea tours and thinks of how he always wanted to see the ocean.

Whenever she cries in the bathtub, she covers the mirror with a towel to avoid his face.

The bathroom is quiet, and so is her voice, when she asks, "Felix, are you okay?"

On their seventh birthday, they found a dead rabbit after Church. Its neck lacerated, attacked at the throat, the grass slick with blood. They buried it that night. She dug, dirt clogging her fingernails. He laid the corpse down, and said the rabbit's eyes looked like marbles. But Felix wanted to give it a name. She had to shut him down, and remind him that you never name what you bury. Because, she told him, when you give something a name, they become real.