

Pears

[Jamie]

Another apple falls with a bruise into the plastic bag, with another friendly neighbour walking by, pausing to turn over plums in their palms. He's rifling through the pears, too many marked with death, too many crinkling like worn-out leather, too many smooshed down into the black boxes that cage them. He takes another pear up, skin caterpillar green, holding it to the light. Looking for the blemishes. But the pear he holds now is just right, almost perfect, but the stem – the stem is falling off, don't you see this, he says, shoving the pear into his daughter's face. She resists the urge to bite into the pear, make it less than just right, make it blemished and horrid and a scrap now, something he can heap into the compost out back like he does with the other pears and apples he eats half of. Taste must be just right for him. She glares back at that stem, the crow's nest of a vessel that wouldn't yet sink, until tomorrow morning, at breakfast. When he takes that first bite, stem torn off, stem in the trash can.

Why then does it matter, Dad, she thinks, watching his finger as it points towards the stack of brown onions. Get them, come one...sorry, please, we need onions for dinner tonight. Her fingers fiddle with the plastic bag. They make these things fortified, like castles, but then you find your way inside and fill this little plastic baggy with fruit, vegetables, brown onions. Your fingers find footholds. The air escapes. You spin it round, and round, and round, and the onions are in some trap now. The castle is a prison now. And it comes complete with a sleeping curse, and the thorns, because there he goes tossing the bag of pears down into the bottom of the trolley. She cradles the onions with both hands as she moves back towards her father, waiting by the rows of capsicums, two hands planted on the trolley.

"Do you think we need any spinach?" His voice slips out, a thought he's got on the top of his mind, a thought he can't respond to by himself. She's already reaching for a bag, checking the used-by dates.

"I wasn't sure if we had some at home," he continues, but she's stopped listening. Her fingers tumble over the words in black ink, then the bag tumbles into the shopping trolley, landing by the pears. The just-right pears. His pears.

He'd kill her if she touched them.

They round a corner, and TJ is stocking shelves again. He's bent down, gripping to the cardboard of cereal boxes again. His shirt is riding up his back again. Up above, in that no man's land between the rooftop levels of aisle skyscrapers and the sprinklers, only for emergency, the sweet music of a dead 90s pop star floats downward. It tangles itself in TJ's hair.

"We've got enough cereal, I think," her father says, turning the trolley towards the next aisle – aisle four, confectionary, chips, nothing he should skip over. She takes another glance at TJ, peaking his butt up as he picks up something he's dropped. To her, he's a million things she'd casually ignore in any other situation, but there's something about him. He probably did average in school, he probably listens to music she changes when it comes on, because it stirs her up too much. He probably would piss off her dad, but maybe there is charm there.

TJ was there, in that spot, where she'd snuck a look at the edge of his underwear, when she came shopping with her father last week. The week before he'd had to serve, and she was hoping maybe he'd be still out there after her dad picked out a new set of socks for work, but he'd gone back to shelves by then. I sound like a teenager, she thinks to herself, as the wheels click down aisle number four.

But TJ could be her first since Henry, and he's been dead for a few weeks now.

Her father tosses two packets of chips into the trolley, but they aren't the flavour he usually buys. "They're out of fucking Light and Tangy," he spits out, waiting for the echo of the crinkle of the packets, as they brush up against pears, and onions. "Christ."

"I'll ask up front if they've got any out back, Dad."

“And they have a three-second look and exclaim, No sir, you’ll have to go without for a few days,” and his temper is coming out, in the chocolate and chips aisle. And he’s snatching back up the packets he’d thrown in. Squeezing at the neck.

She fumbles at her pocket, discretely, just touching the metal of the taser.

“I can come back tomorrow and have a look, Dad,” she says, moving her hand back out of her pocket. I don’t want to use it on you today, Dad, is what she means.

Another customer wheels away into the next aisle. He loosens his grip on the packet of chips. He breathes in, out, in, out. “Okay, thank you,” he whispers, masking back the bruises on his flesh. Going back to the just-right pear, if he can be. She pushes the trolley ahead, swiping up a chocolate bar, tossing it down with a thump. We can breathe easy again, she cycles up in her head, repeating back those words over, and over. He has those outbursts. He’s had them since jail.

The drive home, they sit in silence, except for the hum of the radio station playing the hits of the 1990s. She thinks of TJ, he thinks of TJ, bending back his skull for looking at his daughter that one time. But he’s crossed that out of his mind. TJ is like someone out of a boyband from back then, she thinks, then glances over at her dad, with the scowl on his face. No, he’s irrelevant then, and she’s tried to bury him – without much luck – with the tricky stuff she learnt in Math, and the childhood fantasies she had, like when she’d pretend to be a mermaid. Where she could swim off into the distance and leave her father stranded on a cluster of rocks. He’d call down no thunder, no lightning, from there.

He ain’t so bad, she thinks to herself, almost stuttering it out. *Who am I kidding?* The other passengers in the other cars are making other faces with their other lips and their other drivers perched beside them, staring ahead with other eyes. They listen to other music, or maybe they don’t. They are other people, Jamie, she tells herself, slapping her head forward, tightening her stare on the car up ahead. A baby on board sign dangles in the rear window.

She wants to ask him to pull over. Wants to beg him.

But he wouldn’t.

We’ve gotta get home, Jamie.

[Lil]

They came inside with the groceries, bags for bricklayers, and they dumped them down in the centre of the dining table, waking up the dog.

“Come on, help us unpack,” he said to her, sitting there on the windowsill, the little booth her mother had claimed as her spot, until she was no longer there to claim it. Lil left a spot, left enough room, just in case her mother floated in through that doorway and needed some peace. Nothing, yet, but who could say how long a ghost needed before coming back for the homecoming party.

Jamie always races upstairs after unpacking a bag, or two, and Lil always stands there, in silence, with the pout forming in seconds, wishing everything wouldn’t shift over just like that. Like a click. I won’t say a word, then, she tells herself every time, but then he grumbles, and his grumbles mean he’s getting annoyed with her again, goodness Lil, you’re like your mother, you don’t talk enough, and you sit in that darned window-seat waiting for the rain like some shaman, and then when you do speak, give me a break. I tell ya. She bites down hard on her bottom lip. Her dad finds it pathetic.

Henry thinks it’s cute.

“Did you want to watch a movie with us tonight, Dad?” Her voice does its best impression of not terrified. She carries herself out on some waterbed, making a raft of the reeds. His grunting stops.

He clears his throat. "I've got nothing else on, why not?" He continues sifting through the bags of groceries, a content man, snatching up the bag of just-right pears. One of the pears is smooshed at the bottom, but he doesn't notice.

She does.

She digs out a packet of cookies and buries them in the pantry. Chocolate chip, her favourite. Their favourite. She ate an entire packet when her mum died. She texted Henry asking him to pick up more, and he did, without a question. He asked all the questions – what type do you like, Lil? What brand is better? The bigger packet is more expensive, but do you need it? Her answer was yes. So he would be around soon with the gift, and a hug. He'd been coming over to comfort Jamie, anyway.

It was the message that lingered in her nightmares, instead of her mum's cold face. She still had dreams that her mum would come in with breakfast in bed for her, on her birthday, of course, or she would surprise her with a picnic, or she would ride in on a unicorn like those dreams she had when she was younger. But she came second. Always second, but not something she could blame on her mum. Besides. She'd keep that in her head, that word, besides. Besides, Jamie is only a year older, she'd punch into her pillow, tears trickling down her cheek.

She'd wake in the morning, ready for the day, and give Jamie the biggest hug possible.

I love you, sis.

She helps him cook dinner, most nights. Tonight's menu: spaghetti Bolognese, topped with grated cheese, maybe some garlic bread on the side if there's any in the freezer. Sometimes he forgets to buy it, or it's too expensive, or he heats it up for some other meal, because he feels like it. Then he gnaws on the end pieces first, sawing them with his teeth, garlic butter staining.

"We've got garlic bread, Jamie remembered," he mutters, opening the freezer to grab it out again. It's the nicer one, the one they all like, not the cheaper one he buys when he's *trying to be frugal*.

Dinner is one of the chores she agreed to, when they sat down in the attic, with him passed out in Grandma's old reclining chair, up there for storage. They knew he'd be out for hours, after what he'd done, after what they'd covered up.

We are not as bad as him, she'd whispered out, picking up the little slip of paper with the word 'cooking' on it, that Michaela had written up in her cutesy handwriting. Jamie wanted shopping, and laundry, she wanted to do things, she wanted to be like her mother. Michaela is still in school, talking up boys and doing her homework, but she walks the dog, and goes with their dad to his football games on the weekends. Lil sighs, thinking of those games again. How they grind her bones, thinking of men brushing up against men, clutching to balls that represent so much more than balls. It's the way her mum would've looked at it, and how Jamie looks at it. A competitive heap of testosterone. Perfect for Dad, then, she thinks, helping stir the pasta. It's starting to cave in, like dampened cardboard.

He's quiet while making dinner, she thinks to herself. He moves around the kitchen, bumping into her a few times, but all he mutters out is a quick sorry before he's moved on, moved to some other station in the kitchen. But some nights he is quiet, or quieter – he gets in the zone when he cooks, though he appreciates the help he gets from Lil. He kisses her forehead when every plate is served up, treating her like the sous chef to his head chef. But he's always glancing down at the plates, as they head out to the table, all neatly set up with cutlery, with the napkins in the centre, with the chairs tucked in still. Waiting on the others to come rushing down. You can let them know now, Lil.

Yes, chef.

She bumps into the fork with her pinky, an accident. It chinks against the plate. The garlic bread is there now, beside the napkin holder. He always takes it straight out the oven and slips it down onto a cutting board, to make the appearance that they're someplace else.

But we're not, she thinks. We are under his roof. She straightens the fork again.

[Michaela]

She couldn't have heard the first call for dinner, anyway, she had headphones on, and the sound of Taylor Swift drowned out everything. The sound of Taylor Swift turned up close to max, near-deafening her. Their dog, little Benji, is trying his best to get her attention from outside the door, in the hallway. Jamie slams her fists against the wood. "Come on, lazy bones, dinner!" Her voice echoes into the bedroom, finding a crack between the headphones and Michaela's ears. She grunts.

The music stops.

Everyone else is waiting already downstairs, even Benji, when she comes into the dining room, her socks slipping a little on the polished wooden floorboards. She threw off the school uniform when she got home, changing into that top she bought last month, one of the ones she bought when she was out shopping with Bella. It slumps off her shoulders, makes her look like she jumped right out of bed, but she's sure it's not something either of her older sisters could pull off. They're too angular for it. They're too old, she'd want to spit out.

Michaela was born on the 21st of December, two years younger than Lil. Or Lili, but no one called her that, and she isn't short, that's not why we call her that, Michaela says, if someone asks. The truth is, it's her fault, the littlest sister. She likes nicknames, giving them – not getting them. No one calls her Miki, or Mick, or anything similar, no one tries. She's got her way, dolling out nicknames, the perfect choice, has since she was really little. When she chopped off one letter and shouted out 'Lil!', and it stuck, and her mum cooed and awed, and her dad stood there with the biggest grin on his face, and...and they'd been so normal then, so cheery, so much like a family. It's stuff like that she misses now. The stuff she tries to find in music, see if they buried it in. Like lost treasure. Musicians aren't pirates, Michaela. Someone would say that, if she blurted it out. They'd think she's *pathetic*.

The staircase squeaks, but it always has, since they moved in. It's an older house, but it was cheaper than building something up that he could topple down. Her dad. He'd fixed up around the house, made it work, made it chime with every gust of wind, but not everything was broken then. Some things broke later, when he'd been careless. He'd never fixed these stairs. He said the squeaking wasn't the floorboards.

Jamie, Lil and Dad sit around the table already, their eyes inching for the empty spot. The table used to have more chairs, used to be used for more things, sometimes they'd have dinner parties or friends over, but now he's done something with the chairs no one sits in. Maybe he's tossed them out, one swift kick out, because he can't expect any of his friends to visit, or any of theirs. People are unsure, then. The dinner parties ended with their mum dying. Now they eat their spaghetti alone, they eat their fish alone, they eat alone, four chairs. He'd had to fix the leg on Lil's chair.

I think he got a bit mad around it, she thinks, taking her place at the table.

"How was school today," and he almost gives her a nickname, sometimes he slips up like that.

She smiles, wrapping her fingers around the cutlery. "It was good," she says, "Bella was sick again, so I was just hanging around Nick and his friends." They start to eat, shoving around the food on their plates – she's not too hungry, anyway.

Can she still blame Nick if it's been a few hours?

Lil always sits opposite her, smiling at her whenever their eyes meet, giving her little nods and little winks. They tried to master Morse code when they were younger, watching online tutorials, reading books about it, but someone would always be confused. Lil, what's that letter? I thought two knocks like that was O? I don't know, Michaela. Dad says he knows Morse code. Dad could teach us? But they didn't want to annoy him, and the code language is their secret.

So sometimes Lil knocks softly underneath the table, and sometimes he hears, thinking there's someone at the door. Jamie always leaps up to answer it, but of course no one's there, and sometimes he leaps up in some fit of anger, thinking some idiot teenage boys are playing ding-dong-ditch, and *at my house?* Those idiots. Lil just smiles, but she then she won't knock under the table for a while, sometimes even a few days. But most times, her knocks sound only like bumps. Friendly bumps. Bumps to remind Michaela everything is okay. Because I'm here, Michaela.

She should be shoveling the spaghetti into her mouth, chewing it up and swallowing it, because it's been her favourite since she was little, when she started eating solid foods, not just pumpkin mash. Jamie is eating, Lil is eating, Dad is eating, Dad is inhaling his food, barely stopping for his breaths, in, out. Then he's noticed she's picking at pieces of the spaghetti, and crumbs of the bread.

"Everything okay over there, Michaela?"

She drops the fork and looks up at him, innocent puppy dog eyes. "Yeah, Dad," she mumbles, picking up the fork again, sucking up a strand of spaghetti. "Just not too hungry."

"Don't force it down," Jamie pipes in, finishing off her second piece of garlic bread. She smiles, genuine and kind, then gets back to her dinner, her eyes burgeoning into grapefruits. Her eyes reacting the way the starved react to food, but she's halfway through her plate. It almost makes Michaela puke, watching her sit there so comfortably, with every head-glance up staring right at their dad. He's just sitting at our table, that man, she wants to whisper out, let it be known that they've been ignoring things for too long already. But Jamie would know, and Lil would know.

She checks her pocket for the taser. She likes rubbing her cool hands over it, touching every groove, making sure it's there in her pocket, just in case. She's never used it. Have they? She wants to ask them, before they sleep tonight. Maybe she's forgotten. Maybe they didn't tell her, because they didn't want her thinking he's worse than he is. But he's bad. He's horrible. He's their no-good-dad. Or else why would they have tasers? Or else why would she worry that coming home from school could mean she stumbles into the living room and there their bodies lie, her sisters, mangled and beat up, limbs torn away from sockets, scars on their breasts, or gunshot wounds in their heads. And who would be sitting there in the armchair with the gun, pointed into the hall?

Dad. Dad, who should be in prison.

Maybe he can read minds.

"I have something I've been thinking about," he says, tearing into a piece of garlic bread with his hands. His chubby fingers. He sits up a little more, pausing for a breath, then he puts down the piece of bread again and he looks at his three daughters, lingering on each one, just a little.

"I think," he says, and it sounds like everything outside has tuned in, quiet, "I think you should turn me into the police...for what I've done."

Murder, that's what you did, Dad, she thinks to herself, a pause caught in her throat. A pause like leaving the TV on the face of an attractive actor, not to stare at his face, no, but you leave him there long enough that he begins to wonder if you've gone, vanished, been abducted by aliens, or something like that.

He's done bad things, my dad, she'd say, if this was like those documentary-style shows she watches in bed late at night, forgetting about her dad.

But she says this, instead: "Dad, no, we're trying our best to forgive you," and she croaks out, "I don't think you belong there, Dad." He cracks out a little smile, a hesitant one, but those are words he likes to hear, like ballerina twirls out of her mouth.

Like *murder is a mindset, Dad*, and maybe you're getting free of it. With our help.

"I see how you look at me sometimes, Michaela," he mutters.

She has an expressive face, then. "I want us to help, Dad."

She wants to bury her face in the spaghetti, and then maybe they'd think she's eating again. But the sauce would ruin her face, not that she has anyone left to impress in the house. Henry is gone.

Of course he is.

Her dad sits there close by, but his silence leaves the distance between them doubling, and doubling. Then he clears his throat, then he takes up the fork in his hand again, and he speaks.

"That's awful nice of you, hey."

[Lil]

He wants his daughters to send him away, then. She had a mouthful of food when he'd said it, but never had she swallowed faster. It came as a tumbling shock, the words he said, when he hadn't as much as mentioned the past any hour before. She reaches over for her glass, takes a sip, then another.

Her father and her mother had been in love, when they got married. He'd always smile at that, the mention of their wedding day, because he'd been a buffoon, stressing himself out, thinking she was leaving him at the last minute. No, god, traffic was just terrible! I'm here, I'm here, and in she walked, stunning, because she loved the pictures they had taken. Because she looked breathtaking in the pictures, because the photographer wasn't her cousin, because he was an amateur, trust me. But she loved her cousin, no questions, he was such a sweet sweet boy. Sorry, is. But did he know how to use a camera the way I wanted him to use it? Nope.

But they were in love, they were in love, up until that moment she died, because a dead person can no longer love, or that's what Lil grew up thinking. Horror movies gave her ghosts, gave her nightmares sometimes too, but she'd never been able to believe in ghosts. Mum said they were illusions; Dad said they were just plain old stupid.

Dad said he loved Lil since she came headfirst out, their adorable baby girl, ain't she the cutest? And there was no reason for her to not love him back, when he tickled her, when he squeezed her cheeks, when he threw her up, down, up, down. Caught her every time. He'd taught her to ride a bike, he'd taught her to tie her laces, make little bunny rabbits, look it can be so cute! He'd cuddle her, kiss her forehead goodnight, so no, he couldn't have lost his love for her yet, had he?

She didn't think so.

She wanted him here, sleeping in his bed, making dinner with her.

Even though she felt unsure sometimes, worried he might lash out and burn her hand in the frying pan, or slam her hands in the drawers, or splash burning oil in her eyes.

Even though she knew his past, but knew it wasn't yesterday.

"Dad, we know you're sorry, you're improving," she says, reassuring herself, squeezing tight to the leg of the table. "Stay, for us."

He lets out a little grunt, swallowing a mouthful of his dinner.

"You only say that 'cause you need a roof over your head," he snaps. He chews into the garlic bread.

"That's not true." If the leg of the table was a pipe of sewage, she'd have burst it. Her lip quivers. "If there are things you want to say, Dad, you can say them." But there are limits, she wishes she could add. You can't say you don't regret the things you did, Dad. You have to repent, Dad. You can't blame us.

It isn't my fault the pear is bruised, Dad.

He clears his throat, again. It was different sitting at the table when there was a father and a mother. There was balance. Lil, Jamie, and Michaela would sit somewhere in the middle, places weren't set in stone, but Mum and Dad were at either end. Now, it's either peace or chaos, and tonight's destination of choice: an awkward in-between. But they'd never talked about this sort of stuff at dinner, not like

this was a spaghetti and bread sort of topic. He wanted them to turn him in. She'd never even called the police. What would she say?

Hello, this is, uh, Lili, and I...I'll pass the phone to Jamie, she can talk.

But no, and she almost spits this out, like chewed-down gum. Sick of the constant thought of it, but no, he's your father, Lil, he's your dad, he loves you, he'd never ever hurt you.

She loosens her grip on the leg of the table, and hears it breathe out of her death hold. The taser has worked. If he messes up again, the taser will work on him again.

Because there was the laundry room incident, when Jamie was sick in bed. He'd been in a terrible mood, he'd shouted a little, snatched the basket out from her hands that his fingernails scratched her skin. She'd pushed herself up into the corner, hiding her face in her hands. She didn't even want to look at him, because she'd see his anger, pale as the moonlight's reflection on the water, rearing up like a brown bear.

And she'd mistaken his arms reaching out to check her hands, make sure he hadn't dug in deep, left little crevices in her skin, little moon craters. Mistaken that for the leap. And she'd torn the taser from her pocket.

He'd said, that was a misunderstanding, Lil. I love you.

[Jamie]

The table is a jury. A man has been imprisoned up in his house, but the man has done an act that can't be excused with a fine, or community service, or a slap on the wrist.

But he fixed up your first boo-boo when you scraped your knee, Jamie. He found the band-aid with the princesses on it, and he tore off the back, and gently hid away the boo-boo, and kissed your knee so everything would be better again.

"I think it's a good idea," she lets slip out, without a pause. "I can take care of my sisters." A gear grinds up against another gear, an idea forms. A river can have veering streams, the boat forks to the right. A member of the box, squared in, calls for a hung jury.

"Jamie..." It's Lil, reaching her hand out across the table, her other hand tucked under the table. Her voice is soft, hushed, but stabilized; this isn't fear in her eyes, it's something else. A sense of sisterhood. A familial urge peeking out from the covers, whispering out for Dad to tuck it back in. But not from fear. She's overcoming that, or at least Jamie think so, peering over at her. Waiting for her to reprimand her, slap her square in the jaw, or just...what? Tell her their father is improving, repeat that back and back, the tape unravelling itself and pinching up. But then would it stop? She breathes, her eyes back on her dad. He's been mulling things over in his head, then, quiet and reserved. But he expected someone to agree with him.

He had to have.

"Interesting," he says, curling up his fingers, uncurling them slower. "One of you has the smarts, then." He glances between her two younger sisters, no expression on his face but an arched eyebrow, which falls, almost with a thud, as he stares over at Michaela. She's stopped pushing the food around the plate, she's stopped doing anything. She just watches over him, unsure of him. Jamie knows he isn't finished talking, because every now and then his mouth opens, waiting for the moment. Knowing it will come. "One of you has the guts, hey."

The guts to face what you have done, she thinks to herself, mouthing out the word 'guts', hoping no one notices. He sits there, staring back at her. She'd thought it all over, then. Probably he set out to find out which of his daughters was by his side, and was the answer what he expected? When she'd shut him down in the supermarket, gripping to her taser, thinking of how she could run off with TJ, but

maybe she could tonight, out the window with him. How running off with him would be – exciting for a day, maybe a few, then boring, bland, because he'd become trouble, or he'd hide all of that just to please her. Sure, maybe, who knows, the sex could be alright for her, better than an awkward kiss on the forehead from dear old murdering dad. But sending him away, telling people what her father did, wouldn't mean she can be free of what she's faced. Her sisters tug down on the hem of her shirt, asking for a bedtime story. It's ten years ago, then, and she feels older, she feels like her mum, she's accepted it. Mum was alive back then, remember, she trickles through the stream of her brain, passing the signposts of her childhood – birth, baby teeth, bicycle riding, boys, all coming down to that moment, when the illusions faded. Bad, bad, naughty dad!

You deserve hell, she thinks, seeing Henry's face flash in the darkness of her eyelids. Him, another signpost, shouting out 'you're a teenager now, Jamie', shouting for her if danger stood somewhere down the path. They'd had some argument.

I've started some argument now, she thinks to herself.

Henry spent a lot of his time at the house. He was dating one daughter, but it was difficult to ignore that he grew fond of more than just the eldest. He'd tell Lil she was pretty, when none of the boys her age gave her even a glance – she wouldn't tell him she shut down the uglier ones. He started to teach Michaela how to dance, how to sing, how to flirt, a little, but he meant it out of fun – she only happened to be a natural, and the other boys her age couldn't compare to the boy who had all the right words, all the right teeth to smile with. Jamie was, well, a different person back in the Henry days. Her sisters hid their secrets from her. She leapt into his arms without noticing their eyes peeking through the key-holes.

And then Henry was dead. Murder is a complicated thing, she remembers reading in some cheesy young adult crime novel, but he had his reasons – he had his motive. He has a temper, her father. He's a murderer, her father. But he didn't kill her mother. The woman he loved, and sure they fought, and sure he frightened her the day she came home to find Henry there on the tiled floor, bleeding out from his stomach, bleeding down his back, and sure! Sure, he terrified her. Sure, he watched her flee from him, from his scene, fear flickering in the dilated pupils of her eyes, but he never meant for her to die! *But she died, father.*

Sitting over there, her dad pushes back the chair with his feet, beginning to rise up, bubble and brew. He's silent, except for the squeak of the chair. Except for a cough, a cough he makes as he bumps his toes into the foot of the chair, just a nudge, but it must hurt, hard against soft. Like the metal to her mother's face. When they'd found her there, dead, on impact, because of the frantic way she'd been sitting, driving, worrying – must've been. No, she'd forgotten her seatbelt, in the panic. The panic to get far, far away from her husband, the murderous man, he's killed Henry! If she'd had final thoughts, a pen and paper to scribble with in that car, maybe she'd written out something like that. *Go back for Henry, or My husband is a monster*, but no, no, no, nothing like that, she flung herself away from him as fast as she could, driving that car, forgetting the seatbelt. Forgetting her children.

She hadn't seen the other car coming. It's a common story, a story you've heard before. They've come to think he did it somehow, anyway. He's a magic man, an illusionist – but that's silly, Michaela, Jamie's said a few times, wrapping her tight in a hug. No, I won't push you away, Michaela – and she kisses her forehead, whispering that all will be okay, because guess what?

We have the tasers now, Michaela.

Jamie and her dad are locking eyes, and he's been mumbling things, and she's listening to some of it, the parts that aren't the repetition from the night everything happened. Do you know right and wrong, Jamie? Do you know? I did things to protect you all. It sounds like word jumble and comes back like

mouldy garlic bread. The act is stale. The act needs some fresh numbers, some fancier lights. A new lead actor stepping into the shoes.

I want to cull the actor altogether, she thinks, staring up into his eyes, like hockey pucks squaring up her jaw. He stops speaking. The room is silent, of course no one is game to speak again.

“I think, or I know,” she delivers, coming round with the silver platter, “I know that you should be rotting behind bars for murdering the man that did a better job of supporting us.”

He pushes in the chair. You can feel the world settle into limbo, she’d said, a few hours after Henry was dead. Her father has the hold of a knife he’d wrangled out from the kitchen drawer, first he’d just used words, screaming at them, shouting at them, telling them – don’t you fucking move from your seats. Henry’s body had been cold, maybe a few more hours and she’d gotten frostbite. Dad’s waving around the knife, pointing it at each of them. Lil had helped her up, helped her say goodbye to Henry.

There wasn’t even a fucking funeral.

Because they hadn’t turned him in, they’d hidden things. Somehow. Henry didn’t have much of a family. It’s why he spent a lot of his time at their house, why he grew so close to not just Jamie, but the other two girls, even their mother, a little. Not so much their father.

His murderer.

Waving around a knife and shouting. Then he stops, freezes up in place, and quiets down.

“I, uh...I don’t want the neighbours thinking we’re getting into a fight over here,” he says, still clutching to the knife. The expression on his face doesn’t change.

He’s inching towards Jamie. He’s not looking at the other girls, the ones that stood by him like precious little daughters they try to be, so he doesn’t slit their throats if they slip down the stairs, or punch him in the gut, or taser him because he’s trying to slit their throats.

He’s not looking at the other girls.

Michaela bolts out of the room, up the stairs.

Jamie can hear her heavy panting. Lil’s right behind her.

Where are you gonna go, Dad?

[Lil]

The bedroom is dark, blotted out with ink from the solar system’s pen. But she can see the light from underneath the door, slipping in, crashing into the tar-like stuff with no friend like the Moon. The light is close and far, far away – it’s friend and foe, and she knows what waits for her if she lets more of that light in, the light that makes her comfortable and whole. He’s waiting, but at least his toes don’t block up more of that light. He’s downstairs or he’s up here, then. She hasn’t been listening out for footsteps. She’s been trying to breathe, first, inhale, exhale, oh god is that him now, no, it’s just the wind beating at the window panes. The wind is antsy. It’s started to panic for her.

She tries not to think of what position Jamie could be in. She could be curled up in that chair, backed into the corner, quivering like when she had that fever, and Mum had wrapped her up in her arms. Jamie could be like that, without the warmth of arms. Or she could be on the floor, face down, and there could be blood pooling, slipping on the wooden boards. Maybe he stabbed her already, she thinks, then tries to unthink – no I don’t want those thoughts, brain, no.

There’s footsteps on the staircase. Heavy, his feet. They make him sound like a giant, stomping around like that – but that’s in her head, sound heightening as she hears it. Her ears like megaphones.

There’s footsteps, and then the thud as he makes it to the upstairs corridor.

Why haven’t I tried getting out that window?

But with every glance, she finds her fears – your legs will break, your neck will snap, how will you even get out, there’s a screen of mesh like spider webs and then you’ll think of spiders and one will crawl right up into your head and mash around till it finds a nerve that it can pluck like a harp – no.

It was the wrong decision, then, to not call the police on him back then. She’s scratching at the wood of her bedside, trying not to make too much noise. Trying to calm herself down, focus on something else. *You thought a taser could save you from him?* Maybe she’s blocked out the sounds of his feet now. The house is a graveyard. There’s a ghost come back to find a soul to drag back to Hell with it.

But wait. She wants to take back every nasty thought of him she’s had, thoughts where he deserves what will come to him. *He’s my dad, why am I supposed to be saved from my father?* The answer rattles around in her head. A simple one, simple answer. Where are his footsteps? Can’t the house be a circus? Can’t the house be a wild ride like one at the fair, where you go up, down, round, round, round, backwards, with the generic tune that only brings you joy playing, repeating, like the ride does.

He has anger, he has that temper.

Remember he killed that tourist with the camera and the map, said he’d gotten in the way?

And we’d covered that up too, because Mum said to.

But that was years ago. She had been a kid, Michaela had been barely able to open her eyes. It didn’t mean as much as losing Henry, not to them, and they’d grown up remembering it as some accident that happened when they were little, that their dad hadn’t the time to slow down. Of course he stopped to make sure the tourist was okay, Mum would always say, if someone thought it back up. No one did after a while, when the story was told out, and the tourist was long dead. He hadn’t stopped, and now she knew it wasn’t some speeding accident. He’d put their pets out of their miseries if they got hit by cars. He’d tell them to walk off their injuries, you’re tough enough. He’d scare off birds that lay their eggs in the yard. But killing Henry – that had been the worst. It was like pulling the plug from the fountain of life, draining out anything and everything.

She’d loved him.

There’s another boom of a step from the hallway, and a door creaks open, letting out the ghost of an empty room. Because he slams it back shut and grunts to himself. He’s become some horror movie villain, maybe he has a machete and a mask made of old fabric or a hockey mask – maybe, but from her ball on the ground she can’t see him, or his footsteps. She can see the light of the moon, and it calls for her – come on, Lil, come fly to me.

Another door opens. He’s moving down the hallway, checking every room. He’s done something to Jamie, or she’s ran, but would he have given up? Maybe he’s snatched up her taser and stunned her, given himself enough time to tie her up. *Stop thinking worse thoughts*, she drills into her head, leaning back against the wall. Tapping once or twice into the room next door. Just hoping Michaela is there, listening, hoping. Something like that. He slams shut another door.

She taps out what they used to memorise as their names. It’s once, at first, and then two short, stubby knocks, lightning bolt speeds. It meant Lili. She tries to be quiet, so he’d think the wind is just slapping its bare-knuckled fists at the brick walls. The knocks are for one person, and then the knocks would fade out into oblivion because they had no use otherwise. She listens out for her reply. Michaela is three soft beginning knocks, a pause, then one sharp knock, like a slam. They’d made their names short and memorable. Stuff like ‘oh god lord I’m being murdered’ they’d never come up with. But maybe it’d be one single, slap of a knock. Like *fuck*. Help me.

Oh how she hoped now for no single, lonesome bang. Then comes another door opening, and she knows it’s close. It is the next room over. She bites down on her bottom lip. The moon, hanging from a hook, dangling above the treetops, cowers behind a cloud, almost like it fears for her. He steps into the

bedroom next-door. He's making slow, calculated steps – it's unlike him, but he's less of himself than ever before.

She wonders if Jamie said something else to infuriate him like this. For him to come after the ones that wanted to protect him. Then she remembers when Henry died, what her dad had said.

“If things are destined to change, my mum used to say, they don't settle for the littlest of ripples,” he'd said, confusing her a little, thinking of tide pools and waves and the backstrokes of little baby otters, like she'd seen at the zoo when he'd taken her a year or so ago. Now she's piecing it together. Henry threatened him too much, the man in the house, he'd lose Jamie in a heartbeat.

She swallows, her throat tightening. She'd almost forgotten her sister. Fuck fuck fuck.

Because the house is silent, rocking back and forth in the wind, singing to the bright full moon. No one is screaming, not yet. He paces the room, with footsteps light like he leaps from cloud to cloud, careful of the cracks. Careful of jolts of lightning. She goes to tap the wall, for any signal her sister is okay, but stops with her knuckles pressed up against the silvery paint. *No, don't.* She wraps the arm around her stomach, squeezing in. Her breaths are short, stunted, silent. She's keeping herself down, when now would be her chance to leap for the door, or the window, or for him with the taser. But there's a butterfly stuck in her throat, beating its wings against her uvula. She tears off a nail that's grown too long. Now would be her moment.

But what do I do? She crawls into the middle of the room, blocking up her ears. What.

What do I –

What do I do?

The scream is overwhelming, tying her down to each individual strand of the carpet in seconds. Pinning her. She wants to vault herself into the next room and snatch that knife from his hands, if he's still got it, and drive it deep into his eyes. His brown eyes, the colour of chocolate when she was little; the colour of dog shit now. His eyes are sludge – he's sludge, sludge monster.

But it isn't just Michaela's voice – there's other voices, bouncing off each other, the gruff meeting with the feminine, something that sounds like a wail of grief. She falls back, staring up at the ceiling. There's those glow-in-the-dark stars, they faded away with the years. They'd been cheap, too. They'd made her feel like she knew the whole universe, like she'd never need some rocket to blast off and find out what the Big Dipper looked like up close. They can't transport her into space anymore, they'd lost their shimmer and shine. Now she hears the agony of Earth.

Now she wonders what all the screaming looks like up close.

But her heart is leaping out from her chest. Her breaths are shorter.

She can't stop shaking.

[Michaela]

It was silent, empty, black a few seconds ago, before he flings open the bedroom door and starts searching for her. He sounds like a cartoon burglar, on his tiptoes, with the theme music humming in the background, but she doesn't risk peeking at him. She is buried in her sheets and blankets, but not on the bed. She is underneath it, pushed right up against the wall, forming that wall of protection that hopefully he won't notice. But if he sees her there, hiding in darkness, is there a way to escape? She looks down at her feet, at the gap beyond them where a pocket of moon slithers in. She'd have to be quick, to shimmy down that way, so he couldn't poke holes in the duvet and the sheets. The holes that would bleed in seconds. She takes a deep breath. She didn't respond to Lil's knocking. She couldn't,

bounding herself up in the sheets, muffling her breath in the fabric of the sheets. They smell like her perfume, and she bites down, hoping all this inhaling doesn't start making her sneeze.

Nothing yet, nothing but her fast breaths, and his footsteps echoing like he's right there in front of her, taunting her, swiping at the air with that knife in case she notices, and screams. She slaps a hand over her mouth, breathing out through her nostrils.

You aren't dying tonight, Michaela.

But she'd be tearing through her lips with her teeth before she could be confident with that.

She thinks about waking up in the morning, as if this was all some horror dream – a nightmare playing off the past – but pinching herself does absolutely nothing. The skin just tenses up, and she muffles the tiny squirm into the sheet. She's pinching herself too hard. Wishing she'd wake up too deeply. This isn't some nightmare, then, she thinks, closing her eyes tight again. She's back in her grandma's house. The grass was just cut, by her grandfather, so she runs her feet over the edges, sinking into the backyard like it could swallow her up whole, and she'd not refuse it. Prickles nip at her toes, promising not to bite too hard. Her grandma, hair never greying because she dyes it often enough, watches her from the window. Those days she helped her grandma dye her hair again were the best, because they'd spend the morning talking, and talking, and talking, about everything really. That's what she's waiting on in this dreamland – to go inside again, to sit beside her grandma and talk, and talk, and talk, while hair dye drips down her grandma's neck. But she's stuck outside in the yard, picking at the strands of grass that grow and grow and grow. And there's her dad, with a cricket bat sharpened up like a knife. "Come on, come play a game with me!"

Suddenly she remembers Nick. Suddenly she forgives him, and forgets him all over again.

He'll be gone in the morning, she thinks, washing the tide over herself. Squeezing down on the edge of the sheets. If stuff like this teaches you anything, she thinks, it's to protect yourself from everything. If you can.

He finds her. He'd searched the whole room, knowing she'd be crouched up somehow in her bedroom, waiting for the storm to blow over. Waiting for the sirens to die down. He'd bent down to search under the bed. Somehow, she could tell he was there, staring right into her, boring a hole in her skin – tapping her blood like wine. But he hasn't done anything yet. He's trying to position himself better, to tear away those sheets and the blanket, or he could leap right at the pile, expecting screams. She bites down on her lip, harsh, expecting blood.

She shuts herself down, at least in her heart. Her brain thinks about how every limb, every bone and muscle, can stay perfectly still – stuff she's probably built up for by now, being one of the more popular girls. Everyone's always watching you. A little shake of your knee and they think maybe she's not so perfect after all.

He snatches at the blanket, the sheets, and he grips onto her arm, digging his talons into her. But he's got the sheet, too, and she forces herself out, scurrying as quick as she can, scraping her arms, her stomach, against the carpet. She's caught alight by carpet burn friction, and her foot tangles up in the sheets, but she's wriggling free, again, knowing he's right there – right in front of her, and she needs his confusion to reach the bedroom door before he can claw at her nail-polished feet. He's scrambling underneath the bed, banging his head on metal, burying his feet in the carpet to pull him right back up again. She palms the wall, breathing in, breathing out. The first moment she's stopped screaming. But then, after a pause, another high-pitched wail echoes out from her throat. Shadows make themselves known in the bedroom doorway, and she fall back, stunted, thinking he's grown two heads.

Jamie's got a gun.

He's screaming, she shot him right in the foot. Michaela scrambles for the wall furthest from the door, furthest from the bed, fumbling with the door of the closet. She wants to crumple herself up inside there like a discarded paper snowflake and make herself less unique, make herself stand out less. She's listening to the screams behind her like a film she's walking out on, this time the people in costume have leapt out to chase after her – like she's become a bit-player in their game. Every loud sound terrifies her. But he's stopped coming for her, she thinks, panting, shoving herself in the smallest spot in the closet, bruising her legs. She bumps her head too many times to count. She draws closed the closet door, inventing a makeshift panic room. Has he gotten to Lil, somehow, is that why she's gone? Was that him knocking and she just made up thinking it was her older sister? *No. It can't have been.* Lil has to be okay, Lil has to be okay, Lil has to be okay. She's biting down too hard again.

There's another gunshot. She muffles a scream, hoping no body falls down dead on her carpet. Hoping no blood spills out and stains, reminding her for forever that she could have been the one murdered in her bedroom. There aren't slits for her to peek out of – she'd have to slide open the closet door, risk seeing another bullet shoot out and wedge itself in her father. She sits still, as still as possible. Another gunshot. The world is a graveyard. She starts to think Jamie's dead too, and that other guy, whoever he is. A second feels like a year to her, until the closet door opens.

Jamie holds out her hand, smiling down. There's blood staining her t-shirt. She doesn't seem to notice, or care.

[Jamie]

Something changes in you when you hold a loaded gun, his gun, one of his illegal ones. No one ever said he was a perfect role model. But he's got weapons. She hasn't asked where he gets them from, she hasn't questioned it – it's a part of him charm, his unique charm, that he can protect her if something like this happens.

They'd been in high school together, so she remembers how he was back then – the skirts-of-town kid, the one with his own uniform that hovered above his head. It was a mystery, the cloud that lingered on him. He'd talk, but not about himself. He had that job at the supermarket since it was legal for him to work there, he needed the money, for god knows what. Drugs, she always thought. Guns. He only smokes every now and then, when he's bummed out. If there's no one around to suck him off.

Back then, she'd not talked to him much, fearing some security camera would catch it on tape and report straight to her parents – *Jamie, he's the worst influence in the world!* He might want to you-know-what. But she'd had Henry, anyway. TJ waited in the wings. He had lines coming up, a whole role to play, he just didn't know back then.

Not that she knew her dad would go psycho and murder her boyfriend. But she remembered the tourist incident, being the eldest. She remembered the way a dead person's body screamed *kersplat* just by being there, dead, flattened down on the ground, before they sped off into the paled horizon. But TJ, he looked like security, all the while looking like a safety hazard. Henry was the sort of boy you'd bring home to Thanksgiving, with your normal family, everyone seated around the table, and he'd bless them – not that he was the religious type, he was just the positive type – and she'd thought no one could glance at him with a snicker. A lot can change when people do, she thinks to herself, pulling the trigger. She'd wanted to be the hero, when he came in to the rescue. She'd shaken him off, wincing in the pain from the wound in her shoulder. He'd lunged at her, dear dad, but she'd moved wrong and he'd slipped, and he missed her stomach, he drove the knife into her shoulder. She should've been

screaming, crying, moaning, wailing at the moon! But she treated it like a bruise, wrapped his shirt around it, and told him to go to his car. Get the gun, TJ, get the goddamn gun!

He's a bad influence, remember.

She'd wanted it to be like the movies, where the triumphant heroine bursts into the room with the gun and the handsome co-star behind her, for moral support, to look pretty, those sorts of things – and then she would save the day, man down the villain. Maybe it looked like that, from outside the window, from down the street, from a view on the moon. But in the bedroom, when she broke in to save the day, it was awkward shooting your father, hoping he'd fall flat on his face and leave you alone, forever.

Because he'd raised you, she thinks to herself. *That's what made it different.*

"Come on, Jamie, we don't have all the time in the world," she mumbles to herself, in the upstairs hallway, right outside Michaela's bedroom. TJ's there, unsure of everything. Shirtless, awkwardly. His body is usual for the type of guy he is, not some buff superhero but not pudgy. He's thin, lean, but she's never once swooned over it. She focuses on what he has to offer: the gun, the rebellion, the escape from reminiscing on Henry. Dead Henry, buried Henry, forget him – he's your trauma, Jamie, your father is your trauma. Blow his brains. With the gun.

Her hand lingers on the door handle, for the slightest of seconds. Every moment here is a moment lost to in there, where he could be digging the knife into her little sister, not missing a beat.

Someone should check on Lil, she thinks, twisting the knob. No one does. They leap into the bedroom, like comic book vigilantes, surprise dastardly foe! The bedroom paints them over in darker colour, blotchy but moonlit, and she sees her father there, scrambling near the bed. Michaela screams, falling back against the wall, squeezing herself. Bang. Blood pours out from her father, coursing piddly streams, soon to be rivers and lakes and dams and then drying up, evaporating out. She wants him dead, never has she wanted a person to be dead before, not in the gut feeling she has as it rises up with every exhale and falls back down with every inhale. She wants him dead, she wants to bury him herself, in the back garden, maybe, grow a tree over his rot. But then another death would be hidden.

She shoots him again, as he's stumbling towards her, trying to make out words. He's gone quiet from the shock, the sudden screeching pain in his foot. An odd choice, but I didn't want him to be able to stand, like I couldn't, she thinks, resting another rose on Henry's grave in her mind, the grave he deserves. There it would be, in a beautiful spot in the cemetery, overlooking a river or a forest of trees, and her rose would last forever atop his resting place – her love, forever. She couldn't bring herself to shoot her father in the heart, then. Not to crush any love he has for them there, not to end him so suddenly – he must feel the pain, the regret, the beginning and the end and the everything. The heart will stop beating last, with the brain, when feeling and thought die off. And end with death, a finer prison for him, with no coming back.

He's still alive. Grasping onto the edge of his life with the makeshift rope, clinging, clinging, wanting to say a few last words to his daughters, then. But Michaela's in the closet. Lil's not in the room, Lil's someplace else, inhaling, exhaling, forming little breaths in between the screams that echo out from Michaela's bedroom.

"Jamie," he mutters out, his voice blotchy like paint, "I'm...I'm an...an idiot."

He falls, and the gun shakes in her unsteady hand – but she fired again, without a pause, without thinking maybe he'd change if they kept him alive and nursed him back. Maybe, but maybe not.

"You are a monster, Dad." She hands the gun off to TJ, shaking, stumbling towards the closet door. Michaela, she thinks, Michaela, please be okay, Michaela. She reaches her hand into the paled dark of the closet, hoping no nightmare leaps out in the place of her sister. Michaela is shaking, but takes up the hand, coming out of the closet with her eyes trapped looking down, away from the bed, away from her father's body, limp. Lifeless.

MICHAELA

“He, uh, he... was my dad, from when I was born to when he died, in my, uh, bedroom. Yeah. I could have died, I know how lucky I was to get out with just a bruise on my arm, and some carpet burn, uh, I never really looked back under the bed again. The sheets stayed there, the blankets stayed there. I could buy new ones, I have – we’ve bought new stuff, to replace over him... but you can’t forget that you had a father. He loved us, that much is true. I’m the youngest, so I spent the least with him, but towards the end, I, uh, saw a lot of him. Not just the darker parts of him, no. I saw how much he wanted to protect us, protect me. He thought Henry was bad for me, was some evil that wanted me to lose my virginity early and become Satan’s wife, but, uh... in truth, Henry didn’t touch me once. He showed me, uh, some of his moves, because he thought I might need to whip the guys I was in school with into shape... he was so much better than Nick, so I hid Nick, even when Nick wasn’t the worst guy in the world, he was just normal, he was just a stupid teenage boy that didn’t know everything there was to know... no one could. Nick and I broke up, if you wondered. My sisters and I are living away with Mum’s family, trying to set things back to some sort of normal. But things won’t be, you know, normal. When your father comes after you, screaming he’ll hurt you for lying, for pretending things were working out for the better... things don’t go back to normal, knowing you let him get like that. My dad did some bad things. Soon enough all that got out. We had to protect ourselves.”

LIL

“I lied there on the carpet for the rest of the night, thinking about my mum, thinking about my dad, thinking about my sisters. Thinking, which was catching me off guard, because I just wanted to lie there and sob, or lie there without doing anything. I wish I could’ve just stared up at the ceiling, but I can’t control what I think, what I remember... what I hear from the room next door. Where everything happened, that’s what I’ve said countless time... I wasn’t there, not in that room. I was separated by a wall, and, uh, I couldn’t have felt more distant to everything. Stuck, trapped down by darkness. They came to me when everything had ended, when he was... dead. They, uh, came in, found me shaking a little, made sure I wasn’t hurt... not psychically, no, I wasn’t...”

She pauses, staring down at her hands. She mouths out *give me a minute*, turns away, biting her lip. Resting her hands up on her forehead – making a sort of barrier from the cameras, and the interviewer – she starts to mouth out the lyrics to a song, softly, silent. There’s a click from in front of her.

“Sorry. You, uh, can’t help but feel incredibly lonely when there’s no one there for you, and there’s a threat to your life just waiting out in the hallway, and you hear his footsteps, that’s all you hear – thump, thump, bang! He, uh, never liked closing doors softly. Because he wasn’t a soft person, you can tell. Uh... you could tell. I heard someone wants to turn it all into a movie, cast someone as my dad... cast someone as me. I didn’t... I didn’t tell them no, I don’t know why... I don’t want the money. I guess I want the, uh, story to be told, finally. You’ll tell the story, too, yeah.

Sorry. I think it’ll be freeing to see some girl, pretending to be me, laying there on the carpet, with the whole world there with her. I’ll feel less alone.

But I wouldn’t go back and ask Jamie to come for me first. We were lucky he didn’t – you know, he could’ve... I had to be alone, terrified, completely, so we could save my little sister.”

JAMIE

She settles into the seat, relaxing her shoulders. There are bags under her eyes, but her shoulder's healing up nicely. She folds her arms into her lap, staring ahead, inhaling, exhaling. There's a sound, a little click, and she flinches, jerking her shoulder a little. But then everything is calm, silent, and she breathes, and she opens her mouth to speak.

"I loved him, because I was born to. He was my father, any kid who isn't left behind by him has some need to love their father, some desire to...I'd block out anything bad he'd do, when I was younger, because I loved him. But as you grow up, you start to see things that become cracks, and scars, and some people forget scars are there, but I, uh...I couldn't, not with him. Because he killed Henry, I couldn't just forget that like some scar on the bottom of my foot...I'm sorry if I sound unremorseful, it's, uh, horrible dealing with what happened to him, but I can't be weak, I can't be vulnerable, because I've had to be strong for my sisters, watching them crumble, because...because now they don't have to pretend to be happy, pretend he's getting better, becoming someone better...he wasn't. My dad, he, uh, used to be the sort of guy all the kids in the street thought was hilarious. He'd play, mess around with us, build us things, he didn't care if you were someone else's kid...he just wanted you to be smiling, and having fun, but, uh...if you fell down, grazed your knee, he'd tell you to man up and walk it off, you baby...it could be like two sides of a coin with him, and you'd be flipping each day at random, wonder what side of my father I'll face...and he didn't know neutral, he didn't know calm.

Henry's death...it was more than a father being jealous, more than him thinking this younger guy could take everything from him...they fought, when they thought none of us noticed. Some drunken night I told...I told Henry about the tourist, about how Dad could get when he was angry, moody, horrible...Henry didn't just brush it off. I guess he couldn't, wondering if one day my father would snap, snap my neck, kill me dead...he never did, but he tried, more than once. They'd fight late at night, mostly, because Henry would get up for a drink and probably find Dad sitting there at the dining table, restless, thinking...thinking the love of my life was the troubled one. He, uh...we said goodbye to Henry because of some rage-induced...thing...my dad, he'd been horrid, so so angry, and he isn't blameless...he left us on the edge of things, helpless, except for the grip we have on each other, my sisters and me. I wanted to give Henry a proper goodbye, and I did...but now I'm here, and things have changed."

She shifts herself in the chair, clunking the metal against the floor. Despite the cameras, the interviewer, any other eyes peering in on her, she feels alone, left behind. Strangers who don't know her can't seem to fit into the comfort-shaped hole she has left. But she inhales, exhales, and rests her hands back on the table, taking in the world that gives itself to her right this moment.

"I grew up thinking violence happened because it could. I grew up thinking that my Dad could brush off what he did, because he was the man of the house, because he had a deeper voice, and testicles, and a penis. I, uh, didn't realise back then that my life was barreling down the path that would lead me to the moment I shot him, three times, I think. You don't expect it. Because you love him. You admire him, for bouncing back, for being loving and supporting. Until he isn't. And you think it's on you, that you've done something wrong. My father was a wreck of a man, because of what he did. It's easy enough to forgive a dead man, because he can't truly come back and turn everything back again. I give a piece of him up every day. Yesterday, it was the way he clapped when I performed for a talent show when I was ten, today...today I gave up all the little moments I'd notice he wasn't trusting of Henry, because today I have neither of them. Tomorrow it'll be something unexpected, but I'll give it away."