

More Lies About Sisters

Allie Marini

“All over the city there are sisters. Any one of them could be mine.”

—Karin Gotshall, *More Lies*

I live sisterless in a city full of sisters & in another city, fully halved by the stretch of continent between them (& every bit as insurmountable, as untraversable by foot) lives my sister, except most of the time, I think, she wishes she was sisterless in her own city full of sisters, none of them hers. We go weeks, months, even years without talking and when we finally do, she interrupts me. I can't perform my part when I'm depressed, which is always. Everything that makes me happy is as fleeting & fickle as the price of tulips in April. My job sucks. I tell too many secrets in my writing. I'm a messy person. I won't quit smoking. I wear too much eyeliner & my shoes are ugly. I change the subject. Cooking is always safe, except when it isn't. I tell her about my Instant Pot. She interrupts. I light a cigarette. I can hear her sigh at how poorly I'm performing my part as her sister, even from a continent away. How it felt to be a good sister is as fickle as the April price of tulips, so I rewind to a time when it didn't: *Once upon a time, I was 17 & you were 13 & we went everywhere together. I told you secrets & you kept them, I borrowed your ugly shoes & I kept them, I had all this potential & so did we. I took you to see Tears for Fears on a school night & our parents let us go because they were secretly happy their daughters chose to be friends instead of just sisters...*

You're not even listening to me

...& just like that I'm back & I know there was an *Uh huh, right*, I missed in the patter of a conversation where we're both talking sideways out of our mouths like a flounder. So to try & straighten out my speech I hold the lit tip of the cigarette over my wrist, just millimeters away from the skin. I can feel the burn of it without the singe—because I don't do that anymore—but just because you're not doing something doesn't mean that it doesn't occupy your thoughts all the time, that it doesn't take up all that empty space that's in the shape of a sister who was supposed to be there, but cut herself out like she was made of paper & curled up into ash like someone holding the hot tip of a cigarette next to her surface. Or maybe I'm the one who cut myself out of paper & words & called it a choice, who burnt in scars just to feel something. Maybe it's my fault we can only speak sideways out of a crooked mouth & why when we see each other it's one-eyed, fish-eyed, skewed. It's hard to know & anyway, *Yes I am, I was just thinking, sorry* & isn't that the upshot of all this? *I'm sorry*. When I finally hang up the phone I feel more alone than when I dialed because the only sister I know & miss is the one I don't have anymore, a perpetually pissed-off 15 year-old punk rock kid who thinks my messy room is the best place to be & who doesn't really know much about Tears for Fears but knows that music guides me towards True North when I'm lost, which is all the time. There's an untraversable continent between us & we're living sisterless in cities full of sisters, none of them ours. I need someone to call True North & it was supposed to be my sister, but it's not. Because it's true: My job *does* suck, & I *do* tell too many secrets in my writing—(like I'm doing right now)—but it's only because there's a sister-shaped hole in my heart & I'm pouring words into it to see if anything will ever fill it up, if maybe she sank like an ugly shoe & if I put enough words into the hole she'll eventually swallow a few of them & float to the surface on the back of a flat fish & see me dead-on through its one-eyed field of vision. Maybe I'll be able to pull her out by her long-gone mohawk & she'll say, *Wow those shoes are kind of ugly but you're rocking them & maybe she'll ask me for a cigarette*

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The Juliana Hatfield
Three

“My Sister”

Become What You Are

08/1993

Mammoth

Just this once, because I'm with you, you know? & I'll show her my room & she'll say It's really not that messy after all, I guess I misjudged you & she'll ask what I'm writing these days & I'll put these words in the Instant Pot & even if there are too many secrets in it (like there are in this story) she'll turn her humongous green eyes in my direction & say, It must have felt really lonely to keep all those secrets to yourself for so long, I bet you feel better now.