

# The Twin Thing

I want to say something hateful.

Instead, I just take the camera strap and yank her around with it.

The flat of her foot is against my chest. I put the lens up to my eye and squint into the 35mm, twisting and turning every knob to distract myself.

She sticks her thumb into my armpit and says

“What are you doing here?”

“Just returning your camera stuff before I leave.”

“You’re still going?”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

She gives me the look with different colored eyes. Her right, gray. Her left, hazel. When we were children she spoke to them individually—addressing each discolored orb as if they were two conflicting personalities, each a soul within themselves.

She picks up the camera, opens the back and blows into the guts. The gray eye twitches at me and she says

“I just thought you were above ornamentation.”

“She’s—*it’s* not ornamentation. Magazines are dying, and this is an opportunity to get involved with one that’s actually making a profit.”

“You’re really going to sit here and tell me she has nothing to do with it?”

“Not really...she’s more like a bonus.”

“A bonus that fucks?”

“I won’t be leaving forever—this isn’t like Mom and Dad.”

Her hands begin to shake when I mention our parents. I reach across to quiet them.

“I promise I’ll be back.”

She huffs and leaves the room.

Doesn’t matter what I say, she’ll never believe me. It was New Year’s Eve when our parents went to Jersey for a party and never came back. We were seventeen. There was no one else. No grandparents, aunts, uncles. Just us. Fifteen years later, our dynamic hadn’t shifted.

From the other room she says

“I got something to show you.”

I look around and see boxes of bread ties and rancid pizza dough. Magazines with celebrity baby announcements on the cover. Archaic New Jersey obituary sections. Her collecting used to be endearing. Marble-eyed owl statues. Hard candies. Pop tabs as long as they still had the small eyelet attached. She was supposed to stop when she got older, but the collecting only became more rabid and obscure. I kick aside a stack of magazines and find a clump of black bones, a knot of dead pinkie mice.

She walks back in under a six-foot traffic cone, beeping, bumping into everything.

“Guy at the garage sale said it was from Japan.”

We laugh belly laughs. She spins, makes space noises. The base lifts and a butter container slides out.

I pick it up and say

“Uhh...thank you?”

“Open it, jackass.”

Inside are root-beer candies and a butterfly knife.

“Thought you might need it when you’re reporting...people hate reporters.”

She flings off the cone and takes the knife.

“You have to learn how to use it right or else they’ll turn it on you.”

She snaps it open and shut, makes the blades dance.

“Where did you learn to do that?”

“Some guy.”

“Why does that not surprise me?”

Her tongue is a bumpy slice at the corner of her mouth. She grabs the blades mid-dance, the point right on me.

“There are some things you don’t know about me.”

I push the blade to her hip.

“Don’t I know it.”

She pops one of the root-beer candies into her mouth.

“Just promise me you’ll be back.”

“I already did.”

She continues to fiddle with the knife. The slide of metal is fierce and smooth and makes me want to stab something.

“Maybe you should keep the camera stuff.”

“You’re not going to get me to stay.”

“Don’t be so paranoid. I was just thinking you might want to expand your palate—add photo to your journalist tag.”

A rat scurries from beneath a pile of half-full bottles of grape soda. She throws the knife. It sticks, wavers; the rat’s tail caught underneath the blade.

“Been trying to get that guy for awhile now.”

She walks to it, picks it up and strokes it like a runt pup. She leads me downstairs to a corner of the basement squared off with splintered windshields. Through the vascular glass are multiple levels packed with dozens of rats. Troughs and beddings of wood shavings and newspapers line the walls. An immaculately cared for rat tenement. She drops the new rat into the enclosure. His tail still bleeding, the others come to him, inspecting, licking the wound.

“They’re not as bad as people make them out to be. People never try to understand.”

Bad as people make them out to be. My sister. We share so much but know so little.

I pick up a pack of the pinkies, their bodies the gummy squish of a just-right pear or avocado. She puts one between her teeth and squeezes. I snap a picture of it’s bulging, puce eyes. She spits it back into the pile and strokes the mother.

“I can’t go with you.”

“I never asked you to.”

“You thought about it though.”

The twin thing is real. I did think about it. I can see why the Nazis wanted to experiment. The telepathy. It’s not a voice—just a look, a tone. Us together never really works though. We love each other deeply, forever, but the way we contribute to each other’s flaws is corrosive and deadly.

She’s right about one thing. People never understood her. She’s wrong about another though. She’s not a rat. She’s a rat king. Miles of tangled thoughts pulling her in a thousand different directions. A cacophony even she will never understand.