

The first to arrive was probably the first to die. He waited outside our house, idling in his cranberry colored car, before my sister was even home from work. She had told me he was coming, but he never approached the door despite meeting my eyes through the bay window where I perched, reading. My sister laughed afterwards while telling me about receiving his increasingly vulgar messages. The ones she read out to me progressed from confusion all the way to cursing her for staring out at him and yet making no move to unlock the doors. It was a common mistake, really. I may look it, but I am not my sister.

At eight o'clock my sister came home, bringing six more friends from work who spilled out from her car, arms laden with party mixes of chips, plastic bag clad bottles, and a Bluetooth speaker or two. Standing on the doormat of the house they all said I looked just like her. As they set about fixing up the lights, the drinks, and their hair, I was offered what my sister was drinking. The concoction in her red party cup smelled too strongly of fake strawberry flavoring and the sharp prick of something vinegary. The overwhelmed look on my face was apparently amusing to them, and they snickered when I said that I preferred tea.

"I am not my sister" I told them.

As the sky bruised and then darkened, more people arrived.

Always more people. It seemed like an endless train of bodies coming in from the night air. Just walking from room to room was dangerous, below my feet felt like quicksand. You had to trudge slowly for fear of tripping over displaced furniture, discarded bottles, or the girls with big, black pupils who didn't seem to register when they stumbled into me. I tried escaping upstairs to my room, and learned that my walls offered no separation from the bass driven drone of the music. Even with a fan and an open window, nothing seemed to alleviate the heat from our house, which was too crowded. I wanted to leave, to distance myself from these strangers.

I pushed my way to the front door and found my coat on a closet hanger, half concealed by an unrecognizable jean jacket. I had just buttoned it up when I felt the prick of sharp acrylic nails wrapping around the crook of my arm. It was the manicured hand of one of my sister's friends, who looked up at me with large, dark eyes. She said she was going outside too, and would walk me to the door. I ended up being the one supporting most of her weight. She felt almost as light as her carefree, feathery giggles. Under the pale orange light of the porch she pulled out a withered paper joint. The silver on her pointed acrylic nails glinted with the reflection of the string lights as she offered it to me as casually as one might lend out a pencil.

"It's not even bad" she whispered conspiratorially, "Your sister smokes sometimes, she wouldn't be mad".

"I am not my sister" I told her.

I shook off her grasp and walked out from under the shelter of the porch. It was a chilled night, and pelting small, sharp raindrops, but it still felt better than the overwhelming noise and heat of the house. Still, the earthy smell of smoke and the odd wind-carried snatch of laughter stalked me for another ten minutes as I walked down the glistening sidewalk. When I finally rounded the corner back onto our street, I saw my sister alone on our front porch, sitting with an air of slumped dejection. When I drew nearer, she looked up and seemed to visually inflate, her wave to me as buoyant as if she really was made of nothing but air. Something about it made my stomach clench in concern. When I came close enough to get a good look at her, illuminated under the porch light, the sick feeling in my stomach deepened into nausea.

My sister was off balance, leaning against the rough stone of the wall for support. There was a drink spilled across the front of her soft blue sweater, whose clamminess she didn't seem to feel.

"I didn't know where you'd gone, and I was so scared you wouldn't come back," she confessed in a small, fractured voice,

"what if something happened to my sister?"

And the words became strangled as if the party lights above our heads had become a noose. And she reaches out for me, and she's crying, and those damp vodka stains on her sweatshirt are blending with the saltwater from her fallen tears. My sister's vision was too blurry to see me cry. Sometimes we're a little too similar.

Suddenly the gentle silence of the rainy night was interrupted by slurred laughter from a small group standing by the curb in front of our house, and the crisp thump from a car door shutting. I didn't want to intrude. To poke into what wasn't my business. But the recognition of that cranberry red car made me walk over, fearfully calling out for them to wait. With a roll of their eyes, two girls slid onto the leather back seats.

"We do this all the time and we're always fine" one of them said exasperatedly. Still, I pleaded with the driver not to go. I told him I would call a cab, give them bus money, that he could come back in the morning to get his car.

"Relax a bit more, like your sister" he said, and patted my hair, "go enjoy the party".

"I am not my sister" I told him.

But I hesitantly turned away. She's told me again and again

that it wasn't our responsibility. But I know who's at fault for taking those steps back to our porch. For retreating to the heat and light of the house, and shutting the door that they couldn't close properly. I didn't even look out the window to watch them go, but I know I would have seen them peeling away from the curb, windows down and music up, the wind and rain whisking their hair into a dance around their faces as the car accelerated down the road.

I found out a few days later when I saw the skid marks sprawling into the woods two streets over, black and sticky like rivers of spilled ink on the asphalt. My sister refuses to learn all their names. Refuses to look at their photos in the newspaper.

I am not my sister.