

Half-Moon

Runner-up for the 2017 1/2 K Prize

My sister marked me as a child, or perhaps I marked her. Remember this: my sneakered feet on the ground and then lifting into space, twig-like arms reaching for spontaneous embrace, forehead colliding with chin. I did not cry until I saw blood, and then I wept freely, wept the tears of someone who has hurt her own self. Employees of the big box store shuffled us into the break room while we waited for the ambulance.

Remember the head wrap and how it lifted off my skull like a crown, the medics' surprise when they discovered my sister's split chin. Later, lying shoulder-to-shoulder in a hospital bed, a nurse passed by and cooed, "They look like little angels."

♦ ♦ ♦

On the day of my wedding, my sister gave herself a black eye. We were getting dressed in the youth room of the church when she collided with a pole from the foosball table.

In a way, this too was my fault. I should not have been getting married—not at nineteen, certainly not as a presumed antidote to grief—and when I looked at her later, the skin beneath her eye deepening to a shade of purple that matched her dress, I thought *I'm sorry for this*, but I did not say it.

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We grew inseparable, we grew separately: the fate of half-sisters, the fallout of feuding fathers. We see two sides of the same mother and fail to understand the other's version, her oversights particular to that daughter.

We fight like sisters or we fight like total strangers—I've never been able to tell the difference.

♦ ♦ ♦

When my sister was carrying her second daughter, I requested to attend the delivery. This birth thing—this experience that I almost but did not

experience at nineteen—I resented that it was kept secret, reserved only for the women able to achieve it.

In those first moments after the baby spilled out, I could not look away from the umbilical cord. It was so much thicker than I expected, a pulsing shade of blue. It sagged from my sister's body all the way to the floor, like the phone cord of our old landline.

Later, I will ask the internet if I also grew a rope like this. I assume this stage of development happens far later than my eleventh-week miscarriage, but evidently it happens in the seventh. The chromosome count reveals it was a girl I was growing, and I think *yes, yes of course*.



My sister's daughters follow each other around the house. They pull hair, they roar. They knock each other down. They try so desperately to exist as the same entity and weep each time they fail.

The oldest appears at my bedside in the morning, reaches out with the soft pads of her fingers and traces the white half-moon on my temple. She asks how I got the scar. She wants to know where she can get one like it.