

Post- Cards

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content warning: suicide, death

Greetings, from an Uncertain Past

Dear little brother,

Long long long ago, your dad went to a fortune teller.

This is how I imagine it: he is young, 24 perhaps, and unmarried. He walks into the dimly lit lobby of a Chinese fortune telling business, where the glossy leaves of a silk tree reflect the maraschino-red alter candles.

Your dad wanders through a beaded curtain and sits on a lacquered chair. It is hard and unforgiving.

The teller looks at him, takes one long cigarette drag, and says, “You will have three sons.” The words float across the table, carried by exhalation and wholesale mysticism. Your dad breaths it in, and the words ricochet off the walls of his meaty nostrils, on their way to the safety of his reservoir memory.

In about thirty years, it will surface and greet me.

But before that, he will marry his first wife and have *two* sons. The years will ooze by with no third spawn in sight. I imagine him smirking at the stars, throwing popcorn kernels back at the glittering spectators that hover in the sky with expectation.

But when he is 54, things change! A lot! And quickly!

It is 2008. Your dad’s first wife passes away from cancer. That same year, your dad will marry our mom, who is 39 at the time. Pre-2008, she is a single mother, and I her single child: intergenerational best friends that sometimes conspire against sermonic grandparents. And I preserve that feeling in fossilized tree resin before it escapes me.

But in 2008, you are born: the prophetic son. You tumble down from the stars and into our lives, covered in Martian slime, demanding patience and love and compromise with your exuberant life force.

That day, I had to sleep over at my best friend’s house while your miracle of life happened at Kaiser Permanente. We lay in her bed, bent knees touching, whispering in sifted darkness. I tell her that I want a refund—I asked for a baby *sister*. She laughs. Perhaps the stars misheard me, I say. (I’m half-kidding. You know I love you.)

So, it is still 2008. Your dad’s house burns down in a local brushfire, taking with it the last of his family’s photo albums, lived memories, and more. It is a year of immense love, but also immense loss. This will be a theme in our lives.

Later, among the charred ruins, he finds a quarter that has turned permanently ochre. It sparkles when you tilt it against light, the result of some chemical reaction beyond me. At the site of desolation, the smoke and the sorrow drift back into his nasal canals, back into his reservoir memory.

On the car ride home, his shirt sleeves smell of exhaust. He stoops over the wheel and tells me about the prophecy from his youth, the one of fate and fear and family. He doesn't talk much, so I know to listen closely.

And at the next red light, he reaches into his pocket and takes out the ochre quarter. He places it in my palm. The metal is warm against my skin.

With hope,
your sister.

Greetings, from the Portal of the First House

Dear little brother,

This is where I stood, ugly crying, because I had to give away my white cat. The one with the gray markings on her head, marble green eyes anchored in socket thrones. I was a young witch, and she, my animal companion.

You were just a wee, wrinkled sack of need back then—but once, she padded over to your crib and sniffed your wispy baby hair and your warm baby head. Before proper introductions could be exchanged, mom rudely shooed her away and scooped you up.

A newborn baby and a curious cat weren't allowed to coexist in that house.

And so, on the wicked ledge of the door between the laundry room and the garage, I handed her off in a cramped, burgundy carrier to new owners.

My witch heart broke that day.

In my sadness, I immortalized her in inky droplets of cyan, magenta, yellow, and key. I even visited her once at her new home, but when I did, she looked down at me from the top of unfamiliar stairs and didn't blink. I don't think she recognized me.

With a slight grudge,
your sister.

Greetings, from the Shores of the Second House

Dear little brother,

When you were two, we moved away to the house that had a playground wedged into the small backyard. Last time I asked, you didn't remember this era, which is a shame because you seemed so determined to be a presence, a tiny terrible twos tyrant with globular, close-set eyes and a flossy head of hair.

Your dad and your two much older half-brothers still lived in the first house. We didn't see them often, but I think we were all secretly relieved. I asked mom why we had to move, but she wouldn't tell me until much later that she and your dad had separated—that even though I, an only child who suddenly found herself with not just one but *three* new brothers, wanted to be around my new family-on-loan, they needed space and time away from the three of us.

And so we lived in this house, just you me and mom. My heart aches when I think back on this time. On this island of exile, the three of us survived together. For you, they were distant apparitions that danced on the horizon line, dipping in and out of clarity, and eventually you learned to look away.

With sadness,
your sister.

Greetings, from the Escape Pod in the Corner of the Second House

Dear little brother,

When you were teething, you drooled. I was familiar with the feeling of your saliva pooling on the knees of my jeans, free-falling in slow-motion from the precipice of your gummy spit spout as I cradled you.

There was this rocking chair in the corner of our family room, right next to the fireplace we never used. It was made of white wood, and it had yellow gingham cushions speckled with snack crumbs. The two of us (one skinny pre-pubescent girl, one pudgy baby) fit perfectly.

You loved it when I read to you, swaying gently as I spoke in hyperbolic character voices that made you giggle and spill more drool. *Tickets please!* I paid with spoken words, you paid with gurgled attention, and together we flipped through glossy book pages that smelled of public library into different dimensions. When we emerged, you would often stay behind on the other side, snoring softly.

With whispered endings,
your sister.

Greetings, from a Distant Land of Amusement

Dear little brother,

It's my thirteenth birthday, and we decide you're old enough to appreciate the joy of sensationalized fear.

I'm not sure how ethical it was, but we decided to bring you on the log ride with us. My friend sits in front, I sit second, and you are sandwiched behind, between myself and mom.

We meander through the ride theatrics, and you remain surprisingly calm throughout. The smell of the sloshing recycled water is both nostalgic and nauseating. You gnaw on your fingers, raw and red, as we bump along the fake river canals.

I've been on this ride many times before so I know it when it comes. Our vessel clinks up a steep incline, the chain mechanisms creating scary *ker-chlunks* with every jolt of ascension. And when the sunlight spills into our retinas and the log suffers a moment of uncertainty at the top of the slope, you remain calm. Aloof and terribly young, you have no context.

You are gnawing on your fingers still, as we plunge down into a mist of chlorinated, who-knows-how-old water. A bright flash winks at us during our descent. It is after, as we smoothly drift back to base, that the realization washes over you. It is after, that you start crying.

But in the keychain photograph (our faces smaller than a pinky nail), you are the image of innocence.

Sorry,
your sister.

Greetings, from the Palm Tree Palace

Dear little brother,

Now you are five, and I am sixteen. Things must have been quite different on Mars—and after five years, you still don't quite seem adjusted to this Earthly density. But at sixteen, I have difficulty adjusting too.

Your dad, having sent your brothers off to college, enters stage left bearing riches and return; we (you, me, mom) are discovered again and scooped away from exile, into a strange new place: the third house in the ongoing saga of our time together. It is large and luxurious, a peace offering that we (you, me, mom) could not possibly afford for ourselves. But this backyard is barren, save for four needle palms, and one fountain with three dolphins forever twisted in metal embrace.

At this time, we are all rusted with the exhaustion of acclimation: you are mean, I am hormonal, mom is spread thin, and your dad is learning. He extends a hand towards you, but you snap at his fingers—which smell of material compensation—and run back behind the legs of our mom.

In this cavernous house-not-home, we float in a space of ambiguity and frustration. I see in you the meanness of my own youth, a meanness that stems from a deep maternal allegiance and an allergic reaction to absent fathers.

With solidarity,
your sister.

Greetings, from the Place We Don't Talk About

Dear little brother,

You are six, and I am seventeen. I am going off to college, you and mom will move to Northern California at the end of Summer. We are on course and flying fast in the comfort of darkness, stars streaking by in silence. But on June 19th, an asteroid hits and our journey tumbles to a sudden standstill.

In broken English, your dad texts my mom, "Jesse pass away." Your mom and I are left with radio silence. You are still watching Youtube videos in the other room.

I find out later that night that he left quietly early that morning, when it was still dark out, under a tree in a park I'd never been to.

I'm not sure if I remember where you were on the day of the funeral. I think you were at home, but everyone who would've watched you was with me, so I think you were at school, but I remember from the heat and the dust that it was a California June, so I have decided to think you were at daycare.

When I ask you if you know what happened, two days after, you say matter-of-factly and with the immature rudeness that so many other seven-year-olds develop, "My second brother died and everyone is sad, I know, okay?"

I shrink back and let you continue playing with your Legos. You are the image of innocence.

I'm sorry,
your sister.

Greetings, from the Neverland of Now

Dear little brother,

Now you are nine, and I am twenty. Now you live on a mountain, and I live on a hill. I see you perhaps twice a year, but I think we are beginning to understand each other as individuals. It is strange, and wonderful. Small and tremendous.

We spent this summer in a cathedral of natural splendor (Mount Shasta), now home for you and mom. In our backyard, pine trees and wild flowers bearing witness, I tried to teach you how to meditate. You impressed me with your newfound ability to sit still, if only for ten seconds at a time.

I didn't want to move up here, but you and mom never doubted it. I have a theory that both of you were called by the mountain. Eighteen and hormonal, I let it go to voicemail when the call came. You didn't know what it meant, though. You didn't have roots in Southern California like I did, you didn't know what we were leaving behind.

The summer of 2015 is when we moved, but it was also the summer your half-brother (my step-brother) took his own life. You didn't know him well, and towards the end, neither did I. So when I ask you about your siblings, you say I am your sister and end it there. But I always wonder if you remember that you have a 29-year-old half-brother too, that you will always have a 21-year-old half-brother.

The night before the night that I left for my third year in school, we sat in our backyard and watched the meteor shower. We (you, me, mom) collectively witnessed twenty-three shooting stars. You were surprisingly quiet and observant, concentrating on the vast cosmic bowl above. This time, we were the glittering spectators.

You are still so young, little Martian. You are a blessing, a cosmic consequence, a prophecy fulfilled. Dear brother, perhaps you will read this and understand one day the heavy weight of life that we have all been gifted.

With love,
your sister.