

AND ABEL

As of late, I like to sit at the kitchen table and mourn the passage of time. As your younger sister, I find the passage of time particularly disturbing. And as your younger sister, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but I love you.

Obviously, we're supposed to say it on each other's birthdays. After one is sung to, cult-like and embarrassing, but before the candles are wished upon and blown out.

You'd know, more than anyone else, how much I hate being sung to on my birthday. How, every year, I'd dive under the kitchen table, meltdown forthcoming.

We probably inherited that aversion to vulnerability like we did a bunch of other Ashkenazi stuff - dark hair, and that gene that can give kids cerebral palsy.

Vulnerability is overrated. I prefer our language of pop-culture hieroglyphs, a mother tongue strung together from a childhood's worth of scratched DVDs, violence in movies, sex on TV.

That is how I always think of us: in the kitchen.

You come home from work, open the fridge.

I'm at the stove, like, did you see that thing I sent?

And what I mean to say is It made me laugh, and I thought of you.

I'm at the sink, you're at the microwave, and I'm like, wouldn't you like to see Jason Segel do more dramatic roles?

And what I mean to say is I would concede all of the suffering, and the great sisyphian weight of existence, if it meant I could always come back to the kitchen with you.

Contentment. Murmured and velvety and generous and tender.

It's heimishe.

That's a Yiddish word, reader. I couldn't find its exact translation, but I suspect it was left somewhere between the folds of my late grandmother's blouses.

From a fraction of flaxen light, a photograph of our domestic camaraderie. Yet to ever step out of the casual tableau and observe, appraise, would be to expose the image before it had developed; its sweet, novel monotony, erased.

To acknowledge its significance would acknowledge its impermanence. But it is achingly, overwhelmingly impermanent: where you once dumped your school bag now rests the baskets of laundry you carry in from the other house, the one you live in sometimes, with its own kitchen, and poor interior design choices.

As your younger sister, I feel I am audience to a movie still in its first act, anticipating some inciting incident.

Beside you in the kitchen, I am struck with the urge to encase these moments in layers and layers of fossilised resin, trapped in luminous amber, so that long after we collide with the asteroid that will splinter our habitat into far corners of the universe, Jeff Goldblum can find a way to prolong our existence. I'd like for life to find a way.

But if there's one way to ruin a moment, it's by saying, hey, isn't it profoundly beautiful, so goddamn sacrosanct, how normal we're being right now? So I remain quiet, so as to enjoy our sacred domesticity, the novelty of my older brother enjoying my company. I am at once Jeff Goldblum, and tyrannosaurus rex.

And I am no stranger to gratuitous overthinking, but these suspicions aren't so ludicrous. It was Cain who committed the first murder, an older brother weary of a domestic existence. I remember; it was my Bat-mitzvah parshah.

You'd roll your eyes at that. Look, I'm not that worried. For one thing, we're not inbred.

For the record, I probably wouldn't kill you, not ever, not even if we were Cain and Abel, and God didn't like my sacrifice as much as yours. Not even if we were Judah and Simeon and Joseph, and I had to be a field hand, and you got a technicolour dream coat.

In the interest of total honesty, if we were Amnon and Absalom, and you pulled even half the shit that goes down in the book of Samuel, all bets would be off.

Because it's the older sibling, in all of these stories, that's the antagonist.

Even so, I am not Abel, nor Joseph, nor Absalom.

As your younger sister, part of me would rather you not traverse anywhere beyond this exact moment. You could stay beside me, orbiting laps around our home forever. The sun and the moon.

As your younger sister, that makes me Jacob.

I'm Jacob, and you're Esau, and you come into the kitchen after a long day, and I pretend not to tell you how much I'm dreading the future.

You get something to eat, because you never could eat dinner on an empty stomach. And I'm like, which season would you say *The Office* peaked in? And I'll resist the urge to tell you how much I can already feel myself missing this moment.

I'm Jacob, and I wish we could stay in the kitchen a little longer. I know, it's your birthright to leave first, but maybe you don't have to, not just yet.

It's not like Esau ever saw it that way. It was Jacob, alone, who bore the full knowledge of how fleeting their circumstances were. How few the sands that remained in their hourglass.

I suppose you might say that *Jurassic Park* was only such a lucrative venture (I imagine, before all the injuries claims that were to follow, or perhaps a class-action) because the chance to revisit the past was so novel, so extraordinary.

That we're so careful to protect the film, only because we know how fragile the process of photography is, how easily a photo can vanish.

It's almost as if the sanctity of our normalcy would not exist, then, if not for the knowledge it could disappear at any moment.

A single axiom, split into two. Fraternal twins; Jacob and Esau.

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(That is how I thought to end this essay.)

(But as your younger sister, I think I will still be waiting in the kitchen, for as long as you'd like).