

The Ties that Bind

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Content Warning: rape and self-harm

You stand in front of the bathroom mirror with your sister Abigail, whose eyes no longer hold oceans, but Sunday coffee—just like yours—and as you both run a brush through your hair, Abigail’s grows two inches which was the same length as yours when you were sixteen; it was the perfect length for that senior boy from Spanish class to grab as he kissed your neck and forced you into a dark room at a party where you did not know the host—but hey, everyone was going to be there—and as you both cake on foundation, Abigail’s features begin to look more like your own, and then she covers the hickey on the side of her neck; you did the same when you hooked-up with any guy who showed you interest because all you wanted was to feel in control of your own body, but that sense of security never came; as Abigail runs a curling iron through her hair, scars form down her wrists on the same spots you used to drag razors and flames because each time you closed your eyes you thought about how he forced you into a cold room, the sound of a locking door, and the feeling of his breath on your neck as he forced himself on you while you cried; your sister blends concealer under her eyes, but the dark circles deepen with each brush stroke because—just like you—she tries to hide the nights where she cannot close her eyes without feeling the weight of an unwelcome intruder on top of her, but she cannot tell anyone because no one believes the girl in these scenarios, so you both run peach lip balm over your mouths that kissed the ends of red solo cups and cigarettes every weekend because you

wanted to feel better for a night; you wanted to forget; Abigail flashes you a smile with glossed over lips, but you cannot tell which reflection is yours, and your little sister’s legs grow another inch and her eyes become empty, so you begin to worry that the oceans will not return, her hair will remain long, and her scars will not fade because you know all too well the weight of silence; then mom calls out, “Elena, are you ready?”

Before you can respond, Abigail yells, “Yes, coming,” and runs down the stairs, leaving you face-to-face with her reflection.