

What am I? I sit at the computer all day, doing nothing, randomly sifting through things here and there.

I'm a shadow. I'm the remains of a great empire, a singer reduced to silence. I am an artist without a brush, a single tree left standing in the wake of a storm.

What am I? I am me. I am. Am I?

I can't write fast enough, can't put all the ideas down. I'm spelling things wrong, making stupid similes, not bothering to fix my grammatical mistakes that I know I'm making. When did this become who I am? I was so great, I had everything. I had power, balance, love. It's gone now, and maybe I should be too, instead of sitting here in the dark typing, typing, typing.

I want to blame it all on you, for leaving me alone. It's all your fault. You're supposed to help me; you promised you would, as my brother. Well, you should have been a better one. I told you to stay, but you left me here. I don't think you care. Will you come back again? When will you come back?

When you did come back, it was all wrong. We celebrated, but it was strange. We smiled, something was missing. It's all your fault – just let me help! I only want to help. Let me do something, before I waste away to nothing. What is wrong with me? You say you care but you don't look me in the eye. No, you'd rather read than sit with me and *what* exactly is that you were reading anyway?

You stopped buying soda when I had too much sugar and passed out. Wasn't that your fault in the first place? I just needed something and *yes* I know that was dumb but what makes you think I'd do it again? If you had stayed, I wouldn't end up like that, but you didn't. What is so wrong with me?

I think you're different now than before. Who was it? What happened, in that time when I couldn't see you? You called me and I thought you were just tired. Now I know it was more. What? Yeah, know what, it wasn't great living alone with nobody for company. Why should you care? We're together now. I can tell you're glad that I'm back, so why do you want to get rid of me? You gave me a job for once, but you lied. It was only so that your guest wouldn't see me. You moved all of my belongings out of sight.

You called the doctor behind my back. I found that note on your desk, that you carelessly left out.

“Dear Sir,
You appear to be correct in diagnosing your sister with major depression and delirium. Here are the recommended medications for her situation:”

Did you think I'm some kind of lunatic? I ripped it to shreds and threw it in the

trash, where it should have been in the first place.

You're ashamed of me. Why did I ever stay here anyway? Oh right, you're the one staying *here*. Except you took over my place, so technically *I'm* intruding. Well then. Stop being a wimp and tell me to my face. I think it would be easier that way. Just say, "I don't need you anymore, sister." Like that, simple and clean. It hurts more when you keep it hidden.

I left. What did you expect? I don't stay where I'm not wanted. I enjoyed ignoring your phone calls. I loved going to the store without you hanging off of me like an extra appendage. I sat on the couch for hours on end savoring the tranquility. I wondered why I ever wanted to see you again. Oh yes, good times. Wonderful, incredible, skin-deep good times.

I came back. What did *I* expect? A new world? My house was bare. You were gone. I would take drives and forget where I was going. It was all me again. I dwindled away my time with pointless things that kept the pain from gnawing at my heart.

No, I only came back because it was cheaper here. The food is better. The rest of the world stinks worse than having to put up with you, so I came back. Good riddance, eh? I'm glad that you weren't here. I got all the benefits of living in my home without your nagging. Skin-deep good times, every day and every hour.

I don't think you understand. I should talk to you.

I get everything I want now. Know that? *I am happy here*. I'm so glad that you left. I can't think of anything or any place I'd rather be. Hear that? It's amazing without you. Unbelievably amazing. I didn't think such bliss was possible. Do you hear that? I don't need you, I don't need anything about you. Don't come back.

Liar *liar liar LIAR*. I'm a liar. The lies are so bad that I can see the smoke curling from my mouth. Lies, lies. They're poisoning me, these lies I'm telling.

NO, NO, NO. I'm not a liar. You're the liar. Excuse my slip of the tongue. I am happy. HAPPY! *I AM HAPPY*. Tell me that I'm happy. I am happy. I know it, you know it. I am *happy*.

Don't tell me I'm insecure! I'm happy. I told you that you're a liar, and I'm always right. See me smiling? I'm happy, and you can't tell me otherwise. Huh? It is not fake! Don't you tell me that it doesn't reach my eyes! YOU'RE the fake one. Fake, fake, fake! You're fake!

No, don't go! I'm not finished telling you that- no, please just don't-

Click

Don't hang up on me! You can't hang up on me, that's-

That was you hanging up on me.

Goodbye, sunblock. I'm the shadow.

Goodbye, glory days. I'm rubble.

Goodbye, sound. I'm the quiet.

Goodbye, color. I'm achromatism.

Goodbye, forest. I'm the lone tree.

Goodbye, brother. You don't want to hear me anymore.

Stupid, stupid. Why am I a shadow? That used to be you. You used to be the one alone. I rescued you. I took care of you, taught you how to live. You called me big sister. I called you little brother. We were supposed to grow side by side, and last that way until the end of time. You were never supposed to grow taller than me. You were supposed to stand and cast a twin shadow with me, never tower over me. I was supposed to save your life. You were supposed to save mine.

I'm getting dreams in my sleep, scary dreams. I remember holding you, young and helpless, through countless nightmares. Why aren't you here to do the same? I'm left watching rain drip, drip in rivers down the window. Sky's tears. My reflection shows me that my eyes are raining, too.

Fine job you did, sir. I'm good as dead. It's all your fault. Proud yet? Yes, feast your eyes. I've become *this*, and it's *all your fault*.

I cleaned the house today, rummaging through your old closet. Somehow stacking white sheet after white sheet clears my mind. A folded green corner glared from the back corner, and I pulled on it. Your baby blanket fluttered delicately to the floor, frayed edges waving like butterfly wings. I held it close, remembering those hours I spent hemming material, late at night, stitching memories into every seam.

See the scars? Here. No, not on my chest, not on my skin. Not on flesh. Here – right over my heart. Right *on* my heart. Scars that are your fault. My scars. *Your* scars.

See the stars? They're there every night. Why aren't you?

The piano was shut up in the basement, so long that I forgot why. Once I took it out and hit a key, the memories of you sitting happily on a bench and tapping note after note came rushing back in a torrent. I put it away again.

Feel guilty? You should. You should feel all the pain that I'm feeling. You should take responsibility. It is your fault, and-

I should call you. Where is that phone again?

You know what? You're right. It's really my fault. I apologize. I threw you away and wrote it the other way around, backwards and twisted and upside-down. I'm not really anything anymore, just an empty soul with words.

With you, I'm more. Will you come back? I can make up for what I did, even if it's just once, because I just want to see you again and maybe it'll be okay then and-

You'll come back. Really? For *good*? You're willing to do all the work it will take to fix it up? You're willing to try for a shadow?

Thank you. That means so much. Goodbye, little brother. I'll talk to you another time.

The days are no longer full of rain. I spend my time working, and feeling proud of my progress. I'm getting better, really. The best part is when you come home and we sit, sipping tea and chatting. Just talking and taking tiny little strides toward the light. The steps are slow, but sure, and I think I'm getting there. One foot in front of the other, again and again. It's like part of that quote from E.L. Doctorow, the one about driving at night. He said that even though you can only see as far as your headlights, you can make the whole trip like that. That's me – driving at night; driving out of the night, past the golden half-warm dusk and into the bright, bright day.

The clouds are blowing away, taking with them the heavy blanket that hung overhead. The sunshine is back again, warm and full on my skin. I'm no longer a shadow. I'm the sun itself, radiant among a sea of endless blue.