

you-me-my sister

Something you must know: I spent hours painting my face before coming to see you. First, the canvas of my skin. I flattened it out, covered all the acne craters and the strange landscape of blood vessels on the apples of my cheeks. Whitened it until my surface resembled porcelain and I was a marble statue. Then I filled in my eyebrows – not by much. Only just enough. Precision is important. Then, my lips; pink. Changed the shape of my nose. Finally, I gave my cheeks a real good pinch between pointer finger and thumb to make them red again. I'm good at pinching, you know. I used to do it to my sister all the time. We'd pinch and scratch at each other until we bled. All the time, over the smallest of things. Most often about toys. Call it sisterly bonding.

Before I went into the restaurant to meet you, I examined myself in the window of a car. Pinched my cheeks again. My cheeks are pretty red, naturally. I have a skin condition – I bet you didn't know that! My sister doesn't have it, but my dad does. I got it from him. Either way, it's the wrong shade of red. All wrong, a sick wrong, which is why it's important I paint it over. A freshly-pinched cheek is more desirable according to my sister; she'd read that somewhere in a magazine when we were kids before squeezing my skin so hard, I still feel it on my face till this day. A phantom pinch.

My sister and I still fight. Except now, we use our words and the words of other people, like real adults. Fighting with our fists is unfitting for women like us.

But this is about you, and not my sister.

I painted my face before coming to see you. Did all of this work, hoping you would examine me like I'm ripe fruit, ready for picking.

My sister and I are grown from the same tree, and I think that tree was sick from the beginning. Maybe I'm just saying that because the idea of a sick tree is easier for me to accept than the idea of an apple that got sick by itself. The why and how doesn't change the fact that the fruit is sick, that everything I do will always be about the sickness in my core, and I'm not talking about my rosacea, I'm talking about my sister and I.

I see you now, sitting at a table. You wave at me, and I imagine an entire life with you. A perfect life. How we'll get married and settle down and have an angelic daughter with cherubic cheeks because I will have passed on my rosacea down to her, and we'll be such a happy, picture-fucking-perfect family. Happy, happy, happy, you could paint a fucking portrait with how happy we'll be.

I pull up a chair. You smile at me. Did it work?

Am I desirable yet?

Are you going to pick me over her?