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## Twinless

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*University of Mississippi*

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TWINLESS

A Thesis  
presented for the Master of Arts Degree  
in the Department of English  
at the University of Mississippi

by

Molly McCully Brown

May 2017

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## ABSTRACT

This manuscript is concerned with the loss of my identical twin sister, who died when we were infants. The collection as a whole uses biographical experience to engage with issues of identity, grief, sisterhood, and selfhood. It's interested in the ways that spiritual experience is borne out in the body, and in interrogating the manner in which we're all made and marked by our own particular hieroglyphs of loss.

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## The One Left Behind Tries to Imagine How It Happened

In the beginning, I think there was a well.  
I think we saw the stars reflected there.  
I think you went in after them  
like sunken pennies.

We were born too early  
to have ever  
opened our eyes.

Maybe I made you up?  
Needed a myth in a blue dress  
with a pocket watch, a little flame.  
Needed an excuse to abide,  
a mirage in the worst of the jungle?

It was a junkyard of machines.  
It was loud. You must  
have loved the quiet.

Maybe you let my wrist loose where the river  
forked, & floated right. Maybe I lost sight of you  
in all the weeds & wildflowers; you raised  
one hand before you disappeared.

They warned me not  
to look back  
& I looked.

**I.**

## The Facts, As I Understand Them

1.

I am an identical twin. Or was.

*What's the right tense for having the same genetic material as a ghost?*

2.

In the beginning, there was one egg. Then there were two of us.  
My whole life I have felt like half of something.

*But is that right, exactly?*

3.

We arrived at twenty seven weeks and, together, we weighed less than four pounds.  
I was slightly larger. It was her amniotic sac that broke open, but mine followed suit.  
They tried to stop us being born for weeks after the rupture.

*Why were we so bent on coming?*

4.

They cut us out and rushed us to the NICU while our mother was still under.  
We were blue. We were not breathing, but we had our fists up.  
You could see our not-yet-lungs at rest inside our matchbox chests.  
You could watch them fail to balloon.

*How long, exactly, were we without air? How long did it take?*

5.

She died after thirty-six hours. I lived. That should have been the last of it.

*Why wasn't that the last of it?*

6.

My body bears the marks of our arrival in the world. I am spastic, off-balance,  
hardly able to walk. Often, I wake up sure my body isn't mine. Often, I love being alive.  
I have nightmares that I've left her for the wolves. I have nightmares that she's left me  
for the wolves.

*Who am I without her, when I've only ever been without her?  
Which one of us, exactly, did the leaving?*



## Material

There is a lot I want you to know about being alive:  
The way the coffee maker, telephone, ceiling fan  
sound, all going at once in summer.  
The way, when you cut your knuckle, it bleeds  
for days, reopening each time you bend your finger.  
How that same finger finds its way to a man's lower lip.  
I want for you the small agonies: canker sores, smudged lipstick,  
the grackles crying too loud outside the bedroom window.  
It's too easy, all of it. But I want for you a body.  
Even mine. Even what would have been yours,  
whatever the damage.

## On Construction

The man at the hardware store likes my black dress.

*Nice contrast, ma'am*, he says. *The shape is pretty but the zipper's kinda strong*. I'm aching on the floor and badly hunting screws for the machine my body needs.

If he were young, then this would be a better story:

sun-beaten boy drawls gentle compliment to grimy girl all wrapped up in her damage, then the light comes through the window like a drill.

He's not. He's much too old to even be my father, and anyway he's seen me here before, come in to buy a flashlight for the storm or other incarnations of the screws I still can't find, and so he knows exactly how my ankles drag my feet small, painful distances along the floor. But he said *shape* and *contrast* so I tell him that I like the way the dress reminds me of a bell, the place the skirt flares out. He laughs, crouches down to help, and in that minute we both love a well-made thing—

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**VITA:**

**EDUCATION:**

B.A. in English with a concentration in Creative Writing, Stanford University, 2012

A.A. in English, Bard College at Simon's Rock, 2010

**PUBLICATIONS:**

**BOOK:**

The Virginia State Colony For Epileptics And Feebleminded  
*poetry*, Persea Books, March 2017

**POEMS:**

"Letter to Julian, Midsummer," *Ninth Letter*, forthcoming fall 2017

"Self Portrait, As The Other Girl", "Self Portrait, From A Distance, Without The Other Girl," *Pleiades*, forthcoming summer 2017

"The Facts, As I Understand Them," *Nashville Review*, winter 2016

"The Dormitory," five poem sequence, *Gulf Coast*, winter 2016

"The Infirmary," five poem sequence, *The Colorado Review*, summer 2016

"Where You Are (vii)," "Oxygen," *The Adroit Journal*, summer 2016

"Transubstantiation," "Useless Information I Wish You Were Alive to Know," "For the Woman on the Balcony of the Bar," *Meridian*, summer 2016

"The Blindroom," six poem sequence, *Connotation Press: An Online Artifact*, spring 2016

"After," *TriQuarterly Online*, winter 2013

"Terra Incognita," *The Kenyon Review*, fall 2008

**ESSAYS:**

"Bent Body, Lamb," *Image Journal*, summer 2016

"System of Ghosts: Reviewed," *New Orleans Review*, summer 2016

"Something's Wrong With Me," *The Rumpus*, fall 2014