the first time my brother told me he wanted to kill himself

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the first time my brother told me he wanted to kill himself

Brooke Nelson

I saw his life
flash
before my eyes.
A naked toddler
runs across the room.
His stream of yellow
paints the walls
like a lemon sprinkler.
He is two.

I am up early,
Mom at work,
“Dad” in bed.
I make scrambled eggs and tie his shoes.
Cartoons on for the little ones,
I walk him across the street
to the doors of his classroom
before finding my own.
He is five.

The divorce doesn’t treat us kindly.
He asks our mother for
bread
peanut butter
jelly
and spaghetti
to take with him.
They are things he can make alone.
He is eight.

We spend hours after school
nose to nose,
spitting out frustration
the way his father showed us.
The words sail from our mouths
like knives,
leaving scars I still feel
sunken between my ribs.
He is eleven.

I make four flower crowns.
His is purple.
He flips off the camera,
grinning—
He is fourteen.

He’s telling me about his car
Speeding towards a hundred
And he’s crying
And he’s telling me that he had his destination set for a fir tree
and he’s *crying*
He tells me he swerved for our brother
He tells me he’s *alive* for our brother
All I can think is
*what about me?*
He is seventeen.

Now,
I try to remember
when those
autumn eyes
shift to winter—
*he is eighteen.*