

Life Story

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Between the layers of batting in a queen-sized quilt, two winter melons grew trapped in polyester; rind perforated by a skillful hand with generations of practice. As they grew, itching in silver thread, the world began to reveal itself around them like light through a stained-glass window.

The light first illuminated the woman whose yard in which they grew. They saw she was persistent, lonely or independent. She called them names they didn't recognize, and she laughed like the wind through the trees. The way she looked at them, the way she spoke to them, they didn't think she knew them, but how could she not, for they grew in the palms of her hands.

The light drifted slightly to the left, and their mother came into view. A mirror of the first woman, only younger. When she smiled, something else was different too, but they couldn't tell what it was. Maybe the women were smiling for two different reasons. The women looked at each other as if they shared a happy secret, and as the light moved past them, they began to sing.

The next thing the light revealed was their father. He sat, resting on the arm of the sofa, listening to the distant singing. He tapped his foot, slowly to the sleepy melody, and all the love that surrounded him warmed and yellowed the beams of light. Sunlight blanketed their skin for the first time as they emerged one after another through layers of careful incisions.

I am twin B, born three minutes after twin A. Twins, but no one has ever thought us alike.

We grew up on the edge of a great green valley. High-rise apartments towered over treetops as if they too were rooted in soil. At the bottom of the valley, an abandoned brick factory. Empty smokestacks formed from the ground they now decayed on. WORKS, VALLEY, BRICK, DON. Under smokestacks, under highrises, we followed the Don River through echoing storm drains, searching for sunlight where the river left off. When summer ended, the drains swam and plundered with autumn rain and winter snow and with the season came stories of winter on the prairie.

A prairie boy's winter. Snowbanks so high, over fields so flat. A crinkled white sheet; corners pinned at the ends of the earth. Opening the front door of the farmhouse to a tightly packed wall. Carving through like moles through the sparkling, glistening. Life on the moon was a memory passed down.

As spring merged into summer, our mother grew a garden. No winter melons, but tomatoes, eggplants, potatoes. Grown in baskets and bins between high-rises. Potted and re-potted, arranged on the patio.

We returned to our oasis by the river. We rode our bikes under trees and highway viaducts. Our mother never told us stories from her childhood, but we came to the understanding that she grew up on Earth. Not an experience to be envied.

We came home to our grandmother in the garden, admiring her daughter's work. When she looked up at us, she called us names we did not recognize and laughed like the wind through the trees. Her pride was immeasurable.