

She told him her schizophrenic brother had been committed again to a psychiatric ward, this time for holding a ballpoint pen to the neck of a local morning radio talk-show host.

He lifted the remote as he slumped onto the couch, said, "That's really sad," and changed the channel.

She burst into a fury contained for months at the edges of her veins. "You are *nothing*," she shouted. "You have *zero* fucking emotion—"

"I just don't know—"

"How to show it, yeah. I've heard that a billion times, and it was bullshit from the jump."

"I *don't*, Em. I really don't."

She shook her head, once. "You know what?" she said, walking to the entryway and grabbing his keys off the sideboard and then twisting off the bronze key to her apartment. "You are not allowed back in here. Ever again."

"I—"

"Leave," she said, pointing the key at him. "Six months and you've given me nothing. I tell you of my life, and tell you and tell you and tell you." She paused, palm to her brow. "And I tell you *this* happens to my brother, and all you have to say is, '*that's sad*'? It doesn't matter what I say, does it? All you give me is an outline. The most you talk about is your freaking paper mache projects. You're a stencil of a human being," she said, pointing at the door. "Get out."

"Are you—"

"Serious. Very."

He unfolded from the couch and took a step toward the bedroom.

"Nuh-uh," she said. "You take nothing. I'll pack it up and mail it to wherever you end up. Get out. I'm so fucking serious."

Her eyes were glistening in the frail glow of the TV, the upstairs neighbor playing chopsticks on an electric piano, rain scattering against the window.

He tried a few more times to talk to her, and failed, so he left, out into the night.

She went to the window and watched him walk across the crosswalk, over a smeared streak of green painted there by a traffic light. He turned north, walked up the opposite sidewalk, until he passed under an awning where rain wept off the edges, and was gone. Then she walked into her bedroom and cried.

In the morning, she got dressed for work. She drank half a mug of coffee, poured the rest in the sink. She grabbed her purse, feeling her heart thinning out to some red steam as she noticed the absence of him, and how it barely felt different than him being there.

She opened the front door and saw, on the opposite wall of the hall, a tall white poster, with a sketched outline of a person. In the center of the person's chest was a red paper mache heart, painted with the words, *For Emma*.