

## SWIMMING UNDER WATER

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It was my last night before I had to set off when he told us he was thinking of ending it. He said exactly that. Those were his words. The only word I'm not sure about is the last. He might also have said "all". That he was thinking of ending it all. But otherwise those were the words. We were sitting together around the table in the living room, having lunch and chatting about my imminent trip. I was going to study in another city. I was the third to leave home - my brother lived in the capital, he was also studying. Only my youngest sister was still living at home. We had spent the final week of the summer holidays together. I remember we'd gotten into a discussion about money, my brother had been drinking. And that was when he told us. I don't know if any of us believed he really meant it. In the end Mum left the table. What I remember most is her saying: I deserve better than this.

Dad said nothing. We looked at him, but he said nothing. The year before, he chucked Tom out the house, they'd stayed up all night arguing, I don't know why, I was younger, I had nothing to do with it. Tom disappeared for a few days, and when he came back, they didn't say much to each other. He was planning to give up studying. You still have one son, he said one time he was drunk, and pointed at me. I think Dad laughed.

One morning, a long time ago: I was six or seven, standing on a swing in the garden, a tyre tied to the thick branch of a tree, it was the summer holidays or soon after, the sun was out, and beneath me my shadow swayed just short of me, it was hot, I was swinging towards a rusty barrel at the bottom of the garden, back and forth, until all of a sudden I thought to turn around, as if I knew there was someone behind me, I glanced towards the house, and caught sight of Mum in one of the windows on the second floor. She was crying. Maybe she was looking right at me. I kept swinging, but more and more slowly, until I stopped completely and the shadow was a hole in the ground beneath me.

It's hard to imagine why it was that she was crying, I might also be mistaken. Looking back, I see her as harmonious and happy - that last word is hard to grasp the dimensions of. I've never asked her - if I did, she'd brush it all aside. Rarely is she caught off guard.

There are a fair few home movies from when we were kids. When I'm home, I sometimes take them out. They bring me to a sweat, I feel I'm floundering, like in a dream, my clothes clinging to the surface of my skin. The images of my youngest sister, in which she looks like a young man...she has a skinny, dog-like air about her. Maybe she's always had that look, I've just never taken any notice. The videos show two little women and two little men. We were young adults together, then suddenly we were actual adults. Sometimes at night I wake up abruptly and I know what I've dreamed, even if I have no distinct image on my retina. Picturing my childhood is like swimming under water. I roam in the unknown, yet this seems to me like

something I should recognise. A certain helplessness...my eyes are open, but everything is unclear, and whenever something turns out to be visible, it rarely appears to be what I thought.

I call home once in a while. My parents live alone now. But mum's always optimistic. She tells me something that's happened. Dad asks me how things are. I reply that everything's fine. I know it's my turn to speak. And I might not do so. I'll be completely silent. I know I'm meant to say something. That sums it up between us, distant voices coming onto the line, between me and Dad. I hope you come home soon, he always says before I hang up. We never talk about my brother.

It was just after I'd gone to the city I was about to study in, that I received the letter. It was the kind of letter you hardly ever get. On the front I could see where the ink had run, as if it had been dipped in water for a moment, I walked around with it for a couple of days, one time I put it in front of the books on the shelf in my room, I sat up all night and looked at it, the front, the lettering - I never opened it.

One of the videos is taken in the summer, in the front yard of our house. We're all there: Dad's lips are moving, Mum comes in front of the camera, waving, her shoes are blue, she's small--my brother and I are already taller than her where we're standing, at the finishing line of an impromptu race--she's holding out a plate with lunch on it, laughing, it's my oldest sister who's holding the camera, Dad who is shaking his head, in the background now, Mum backs out of shot.