

My Brother Bites His Nails

My brother bites his nails. Although he's older than me, he never got his license. So, I drive us to school. We never really talk; I just wait for him to get ready in the mornings and he follows me out to the car. Sometimes, out of the corner of my eye, I can see him biting away at his nails in the passenger seat, the only audible sound in the car being the click of his teeth splitting his fingernails in two.

I pick him up from football practice, too. It's not like I'm ever doing anything and would have a reason not to. My parents pay me twenty bucks a week for it, but I just stash most of it under my bed; I never go out. Sometimes I don't even bother to go home until I need to pick my brother up. When this happens, I'll sit in my car in the parking lot of the football field and watch him practice. I always make sure to move back to the school before practice is over though; I know he feels weird and plays worse if he knows I'm watching. On the ride home, he works tentatively away at his nails.

At lunch, as I sit by myself, I sometimes watch my brother talk and laugh with his friends and teammates. I change where I sit often, because whenever he happens to see me, he loses interest in his friends and starts biting his nails again. I don't mean to make him so uncomfortable. God, I just wish he would talk to me.

My brother also doesn't like to come in our room except for when we go to bed. Our room is where I spend the majority of my time, either lying in bed and staring at the ceiling or browsing the internet. Whenever he happens to come in the room, he only ever has one hand free because the other is being frantically chomped away at.

At night, while I do my best to sob silently about my lack of friends, hobbies, and interests, I know I've been too loud when my sobbing is also accompanied by a click, click, clicking of split nails coming from my brother's side of the room. I force myself to stop, and roll over to face the room rather than the wall. I stare at his silhouette until I can finally pass out.

Yesterday, much to my parents' surprise, I left the house after I brought my brother home. I used some of my stash of money to make a purchase at the department store.

I've been lying in bed for hours, and at last I think everyone is asleep at 3 A.M. I slowly crawl out of bed, my eyes fixated on my brother. I stumble, trying to put on my shoes in the dark, and drop one banging footstep. My brother shifts in bed. I assume he is still asleep. I grab what I bought earlier today, and shuffle to the door. As I open it ever so delicately, I take one final glance back. It's dark, but the faint light from the hallway makes it just easy enough to see my brother biting at what little fingernail he has left. I squint, and almost wonder if his eyes are open. I think I see a small reflection of light on what is presumably a tear rolling down his cheek, and know immediately he's seen what's in my hand. And yet, he says nothing; how can he, when his mouth is already preoccupied with biting his nails? I turn around and close the door. I have an appointment with the tree in our backyard. As I tip toe down the hall, I glance down at the noose in my hand and notice my nails have been bitten down, too.