

Brackish waters and rough waves, water whirling in a sink and pushing itself down the drain. You, moving like water, pushing yourself down the drain. You, biting your tongue and spitting the blood and bile into the sink, creating an ocean of distrust and man-made disaster that boils and scorches. But you level yourself and smooth your dress and wipe your nose, and walk out of the bathroom without looking at yourself in the mirror so you don't have to see the mess you've made. The messes you've made. The times you've cried into your mother's arms and she's held you, held you, still tries her best to hold you. But you're the water, and the mud boiling underneath, and the heat at the center of the earth.

When I was seven, the treehouse in my backyard was torn down because of termites. They were eating it up from the inside out and the haven was lost to the dogs. The termites had to find a new home and I offered my body. For ten years they lived in me, eating me from the inside out. Slowly sometimes, so it felt like a steady hum I could always rely on. But sometimes it hurt and they were heavy, and I'd take a hot bath and find refuge in my mother's bed until I remembered who I was enough to brush my teeth.

When I was seventeen the termites were exterminated. I don't know if the emptiness I felt after came from the lack of these insects or because I had finally realized what I had lost. A part of me thought whatever they destroyed would grow back once they left, but the termites had resided in my rib cage long enough to leave me with something missing permanently, gone forever. Nobody else noticed, but I did.

The first time I cried to my mother I couldn't tell her why I was throwing such a fit. She understands the things she can't, so she just let me weep. When I couldn't stop, she gave me a Xanax. My older sister was jealous of that, but I wasn't listening to her complain. I was half-asleep in bed and I don't remember what she was saying. I was sleepy and sad. The feeling was not too dissimilar from when I was twelve and had laughing gas at the dentist because I had to get a cavity filled.

My older sister had a cavity in the same tooth, so we went into the office at the same time. I cried in the waiting room after the procedure. My mom sat next to me, watching the TV in the corner and holding my hand. We had to wait on my sister for half an hour. It had taken the dentists a longer time to fix her tooth because she had been laughing so much from the gas.

I'm afraid my sister and I might have switched bodies, because I don't have termites now and I laugh a lot, and she's the opposite. She might have been the one to exterminate my termites and had taken them in as her own. If she did, she never told me, but that's not the sort of thing she would want me to know. Or maybe we both died in the dentist's office, side by side with the dentistry staff looming over us, and we have different ways of dealing with our lives after death. I wish the termites could find a more fitting place than a living corpse to gnaw and erode.

I don't get angry with my mom ever since she held me while I cried to her for the first time that I can remember. That's a lie—I was angry with her, once, right after the fit. She told my dad that I wasn't feeling great, and after the Xanax wore off I saw him in the living room. He gave me a sympathetic look from the couch and asked if I was okay. I don't like when my dad is serious and I felt like he thought he was looking at a stranger. He shouldn't know that I've ever cried, except maybe for when I was a baby and he would hold me, hold me, still tries his best to hold me. But he thinks I'm grown now, and we both know we have secrets that neither of us want the other to know.