On the morning of our death, I wake before dawn. Lying under tangled sheets of our shared bed, I snap the cool blade of the jackknife open, shut, open, shut as the sky blues with the rising sun. Outside shards of light break the horizon. Bent shadows creep crooked across our window; branches flail against the glass. With our synchronized hearts thudding and our lungs rising and falling in silent harmony, I whisper to my brother: “Today is the day. I’m going to cut it. I swear to God I am.”

Next to me, Lloyd dozes, spindly legs stretched out at odd angles, tiny hips pressed against my own massive shanks, drool puddling under his cheek. Running my hand over our shared flesh, it seems impossible that this band of skin, this slab of ropey veins and soft flesh could sustain two lives, could forestall twin deaths. I press my fingers against the long cartilaginous band that connects me to my brother; with one cut—one long, bloody slice—all of this will be over. We will cease to exist. There will be no us. Only Lloyd and Floyd: separate, conjoined no more.

My brother snores softly; I study his face, my face: the thick brown curls, the beetle brow, the severe underbite, the cleft chin. Staring into the mirror that is Lloyd, I snap the jackknife open, shut and whisper, “All of this is your fault. All of this is because you had to write that book.”
Someday very soon—when all of this is over, when our decaying bodies are discovered, when the police smash through our thin door, when we are hefted into black body bags, when our caskets are lowered into the earth—the world will know that the publication of *Our Selfsame Bodies* was the beginning of our end.

I stare up at the white ceiling, flicking the jackknife open, shut, open, shut, pressing the cool blade against my palm. Outside, the day is bright and clear. Sunlight filters through the curtains. Dust motes float past the window. My brother snores, rubs at his chin. All around the bed, stacks of *Our Selfsame Bodies* wait to be autographed and shipped to adoring readers. The room is littered with copies of Lloyd's book: in corners and closets, in empty cupboards, under the desk, on windowsills. Everywhere are rickety towers of that tell-all invasion of my privacy.

Soon, when I lie dying in a pool of our shared blood, what I will remember is Lloyd writing that book: My brother sitting silently at his desk—with me hunched awkwardly next to him on a small footstool—licking the tip of his pencil, pulling at his bangs, scribbling into yellow legal pads. I will remember saying, “Please don’t do this. I don’t want people to know.” I will remember my brother smiling: “Floyd, we must show the world who we are. We must tell our story. We must tell the world.”

And that is what Lloyd did. He revealed our ugly secrets, published glossy photos of our conjoined bodies, penned cheap and offensive chapters that showed . . . But what is this? He stirs . . . . he wakes. “I’m sorry? What was that, dear brother?”

It should be noted that Floyd performs these maddening histrionics every morning, his mutinous gob blathering away about some incomprehensible trumpery. The soundest course of action is to ignore him. That’s what I do. In truth, that’s what most everyone does. “Floyd, you truculent, green-eyed hobgoblin, please silence yourself. I’m attempting slumber.”

“Oh dear, Lloyd. Did I wake you? I’m ever so sorry.”
This is merely a daily reiteration. Every morning, the caterwauling recurs: “I’m going to cut it. I’m going to cut it.” But the threat never comes to fruition. “Does it, Floyd?” Not to mention the fact that his beloved jackknife is rusty and dull. Not to mention the fact that just last week he swooned whilst receiving his Hepatitis C booster. “For once in your life, silence. And, yes. You woke me. All that grousing and mindless sputtering. I must rest before Carol and Beryl Gabon arrive.” Why is my brother the most inconsiderate person in the world? “Why, Floyd? Why?”

“Oh, Lloyd. I’m ever so sorry. Please, go back to sleep. Here, let me stroke your temple—no, no, let me stroke our band, that union of our livers, our intestines, our diaphragms, our hearts—and tell you a story . . . yes, that’s it, drift off to the land of nod . . . dream about presenting a copy of your book about the Hypersomiotic Gabon sisters . . . there we go . . . that’s it . . . time to sleep . . . listen to your bedtime story: Once upon a time there were two brothers, the brave and noble Floyd and the evil, treacherous Lloyd—”

My brother is a bitter man. And, it’s worth noting, for the record, that Hypersomia is no longer acceptable nomenclature. Pituitary Gigantism is the proper mot du moment. “Floyd, please, stop stroking our band.” His touch is poison.

“There, there brother. Off to sleep with you . . . yes, very good. Rest.” Now, where was I? Yes, of course. Let me just consume these seven éclairs and continue: Within weeks of its publication, Our Selfsame Bodies was a bestseller. My brother was famous. There were book tours to Boston and New York, author interviews, television appearances, inspirational speeches, conferences, meetings with state legislators. And I was dragged, kicking and frothing, to all those nauseating events, because what would my brother be without the other half of his newfound celebrity, without the other half of his claim to fame? “Without me, Lloyd, you are nothing.” On the lecture tour, I shook hands. At parties, I made small talk
and sipped champagne. I stood with my brother in cheap motels, gazing into mirrors, buttoning my matching shirt, knotting my matching tie, buffing my matching shoes, and thinking: I am so happy to be conjoined to you. I am so happy. So very happy. “I tried, Lloyd. Really I did. I tried. And then St. Louis happened.”

The whole thing is kind of a blur: It was August. I remember my brother reading from his book. A large crowd was packed into that cramped bookstore. People clapped. Lloyd answered questions. I remember feeling nauseated, sweating through my shirt and popping antacid tablets. And then that kid with the green hair and the nose ring stood up. “Aren’t you both glad you were born this way?” he said. “Aren’t you glad you’re not normal like everyone else?” I stared at him for moment. My brother sniffed nervously. Someone cleared her throat. The next thing I remember is lunging into the audience, dragging Lloyd with me, tossing audio equipment and podiums across the room as people trampled one another and screamed. I’ve been told that shortly thereafter, security decided to “taser the crazy one” because “he went on some kind of sick rampage.”

After St. Louis, my compulsive eating began: the strawberry rhubarb pies, the jars of gherkins, the honey-baked hams, the bear claws, the gallons of borscht. At first my binges controlled me, but soon they became my chocolate-frosted, partially hydrogenated revenge. And look at us now. My brother moored to me: a four hundred pound millstone—a mountain of doughy, dimpled pink replete with rolls and chins and dank sweaty crevices—all connected to him by this thick pink band. “I am going to cut it, Lloyd. I swear to God.”

Let me pause a moment and wash down those éclairs with a pint of whole milk and some mincemeat pie. Ah, that hits the spot. Outside, the sun rises higher, the sky is pale blue and cloudless. Soon, my brother and I will be dead. But first, another wedge of pie. Yes. Now, where was I? After St. Louis, we entered therapy. We took a bus and met with Dr. Hackle-Wells at the Institute of Living. Inside her cramped and cluttered office, I sat on a leather loveseat with my brother and explained about the book, about the
betrayal: “We’re freaks now,” I said. “My brother made us freaks. A double monster. Like something from the circus.” Lloyd said nothing, stared at the carpet. Dr. Hackle-Wells crossed her legs at the ankles. When my brother finally spoke, he was smiling: “I made us into something. I took away the pity and the shame and I made us matter, I made us exist.”

That is it. There’s only so much one man can countenance. It is futile: Lying here, attempting slumber, whilst my brother spews forth one offensive, spiteful lie after another. There is a limit even to my forbearance.

“Oh dear brother, did I offend your gentle—”

“Floyd, you give me no option, save refuting your inane rants with some semblance of the truth. Though I must admit, I scarcely know where to begin.” Perhaps, as we say in the world of letters: au commencement. Let me just marshal my thoughts: From an early age, it was clear that Floyd was not my intellectual equal. While I spent sunny afternoons working trigonometry problems in our sandbox, Floyd sat next to me, staring at a handful of twigs, making mud patties, muttering, and battering himself in the groin with a pinecone. This unfortunate disparity intensified as we matured. When we graduated from Weybridge High School, I stood at the podium and delivered a rousing commencement address whilst my brother slouched at my side and mutely gazed at his shoes. When I captained the Maine State Chess Club, Floyd again slouched at my side, dozing during competitions or reading comic books. I could continue to could catalogue my many triumphs and Floyds many defeats, but that would be unnecessarily cruel. The point is: a pattern was established. I thrived whilst my poor brother flailed. And that disparity created a rift between us. A vast rift only exacerbated by the publication of my modest—though highly praised—magnum opus, Our Selfsame Bodies. Floyd took to clutching his green comforter and sulking on our bed—with my lying next to him—for hours on end. He dressed exclusively in black. He shouted wild
accusations: “You’ve no right. This is my life, too.” He refused to accompany me on important meetings with editors and publishers. For six months, he gave me the silent treatment. At night, I would wake and discover him staring at me with a savage gleam in his eyes—

“Oh, what a colossal tsunami of guano.”

“Silence! Shall I list your many failings? Shall I expose you?” No. Not yet. First, I must partake of a caffeinated beverage. It is early and a mind of my caliber oft requires chemical stimulation in the a.m. “Stand up, Floyd. Let’s go. On your feet.”

“I’m not going anywhere, you mutated tyrant.”

“Yes, you are. We’re going to the kitchen. Don’t make me drag you there by our band.”

“Don’t touch me. I said don’t touch. Fine. Fine. I’m up.”

“Good. Very good . . . Thank you, dear brother.” Humping down this short hallway—one awkward sidestep after another—my twin brother and I pause to admire my copious diplomas and awards that hang from the walls. Outside the wind tugs at treetops. A cloud skims the horizon. I lead my brother into the kitchen, a small salmon-colored room, smelling faintly of raw onion and cumin. My books and papers litter the countertops, files heaped on tables and chairs. Shifting our body onto a wide bench, I prepare a café au lait; my brother picks his teeth with a fork. Now, getting back to Floyd’s failures—“Brother? Café au lait? No? I thought not.”—there was oil painting, origami, juggling, prose poetry, stamp collecting, woodworking, the guitar, the drums, the bass guitar. There was flower gardening, vegetable gardening, dog walking, animal husbandry, day trading, real estate. Floyd took it all very badly. He fell into deep depressions—drinking heavily, abusing drugs. And
then *Our Selfsame Bodies* was published and, to make a long story short, Floyd couldn’t handle it. He went off the deep end—

“You sold us. That’s what you did, Lloyd.”

“Floyd, is there no level to which you will not stoop?” One minute my brother is threatening to cut our band. The next minute he’s an arbiter of justice and righteousness. Sitting next to him as he shovels toast into his mouth—his huge stomach hanging low and glossy—I can only speculate as to the warped workings of his mind.

“Lloyd, I hate you.”

“No you don’t.”

“Yes. Yes I do.”

No. He hates himself. He hates himself because of what we are. That’s the truth. All I’ve ever done is tell the truth.

The jackknife is in my hand. I snap the blade open, a ribbon of light glimmers along the blade. “I’m going to cut it, Lloyd.”

The jackknife is in his hand. I place my café au lait on the table. I lick a grain of sugar from my fingertip. Sweat drips down Floyd’s forehead. He is not going to cut it.

I press the blade of the jackknife against our band. This is the last moment of our lives. And it’s nothing like I imagined. When our bodies are discovered, there will be no signs of a struggle, there will be nothing to explain why or how. Everything will seem normal: two dead bodies—the bloody shells of two brothers who quietly breakfasted on coffee and toast on the morning of their death.
I stare at my brother. His face is my face: calm, passive, tired. “What would I be without you? What would you be? There's nothing wrong with what we are.” I place my palm against his cheek. It is warm and dry.

I grab my brother's arm and pin our body against the table. He stares into my eyes but is silent, his breath heavy and labored. Digging the tip of the jackknife into our band, I notice small things in kitchen: the spice rack, the hanging baskets, the striped wallpaper, the stacks of dirty dishes. Outside the sun passes behind a cloud. There's something wrong with everyone. Ours is just visible.

The tip of the jackknife digs into our band. The blade feels coarse and warm. There is a spike of pain. A trickle of blood runs down my stomach. I try to struggle, but my brother's weight is pressed against my arm. “We'll die, Floyd. This will kill us.”

The jackknife is oddly heavy in my hand. Pressing it into our band, I look into the hundred shades of brown and gray that are my brother's eyes. And then I slice the thick band of pink.

Red is flooding the kitchen floor. My body burns. Lloyd and I stagger away from each other, looking—for the first time—at our separate bodies, our separate selves. The circle of red is spreading across the floor. I smile sadly at my brother. He smiles at me. And we both drop to our knees.