

**Lane Devers**

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Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

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## **Maintenance**

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At the pre op appointment a projector is rolled in on a squeaky cart. My brother tries to whisper something into my ear but is stopped by my mother cupping her palms in a tight circle around his mouth. The same instructional video plays in loops, the blue latex gloves entering the shot first, followed by thin pale slices of visible wrist. The rubber patient is just face, chest, and hands. The narration covers scar maintenance. How direct of an angle a faucet head should point in relation to the wound, massaging techniques, creams.

For Christmas one year my brother and I receive a disposable camera we keep stuck between our mattress pad and the bed-frame. It captures the only evidence of us attending county fairs, farmers markets, and city aquarium shows. There are only a handful of photos with both of us fully in frame. Us in baseball hats, in swim trunks, on top of jungle gyms. Us standing so close you can't quite tell which set of arms belongs to who. Despite a three year age gap, we share the same teeth, shoe size and face.

The gloves quietly pull things found inside the practice patient outside of itself. The surgeon's table is the shade of muddied lip gloss. By the end there is a bowl the size of a coffee mug full of insides.

In physical therapy I am asked to make different shapes out of Play-Dough using only my bad hand. Golden crown, blue whale breaching, green four leaf clovers, I manage nothing but crumpled heaps.

Throughout elementary school our teachers confuse us constantly. There is rarely a sentence spoken to one of us in which we aren't both the implied subject. We eat our lunches behind the gym, push into each other's shoulders, keep our gums neat and tidy with a bit of floss.

Every winter post operation I picture my index finger as a hollow rod, all exterior. The center is the hardest part to teach to reheat itself after being out in the cold too long. Mittens fit better than gloves because they don't try to divide my hand into functioning pieces.

When visiting the aquarium we take turns comparing the other to different species of ugly fish.

I am an eel and he is an enormous catfish. We live in separate tanks on opposing ends of the ground floor.

The doll is taken off screen to recover. Anecdotes about cartilage growth flash across the screen in various shades of bile.

The narration follows me into the shower. It tells me to scrub. I start with the knees, working upwards in slow circles. *Harder. Steam swells. Like you mean it.*

My mother, a substitute teacher of kindergarteners, is the first to suggest finger painting. Thinking I might regain some sensory feeling if I rub the acrylic against the paper long enough.

My brother's first word was "hot" because before I was born my parents lived in a house with a furnace at the center and whenever he would try to bring his hand to it they would say "No. Hot."

Parallel to the bathroom mirror, we set an egg timer. Brush our teeth in long rhythmic strokes until it dings. Naturally, we are both left handed, but with the cast I have to use my right. Everything is out of sync.

*Boil until clean*, the narration commands, referencing metal tool sterilization, and I remind myself it is not suggesting I do this to bone.

At the petting zoo there are signs telling us to lay our palms flat so the animals don't mistake us for food. The goats are particularly grabby, their tongues are like rope. They pull us closer and closer to their stomachs, stopping only when we scratch.

There is never enough skin to maintain heat. I can still construct a snowman, but only if someone else does the rolling.

We move often. Each new house with a bunk bed waiting for us. Our mother doesn't help the twin rumors. She wraps us in matching sweaters, has us share a birthday cake each year, allows us to speak in coded whispers. Our laundry is always mixed up in the wash, we sort what belongs to who methodically, arguing over color and size. It is all we ever fight about, our skin covered in suds.

My hospital room was small, my twin cot like a shelf. The morning after I stood alone in the body length mirror propped against IV chords. I pressed my thumb against the glass like I was at the aquarium. I thought about catfish. I pushed harder.