Barefoot Behind a Jail

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Alone, darkness pulses, silence whispers
“you still haven’t finished your thought.”

I know,
I know.

If truth be told, silence lies.
Loneliness is written on my blank paper.

I know
I know.

But what company does loneliness keep
other than the stain of tears and blood?

I know. I know.

Silence whispers once more, taking my
thoughts in its breath, only to join the darkness.

I know. I know.

Light fills the dark (they aren’t on speaking terms)
and I say into silence,
when the time comes, I will set myself afire, for
the world must burn, and I am the only world I know.

I know that I don’t know.
Stare at the ceiling, at how clean it is up there.  
And he’ll tell me for the first time that he needs to be out west.  
He’ll get up and look at me from the door like he can still change the world  
By running barefoot down East Kathleen while Dad drives after him.  
I’ll spend my money on road signs so that he’ll have to think of me still.  
Michigan, 10,025 km that way  
And before he does leave I’ll bike home and lay  
Down on that saggy part of my  
Living room floor  
So that I might fall through it  
Like the ice over Holland’s pond  
And that I might find our shorts and underwear down there before surfacing  
And grab them from the muck and the clay  
So that I can give them to my kids one day and say “Look!  
We ran home through the snow, all the way, naked and cackling  
As our penises shriveled and our butt cheeks got red  
And your grandparents were just lying there  
Laughing, they could barely breathe”

When Marianne was first invited over, she’d wanted to come. She’d been meaning to stop by and visit, just like the old days. Except in the old days Felix didn’t have tumors growing inside his body like grapes in a vineyard. He was skinny, pale, bald, with chapped lips and sunken eyes—but he’d smiled when she showed up at his bedroom door and waved her in, almost cheering. “Annie! I missed ya,” he said. “How’ve you been? How was Seattle?”

“Rainy.”

Felix asked how her family was, what she’s been doing with herself. He talked about how much he’d love to make a snowman that winter or maybe even dare to dream he’d be well enough to go skiing. He was feeling better, he’d said. Nobody visited him after the first two years. After maybe an hour, an hour twenty, when Marianne was dangerously close to yawning, Felix gestured to his bookshelf, “Do you wanna watch a movie, Annie?”

“It’s getting late, Felix. I should probably let Brutus out of his kennel.”

“But I have X-Men. You love X-Men.”

“I really have to go, Felix.” Marianne frowned, reaching forward to squeeze her friend’s bony, cold hand.

“Okay,” he muttered, disappointment dripping from his voice. “But come and hang with me more often. Please?”

“Promise,” she said, exhausted. “I’ll visit all the time.”

Three weeks passed without seeing Felix, by fault of the whirlwind that was Marianne’s day-to-day life, and when she got the phone call at four in the morning, Marianne realized, with all the grace of an anvil crashing down on her skull, she wouldn’t.