

*Ham*

Before they were born, Georgia and Bessi experienced a moment of indecision. They had been travelling through the undergrowth on a crescent-moon night with no fixed destination and no notion of where they were, whether it was a field in Buckinghamshire, the Yorkshire Dales or somewhere along the M1 from Staples Corner to Watford. Night birds were singing. The earth smelt of old rain. Through scratchy bramble they scurried, through holes that became warm tunnels and softly lit underground caves. Their paws pressed sweet berries in the long grass and they sniffed each other's scent to stay together.

Soon they began to sense that they were coming to a road. One of those huge open spaces of catastrophe where so many had perished. Squirrels smashed into the tarmac. Rabbits, badgers, walking birds – murdered and left for the flies. Bessi thought they should risk it and cross, there was nothing coming for miles. But Georgia wasn't sure, because you could never be sure, and look at what the consequences might be (a little way up the road a bird lay glistening in its blood, feathers from its wing pointing stiffly up to the sky).

They crept to the roadside to get a closer look. Nothing coming at all. No engine thunder, no lights. It took a long time for Georgia to come round. OK then. Let's be quick, quicker than quick. Run, leap, fly. Be boundless, all speed. They stepped on to the road and shot forward, almost touching, and then the engine came, and for reasons beyond their reach, they stopped.

That was the memory that stayed with them: two furry creatures with petrified eyes staring into the oncoming headlights, into the doubled icy sun, into possibility. It helped explain things. It reminded them of who they were.

A slowness followed the killing. While their blood seeped into the road they experienced warmth, softness, wet. But mostly it was brutal. There were screams and a feeling of being strangled. Then a violent push and they landed freezing cold in surgical electric white, hysterical, blubbering, trying to shake the shock from their hearts. It was a lot to handle. Georgia, who was born first, forty-five minutes first, refused to breathe for seven minutes. And two and a half years later, still resentful, she was rushed back to St Luke's Hospital with dishcloth, carpet dust, half her afro and tassels off the bottom of the sofa clinging to her intestines. She'd eaten them, between and sometimes instead of her rice pudding and ravioli. The ordeal of it. Ida running around the house shouting Georgia's dying, my Georgia's dying! and the ambulance whisking her off and Bessi feeling that strange sinking back towards the road (which, when they were old enough to explore the wilderness of Neasden, they decided could well have been the North Circular that raged across the bottom of their street).

There is a photograph of them seated at a table in front of their third birthday cake, about to blow, three candle flames preparing to disappear. Georgia's arms are raised in protest of something forgotten and across her stomach, hidden, is the scar left over from where they'd slit her open and lifted out the hair and the living room carpet like bleeding worms and then sewed her back together. The scar grew up with her. It widened like a pale smile and split her in two.

As for Bessi, she spent her first human month in an incubator, with wires in her chest, limbs straggling and pleading like a beetle on its back. The incubator had a lot to answer for.