

Siblings

by [Emily Rose Proctor](#) in the [February 2023](#) issue

I could not, for the life of me, understand
why Genesis moved so soon to murder—
to fratricide. But then I had kids,
and now I know it to be at least as true
as what happened in the garden.

How quickly we skip
from *It's pretty* to *I want it* to *It's mine*.
How quickly we turn from
I'm unhappy to *I hate you*
to *I wish you were dead*.

When his baby sister was born,
my oldest would look at me holding her,
and a shiver, like an electric current,
would run up through his trunk,
shaking his little arms and fists.

Later, when she could walk,
he'd wrap his arms
and legs around her and,
like a boa constrictor, squeeze—
the way Esau must have embraced Jacob

that fateful day near Penuel, his teeth
so near his brother's neck, he could taste
the usurper's sweat, feel the delicate fuzz
at his nape brushing against his own lips,
chapped and raw and stinging.