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CBC Writing Competition
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Sisters

I am alone right now. That is not common. Usually my sister would be here. She is finishing the painting for the large wall on her side of our room. She is painting with a lot of blue. I like blue. I like yellow better though.

She put a little bit of yellow in it. Said it was for me.

I love her. There are lots of reasons why. She is bright and quiet, kind and trustworthy. She loves me too.

She is tall from what I can tell, almost as tall as Father, who is a foot taller than Mother. She is light haired and fair skinned and has a long slender body. We are the same, but I am not as tall. One time Mother said that we were like twins. I would have found that word in the dictionary if we had one.

My mother would let us look through catalogs and pick new clothes every few months. She would go to her purse and pull out a smaller leather purse with zippers and snaps that were filled with coins and plastic cards with words on them. Some had numbers. She would use the green one with an “L” on the front. The “L” was very pretty and I don't know how it got there because I have never seen another letter like that. She would then use the phone, pressing many numbers and from what I could tell there was another person on the phone that she gave all the catalog numbers to.

One day my sister and I wanted to order some dresses that we had seen in one of the catalogs. The girl in the dress looked like us and the dress was beautiful. Purple fabric draped over her left shoulder into a strap across her belly where the rest of the fabric lay taught and sparkling. The square to the right indicated that we could choose from five colors. My sister chose blue. I chose yellow. When we had made up our minds we got the pouch from Mother's

purse and opened it slowly. There were many things inside that we had never seen. It was Mother's, not ours.

We looked for the green card, but we saw a card with Mother on it. It said some things that we could not read and some of the words had numbers in them. There were lines that said “Chandler” and “Karen Dorothy”. We tried to look these up in the dictionary we had, but there was nothing there.

On another line were the words “Driver License”. We were trying to look these words up when Father came into the kitchen where we sat huddled around the table where the thick book lay.

Father's face became red and swollen and he tried to say words, but they were not words. Mother walked in and seeing the reason for Father's upset manner she snatched the small purse and the card away and dragged the dictionary from our wanting hands. Both our eyes smarted and so did Mother's. She did not say anything to us, but she took the book, dropped it into a plastic bag and hauled it up the stairs.

She does not leave her purse where we can find it anymore. We did not get sparkling dresses. We do not have a dictionary now. I do not know if we are twins.

I think about that day a lot. It was not very long ago and I repeat the words from the card to myself, sometimes to my sister, never to Father or Mother.

I am sitting on a rough stump where the creek runs through near our house. I can feel the unevenness under my skin and the prick of tiny splinters through the thin fabric of my shorts. The air is hot today. There is dew in it, like it might think about raining. The air thinks a lot. I can tell because before things happen it waits. I don't know what it's waiting for, but I know that it is thinking of what to do next.

I hear my sister coming and Randal is with her. He is a boy. He calls Mother “mom” and

Father “dad”. Randal does not look like us and I don’t think he is a “twin”. He looks like Mother, but his hair is the color of Father's and he is much shorter than my sister and I. He has funny words sometimes and tries to tell us stories that are not true. He says that there are things we should know because we have been here a long time, but Mother and Father say that what he tells us are called “lies” and that we are to never believe him.

He says he is twelve, but there is only one of him, not twelve. He says he goes to “school” where he learns things, but he does not read the dictionary. He says that we aren't his sisters, and that Mother and Father are not our parents, and he doesn't know how we got there.

He is a liar. He is deceitful.

“It's time to come to the house for dinner.” my sister says as she comes close.

I don't answer. I sit. I can hear Randal behind her protesting on about something and I hear “soup” which I assume was after the word “lentil” because he hates lentil soup. I don't mind lentil soup, but that may be because I know that in most cases it is a promise of cheesy drop biscuits which I like very much.

“It's time for dinner.” she says again.

I still don't say anything. There is nothing to say. I get up and we walk a while before she says anything.

“I finished the painting...” Her smile is beautiful.

Randal is trailing behind us, still whimpering at the dinner menu.

“...it looks good I think.” She continues.

“I can't wait to see it.” I am fighting a smirk to my mouth.

“What is wrong today?”

“I have not been thinking well.”

“You think all the time. What do you mean you haven't been “thinking” well? You're the best at thinking.”

“I can't think. It's like I'm stuck. Nothing will go through. It's just stuck. I don't know how to explain it. I can only remember. Nothing new will go through the right way.” I can feel my cheeks getting warm.

My sister's hand winds around my wrist and she smashes my fingers between her's one by one and then grasps my hand between both of her's and sighs heavy.

Our hearts are knit together with cable. There is no space between them. When she is far from me she is next to me. We are the same. When she gets sad it makes my chest hurt. It makes me feel like a tiny bird that is trapped beneath a fallen pine tree. We know when to talk and when to stay still. She always knows when to tell me about something funny and when we don't like each other we forget why we are mad. We remember things together. Things that never have happened, but they are the same.

We are nearing the house now. It is the color of stones, the stones that are down by the creek. There are twenty four windows. I only know where to look from fifteen. My sister and I often imagine what the other nine could have inside. Randal once told us that the dictionary was inside of the highest, but he does not tell the truth. Mother says that there is nothing in those windows. That they are there for looking at, not out of.

“We will think together later before we sleep.” she leans into my hair and I can feel her breath in my ear.

I nudge my head into her's and sigh the way she had sighed. I am not so sad anymore. She makes things better. She is different than me. There is something in her that knows things she does not know. It knows things that I do not know. She says the same thing about me, but I don't

think there is something inside me that knows the same things.

Dinner is lentil soup. There are no biscuits. Randal is slurping the liquid slowly pursing his lips and squinting both eyes. I think that he might be trying to fake a smile. He is deceitful.

Mother and Father are discussing things that have to do with their works.

Mother works somewhere in “town” and she says that it is an awful place, very scary. She wears silky skirts and shirts with lots of buttons and shoes that are lady shoes. They have a tall heel and small buckles on each side. Most days she wears black and dark blue, but sometimes she wears gray. She wears perfume that fills my nose like chocolate pudding mix before you add milk. Mother is not pretty, but she wears colors on her face sometimes that make her eyes look bigger. She talks often about going on a diet.

When we had a dictionary I looked up the word and did not understand why she wanted to go on a “selection of foods” because she already ate lots of different kinds of foods.

Father works where they “make men out of boys”. I don't know why he has not taken Randal there. He wears clothes that seem to match Mother's and a thing around his neck that he calls a “tie”. Father usually leaves before Mother in the morning, but sometimes he comes back much later. On the days that he comes back after we have gone to bed we try to pretend that we are already asleep so that he will not come in to say goodnight. On the nights that he does come in we lie quietly and still until he is done and we can crawl into the other's bed. We prefer the nights that he is away too late. These nights are happy and full of whispers and hushed laughter.

In the mornings my sister and I are awake before the sun and we run to the edge of the cliff that drops from the last of the woods into a gully of large rocks. We strip ourselves down to our underwear and sit quietly letting the rays peak over the horizon onto our skin. We are alone, and we are safe. No one can know that we are here. It is quiet. This is our favorite place to be.

After dinner my sister and I read aloud to Mother and Father from The Norton Anthology of American Literature. They do not like it. Randal is playing a video game with his headphones in.

The clock is ringing nine times and we are creeping up the stairs to our room.

My sister's voice spoke quietly behind me. “I love the things in that book.” I could hear her smiling.

“I'll be up shortly girls.” Said Father.

I am not going to turn to look at my sister, but I know that her heart is beating as quickly as mine.

I would be the one every night if he did not often choose her. She did not pull away and she would leave her hands where he put them. I could not do the same because I was not as brave. He would mumble things to her that I could not understand and I would never ask her what they were. When he did come to my bed I would slide to the furthest edge. My limbs became limp and my pulse raced in my head. I would count to myself and sometimes, on accident, out loud. When I did he would put his hand hard against my mouth and shush me softly. He did not stay with me as long as her. I did not want him to stay with me, but I would try to be more like her to keep him from choosing her more often. And then my ears would fill with whooshing and everything goes blank.

I am quiet. We put on our night shirts and my sister is sliding between her sheets. She is turned toward the wall and I think that she is crying.

The painting is already hung and still looks like it may be a little wet, but it is the most beautiful painting I have ever seen. I can see a swan in the corner that is wrapping it’s neck around a long ray coming from a burst near the center. There are many things coming from the

burst that look like butterflies filled with light. The yellow is in the top corner across from the swan and it is a brightly colored coy fish. It's eyes are midnight blue and they stare into me. They are extracting my soul and I want to be the fish. My sister will be the swan. The sun is our quiet morning. Our rescuer.

I hear the stairs creek and I flip the light switch and climb into bed.

I can see Father's figure in the door way. He is closing the door slowly and walking to the center of the room. I know that this is when he chooses. I lay quiet, still, as breathless as possible. His breath stutters and he walks to my sister. I am closing my eyes tightly now and can hear the mumbling. There are small creeks and the sound of sheets moving across one another. I can hear my sister's breath short and muffled. I open my eyes and see that her face is turned away.

It is over quickly. Quicker than normal. I am thankful. He is leaving.

He is gone now. My sister is getting up to come to me. My arms are ready for her and she envelopes herself in them.

“Do you think that Edgar did that?” Her voice is still quivering.

“I don't know if Edgar was a father.” I reply.

“No, I mean the wall. Do you think he bricked someone into a wall?”

“No, that is a story, not him.”

“But he sounded like he knew about it. Like he had done it.” Her voice has a shrillness to it now.

“I don't know. Maybe he knew someone who did. Or maybe he did do it.”

“Do you think it would be hard? I don't think it would be hard.”

“I think that it would be scary and a very bad idea.”

“I want to brick Father up. I want to drag him into a deep dark whole that drips so that

maybe he will drowned slowly, or starve, and then I want to brick the hole up so he suffocates in that hole. I want him to be alone in the dark and I want to sit outside and listen to him scream."

I don't know what to say. I am very quiet. I am holding my breath.

My sister is clammy and her arms stick to mine. Her breath is hot against my chest. We sleep.

It is early morning now and the dawn is calling us. It knows our names. I am Coyfish and she is Swan. We are achy from sleeping in a knot. We do not run to the cliff today. We are walking. I am singing a quiet song about mice. It is something I have always known, but I don't know why. There is nowhere to have learned it. My sister knows this song as well. She does not sing with me today.

We are at the cliff now, and we are earlier than we have ever been. My neck is sore. My clothes struggle with me.

"I think that my thoughts are stuck because I am dead." This comes out of me before I mean for it to.

"Why does that mean that you are dead?" She is pulling her T-shirt over her golden hair.

"Because there is nothing more for me to think of. All my thoughts are stuck. They are done."

We are both very quiet now. There is nothing to say. The sun is reaching over the mountains and kissing our lonely skin. We stand with our toes on the edge of the cliff. I can hear birds. They are crying too. I am trapped beneath a fallen pine tree.

"If you are dead than I want to be dead too." Her eyes are staring at mine. She smiles.

I can feel the air stopping in my lungs. I close my eyes to inhale. It is slow and jagged. I must find something to think of.

There is nothing. I am afraid to be dead.

I open my eyes. My sister's eyes are still set on my face. They are blue. They are full of sorrow. We are the same. The tears are running over. They are sliding down her face. She does not stop them. There are too many to stop.

I reach for her hand and she clings to my fingers with her own.

She knows my thoughts. We are the same.

We close our eyes. I feel her breath steady with mine.

The sun is warm. It's rays rush past her neck.

We breathe in steady, deep…and step.