

## Weird Words: “Little Sister”

Written by Chantal Boudreau  
Sunday, 31 July 2011 11:49

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### FANGORIA

I'm glad it's morning. It's starting to get cold once the sun goes down and I really wanted to crawl into the car last night, even with the bad smell there. It doesn't stink as much when it's cold, but Dad's still there in the driver's seat and I don't like to look at him. It scares me and gives me bad dreams—when I can fall asleep. The only time I can make myself climb in is when it's raining, or it's time to take care of Jill. Otherwise, I stay outside, here in the woods with Mom.

It's not so bad when the sun comes up. It's early September, so most of the chill is at night, even though yesterday morning I could see my breath in little puffs of steam.

They'll come for us soon though, when school starts and we're not there, and I guess that's what really matters. They might not miss me right away, and Jill's still too little for school, but they'll miss Mom and Dad. I stopped calling them Mommy and Daddy after my first year in school. The other kids said only babies do that.

Anyway, they'll be missed when they don't show up when school starts, because they are school teachers. That's also why they probably aren't looking for us yet. People know we went away somewhere else for the end of summer vacation. I don't know if my mom and dad actually told anybody that we would be back this soon. We were coming back with more than a week to go before the first day of class. Mom wanted to be sure that we had time to do things like go school shopping for clothes and supplies. I guess that doesn't matter much now, and I'll have to pick out my own things when they find us.

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Today seems to be warming so that it's more summery than fall. It hasn't rained in a couple of days, so the ground is dry. I like those days best. I can avoid the car almost completely while I pick berries and refill Jill's cup from the river. When I'm done my chores for the day, I usually hang out with Mom.

Maybe it's because she's in the open air rather than stuck inside the car. Maybe it's because she's pretty cold from being frosted over for a couple of mornings and doesn't give off as much stink like stuff in the fridge. Anyway, she doesn't smell as bad as Dad, and I don't mind getting closer. I try not to look at her when I do. Going through the windshield smashed up her face pretty good, and so her cheeks, mouth and forehead are all bloody, and her eyes are open and staring. She had taken her seatbelt off to reach for something that Jill had dropped when the accident happened. I don't blame Jill though. She's mostly still just a baby and she fusses without thinking. She didn't mean for things to happen the way that they did. Just like Dad didn't mean to go off of the road and roll the car down the hill.

When the sunshine has been really nice, I lie down in the grass a few feet away from Mom, and I pretend we're lying in our backyard, watching the clouds like we've done a million times before. We'd peek through the branches into the big blue sky and call out what we saw. It always made me giggle.

"Bunny!" I call and point. Mom doesn't answer the way she would have, but I feel a little better just having her around. That will change when they find us, but for now I'll keep on pretending and it won't bother her.

I get up again after a few more clouds, starting to get tired of this game. Some of the leaves have fallen to the ground around her. Just a few, but I like the way they crunch under my feet, so I dance around her. She would have laughed if she could have. She liked crunching the leaves too. She would smile with all of her teeth too, a big grin, white and shiny. I can see her teeth now if I look, but that's because the skin is ripped away in places, and some of her teeth are broken. It's not the same.

I flop back down on the grass once I'm out of breath from skipping and jumping, and I look at the berries that I picked for me and Jill. I pop a few in my mouth and enjoy their juicy sweetness. My tummy would have grumbled when I did this a couple of days ago. That was when the snack bag had run out and now we just have the berries. They usually leave my belly pretty empty. My stomach hurt and growled a lot at first, but then it got used to having only the

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few berries and it got quiet again. It's kind of like my insides went to sleep. I'm sure that they'll find us before we starve, but we'll be pretty hungry until then.

I figure out how many of the berries is about half, because I need to share with Jill. Mom and Dad would have told me to, if they still could, and I don't want to be a bad girl. I have to take care of my little sister, since they can't.

Pushing the berries to one side, I get Jill's cup. I know the water from the river isn't tap water, but it is running water and there's a better chance that it's good because of that. I wish I could boil it, but I'm not allowed to play with fire, and I don't have any matches. Dad taught me a lot about surviving in the woods, when he used to take me camping. I loved camping, and this is a little bit like camping, but without the tent. He knew a lot about nature because he was a science teacher. Sometimes he would tease Mom that she wasn't a real teacher because she taught art instead. She would get mad at him and smack him in the arm, but she wasn't that mad because they usually ended up laughing.

I like science, and I liked it when Dad talked about science stuff—especially the animals. I love animals. He told me all about Pavlov's dogs and Schrodinger's cat and Ham the chimp astronaut. Mom didn't like it when he talked about those things and said that he better stop before he got to rats and rabbits. She said science could be cruel to animals. Dad would point out that Schrodinger's cat was only a theory, that they didn't do anything to a real cat, and then he would ask Mom if he needed to remind her of some of the things that had been done to animals in the name of art. Mom's face turned bright red and she stomped off. I hated it when they argued, but I guess they won't be arguing anymore.

Once the cup is full, I have to do my other chore and take care of Jill, my little sister. I put the berries in the bowl that she used to keep her dry cereal in, the one with handles, and climb into the car next to Dad. I almost forget to take a deep breath first. I made that mistake yesterday, and it was really yucky, especially with all the flies in there. It's not Dad's fault. Everything stinks when it's dead.

The car is really dark, and I can't see into the back, where Jill is strapped into her car seat. I can still see Dad in the front though. He didn't go flying through the windshield like Mom did. He still has his seat belt on and there's a big puffy airbag there too. That was supposed to help in an accident, but it didn't work. It stopped him from smashing his head and face, but it didn't stop the tree branch from coming through the window—the one sticking through the place

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where his eye used to be.

"I'm doing more science stuff, Dad," I tell him as I tie the handles of the sippy cup and the bowl to the shoelace. The shoelace is tied to a stick I found. I've been able to tie my own shoes since I was four. Mom said I made her proud.

The stink makes me want to throw up, but I have to finish what I'm doing. It's important. I lower the cup and bowl into the dark of the back seat, like a fishing hook. Then I rest the stick against the front seat so that it stands up, and I climb out again. That's when I finally get to take another deep breath.

I have to do this every day. I have to give Jill her share of the berries that I pick, whenever I can find them. The cup leaks a little too, so it would be empty each time I pull it back, if she drank any or not.

I sit on the grass again, and the urge is there to open the back door and peek in, since I don't know what I'll find, but I won't let myself. When the accident happened, when Dad swerved to miss a moose, my booster seat didn't work properly. It was too loose I think, and I woke up outside of the car after the accident, just like Mom. But I wasn't dead—not like Mom and Dad. I could see them, and knew that for a fact. I couldn't say they might be alive because I was sure that they weren't. But I couldn't see Jill. There was still a chance with her.

I suppose in some ways it might be easier if I tried climbing up the steep hill to the road and go looking for help, or if I just opened that back door, instead of waiting for them to find us, and see for myself. If she's dead and I find that out for sure, I could keep all the berries instead of sharing, or I could make that climb and find someone who'll take care of me. But I have a problem with that.

You see, as long as I wait, as long as I make this last, I can keep lying in the grass and staring at the clouds with Mom, and I can keep talking about science stuff with Dad and no one can take those things away from me. And as long as I wait, and I don't look in that back seat, there is just as much of a chance that my little sister, Jill, is alive back there in the dark where I can't see her. Mom and Dad are gone for sure, and she's all that I have left.

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As long as I don't look, she's still my little sister. As long as I don't look, she's both dead and alive, just like Shrodinger's cat...