

Goodbye, Marnie

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Second Place—Short Story Competition

Sandy didn't know why Marnie was packing her things. She watched Marnie from the hallway, through an opening in Marnie's bedroom door. She wanted to ask if Marnie could take her to the frozen yogurt place again next week, but most importantly, Sandy wanted to ask if Marnie was okay.

It was late evening after dinner. Sandy saw that Marnie only had her desk lamp on, the light bathing the room in a dim green tint. Marnie tied her long brown hair into a tight ponytail and grabbed her suitcase from the closet. It was the suitcase Sandy loved to sit inside while Marnie rolled her around the house. Sandy watched as Marnie ripped the flower patterned sheets from her bed, the ones she said she'd give to Sandy when she left for college. Marnie stuffed the suitcase with clothing from her closet along with hastily folded sheets. Mother would scold her because she always wanted the sheets folded with a crisp crease. Mother would also scold Marnie for ravaging through the color coded closet, throwing clothes here and there. Then again, Mother has been scolding Marnie more often lately.

Sandy didn't understand why Marnie was leaving now. Maybe Marnie was going for a sleepover. But why would she need such a big suitcase? Plus, it was a Tuesday, and there was school tomorrow. Sandy watched as Marnie packed textbook after textbook into her backpack. Marnie had told Sandy she was going to college next year, and Sandy remembered Marnie telling her that college would be like school, except you live there. Sandy would miss her older sister's bright smile in the mornings.

Marnie looked up and caught Sandy's eyes. Marnie walked to the door and opened it wider. Sandy looked up. She could see Marnie's unemotional expression behind the glint of her thick glasses. Marnie slammed the door.

The white door was decorated with Marnie's name in sparkling letters and a crayon drawing that Sandy drew of Marnie today in school when the teacher instructed the class to make a card for someone they

were thankful for. Just the day before, Marnie had picked her up from school and had taken her to a frozen yogurt place, a rare occasion. Usually, Marnie had band practice after school or a math club meeting. Marnie was always busy.

Sandy understood that Marnie was her sister, twelve years older and twelve years wiser. Marnie had brown hair and wide eyes, while Sandy had black hair and thin eyes, but that didn't change the fact that they were sisters. Sandy also knew that Father was married to another wife before Mother, but Sandy wasn't a part of that life.

Maybe it had something to do with Mother yelling. Mother and Marnie yelled more often now. Yesterday when they ate at the frozen yogurt place, Sandy asked Marnie why she and Mother yelled so much.

"She just doesn't like me," Marnie shrugged. "I'm different from you, Sandy, and I've made different choices for myself, now that I'm older. Mother doesn't like things that are different. It's out of order for her."

Sandy didn't understand, but she knew Marnie could handle anything. Marnie could drive, and she did well in school. What else could Mother ask for?

Even so, while Sandy sat in her room to read a book or arrange her LEGO houses, she could hear Mother and Marnie yelling. Their household happenings occurred in a predictable schedule. If Marnie didn't have band practice, she would pick Sandy up from school, and they would both go home. Sandy would ask to play LEGOs with Marnie. Marnie would say no with a sad smile, reply that she had to finish her homework, and retreat to her bedroom, door shut.

Mother would come home shortly after and prepare dinner in the kitchen. Sandy would play LEGOs in her room, and sometimes, Mother would come upstairs and yell. Once, they yelled about Marnie's room being messy.

"It's filthy in here! But what else should I expect...I didn't raise you myself."

"Marnie had brown hair and wide eyes, while Sandy had black hair and thin eyes, but that didn't change the fact that they were sisters."

But Sandy knew Marnie kept her room neat and tidy like Mother liked it. Sandy loved looking through her sister's closet and counting the colors in order from red to violet. Lately, however, they yelled about Marnie's school grades.

"Why aren't your grades as good as they used to be, hah?! What are you doing with your time up here? But what else should I expect...I didn't raise you myself."

But Sandy knew Marnie worked hard every day. Marnie always completed her homework, and she went to math club meetings every Tuesday and band practice every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Yesterday, Mother's yelling included another matter. Cell phones and another name, a boy's name but not Father's name.

"Who is Ethan? Why won't you let me look through your cell phone? Nothing in this house will be hidden from me!"

They would argue, back and forth, angry voices rattling and muffled between Sandy's light pink bedroom wall and Marnie's green bedroom wall. Sandy didn't know what to do, but she wished they would stop, but the schedule would continue. As soon as Father's car lights shone through the window, the yelling stopped. Then the family would all come downstairs and eat the dinner Mother prepared: rice and fish soup, curry and rice. Everything would go back to normal, calm and collected. Sandy would take the placemats from the kitchen drawers and arrange them in a neat square around the table. Marnie would set the table with clean white bowls and silverware. Mother would bring the food, steam rising from the rice, spicy aroma filling the air. They would sit together and tell each other about their days. Father would talk. Marnie would reply. Mother would reply, then Sandy would reply. Mother would complain about Marnie, and Father would reply with a shrug. Father always listened to Mother.

"You're right, I guess," he'd say, chewing on his spoon.

Tonight's dinner was different. Mother and Marnie talked to each other, arguing about something silly. Sandy was reminded of the fights schoolchildren have during recess over who had the most friends or who had the nicest clothes. There was no point; they just wanted to make each other mad.

"Marnie has been keeping secrets," accused Mother. Marnie looked up. Father slurped soup from his bowl. Sandy looked at Marnie, confused. Marnie's face was calm.

"I'm old enough to make my own choices," she said. There was silence. Father put down his spoon, his eyes closed.

"Not until you're out of this house," his voice boomed, "Sandy, go upstairs for a bit."

Terrified, Sandy slipped out of her chair and ran up the stairs. She looked down upon the scene, the blue checkerboard tablecloth with a flower vase in the middle, the dining room light creating a soft golden glow on the table. It looked so peaceful. She watched Marnie stand to place her half-empty bowl into the sink. Mother's thin lips parted into a yell. She called Marnie wasteful and disrespectful. These were the yells that Sandy had heard from her bedroom, but she never thought they were this loud or this real. Sandy backed away. She wanted to say something but didn't know how. Sandy knew Marnie. She was the best sister in the world. She shouldn't be yelled at for something so small. Besides, Marnie was twelve years older and twelve years wiser.

Sandy thought of all this while staring at Marnie's closed door. Questions racing through her mind, she returned to her own bedroom and waited. *Maybe Marnie was just upset. Maybe Mother will feel better after Father talks to her. Maybe everything will go back to normal again, and Marnie can take me to get frozen yogurt or play LEGOs with me again,* Sandy hoped.

After a few minutes, Sandy heard the suitcase rolling down the hallway, clicking on the wooden floor, clunking down the staircase, banging with each step. Sandy ran out of her room. Marnie stood at the bottom of the stairs with loaded backpack on her back, suitcase in one hand, red umbrella in the other.

"If it were up to me, I would have left a long time ago," said Marnie. She faced Mother.

"You never belonged here anyway," said Mother. Father stood behind them, his face without emotion. Marnie looked to Sandy, "Sorry."

Sandy didn't understand why she was saying sorry; she hadn't done anything wrong to her. Mother should be saying sorry to Marnie.

"Sandy, maybe we'll get frozen yogurt again some other time."

Sandy nodded. Maybe Marnie *was* coming back later, "Come back soon, okay?"

"I'll try," she replied.

With that, Sandy looked on as Marnie opened the front door, hoisted her suitcase behind her, and walked out into the night. ▲