

SISTERS

1989

The voices were loud and angry. Katie McCabe couldn't hear any actual words, but she knew that her parents were yelling at each other again. She hugged her Raggedy Andy doll closer to her chest and pulled a pillow over her head. The voices continued, muffled but still loud.

Twisting around, she leaned her head over the side of the bunk bed, trying to see the lower bunk in the dim light from the nightlight.

"Brenna?" she called.

Nobody answered, but she could hear her older sister breathing below her.

"Brenna? Are you awake?"

"No." Brenna's sounded grumpy.

"Yes you are."

Brenna started to snore loudly.

"Stop that!" Katie whispered, giggling a little. "You'll wake up Fiona."

"No I won't. She never wakes up after she falls asleep."

Well, that was true. Fiona had slept through some really bad thunderstorms. Katie looked at the cot on the other side of the room. The lump that was her little sister hadn't moved.

The voices of her parents grew even louder and something banged. Katie jumped.

"Brenna?" she called again.

"What?" Brenna didn't sound grumpy anymore. Katie could tell she hadn't really been asleep.

"Can I come down and sleep with you?" Katie asked. It was a baby thing to do, and she was almost eight. But she didn't want to be alone and Andy Guy wasn't helping this time.

"Okay." Brenna said.

Holding Andy Guy around the neck, Katie swung around and quickly climbed down the ladder to the lower bunk. Brenna moved further towards the wall and threw back the cover so she could scramble in beside her. Katie snuggled down into the pillows and hugged Andy Guy, comforted by her sister's warmth.

"You wet the bed and I'm really going to be mad," Brenna said.

"I don't wet the bed, you do." Katie said without heat.

"Do not. I'm nine. I'm too old to wet the bed."

"Fiona wets the bed."

They both giggled.

Katie lay for a moment, listening to the voices on the other side of the wall.

"Why do they do that?" she whispered to Brenna. "Why do they yell like that?"

Brenna was quiet for a moment. "They're just having a bad time," she said.

"They haven't had a bad time for a while," Katie said.

"No."

"This is one of the worst bad times they've ever had."

Brenna moved around on the bed and turned on her side to face away from Katie. "Go to sleep."

Katie wriggled down further into the sheets and hugged Andy Guy, but she couldn't make her eyes close.

"Brenna?"

"What?" Brenna sounded annoyed, but Katie could tell she really wasn't.

"Why doesn't Daddy like me?"

It was a question she'd wanted to ask for a long time, but she didn't want Brenna to think that she was a doofus. Somehow it was easier to talk when it was mostly dark.

Brenna squirmed until she lay on her back. Katie did the same. They looked at each other.

"What are you talking about?" Brenna demanded. "Daddy likes you. He likes you as much as he likes the rest of us."

Katie shook her head. "Not like the boys."

"They're boys," Brenna said as if that explained everything.

"He talks to you," Katie insisted. "He picks Fiona up and plays with her."

"Well," Brenna's voice had taken on that serious tone she got when she was trying to figure things out. "I'm the oldest girl and Fiona is the baby."

"I think it's my hair," Katie said. Her hair was dumb and red and curly. It was as curly as Andy Guy's hair. If she had nice straight brown hair like Brenna it would be better. Even Fiona had prettier hair than she did, and Fiona was only three.

"It's not your hair," Brenna said, disgusted. "Don't be stupid."

"I'm not stupid, you are."

They lay in silence for a moment. The voices on the other side of the wall were quieter now and Katie relaxed a little bit. Maybe the storm was over.

"See?" Brenna was thinking the same thing. "They're better now."

"I guess."

"And Daddy does like you, Katie," Brenna said. "He loves you. He just gets angry sometimes."

"I guess."

"All of us get angry sometimes."

Katie giggled because she couldn't help herself. "We're McCabes."

They lay still for a little while, both of them staring up at the bottom of Katie's bunk bed.

"Are you ever going to get married, Brenna?" Katie asked.

"Maybe. When I'm old."

Katie looked at her sister. "Who will you marry?"

"Liono from Thundercats," Brenna burst into uncontrollable giggles. Katie rolled her eyes.

"Brenna, he's a *cartoon*. And he's a *cat*."

"I don't care."

"I'm never getting married."

"You don't know that." Brenna snorted. "You're a baby."

"I'm not a baby, you are. And I'm never getting married."

Brenna turned her head so they were face to face. She was close enough that Katie could see the nightlight shining in her pale blue eyes.

"You're never getting married even when you're old?" Brenna asked.

Katie shrugged.

"You like Timmy," Brenna said. "Maybe he'll marry you when you both get old."

"Ewww!" Katie made gagging sounds. "Timmy's gross! He was eating his own nose boogers at school yesterday."

Brenna giggled. "Timmy and Katie sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G," she sang

"Stop it!" Katie hit Brenna with Andy Guy. Brenna was laughing so hard now that she was almost gasping.

"And Fiona gets...Kermit the Frog."

"Timmy IS Kermit the Frog!"

"Ribbit!"

Katie laughed until her stomach hurt and she was afraid she really would wet the bed. Laughing with Brenna made her feel better about the angry voices too. After she calmed down, she hugged Andy Guy, burying her face in his red yarn hair.

"If I get married," she whispered. "My husband and I aren't gonna yell at each other like Mommy and Daddy do."

"No way," Brenna agreed, just as quietly.

"We're gonna love each other and all of our kids no matter what."

"Yeah."

In her mind, Katie pictured a boy. It wasn't Timmy with his dorky white hair and glasses. This boy had dark hair and dark eyes. Maybe he could be her Prince Charming, like in Cinderella. She smiled. Maybe she'd even have singing mice and a Fairy Godmother. That would be cool.

"Just remember that neither of us are getting married until we're old," Brenna said positively. "At least twenty."

"Twenty-nine," Katie corrected.

"Okay. Twenty-nine."

Katie yawned. The voices were quiet and the house seemed much more peaceful. She was sleepy. "night, Brenna."

"night, Katie. Don't take all the covers."

They turned away from each other, back to back. Katie's eyes started to droop. Fiona let out a sigh on her cot and Brenna wriggled once more, then lay still.

Katie didn't care what Brenna said. She was never getting married. But if she *did* get married, her husband would be nice to her, not mean like Daddy was to Mommy sometimes.

And before she let him marry her, she'd go places and do stuff. Twenty-nine was a long way away. She could do lots of stuff before then.

And if the boy with the dark hair and dark eyes came and found her, well, they could do stuff together.

Smiling, she fell asleep.

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