

Green Closet Door

The way the corduroy curtain hangs, it leaves a sliver of the window uncovered. A thin gold laser scans up the blanket toward my pillow. It slides over my chin and mouth and when it hits my eyes I come out of my dream with a jolt.

In my dream my brother announced the diagnosis of cancer. I reacted with more screaming than I would've expected. But awake, there is no such thing as cancer or cancer growths. After the light passes over I open my eyes and the green closet door stands facing me. I think of the dream-catcher sitting behind it on a shelf in the darkness. "I'll tell you the truth, as I always do," I said yesterday to the girl who gave it to me for Valentine's, "I'm going to treat it as an ornament. It's not hanging over me while I sleep."

I stretch my right arm and grope until I yank the curtain back. Light floods in and illuminates the patchwork blanket the same girl gave me for Christmas, and dimly, out of view of the window, my brother in his bed. I slide onto my feet, pull on yesterday's clothes, and reach into my mouth to remove my retainer. I deliberate a second: yes, I should wash my hands after that.

In the passenger seat beside my brother, pattering along the familiar old roads to school, my head is turned to the fields, half full of snow caught in the act of melting. I notice the door is unlocked and for some reason I click the lock in. There is music—there usually is—but it's almost inaudible. On the dashboard, a green display switches from 8 to 9, the only way I know the track has changed. I think he doesn't have to hear it to know what song it is; it's a favourite CD.

"Didja ever go skating since grade school?" asks my brother. His sleeves are pulled up over his hands.

"No." That's the main thing that links me and him and even our younger brother: school memories. We've all gone to the same schools, following each other to the same teachers, playgrounds, hymns, skating events. Every year the grade school holds a skating event for the kids at the local rink, with a lot of fuss and hot chocolate with little dissolvvy marshmallows. We're in university now, waiting for our younger brother to catch up, and we still remember these things because we have always had only them in common, only them to talk about.

"'Dja like it though?" he asks.

"Yeah."

"Ever go couple skating? Back then, I mean?"

"No, never."

"I did in grade seven," he says. My gaze drifts from the steering wheel to the window again. "With Maggie, the girl I liked. Actually, before that I asked Lucy Berg.

Three of us asked her," he adds, his lip curling characteristically, which with him means something is funny because absurd. "She couldn't decide between us, she didn't want to hurt our feelings, so she just cried." He pauses, as if it that were the end of the story. "But I bought her hot chocolate after."

"Excellent," I say absentmindedly. I think of Tess, the dark-haired Dutch girl I would have loved to ask in grade seven, if my friend Rob hadn't already wooed her on the class trip to Medieval Times. He had wooed her with a flower he got from God knows where. I forget how or why but I was later accused of eating the flower. And then she went couple skating with him. My thoughts trail even farther; I remember my younger brother coming home from Smoky Trail Bible Camp with our grandma and telling us he'd had his first kiss.

"I was pretty bad at skating," continues my brother, having waited long enough for me to say more. "I just kinda went back and forth. But I remember they were playing Crocodile Rock. I was really into Elton John. And I remember thinking this is, like, the happiest three minutes of my life—skating with the girl I liked, while they played Crocodile Rock."

For a while we drive on in silence, while out the window fields slowly morph into intersections, road signs, fences, sidewalks, buildings, blue sky smudged by smoke rising from distant stacks. I wonder vaguely what makes him and me different, if anything. It's seemed like less and less as our lives have converged. I wonder if subconsciously I want to be like him. Movement from his direction catches my eye, but it's just the display going from 11 to 12.

"Awesome, I love this song," says my brother.