

Margaret

by Frank E Sanabria II

Mommy said Margaret would never hurt me.

She said that it's okay to feel afraid at first, that it was like water leaking from an old bucket and a leaky bucket can't stay full forever.

Mommy said Margaret looks different in my room at night, like her smile is too big for her head, because she's happy we're alone now and it's safe to tell each other secrets. I've never heard Margaret say anything. Margaret's smile opens so wide it looks like she's screaming, and her eyes get so dark sometimes I think she has no eyes at all, but Mommy says the shadows in the room are playing tricks on me, just like in Peter Pan. I wish the shadows wouldn't play like that though, it gets so cold when they play.

When I told Mommy how I would get scared being alone in my room at night, she said the shadows get lonely at night too and need to snuggle to feel safe. That's why my sheets get so heavy in the dark, that's why I can't move sometimes because having Margaret with me let's shadows feel safe enough to snuggle. I hate the shadows, they breathe like the sound of branches against a window.

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Mommy said, when she was a little girl, Margaret would tickle her, and they used to braid each other's hair after Grandma and Grandpa were asleep. I don't think Margaret likes me like Mommy. Sometimes I wake up and I hurt so much from where Margaret was tickling me that it feels like when I woke up the wasps under the slide at school. I hurt so bad I cried and when I got home Mommy put bandages on my stings and kissed them. She doesn't do that when I show her all my new ones.

I started dreaming that someone was pulling my hair and when I woke up, my head was so sore and there were red spots on my pillow. When I noticed Margaret's hair looking more and more like mine, with little red stains on her fingers, I told Mommy and she said to shut up or she would shave it all away and give it to Margaret herself.

Mommy tucks me in every night. I try to stay up and watch Margaret, but it gets so hard when the shadows come. I used to sit up in bed to make it easier, but I don't do that anymore either. The last time Mommy caught me watching Margaret, she got very angry. Mommy came into my room and sat in the chair with Margaret on her lap, like she used to do with me, braiding Margaret's hair while the shadows snuggled me so hard I couldn't breathe. All I could move was my eyes and I tried to tell Mommy I was afraid, but I couldn't say anything. I started to cry but it got so cold I felt my tears freeze on my cheeks. The more I cried, the more Mommy's mouth stretched like Margaret's with that big, empty smile and I could feel my hair start to bleed and I hurt so much it felt like the wasps were back and under the sheets with me, stinging me forever.

Mommy said Margaret would never hurt me.