

“Nesting Mood”

by

Marie Chatfield

I was born with a too-big heart and no skin on my bones.

This is what Mama tells me whenever she finds me nesting in my bed with all the shades pulled down around me. She announces *Sweet Pea you feel too-damn-much* as she stalks around the bedroom I share with Sissy and yanks up the shades so that the sunlight storms in and inundates me.

Even though Mama doesn't really mean it, I still wonder if she is partially right. Sometimes my heart just hurts too-much so that I can't hardly bear it. I asked Mama about that one time, if maybe my heart actually was too-big and that was why it ached. Mama just sighed and shook her head, so that her bangs flopped into her eyes. She looked at me and she said *Sweet Pea, ain't nothing wrong with your heart except you feel too-damn-much*.

She says that a lot, those three words run together like that. Sometimes I think that it is one word, that I will stumble upon that combination in the dictionary one day under the letter T. The English teacher lets me use the dictionary whenever I want, which is a lot. Whenever my too-big heart hurts or my paper-thin skin exposes my nerves, I let that dictionary fall open on the floor and read, starting at the top left corner of the even page and working my way down to the bottom right corner of the odd page. When I am done, I feel normal again and so I politely thank the English teacher and go back to my own classroom.

But sometimes, even the dictionary can't cure me. Sometimes I need Sissy to shrink my heart and give me some of her skin. I head down the long hallway to the Special classroom and ask to see my sister. If the teachers there are nice and Sissy has been good, we may sit in the corner for fifteen minutes before I have to go back and Sissy has to stay.

It is nicer for us to be at home when I am in a nesting mood, because then Sissy will come into our bedroom and sit beside me. I reach out, hold her wrist, and feel the whole universe solemnly pumping through her veins and arteries. When I can breathe again, Sissy wipes my face dry and pats my head, and then goes to play dolls. I lie down next to her and watch, wondering how the toys feel. We stay like that for a long time, Sissy and I do.

When Mama comes home from her two-job day, she usually starts cooking a box-dinner. But sometimes she comes into our bedroom and watches Sissy and me together, and she just does a little smile and makes a little sigh, which gives her a lopsided face.

That, I think, is when we are most like a family.