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Moths

Crystal Smith
Dominican University of California

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Moths

by Crystal Smith

The thick air held still in the hot August evening.

Angela and her family were at their neighbor's house—mostly because they liked the pool they had in their backyard more than they liked their actual neighbors. But her parents were busy schmoozing over beer and barbeque, leaving Angela to play peacemaker among the children—her younger brother, Joe, 10 years of age, and Wesley McArthur, 8 years old. They were best friends and arch rivals, despite their age difference. They especially needed to be watched when they started rough-housing. Angela sighed under the outdoor light, trying to quickly complete reading *Catcher in the Rye*, part of her summer reading list. She had finally gotten around to starting it in the last week, and now she just had two days to read another three books. Now that it was dusk, the outdoor light had attracted a swarm of moths, and she was growing irritated with her new companions. Plus, the parents were growing continuously louder with each beer consumed, and Angela had never personally taken to the 80s rock music that was blasting through the stereo.

Angela just wanted to get back to school. She spent her summer working in an ice cream shop, always wanting to catch up with her friends, but always getting off work late. By the time she called her friends, it would be way past curfew. Only a few of them had just gotten their licenses anyway. Angela, unfortunately, was not one of them.

Wesley was splashing Joe and singing the “neener neener neener” song every two minutes or so. It had been going on for about twenty minutes, and Angela could tell that Joe was done with Wesley for the night.

“Joe! We’re leaving in five minutes!” she yelled to him.

She looked over to her parents, and her dad yelled, “That is an awesome idea Angela! Walk your brother home, and you two should get in bed. School starts in two days! Gotta get back in the flow of things!”

“Great,” she grimaced at him. He was right; she was tired, but he didn’t have to remind her about her mediocre life: that she had been stranded in an ice cream parlor so she would have money to go on the drama trip in October; that her jobless, carless friends had ditched her in favor of the neighborhood coffee shop; that she, being a more than tired fifteen year old, had to walk her irritated little brother home, and that Holden Caulfield was leading a more exciting life than she was. Hell, even her parents seemed happier than she was at this moment.

Joe met her by the glass sliding door, while Wesley continued singing his taunting song to no one.

“Wesley! Shut up and go to bed! This is grown up time!” Mrs. McArthur yelled.

“Can we go now?” Joe asked Angela, and she nodded at him sympathetically.

They walked side by side for the first block back in silence. It was a five minute walk, but the humid air made the street expand far and wide. Angela looked at her younger brother, the baby fat on his cheeks. He still had the cute little boy attitude about him, but she knew he would enter into the awkward, quiet stage soon, the one where hormones start changing your body and you get all insecure. At least, that’s how it had been with her. Recognizing that she was a girl, it was probably different, but she prayed it wasn’t as painful for Joe as it had been for her.

When they had one block left to walk, Joe perked up.

“Hey Angela, can I ask you something?”

“Anything booby.”

“Stop calling me that.”

Angela laughed. “What do you need to know Joe?”

“What’s streaking?”

It was a moment that can only happen between an older, wiser sibling and a younger, curious one. Angela cherished these moments more than anything else that had happened over the past three months.

It was 10 o clock on a still, humid night and Angela’s laugh broke through the stillness of their quiet neighborhood. She stopped on the sidewalk and bent over, whooping, while her brother stared at her expectantly and waited for her answer.

“Angela! What’s streaking?”

He stood there, waiting for her answer, his swimming shorts sticking to his legs from the humidity, his brown hair sticking up on one side of his head from the water in the pool. She laughed until her sides hurt, until she was gasping for breath and the woman whose house she was in front of turned on her bedroom light and yelled, “Get to sleep children! You’ll wake the whole neighborhood! What are you doing out so late?”

"I'm so sorry," Angela yelled back up to her.

"Ok," she breathed.

They continued on their walk, heaving older sister and perplexed little brother.

"Streaking is when you take off all your clothes and run around in public."

"Really?" Joe's eyes were huge.

"Yes. It's usually to make some sort of statement. Like women's rights or something," Angela told him knowingly, proud she could be of assistance to her curious little brother, despite not knowing exactly why he needed to know.

"Oh," was all Joe said.

They were five houses away from their own. Angela wondered if he was embarrassed.

Then, all of a sudden, he was handing her his swimming trunks. She looked up and saw her little brother's fluffy white thighs and round butt bouncing towards their house.

Another roll of laughter escaped her mouth, and her whole body lurched forward, toppling onto the warm concrete.

"What are you doing?" she cried out to him, on the verge of hysterics.

"Streaking!"

"But why?" she yelled to him as he ran across the grass in front of the Hanson house.

"Women's rights!"

A moth landed on her stomach as she rolled around on the ground, confusedly lifting off with every lurch she made. This time around it didn't bother her though, as she looked up and saw her naked brother standing in front of their house, waiting readily for her to arrive with the key.