

Flash Fiction

Martha's Conversation

by Priyanka Kole

A sturdy oak tree drooped over an old, neglected building. Grey paint chipped from its walls. The doors closed tightly as if discouraging visitors to leave. The frequently scoured windows peeped onto the front garden.

The afternoon sun was turning orange. The wind's sough blanketed under the honking cars, and occasional blaring ambulance on the hospital road, but the cawing of the crows perched over the oak tree cut through all.

Martha, a middle-aged, petite woman with unevenly cut black hair was settled on the park bench. She gently patted a wooden doll in her arms.

She smiled at Lily and Cherry playing on the grass.

Cherry kicked a football. Lily grabbed the rolling ball, swept it aside and pulled the UNO cards out of her pocket.

“You cannot decide what we play every time,” Cherry said.

“Mommy asked you to listen to me. I am older. We might faint under the sun,” Lily replied.

Cherry pursed her lip and plopped on the mat lying in front of the park bench. Lily spread the UNO cards and divided them into two piles. Cherry grabbed a thick encyclopedia in her hand and leafed through the first few pages.

“What did you read today?” Cherry asked.

“I read about frogs.”

“Knowing about frogs won’t make you smart.”

“Playing in the mud and getting my clothes dirty won’t make me smart either,” said Lily, stroking Cherry's yellow frock.

Cherry tightened the ribbon on her ponytail as she gazed at Martha through her hazel, soft eyes, “Did mommy forget about us?”

Lily rested her hand on Martha’s knee, “No, she is just occupied.”

Martha glanced back, “How can I forget you? Can’t you see your sister is crying?”, as she swayed the wooden doll in her arms before resting it over her chest.

Lily sighed.

A nurse in an azure scrub came out from the hospital building and trudged towards Martha.

She stared at Martha for a while, then scribbled her pen on a paperboard. She plonked on the park bench beside Martha, “Did she sleep today?” she asked.

“Not a bit. She keeps crying,” Martha said.

“It’s going to get dark. We should go inside. Let’s go get your medicines.”

“I don’t like that bitter green syrup.”

“It will make you healthy. Don’t you want to get better for your kids?”

“Yes, I have to. Let’s go.” She leaped up. “Let me just say bye to Lily and Cherry.”

“Lily and Cherry, your daughters?” asked the nurse. Her forehead creased.

Martha nodded.

The nurse rubbed Martha’s back. “Let me help you with these,” as she took the encyclopedia and football in her hand. Martha walked towards the building clasping her arm around the nurse’s.

The nurse glanced back at the empty park. Only the soft wind hustled there.

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