

The Porch Light

It is 10:03 PM on July 3rd. My mother and aunt are out at an early 4th of July party, and it is a collective agreement between my brothers and I that they are not going to return until late tomorrow morning. The three of us sit on the porch, waiting for our cousins to come outside. They are baking, and it was clear they are having trouble due to the noises of anger coming from the kitchen. The porch lights are shut off, as well as the street lights, and the only source of light is coming from the kitchen, which is upstairs. I can only see my brothers faintly.

My twin brother Jason is on the porch swing. The swing is 32 years young, and the old wood is falling off in small pieces. You have to place your hands carefully on it or else the shavings will cover your hands. I had enough splinters to know that. Jason has one earbud in, with one swaying by his side, swinging back and forth. In his left hand is a can of coke which he had swiped from the downstairs fridge. He is sipping it slowly, wanting to savor it, and not let the caffeine get to him too fast. He pushes the swing using his legs, too lazy to use the force of his body to do so. The old chains creak loudly, but my brothers are both so lost in their thoughts that they can barely hear it. He nods his head along to the song, leaning his head back against the frame of the swing. It doesn't look very comfortable, but he makes no effort to change his position, so I leave him be.

His shirt is an Eagles shirt, which I bought for him four years ago. He only wears it to make me feel better about my gift-giving abilities, which are awful, but I appreciate the gesture. He's a wonderful gift-giver, and even gave me the ring that decorates my finger every day. It's silver and has an opal in the center, which has always been my favorite.

My older brother Luke is sitting on the floor. His back is leaned oddly against the fence that encloses our porch, and similarly to Jason, it does not look very comfortable. But again, I leave him be. He has items in both hands, which I know he only has because he hates not being able to move them. They shake constantly, and he always needs to be fiddling with something. His hands are scarred and bruised, most likely from the bridge we climbed and then proceeded to jump off of the day before.

In his left hand are his car keys, which he swings around anxiously. He drives an old van, which I adore more than anything. It's brown, which definitely wasn't my favorite, but has grown on me. He named it Mary and refused to let anyone change it. I only allowed this because he will drive me anywhere, and let me strap my surfboard to the top. Keychains decorate his keys as well, many of which are from old high school sports or programs. My favorite keychain of his is a yellow patch that says "love your sister". Despite popular opinion, I did not buy it for him. It was actually bought by his girlfriend from months prior, who I grew rather fond of until she broke his heart. I honestly think I was more heartbroken than Luke.

In his right hand is a cigarette, which he takes slow drags of. I hate that he does it, but he can't seem to stop. He picked up the habit over the school year as a way to cope with our father leaving, but even after the pain has subsided enough, he has not stopped. Beside him sits a bag of lollipops, which is my trying attempt to get him to quit. One night when I was looking online for "smoking substitutions" and "how to make your loved ones quit smoking", I found that one reason people continue to smoke is because they crave the way it feels in their hands, and the motions it takes to get into their mouth. I figured that a lollipop was probably a good substitute for a cigarette because you can hold it in your hand the same way, and raise it to your mouth in the same way. It's a way to quit smoking without quitting the actual motion addiction, I guess. I

tried it out, and he seemed happy about it at first. It worked during the daytime when the need to smoke and move his hands was lessened, but at night there was rarely any stopping him. I knew that he only didn't smoke during the day because he wanted me to feel good about myself, and good about my plan. He wants me to think that it's working and that my plan isn't as dumb as we all know it is. At first, I was convinced, but every night when he picks up his pack at 9:32 on the dot, I know that my efforts were all for nothing. I keep trying though, and I remind him often, but on nights like these, where the moon is bright in the sky and the air is crisp, I figure that I shouldn't disturb the peace.

I sit in the corner opposite Jason in a folding chair. It is a washed-out pink color, and I stole it from the neighbor's lawn in final desperation to not sit on the ground. Jason hates when people sit on the swing with him, so I knew that was a no-go. The people next door have little kids, so I know they are already in bed, and I will return it by tomorrow, so there is really no harm. A bowl of cheerios sits on my lap, and I pick at them slowly. My appetite is normally gone by this hour, but I need something to do, so I had grabbed a bowl. Nausea from the summer air rises in me, and I fight the urge to throw the bowl in the bush. I am leaning uncomfortably in my chair, with my legs swung over the side, and my back twisted to somehow lean against the back of the chair. Everything hurt, but I was too tired to find a new position, so I left it be.

The silence is interrupted abruptly by shouts from the kitchen. But instead of shouts of anger, they are shouts of delight - the cookies are done. Now, chocolate chip cookies are something I definitely have an appetite for, even at this hour. Luke glances up towards the kitchen with a smile on his face, most likely thinking the same thing as me. He stubs his cigarette on the ground, and I fight the urge to smile because of that. He never likes to smoke before he eats, so he leans over to Jason and grabs the can of coke out of his hands.

“Hey!” Jason shouts. “Go steal your own can.”

Luke waves him off, taking only one sip before returning the can to Jason's hand. A look of distaste decorates Jason's face, but he simply rolls his eyes and moves on. That is one thing I have always admired about Jason - he has this ability to just let everything go. I gained my temper from my father, and I could barely go minutes without getting angry, even over the simplest things. There are moments when I think I am a bad person for it.

Luke sits up, once again leaning his back against the fence, but in a more comfortable way. The porch lights are still off, the sky has gotten even darker, and I can only see Luke and Jason's silhouettes. But, I know them well enough to know exactly what they are doing. Jason unplugs the earplugs from his phone, knowing that once our cousins get outside, the silence will be over. I think we will all miss the silence we have been suspended in.

“Josie, you won't believe what we did,” Tyler exclaims, still inside the house, but walking down the stairs toward us.

I turn in my chair slightly, facing the door subconsciously before responding with a laugh, “Oh god, what Ty?”

I knew that what he was about to say would be ridiculous, so I readied my ears.

“We made a cookie of your face,” he pauses for a second, “Well, sort of your face; it didn't work out very well, but the thought was there.”

Tyler kicks the screen door open, and holds it open with his shoulder, stepping outside whilst holding a paper plate. I am slightly nervous to look at what graced the plate and can barely look at it when he hands it to me.

“And I made Luke and Jason’s faces!” I hear Dennis say from the top of the stairs, the faint sound of him stomping down reaching my ears.

As he opens the screen door with a shove, he hands the first plate to Luke and then the second to Jason, letting the door shut with a bang.

Dennis sits next to Jason on the swing, and I am surprised to see that Jason offered no protest, and even moves over to let him have more room. Tyler sits beside Luke, pulling his knees up to his chest and breaking a piece off of his cookie. I look down at mine, not seeing how that could have ever resembled me. It is spread out into a blob, and just looks like a normal huge cookie. Nevertheless, I break off a piece and take a bite, letting the dough and the chocolate melt again in my mouth.

“Rating?” Tyler asks me, looking up from his space next to Luke.

His nose is slightly scrunched in disgust, smelling the smoke left over from Lukes cigarette. He slaps him on the arm, kicking the stub feebly off the porch.

“I’ll give it a seven, I guess,” I say. “5 for artwork, but 9 for taste.”

He nods, satisfied with my response.

We stay in relative silence, with only the sound of cookies being eaten or soda being drunk. I lean back in my chair, getting into a more comfortable position than before. It is so late, and I am so tired and content with my life, that I even begin to close my eyes. They flutter between being open and closed for about a half an hour, and I do not bother to speak or put my input in on the little bits of conversation that are going around.

“You can sleep, Jos,” Luke says, his voice low but soft. “We’ll wake you up when we leave.”

I think about it for a moment, but eventually raise my hand in thanks, and finally shut my eyes. When I close them, the darkness barely looks different from the darkness on the porch.

Written by Lucie Manuel, Medfield High School

With that familiar thought in mind, I allow myself to sleep, knowing that even in the darkness, I can be content with my life.